



LANGUAGE POLICY

for The Kildonan School

I. PHILOSOPHY

“Learning to speak another’s language means taking one’s place in the human community. It means reaching out to others across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Language is far more than a system to be explained. It is our most important link to the world around us. Language is culture in motion. It is people interacting with people.” - Savignon (1983)

As a candidate International Baccalaureate (IB) World school, we value the diverse language backgrounds of our learners and recognize that the study of language is the foundation for all learning. To that end, all teachers are language teachers. Language learning is key to effective communication, cultural identity, international mindedness, and lifelong learning. Successful language learning occurs in authentic and meaningful contexts. For such learning to occur, instruction must be differentiated and varied as well as integrated with listening, speaking, viewing, reading, and writing skills.

In the summer of 2012, the Kildonan staff, administration and board developed a five-year Strategic Plan for the school’s future, which is now, of course, our present. A key goal of the “SP” was a multi-sensory foreign language program inspired by Orton-Gillingham principles. We have developed that discipline over two years through consultation with Landmark College and an Indiana-based study. Multi-sensory foreign language instruction is now a required part of the Kildonan academic program for students in grades 6-10, and strongly encouraged in grades 11-12.

II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline our goals for language teaching and learning, including learning an additional language, valuing the linguistic diversity of our community, and supporting students in learning the language of instruction, English. Another purpose is to boost the confidence of all-dyslexic student body, as almost all our students have been told previously that they would never do well in learning a foreign language.

III. DEFINITIONS

- **Mother-tongue:** Describes the language the student uses at home or outside the classroom and may be called the child’s first language, home language, preferred language, native language, or heritage language.
- **Additional language:** Describes a language learned after a first language.
- **English Language Learner (ELL):** Describes a learner whose first language is not English, or who has learned English outside of the United States.

- **Dyslexia:** Dyslexia is phenomenon of the brain that usually confers visual strengths that make written language, consisting of arbitrarily designed visual symbols, difficult for the dyslexic student. That difficulty is primarily associated with a phonological processing deficit. Dyslexia also includes what often appears to be a reduced verbal working memory (WM) span. (Beneventi, Tonnessen, & Erslund, 2009, a study which calls into question the long-standing assumption that dyslexics' low WM scores reflect an inherent WM deficit or rather the text-based nature of WM assessments). Based on information from neuroscientific and linguistic research, the challenge of dyslexia can be summarized as difficulty in the use and processing of arbitrarily assigned and sequenced linguistic/symbolic codes. Persons with dyslexia are those who, despite traditional classroom teaching, are unable to master the basic elements of the written language system of their culture, although some written language systems suit the visually empowered dyslexic brain better than others do. Since written language is the fundamental tool upon which subsequent academic learning is based, such persons often encounter difficulty in all educational endeavors. Studies show that individuals with dyslexia process information in a different area of the brain than do non-dyslexics. The causes for dyslexia are neurobiological and genetic. Individuals inherit the genetic links for dyslexia. Chances are that one of the child's parents, grandparents, aunts, or uncles is dyslexic. (Retrieved from <http://www.kildonan.org/page.cfm?p=382>)
- **Orton-Gillingham:** Orton-Gillingham is an instructional approach intended primarily for use with persons who have difficulty with reading, spelling, and writing of the sort associated with dyslexia. It is most properly understood and practiced as an approach, not a method, program, system or technique. In the hands of a well-trained and experienced instructor, it is a powerful tool of exceptional breadth, depth, and flexibility.

The essential curricular content and instructional practices that characterize the Orton-Gillingham Approach are derived from two sources: first from a body of time-tested knowledge and practice that has been validated over the past 70 years, and second from scientific evidence about how persons learn to read and write; why a significant number have difficulty in doing so; how having dyslexia makes achieving literacy skills more difficult; and which instructional practices are best suited for teaching such persons to read and write well.

