

Language in the Primary Years Programme

The development of language is fundamental to the need to communicate; it supports and enhances our thinking and understanding. Language permeates the world in which we live; it is socially constructed and dependent on the number and nature of our social interactions and relationships. Language plays a vital role in the construction of meaning. It empowers the learner and provides an intellectual framework to support conceptual development and critical thinking. (International Baccalaureate 70).

In the PYP it is recognised that the teaching of language should be imbedded within meaningful experiences rather than a predetermined, incremental series of skills to be acquired. Learning should be relevant, engaging, challenging and significant. Language is a complex web of connections that transcends the artificial separations of disciplines. When the three aspects of learning language, learning about language and learning through language operate together in a relevant context, they provide the most supportive learning environment for language learners.

Language is the most significant connecting element across the school's curriculum. Literacy includes oral and visual as well as the ability to read and write with students appreciating language both functionally and aesthetically. Learning experiences that enable learners to develop language within meaningful and enjoyable contexts help learners to make connections, apply their learning, and transfer their conceptual understanding to new situations. Students use language within and across the subject areas and in a way that transcends them, both inside and outside the classroom. Students need to develop their use of language, appreciation of language, awareness of the nature of language, of the many influences on language, and of the variety on and between languages and dialects. Furthermore, learning that language and literature are creative processes encourages the development of imagination and creativity through self-expression.

The language profiles of students at OSC is diverse. It is acknowledged that development of mother-tongue is crucial for cognitive development, and in maintaining cultural identity. Success in mother-tongue also influences long-term academic achievement, including acquisition of other languages. We therefore encourage parents to support their children in maintaining and developing their mother tongue. At school students are occasionally encouraged to express themselves in their mother tongue both orally and in written language. Our school Library hosts a selection of fiction and non-fiction books in a variety of languages. Students who have English as an additional language may receive in-class or pull-out specialised language support, depending on their needs. Learning the host nation language Sinhala is part of classroom instruction from preschool to grade 2. In grade 3 students have an opportunity to select either Sinhala, French or English as a second language to study more in-depth.

The PYP has identified three strands – oral language, visual language, written language – that are learned across and throughout the curriculum, with each strand being an integral component of language learning. Each strand has been considered from both the receptive aspect – receiving and constructing meaning, and expressive aspect – creating and sharing meaning. The acknowledgment of both the receptive and expressive aspects of the language strands serves to ensure a balanced programme. (International Baccalaureate 75)

Language concepts and skills

Language concepts are divided into four language strands briefly described below.

Language strands	
Oral language - listening and speaking	<p>Almost all students arrive at school with an impressive command of their mother tongue language. It is important to acknowledge the language profile of the individual and build on previous learning in ways that are positive and productive.</p> <p>Listening is the receptive mode and speaking is the expressive mode with both working together in a transactional process between listeners and speakers. In an inquiry-based learning environment, oral language exposes the thinking of the learner. It is a means by which “inner speech” (Vygotsky1999) can be communicated and shared to negotiate and construct meaning and develop deeper levels of understanding.</p>
Visual language – viewing and presenting	<p>Viewing is the receptive process and presenting is the expressive process with neither process having meaning except in relation to the other. These processes involve interpreting, using and constructing visuals and multimedia in a variety of situations and for a range of purposes and audiences.</p> <p>It is important to learn how visual images influence meaning and produce powerful associations that shape the way individuals think and feel.</p>
Written language – reading	<p>Reading is a developmental process that involves constructing meaning from text. The process is interactive and involves the reader’s purpose for reading, the reader’s prior knowledge and experience, and the text itself.</p> <p>Reading helps students to clarify their ideas, feelings, thoughts and opinions. Literature offers a means of understanding and has the power to influence and structure thinking. Well-written fiction provides opportunities for learners to imagine themselves in another’s situation, reflecting on feelings and actions, and developing empathy. The ability to read and comprehend non-fiction is essential for the process of inquiry. As inquirers, learners need to be able to identify, synthesize and apply useful and relevant information from text. In order to develop lifelong reading habits, learners need to have extended periods of time to read for pleasure, interest and information.</p>

Written language - writing

Writing is a personal act that grows and develops with the individual from the earliest lines of young learners to the expression of mature writers. Over time writing involves developing a variety of structures, strategies and literary techniques (spelling, grammar, plot, character, punctuation, voice) and applying them with increasing skills and effectiveness. However the writer's ability to communicate his or her intention and share meaning takes precedence over accuracy and the application of skills. Accuracy and skills grow out of the process of producing meaningful communication.

Learning continuum

The IBO recognizes that learning in language is a developmental process and that the phases through which a learner passes are not always linear or age related. For this reason overall expectations are presented in a continuum divided into phases for each of the four strands of language: oral language, visual language, reading and writing. The overall expectations provide a summary of the understandings and subsequent learning being developed in each phase within a strand.

