Guidelines for developing a school language policy

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**Primary Years Programme, Middle Years Programme
and Diploma Programme
Guidelines for developing a school language policy**

IB mission statement

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.

These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

IB learner profile

The aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world.

IB learners strive to be:

Inquirers They develop their natural curiosity. They acquire the skills necessary to conduct inquiry and research and show independence in learning. They actively enjoy learning and this love of learning will be sustained throughout their lives.

Knowledgeable They explore concepts, ideas and issues that have local and global significance. In so doing, they acquire in-depth knowledge and develop understanding across a broad and balanced range of disciplines.

Thinkers They exercise initiative in applying thinking skills critically and creatively to recognize and approach complex problems, and make reasoned, ethical decisions.

Communicators They understand and express ideas and information confidently and creatively in more than one language and in a variety of modes of communication. They work effectively and willingly in collaboration with others.

Principled They act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness, justice and respect for the dignity of the individual, groups and communities. They take responsibility for their own actions and the consequences that accompany them.

Open-minded They understand and appreciate their own cultures and personal histories, and are open to the perspectives, values and traditions of other individuals and communities. They are accustomed to seeking and evaluating a range of points of view, and are willing to grow from the experience.

Caring They show empathy, compassion and respect towards the needs and feelings of others. They have a personal commitment to service, and act to make a positive difference to the lives of others and to the environment.

Risk-takers They approach unfamiliar situations and uncertainty with courage and forethought, and have the independence of spirit to explore new roles, ideas and strategies. They are brave and articulate in defending their beliefs.

Balanced They understand the importance of intellectual, physical and emotional balance to achieve personal well-being for themselves and others.

Reflective They give thoughtful consideration to their own learning and experience. They are able to assess and understand their strengths and limitations in order to support their learning and personal development.

Guidelines for developing a school language policy

What is a language policy?

> A language policy is an action statement ... It is concerned less with where the students in a school are going, and more with how they are going to get there.
>
> *Language Policy in Schools*, Corson (1999)

A language policy is derived from the school's language philosophy and is a statement of purpose that outlines goals for language teaching and learning. It is constructed around pedagogical and learning beliefs and is therefore also a statement of action describing practices for achieving and evaluating goals.

Every IB World School authorized to offer one or more of the three IB programmes is required to have a written language policy.

> The school has a written language policy (including provision for second-language teaching and mother-tongue language support) that meets the needs of the students and reflects the principles of the programme.
>
> *Programme standards and practices*: B1.20, IB (2005)

The language policy must be consistent with the stipulated principles and practices of the IB. The language policy must therefore:

- recognize that, since language is central to learning, all teachers are, in practice, language teachers with responsibilities in facilitating communication

- outline how students are to learn at least one language in addition to their mother tongue

- describe how the development and maintenance of the mother tongue for all learners is to be supported

- ensure that there are practices in place to provide inclusion and equity of access to the IB programme(s) offered by the school for all learners, including those who are learning in a language other than their mother tongue (the document *Learning in a language other than mother tongue in IB programmes* provides further details on these practices and should be read when a language policy is being compiled)

- describe how the language of the host country is to be promoted

- recognize that administrators, teachers, librarians and other school staff will require professional development in the fields of language learning and teaching, and on how to make sure the language policy becomes a working document

- consider what resources and practices are to be used to involve parents in planning their children's language profile and development.

Each school, of course, exists in a unique social context with complex language and learning-related needs. A language policy must therefore also take into consideration the particular socio-cultural circumstances of each school community. Since these circumstances are not static, a language policy needs to be dynamic and flexible so that it can evolve with the changing needs of the school population. Thus it is essential that, when developing a language policy, there are initial and ongoing collaborative reflective practices in place that will monitor change and consider the views and wishes of the whole community.

Steps for developing a language policy

Step one: Establishing a language policy steering committee

In order to compile a language policy that is accepted by the school community as meaningful and workable, the process must be collaborative and involve all stakeholders of the school.

A language policy steering committee should be established, comprising representatives from the community who have a range of expertise. This might include teachers, librarians, administrators, IB programme coordinators, parents, students and other members of the school community. The steering committee will be responsible for overseeing the procedures needed to develop the language philosophy and policy of the school, and for communicating with those they represent.

A school language philosophy, which states beliefs about languages and how they are learned, is the starting point for developing a language policy. The language philosophy should be written clearly and unequivocally so that the whole school community has a common understanding of what is stated. If a school does not already have a clear language philosophy, one should be written before a school language policy is developed.

Step two: Writing a school language philosophy

A school language philosophy must reflect the interests of the whole school community. The steering committee is responsible for gathering, presenting and collating the views of this community. This data may be gathered in a variety of ways including informal discussions, questionnaires, observations, and interviews with students and other members of the school community.