The Orton-Gillingham Approach always is focused upon the learning needs of the individual student. Students with dyslexia need to master the same basic knowledge about language and its relationship to our writing system as any who seek to become competent readers and writers. However, because of their dyslexia, they need more help than most people in sorting, recognizing, and organizing the raw materials of written language for thinking and use. Language elements that non-dyslexic learners acquire easily must be taught directly and systematically. (Retrieved from <http://www.ortonacademy.org/approach.php>)

Orton-Gillingham instruction can be characterized as systematic and structured; sequential, incremental, and cumulative; reliant on continuous feedback and positive reinforcement; cognitively based; and emotionally sound. (Retrieved from <http://www.ortonacademy.org/approach.php>)

- **Diagnostic Prescriptive:** An Orton-Gillingham lesson is both *diagnostic* and *prescriptive*. It is diagnostic in the sense that the instructor continuously monitors the verbal, nonverbal, and written responses of the student to identify and analyze both the student's problems and progress. This information is the basis of planning the next lesson. That lesson is prescriptive in the sense that it will contain instructional elements that focus upon the resolution of the student's difficulties and that build upon the student's progress noted in the previous lesson. (Retrieved from <http://www.ortonacademy.org/approach.php>)
- **Multisensory:** Instruction that uses all the learning pathways: seeing, hearing, feeling, and awareness of motion, brought together by the thinking brain. The instructor engages in multisensory teaching to convey curricular content in the most understandable way to the student. The teacher also models how the student, by using these multiple pathways, can engage in multisensory learning that results in greater ease and success in learning. (Retrieved from <http://www.ortonacademy.org/approach.php>) Given the visual strengths that the dyslexic brain confers, a multisensory approach is an ideal way to remediate the challenges that an arbitrary written language system imposes on the dyslexic student.

- **Total Physical Response (TPR):** Originally developed by James Asher, an American professor of psychology, in the 1960s, Total Physical Response (TPR) is based on the theory that the memory is enhanced through association with physical movement. It is also closely associated with theories of mother tongue language acquisition in very young children, where they respond physically to parental commands, such as "Pick it up" and "Put it down". TPR as an approach to teaching a second language is based, first and foremost, on listening, and this process is linked to physical actions which are designed to reinforce comprehension of particular basic items.

(Retrieved from

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/methodology/methodology/teaching-approaches/teaching-approaches-total-physical-response/146503.article>)

Total physical response is an example of the comprehension approach to language teaching (*at Kildonan, we use this approach when we introduce our students to Spanish*). Methods in the comprehension approach emphasize the importance of listening on language development, and do not require spoken output in the early stages of learning. In total physical response, students are not forced to speak. Instead, teachers wait until students acquire enough language through listening that they start to speak spontaneously. At the beginning stages of instruction, students can respond to the instructor in their native language. While the majority of class time in total physical response is spent on listening comprehension, the ultimate goal of the method is to develop oral fluency. Asher sees developing listening comprehension skills as the most efficient way of developing spoken language skills. Lessons in TPR are organized around grammar and in particular around the verb. Instructors issue commands based on the verbs and vocabulary to be learned in that lesson. However, the primary focus in lessons is on meaning, which distinguishes TPR from other grammar-based methods such as grammar-translation.

(Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Total_physical_response)

- **Proficiency:** A high degree of competence or skill in a discipline or endeavor that allows one to function successfully in that endeavor.

IV. LANGUAGE PROFILE

In 1969 The Kildonan School was founded to meet the needs of students with dyslexia by strengthening language skills, by providing stimulating subject matter courses, and by building confidence and self-esteem. Despite many changes over the decades in our use of technology and in our application of advances in scientific research into the dyslexic brain, the school philosophy and objectives remain virtually unchanged. The school continues its mission to empower dyslexic students and to identify and further their talents. In the 2014-2015 school year, Spanish as a foreign language was introduced at Kildonan. In the 2015-2016 school year, American Sign Language was introduced as a second option. Although it is unusual for a dyslexia-friendly school to teach a foreign language to its dyslexic students, we do so because of scholarly and scientific data showing that dyslexics are quite capable of gaining proficiency and even fluency in a second language.

