

# Bilingual School of Monza / Play English

## Newsletter



**Issue 1:** *September, October and November 2010*

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## News from the Headteacher

Dear Parents,

The new school year is well underway and I hope you and your children are feeling by now more settled and tuned into the school routines and life. The school year has started with new hopes and confidence as a PYP World School which we celebrated and shared with you at the beginning of September.

A scanned copy of the official IBO Word School certificate is attached to this newsletter .

The new school status has nevertheless placed upon us, as a school and as a community, a series of new responsibilities and expectations which we will strive to fulfill in the months or years to come.

Is it not amazing how September and October seem to already have flown away? They were however two very busy months for children, staff and the new school management team.



1 - Staff Fire Training

**Overview of past events:** We have had opportunities to meet during the September Coffee Mornings the Parent Induction Evenings, the European Day of Languages and the Parent Curriculum night on Bilingual Education. Thank you for attending all these events and offering us your support.



## 2 - Parent Curriculum Coffee Morning

Many of you have had the opportunity to experience how your children learn by attending the Open classrooms in October and through the recent Parent- Teacher-Child conferences you have hopefully been able to gather more specific information on your own child's settling in, and learning in school so far. Thanks to our active PTSA your children have had the opportunity to enjoy a Halloween performance in English and have had fun during the Halloween party on that same evening. After school clubs started in October with some being very popular and others less. We would like to inform you that we will be proposing new ones in January or even before and please do bear in mind that your child can join them at any time. Given the success of the 'ethnic dancing' experience for the preparation of the European Day of Languages, we are hoping to offer an after school club for both children and adults lead by "Folkaos" professionals. Look out for the announcements.

During the week leading to the half term break and part of the following week, our teachers have undergone some important Professional development training on the Sheltered Instruction Protocol (SIOP). An expert in the field, Professor Adrian Sandoval was brought into our school from the USA to work with and train our teachers in using the SIOP method. Some of you had the opportunity to meet Prof Sandoval during the Curriculum night. This has offered our teachers the opportunity to reflect on the strategies used while teaching second language learners, and to enhance their understanding on how lessons need to be planned and delivered if the needs of each individual child have to be catered for.



### 3 - SIOP Training

**Upcoming events:** Parent Curriculum Coffee Morning on November 10th where parents will be offered the opportunity to hear and learn aspects of our PYP Curriculum. Ms Gloria Kauffman, our PYP coordinator will facilitate this workshop.

Di.Co, our parent cultural association will be hosting once again this year the Kevin Harris Jazz Trio from the USA who will be offering, on November 16th, a workshop for our upper elementary and Middle school students as well as a concert for parents on that same evening.

The Open Classrooms scheduled for November 22nd and 26th will be cancelled due to a heavy schedule this month. On November 27th there is our first Open Day of this year and we hope you will be able to support it by sending us as many friends and acquaintances who may be interested in signing up their children to our school. On December 11th there will be our Christmas Bazaar and I am delighted that the PTSA has chosen to support through fundraising one of our past teachers' - Louisa Cummins' - charity in Tanzania. The term will be closing with our Christmas Concert on December 21st. Some children have already started practicing their songs and the new choir costumes to be worn on the day are being frantically prepared by a mum of the school.

**A warm welcome to all our new families:** I would like to address a warm welcome to all the new families at our school this year. I have had the opportunity to meet informally most of you by now. It is my intention to offer you appointments to come and talk to me individually should you wish to. I would be interested in finding out how things have been in the school for you and your children so far, and if there are ways we can offer further support and help. Our Day Nursery has had a few new children this year and more are on the way. A special welcome goes to a recently arrived Greek family from Athens. Their children Dimitra in Grade 3 and Marilia in Grade 6 have been welcomed by their peers and teachers who have been asking me to give them lessons in Greek prior to their arrival. "Kalos orisate" to the Zachariathes family therefore!