The language philosophy should be informed through reading, among other publications, the relevant IB documents such as *Towards a continuum of international education*, *Programme standards and practices*, *IB learner profile booklet, Learning in a language other than mother tongue in IB programmes, Making the PYP happen: A curriculum framework for international primary education* and *MYP: From principles into practice*.

Step three: Reviewing the current language situations and practices and compiling a school language profile

In order to develop a language policy that concurs with the language philosophy of the school and that will lead to effective practice, a thorough understanding of the particular circumstances of the school community to which it will be applied is needed.

It is therefore recommended that schools compile a comprehensive language profile of the school community that identifies the following points.

- The diversity of language needs for learners in the IB programme(s). This should include information on the languages of teaching and learning, the languages of communication used in the school and outside the classroom, and the range and types of mother tongue in the community.

- The other language needs of the community. This should include any legal requirements as a result of government legislation.

- Current practices relating to language teaching and learning. For example, practices relating to the choice and planning of language courses for learners; spelling and referencing protocols; preferred bibliographic styles; rules and expectations about language use around the school.

- Beliefs held about language teaching and learning.

- Other policies that relate directly to language teaching and learning such as admissions and assessment policies.

This data-gathering exercise could involve activities such as informal discussions, questionnaires, observations and student interviews. It requires all members of the school community to reflect on their thoughts and practices regarding language in the school.

The resulting language profile of the school should be scrutinized for any areas of mismatch, contradictions, omissions in practice, ambiguities and other issues to be addressed with regard to the language philosophy. Those observed should be clearly identified as issues to be resolved.

The language profile may also identify the need for a school-based inquiry that will evaluate ideas for future inclusion in the language policy. For example, schools may need to:

- look at the way in which library and media resources are linked to teaching programmes

- consider alternative models for developing and maintaining mother-tongue languages

- consider alternative models for addressing the needs of those learning in a language other than their mother tongue

- initiate or further develop a system for keeping a language profile of each learner

- review the processes used to identify the language needs of each learner

- monitor the effectiveness of differentiation strategies for learners with specific language learning needs

- develop a language continuum scope and sequence.

Step four: Further considerations

Once the school language philosophy and language profile have been compiled, the school language policy can be written. Further considerations, however, should be taken into account for each of the IB programmes.

IB Primary Years Programme

In IB World Schools offering the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP), a language policy should further consider how to:

- promote inquiry-based authentic language learning

- focus on the transdisciplinary nature of language learning

- incorporate the teaching and learning of language into the programme of inquiry

- develop the skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and media literacy

- interrelate the skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and media literacy

- provide for the teaching of additional languages

- promote consistency of practice in the teaching and learning of all languages where more than one language of instruction is used.

Making the PYP happen: A curriculum framework for international primary education contains a subject annex that explains what language teaching and learning in the PYP should look like. Together with the *Language scope and sequence*, this document should inform the construction of a language policy in a PYP school.

IB Middle Years Programme

In IB World Schools offering the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP), a language policy should further consider how to:

- formulate practices for the provision of languages A and B

- integrate the learning of languages with learning in the subject groups

- integrate language learning with interdisciplinary planning.

The MYP language A and language B subject guides and the document *MYP: From principles into practice* provide further guidance for MYP schools.

IB Diploma Programme

In IB World Schools offering the IB Diploma Programme, a language policy should enable a student's language profile to be developed by providing:

- well-resourced special-request and school-supported self-taught options in group 1 to maintain the mother-tongue development

- opportunities for learning *ab initio* and B languages.

Further guidance and support can be found in the Diploma Programme language A1, language B, and language *ab initio* guides, and in the *Diploma Programme assessment: Principles and practice* document.

Making the language policy a working document

Once a language policy has been constructed, further steps need to be taken in order to ensure that it becomes a working document.

Step one: Review process

The timing and responsibilities associated with a review process should be stipulated in the policy. As new ideas are developed, the results of research are gathered and the school language profile changes, the school language policy should be reviewed. The review procedure should also include roles and responsibilities for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the language policy as a working document.

Step two: Linking the language policy to other documents

The language policy should be explicitly linked to other working documents such as assessment, admissions and special educational needs (SEN) policies. This may lead to:

- a consideration of the role of a language profile in admissions as well as in formative and summative assessment

- a review of criteria used for language assessment

- reporting and feedback on language development, early intervention and differentiation strategies for SEN learners.

Step three: Communicating the policy

There should be consideration of how to keep the whole school community informed of the policy process and how they might make contributions.

Resources

References

Baker C. 2000. *A parents' and teachers' guide to bilingualism*. Clevedon, UK. Multilingual Matters.

Corson D. 1999. *Language Policy in Schools: A Resource for Teachers and Administrators*. Mahwah, New Jersey. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.