That ability in dyslexics generally proves especially true in the case of Kildonan students, as we carefully select each of them through a rigorous and thoughtful admissions process. We only accept students with a strong cognitive profile, the clear presence of dyslexia, and the emotional and behavioral stability to function well away from home in a boarding environment that is not therapeutic in nature. Such students respond well to our intellectually challenging, multisensory, OG-based, TPR-influenced foreign language instruction.

V. LANGUAGE COURSES AT KILDONAN

A. ORTON GILLINGHAM APPROACH

- **One-on-one Tutoring** as a subject area is taught to all students (grades 2-12) at Kildonan. Language skills are taught in isolation and later reinforced in combination with other skills, and they are tailored to meet the personal needs of each student in the daily tutoring session.

- **Subject matter courses** - Language skills are integrated into subject matter courses in a spiraling pattern, leading to the ultimate goal of independent learning. In many cases, teachers read aloud to students in class, thus opening up greater access to higher-level thinking and interpretation.

B. FOREIGN LANGUAGE FOR GRADES 2-12

- **Kodiaks (grades 2-5)**: semester-long elementary introduction to Spanish
- **Grade 6 (MYP)**: carousel introduction, a year-long introduction to both ASL and Spanish.
- **Grade 7-10 (MYP)**: 7th graders choose ASL or Spanish and commit until end of 10th grade.
**New students will have the option to select a language and will have one quarter to decide if that language is a good fit. If new students decide they prefer the other language, they may make a permanent switch at the end of their first quarter.
- **Grade 11/12**: foreign language options are offered as electives

C. IB MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAM (MYP) COURSES

- Learning to communicate in a variety of ways in more than one language is fundamental to the development of intercultural understanding in the IB. International Baccalaureate programs, therefore, support complex, rich, dynamic learning across a range of language domains. All IB programs mandate that students learn another language (*MYP: From Principles into Practice*).
- Language acquisition in the MYP aims to develop a respect for, and understanding of, other languages and cultures, and is equally designed to equip the student with a skills base to facilitate further language learning (*MYP Language Acquisition guide*).
- MYP students continuing on to the 11/12 program at Kildonan will have developed not only an inquiring and reflective approach to language learning, but also literacy skills that they will be able to apply and extend in their 11/12 language courses.
- **Language and Literature** as a subject area is taught through:
 - Humanities (*Literature and History*) in the MYP for students in grades 6, 7, 8
 - Literature in the MYP for students in grades 9, 10
- **Language Acquisition** as a subject area is taught through:
 - Spanish and ASL in the MYP for students in grades 6-10

VI. PLACEMENT IN LANGUAGE COURSES

- All students in MYP must take Spanish or ASL.
- Students entering Kildonan are offered a choice of Spanish or ASL, and are asked to commit to that language for at least three years. Students in grade 6 take a semester of each, and are asked to choose for 7th grade.
- Students are placed in Phase 1, 2, or subsequent phases depending upon their proficiency in the language, rather than their age or grade level. Students progress at their own rate, and move on to the next phase when they are ready.
- Students entering 11/12 language courses are strongly encouraged to continue studying the language they studied in the MYP.
- Students are placed with a 1:1 Language Training tutor who will be a good match in terms of personality and experience working with children of a particular age. Students in 11/12 who are preparing for college are matched with tutors who are familiar with the SAT/ACT and college application process. A major factor in assigning tutors is whether a given tutor possesses particular skills in teaching, for example, advanced Latin and Greek-based word morphology or, at the other end of the O.G. scope/sequence, basic sound-symbol correspondence.

VII. DOCUMENT REVIEW

- This language policy will be reviewed by members of the school's instructional teams and/or interested staff by August 1st annually.
- Updated March, 2016.

Bibliography

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