**The new school organizational structure:** As many of you already know, our school has been going through a restructuring process at its management/organization levels. As the word process implies for any substantial changes to take place and for any new systems to be put in place, time is the determining factor. The new management team, the office staff and myself have been working with our consultant Mr Enzo de Ceglie with intensity in order to move forward this process. Some changes may have already been noticeable but others need more time. I thank you for your patience and

understanding in this respect and I would like to reassure you that our commitment towards improvement and development is one hundred per cent. We do of course appreciate your positive and constructive feedback.

## **Bilingual Education: How does my child learn in a Bilingual School?**

### **Some Parent Questions**

- 1) Can the lack of language proficiency be an obstacle to learning?
- 2) Is teaching and learning negatively affected by different student language proficiency levels?
- 3) How can we as parents support our child's (language) learning at home?

Following our last Parent Curriculum night on Bilingual Education where the topic was "How does my child learn in a Bilingual school" the above three questions were posted but due to time restrictions we did not have the opportunity to expand on them sufficiently. I promised to some of the parents present at the workshop that I would have chosen them as one of the topics of our newsletter and would have addressed them in greater detail.

#### **1. Can the lack of language proficiency be an obstacle to learning?**

We all know that language is key to learning. We learn through language and we are able to refine and extend our knowledge through an ongoing process of language skills development when we enter school. In early childhood the emphasis tends to be primarily on developing oral language competencies which help young children to interact with adults and peers around them building thus the social relationships which will help them to make sense of the world around them.

In the primary school years, when learning begins to become more complex by the addition of literacy (reading and writing) learning, language assumes a more important role. It is no surprise that in most sound early childhood education programs the focus of education is that of supporting the child to develop solid oral communication skills. These set the foundations for later language and literacy learning. Most children enter the primary school years with fairly high levels of oral language proficiency in at least one language and this is often their home language or mother tongue. Should children move to a primary years monolingual program where their mother tongue is the language of instruction, then this will understandingly put them at an advantage for learning in school. Should children move to a monolingual primary years program where the language of instruction is different to their home language then they will be, at least initially, at a disadvantage unless special classroom support or extra second language tuition is provided for them. Should children move to a Bilingual

program where one of the two languages of instruction is the child's home language then children will be at an advantage in as far as their learning will continue happening through their first language while

they are acquiring their second one. The child's first language will serve as the bridging force between learning in two languages. Research has shown that skills and concepts developed in one language are easily transferable to the other one. So, for example when a child has learned the concept of addition and subtraction or the skill of reading, these will transfer from one language to the other without having to learn from scratch these concepts or skills in the second language. This ability to transfer facilitates and enhances the acquisition process in the second language. It is important however that teachers of second language learners are knowledgeable about how learning happens through the medium of two languages and use appropriate strategies in their lessons to ensure that students' learning is not hindered by the lack of proficiency in the child's second language. This is where the training of teachers in methods such as the SIOP model becomes useful and necessary. Research has also shown that, whereas second language learners may take up to 1 to 2 years to develop oral language competency, in their second language a period of 4 to 7 years will be required before they develop native like and grade level academic language proficiency. With academic language proficiency we mean the language of school subjects such as science, mathematics, social studies etc. Parents need to therefore be mindful of these milestones of second language development and refrain from putting unrealistic expectations on their children's learning. Scientific studies have shown that when grade level proficiency has been reached at both languages, bilingual students outperform their monolingual counterparts in both linguistic and academic performance (Virginia Collier & Thomas Wayne 2003)

## **2. Is teaching and learning negatively affected by different student language proficiency levels?**

In every classroom regardless of grade level or of the school being a monolingual or a bilingual one, students display a whole range of ability levels in all domains of learning including that of language. There are students who are more able speakers than writers or listeners, others who read fast and those who need more time, students who learn by observing or listening and students who need to write or read everything before it sinks in. Teachers are aware of these differences and those who are sensitive to their students' diverse abilities aim to plan their lessons in ways that they can reach out to each individual child's ability and needs. This in educational language is called differentiated teaching and learning. Our school promotes this approach to teaching and encourages all teachers to adopt it in their day to day classroom practices. In situations where students' language proficiency levels vary, teachers prepare and deliver their lessons in ways that every child can have access to content learning. Through this approach teachers ensure not only content learning but also the development of the children's language skills. In other words every classroom teacher is also a language teacher.

