

This booklet is written to inform our ESL students and parents and to give them some guidance through the ESL Program at the FIS.

The ESL Parent Info Handbook is written by Ms Sabine Lang in her role as the Head of the ESL Department at the FIS and updated by Ms Jessica Davey as Head of the ESL Department from 2015/16.

Thank you to Ms Fitch for contributing to this booklet about “Intensive ESL for High School Students” and to Ms Koyama for working on the ESL Competency Chart.

This booklet is the result of books that have been read, experiences that have been made while teaching ESL at the FIS, as well as of workshops and presentations that have been visited about this topic. The ESL Department at the FIS would like to thank the International Schools in Berlin-Brandenburg, Munich (MIS), Stuttgart and Bangkok for exchanging ideas and sharing materials with us.

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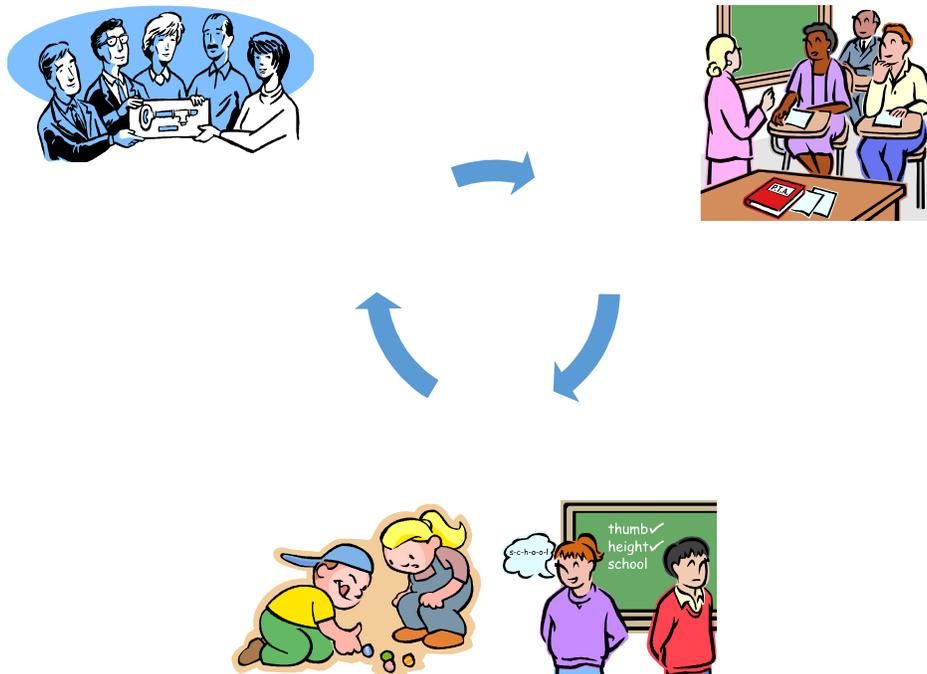
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## Introduction

The ESL Parent Information Handbook has been designed in order to provide ESL students' parents with information about the nature of the ESL Program at the FIS. The ESL Department would like to explain the aims of the ESL Program, the instructional approaches used within the Program, as well as the structure of the Program. Additionally, we would like to provide parents and students with a basic understanding of second language acquisition theory and answer some commonly asked questions. Thus we would like to establish a shared knowledge base between the students, the parents and the ESL Teaching Team in order to best support the ESL students in acquiring the English language and to assist both, parents and students, in the process of settling in into a new environment as well as orienting themselves to the FIS.

The ESL Departments strives for a teamwork approach between the students, the parents, the mainstream teachers and the ESL teachers. A teamwork approach has proven itself as most beneficial to the ESL students and their language learning.

The ESL Teaching Team looks forward to meeting your children and you, as well as to assisting all parties involved in a fruit bearing teamwork approach.



Please feel free to contact the Head of the ESL Department ([Jessica.davey@the-fis.de](mailto:Jessica.davey@the-fis.de)) or any ESL teacher at the respective school sections (ES, MS or HS) if you have any questions or concerns.

## The Nature of the ESL Program

Students who do not speak any English or whose English is not yet sufficient to cope successfully in most situations in the mainstream classroom receive support through the ESL Program. The ESL Program at the FIS is levelled and provides instruction for beginners, intermediate and advanced students. The teaching team strives to support ESL students until they are able to function independently, both academically and socially, in the mainstream classroom. We try to integrate the ESL students fully in the mainstream classes as soon as possible. To this end, a supportive environment is provided in both ESL and mainstream classes to encourage students to take risks in their language learning and to increase their self-confidence. Language is taught and practised within natural contexts and meaningful situations, in which the students feel accepted, happy and comfortable while feeling challenged at the same time being aware that misunderstandings and mistakes are accepted as essential in the learning process.