Oral language—listening and speaking, overall expectations

Phase 1

Learners show an understanding of the value of speaking and listening to communicate. They recognize that sounds are associated with objects, or with symbolic representations of them. They are using language to name their environment, to get to know each other, to initiate and explore relationships, to question and inquire.

Phase 2

Learners show an understanding that sounds are associated with objects, events and ideas, or with symbolic representations of them. They are aware that an object or symbol may have different sounds or words associated with it in different languages. They are beginning to be cognizant about the high degree of variability of language and its uses.

Phase 3

Learners show an understanding of the wide range of purposes of spoken language: that it instructs, informs, entertains, reassures; that each listener's perception of what they hear is unique. They are compiling rules about the use of different aspects of language.

Phase 4

Learners show an understanding of the conventions associated with speaking and listening and the value of adhering to those conventions. They are aware that language is a vehicle for becoming knowledgeable; for negotiating understanding; and for negotiating the social dimension.

Phase 5

Learners are able to understand the difference between literal and figurative language; how to use language differently for different purposes. They are aware that they are building on their previous experiences and using language to construct new meaning.

Visual language—viewing and presenting, overall expectations

Phase 1

Learners show an understanding that the world around them is full of visual language that conveys meaning. They are able to interpret and respond to visual texts. Although much of their own visual language is spontaneous, they are extending and using visual language in more purposeful ways.

Phase 2

Learners identify, interpret and respond to a range of visual text prompts and show an understanding that different types of visual texts serve different purposes. They use this knowledge to create their own visual texts for particular purposes.

Phase 3

Learners show an understanding that visual text may represent reality or fantasy. They recognize that visual text resources can provide factual information and increase understanding. They use visual text in a reflective way to enrich their storytelling or presentations, and to organize and represent information.

Phase 4

Learners show an open-mindedness about the use of a range of visual text resources to access information. They think critically, and are articulate about the use of visual text to influence the viewer. They are able to use visual imagery to present factual information, or to tell a story.

Phase 5

Through inquiry, learners engage with an increasing range of visual text resources. As well as exploring the viewing and presenting strategies that are a part of the planned learning environment, they select and use strategies that suit their learning styles. They are able to make connections between visual imagery and social commentary. They show more discernment in selecting information they consider reliable. They are able to use visual imagery to support a position.

Written language—reading, overall expectations

Phase 1

Learners show an understanding that print represents the real or the imagined world. They know that reading gives them knowledge and pleasure; that it can be a social activity or an individual activity. They have a concept of a “book”, and an awareness of some of its structural elements. They use visual cues to recall sounds and the words they are “reading” to construct meaning.

Phase 2

Learners show an understanding that language can be represented visually through codes and symbols. They are extending their data bank of printed codes and symbols and are able to recognize them in new contexts. They understand that reading is a vehicle for learning, and that the combination of codes conveys meaning.

Phase 3

Learners show an understanding that text is used to convey meaning in different ways and for different purposes—they are developing an awareness of context. They use strategies, based on what they know, to read for understanding. They recognize that the structure and organization of text conveys meaning.

Phase 4

Learners show an understanding of the relationship between reading, thinking and reflection. They know that reading is extending their world, both real and imagined, and that there is a reciprocal relationship between the two. Most importantly, they have established reading routines and relish the process of reading.

Phase 5

Learners show an understanding of the strategies authors use to engage them. They have their favourite authors and can articulate reasons for their choices. Reading provides a sense of accomplishment, not only in the process, but in the access it provides them to further knowledge about, and understanding of, the world.

Written language—writing, overall expectations

Phase 1

Learners show an understanding that writing is a form of expression to be enjoyed. They know that how you write and what you write conveys meaning; that writing is a purposeful act, with both individual and collaborative aspects.

Phase 2

Learners show an understanding that writing is a means of recording, remembering and communicating. They know that writing involves the use of codes and symbols to convey meaning to others; that writing and reading uses the same codes and symbols. They know that writing can describe the factual or the imagined world.

Phase 3

Learners show an understanding that writing can be structured in different ways to express different purposes. They use imagery in their stories to enhance the meaning and to make it more enjoyable to write and read. They understand that writing can produce a variety of responses from readers. They can tell a story and create characters in their writing.

Phase 4

Learners show an understanding of the role of the author and are able to take on the responsibilities of authorship. They demonstrate an understanding of story structure and are able to make critical judgments about their writing, and the writing of others. They are able to rewrite to improve the quality of their writing.

Phase 5

Learners show an understanding of the conventions pertaining to writing, in its different forms, that are widely accepted. In addition, they demonstrate a high level of integration of the strands of language in order to create meaning in a manner that suits their learning styles. They can analyse the writing of others and identify common or recurring themes or issues. They accept feedback from others.



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Works Cited

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