In learning environments where the students' individual levels of proficiency are not taken into consideration, teaching and learning can become a challenge. Having said this however, it is important for us to remember that learning does not happen in a linear fashion or overnight. We need to respect the necessary time frames for our students to develop their levels of second language proficiency to

grade level. Second language learners often resort to using their home language when constructing new meaning in the second language and this is why a bilingual program can end up being a more learning conducive environment. In a differentiated learning and teaching environment all students are given the

opportunity to progress at their pace and level. There is no evidence so far of more able students being held behind by less able students or less able students not making the necessary progress to eventually meet the requirements of the curriculum.

### **3. How can we as parents support our child's (language) learning at home?**

Our advice to parents has always been to continue to support their children's learning at home through the use of the home language. There is no need for parents to change or switch languages just because their child attends a Bilingual school. It is important however that parents take an active interest in their child's learning process by first of all investing time to understand the school's curriculum and our approaches and beliefs on learning. Parents can offer their children numerous opportunities in extending learning at home by supporting the inquiry learning process, by cultivating children's innate curiosity and by exposing them to experiences of putting into practice what they have learned at school i.e. the action component of PYP. Acquiring a sound understanding of the Learner Profile and the Attitudes can offer parents the opportunity to implement them at home and therefore enforcing the learning process. Reading and telling stories to your children will enhance their language skills. Active listening and interacting with rich language vocabulary and open- ended questions will offer children the opportunity to articulate, to stimulate their thinking and learn to share in conversations. Parents who speak both school languages are advised not to mix languages and ideally stick to their mother tongue or the language they have always used with their children since birth. Clear cut language contexts can however be created where bilingual parents can negotiate with their children when to use each language i.e. bedtime stories in English, breakfast songs in Italian, playtime in English and so on.

I hope the above information has been useful to all our readers but should you have any more questions please do not hesitate to forward them to me and I will be happy to respond to them in a future parent workshop or newsletter.

### **Curriculum Related: Reading Aloud At Home**

*by Gloria Kauffman*

Research and practice show that one simple activity — reading aloud — is the best way to prepare children for learning to read and to keep them reading as they learn and grow. Reading aloud helps your children develop the language skills that they will use in school and throughout their lives. Why read aloud?

- Is great fun, and it benefits your children's growth as readers and learners.
- Nurtures your children's love of both the written and spoken word.
- Gives you a chance to rediscover favorite stories and find new ones.

- Helps your children develop important language skills that will help them learn to read on their own.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. How can my child be involved?

The best way to expose your child to the benefits of reading aloud is to begin at home today. Even just 5 minutes a day can make a real difference in your child's listening skills, language development, vocabulary and imagination. Twenty years of research have proven over and over again that: The single most important thing you can do to help your child become a successful reader is to read aloud as early as possible and as often as possible.

### 2. How do I read to a child who won't sit still?

Try to involve the child by letting him or her choose the book, hold the book and turn the pages. Ask the child to name the objects, colors, or tell you what sound the animal makes or count the butterflies with your help. Take the child's pointing finger and trace the letter, number, or shape on the page.

Keep the session short. Sometimes 5 minutes is an achievement. Let the child stand next

to you while you read. If necessary, let the child draw or build block towers while you read for 5 minutes. The child is getting more than you realize. Use finger plays, songs or nursery rhymes as substitutes for stories. These can be said or sung softly in the check-out line at the grocery store. All of these activities are part of reading readiness.

### 3. My child is 7 and can't read. What can I do and where do I get help?

Reading aloud as a family activity is a great way to reawaken your child's interest in and enjoyment of books. Many seven-year-olds start the year reading poorly or not at all and end up reading very well. The Danes believe that reading aloud should not even be introduced to children until they are seven because so many children are not ready to learn to read---even very bright children. The important thing is not to let your child feel overly discouraged to the point of believing themselves unable to learn to read. That kind of wall is hard to climb over. You can help by helping your child find books on subjects that interest him or her. Many publishers have special readers at varying skill levels; ask your librarian or your book dealer. Every school district also has reading specialists you can consult too. Making reading an important family activity will give your child the support and encouragement he or she needs to persevere to accomplishment.

