

Bilingual programme and language principles.

Definitions

Bilingual

The term *Bilingual* describes individuals who use two or more languages in their day to day life. With regards to an educational setting a Bilingual student may learn through their first language (L1) or a second language (L2).

Bilingual Education

The term Bilingual Education varies depending on the context. For the purposes of this piece we can divide the term into subtractive bilingualism in which the development of L1 is suppressed, and additive bilingualism in which students are supported to develop:

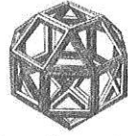
- Age –appropriate levels of L1 competence in reading, writing, speaking and listening
- Age-appropriate levels of advanced proficiency in L2 reading, writing, speaking and listening
- Grade-appropriate levels of academic achievement in non-language school subjects, such as Maths and Science, taught primarily through the L2 and those taught primarily through the L1.
- An understanding and appreciation of the L1 and L2 cultures
- The capacity for and interest in inter-cultural communication
- The cognitive and social skills and habits required for success in an ever-changing world

Leonardo da Vinci Academy aims to provide an **additive** bilingual education for all of our students, achieving the above objectives.

Benefits and Goals of Bilingualism

There are many potential benefits to being bilingual for both the individual, and by extension for society. The following list is but a short description of some of the benefits (Mehisto, 2012).

- *Increased mental processing capacity* – Bilinguals may have a larger cognitive working capacity and therefore able to handle more tasks at once.
- *Greater control over information processing* – In today's world people have greater access to huge amounts of information than in any other period of history. It is thought that bilinguals are able to ignore irrelevant information more easily than monolinguals when working on a given task, therefore not allowing irrelevant information to inhibit thinking and decision making.
- *Improved memory* – evidence supports the idea that the bilingual mind has superior episodic and semantic memory when compared to the monolingual.
- *Greater metalinguistic awareness* – The ability to understand that words can have more than one meaning, or vary in their scope of meaning from language to language. Bilinguals are



more likely to identify ambiguity in communication and seek precision in meaning and concepts.

- *Increased mental flexibility* – Due to having earlier access to a wider range of interpretations of information, this offers the potential for greater cognitive flexibility which is considered an important skill in ensuring personal happiness.
- *Improved health* – There is limited evidence to suggest the being bilingual slows down mental decline by two to four years due to a greater number of synaptic connections and a reduction in synaptic pruning during puberty.
- *Improved inter-cultural skills* – Bilingual students are more likely to have an advantage in communicating across cross-cultural barriers and have a greater awareness of global issues.
- *Increased opportunity for trade and business* – Having a common language allows for the facilitation of trade and business. With Bulgaria being a member of the EU, the ability for students to access the EU job market and to forge business links will provide a noticeable advantage.
- *Increased income* – Being bilingual provides access to more job opportunities than monolinguals.
- *Added value for parents and students* – because St. George International School & Preschool seeks to adopt an additive bilingual programme in which the academic goals are similar or higher than a regular L1 school, nothing will be lost, but instead an intellectually rigorous programme will foster not only expert communication in L2, but increased learning in general.

Immersion and content based language education

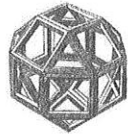
Immersion involves several years of a child's education and consists of at least 50% of their classroom time learning through L2. Typical forms of language instruction are devoid from academic, cognitive and social meaning due to topics or themes which have little meaning outside of the language classroom or day to day life. A content based language approach combined with immersion in the L2 provides material needed for students to forge links between the language, meaning and thought, thereby increasing proficiency in the L2 (Lyster, 2007).

Leonardo da Vinci Academy aims to adopt a model of **early total immersion** (ages 4,5 and/or 6) in order to achieve its goals. A significant body of research concludes that reduced exposure to instruction in the L1 due to the nature of a bilingual programme, does not impede normal L1 development of majority language students (Genesee, 2004; Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Swain & Lapkin, 1982) furthermore, academic achievement in core academic subjects remains similar to students studying exclusively in their L1. (Genesee, 2004). Therefore, we stress the additive nature of a bilingual education; our students will learn as much, if not, more content than a typical L1 programme, but will also develop L2 proficiency.

The classroom will operate within the local cultural context, making links between both L1 and L2 cultures, additionally providing language classes in both L1 and L2.

Advantages of an early start

- Young learners have a natural ability to acquire new languages
- The student-centred, activity-based, experiential approaches commonly used in the International Primary Curriculum are highly suitable for L2 learning



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- Young learners will develop a solid foundation in the L2 which can set them on a road of continuous L2 learning, and prepare them for an L3.
- Students can transfer L2 literacy skills to reading and writing in the L1
- Students can use both L1 and L2 to carry out research
- Students may develop a bilingual and bicultural frame of mind

Implementation of a Bilingual Programme at Leonardo da Vinci Academy

Implementing a bilingual programme requires careful planning and consideration. The following objectives have been highlighted in order to ensure a high quality programme for all students.

- To provide a high quality content based bilingual programme, adopting total immersion in the early years
- To employ high quality bilingual teachers who are dynamic, energetic and recognise that all teachers are language teachers at Leonardo da Vinci Academy
- To provide professional development opportunities for staff.
- To embrace the Czech Language and culture, providing high quality Czech Language courses to both native and non-native speaker
- To forge strong cross curricular links between subjects in the Primary School by adapting the International Primary Curriculum for use in the classroom
- To take advantage of our Pearson Edexcel International School accreditation to make the most of access to curriculum support, assessment and training
- For all students to achieve excellent results in Czech national examinations
- For all students to achieve results exceeding the worldwide average in Pearson Edexcel exams in English, Maths and Science, and a pass in a minimum of seven IGCSEs
- To identify and support students lagging behind their peers in either their L1 or L2
- To use assessment to measure and inform attainment
- To provide opportunities for students to forge cross-cultural links with their L2

References

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