### 4. When should I begin reading aloud to my child?

You can begin reading to your child the day he or she is born. The sound of your voice and the cuddling are comforting and reassuring to the newborn and the story or nursery rhyme you say over and over are incidental. As the child grows older, the content and the type of book becomes more important.

### **5. My child can read now; I don't need to read aloud anymore, do I?**

Even though your child can read, he or she will still enjoy a story read aloud. The child's ability to understand what is read exceeds his or her ability to read it until 8th grade! Reading a story or a poem at family occasions shows your children how much you value reading and helps build memories you and your children will treasure decades from now.

### **6. How can I get my child away from the TV?**

Every family has to work out their own rules about television, but helping children learn how to manage this resource is one of the best gifts we can give them. There are many wonderful programs available and there are also many of lesser quality. Using a VCR to record those we approve of and having a prerecorded program available as a substitute for the ones we don't like is a first step in taking control of TV viewing habits.

### **7. What about video books or books on tape?**

These new resources are just that; an additional resource. There is no substitute for 10 to 20 minutes with you reading aloud every day; but these media are nice supplements which help your child learn to enjoy books.

### **8. My child has trouble reading. How can I help?**

You can help your child become a better reader by making time to read aloud every day.

You can take a turn and then the child can take a turn reading what you just read. You can also choose age-appropriate books. You can encourage your grade-schooler to read to a preschooler. Toddler books are usually within a grade-schooler's ability and are easy to read. Reading this easy material to an appreciative audience will reinforce your child's positive feelings about reading and help build confidence.

*Eugenia adds a perspective with regards to reading in a second language*

### **9. Can or should parents read to their children in a second language?**

As mentioned above, reading to your children at home should be in your mother tongue or the shared home language. There is no need or expectation from our part for parents to feel obliged to read to or with their children in a language which is not theirs. Let us remember that a rich vocabulary in the child's mother tongue is going to facilitate the learning of the second language. The student who is learning to read in a second language will draw on all the acquired resources (concepts, cognates, abilities, conventions) from the experience in reading in his mother tongue.

## 10. Is it possible for children to learn reading simultaneously in both languages?

There is no reason for this not to happen. Experts in the field sustain that there are advantages in learning to read first in one's mother tongue. However from our experience learning to read and write simultaneously in both languages is possible, provided these are taught with the right approach and strategies and the necessary timelines are respected.

## Celebration of the European Day of Languages

By William Bruno



4 - "Mr. Frog On A Log", Transition

As usual, on Friday, October 1st, our school celebrated the European Day of Languages. During the week all classes had related activities, also involving parents. The theme chosen this year was the final exhibition dance. For three weeks the children had dancing lessons, conducted by Renzo, a teacher, who taught them to do dances from various parts of the world.

The show was held at Villasanta, and the children showed everyone how a lot of dedication to an activity like this, can also be a lot of fun. The Transition class has performed the dance, "Mr. Frog On A Log" (USA), Grade 1, "Seven sixths" (Italy), Grade 2 "Ronda del drac" (Canada), Grade 3 "Stern Polka" (Austria), Grade 4 / 5 "Bhangra" (India), Grade 6 "Brendy" (Quebec). The dance teacher, Renzo, then involved everyone in a merry Greek dance, the "Sirtos Trata", in where not only did children participate, but also parents and teachers.



5 - "Ronda del drac", Grade 2

After the thank-you's, the "international party" was finished.

We extend thanks to all those who worked at and attended this event.

### **Welcome Message from the PTSA**

*by Angela Paladino*

The PTSA wishes everybody a marvellous school year! All of us are already at work, and any help offered is very much appreciated.

## Certificate of PYP Authorization



6 - IBO-PYP Certificate / Certificado IBO-PYP