We believe in the maintenance and the valuing of the students' native language and culture. Therefore, we are committed to the support of parents in working with their children at home, as well as to assisting all ESL students in their language learning by giving them useful clues and providing a helping hand whenever it might be needed.

## Aims of the ESL Program

The social and academic integration of the students into the mainstream classroom is the overall goal of the ESL Program at the FIS. In order to help the students achieve this level, we have aims in the following areas:

### Content

- Reinforcement and pre-teaching of concepts and vocabulary from mainstream classroom subjects, such as Social Studies, Science and Maths. Enhance thinking skills used in all subject areas.
- Four Language Skills – Listening, Reading, Speaking, Writing (including Grammar)
- Develop the students' skills in English in all subject areas.

### Attitude

Build the students' self-confidence and instil a positive attitude towards the new language and culture. Generate a positive attitude and awareness of multiculturalism. Encourage risk-taking and viewing mistakes as a learning opportunity. Instil personal patience in the students in the language acquisition process.

## Educating Staff at the FIS

We educate mainstream teachers about the ESL Program, second language acquisition, as well as about the needs of non-native English speaking students in the school. We provide support for adapting worksheets and tests. Additionally, the ESL teachers meet regularly with the mainstream teachers to create joint planning in order to best support the ESL students in the mainstream classes and in the ESL classes.

## Educating Parents of ESL Students

We strive to provide you with information about the ESL Program at the FIS, about the nature of second language acquisition and how to support your children in their language learning. The ESL Department publishes this booklet, hosts an ESL Parent Info Evening, Parent Teacher Conferences, runs its own ESL website (<http://www.fis-esl.de>) and facilitates individual communication with you.

## Instructional Approaches

At the FIS we teach language through a student-centred approach, in which the ESL students' needs direct the effective teaching of the language objectives. The students are provided with opportunities to use English language in meaningful situations and natural, authentic contexts communicating in a wide range of activities. Hands-on activities, learning by doing and by trying out language are motivating methods for language learners. Additionally, we draw on the interests and experiences of all students incorporating the experiences and values of children from differing social and cultural backgrounds. The ESL teachers at the FIS use the following instructional approaches in the teaching of the English language:

- The language Program is a balanced one in which all four skills, listening, speaking, and reading and writing, are equally emphasized and integrated with one another. All four skills include the teaching of English grammar as well as practicing it in a variety of contexts.
- Language teaching is linked to other areas of the curriculum through theme-based topics and / or content work from the mainstream classroom. It is important that the language objectives are taught *through* the content, i.e. mainstream topics, so that the ESL students will be provided access to the background knowledge, skills, strategies and concepts that are taught to their peers in the mainstream classes.
- A variety of methods and materials are used to meet the different language learning styles of children, including visual learners, auditory learners and kinaesthetic learners. It is also important for us to use teaching methods that are appropriate to the age of the students. Methods and materials used include:
  - Art projects (crafts, drawing, painting)
  - Communicative activities (whole group and pair work, discussions, games)
  - Drama and movement (role plays, dialogues, skits, total physical response, pantomime)

- Music (songs, instruments)
- Repetition, oral-aural drills, worksheets
- Literature (rhymes, poems, stories, reading aloud, asking & answering of questions, writing activities)
- Real life experiences (field trips, speakers, student-led interests & projects)
- Technology and Media (magazines, newspapers, Internet websites, CD-ROMs, apps, computer programs, word processing, etc.)
- Realia (board games, pictures, puppets, maps, sensory-related objects, etc.)

## Program Structure and Language Proficiency Scale

### Program Structure

The current ESL Program is structured to meet the individual developmental needs of students at each grade level. The ESL teachers support their students through both “push-in” and “pull-out” classes. In both cases, ESL teachers coordinate closely with mainstream teachers to provide appropriate content information for students, as well as information about individual student needs. The teaching team also discusses differentiation of work that the students need to accomplish in the mainstream classes.

*What are “push-in” and “pull-out” classes?*

“Push-in” classes: ESL teachers accompany ESL students into the mainstream classroom to assist them with the content work. This service may also include provision of adapted worksheets and tests, as well as team teaching situations with the mainstream teachers. These classes allow ESL teachers to assess how their students cope with the content work, to collect information to direct future “pull-out” teaching and to observe how ESL students integrate socially into the mainstream class.

“Pull-out” classes: ESL teachers take students out of the mainstream classroom to provide language instruction in the ESL classroom, as well as content-area support. Content-area support will include pre-teaching and re-enforcing of vocabulary and concepts taught in the mainstream class.

This Sheltered Immersion Model (SIM) allows ESL students at the FIS to successfully meet the criteria of the FIS Curricula, as well as to reach not only Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) but also Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). This is significant for the ESL students to experience success during their school careers, especially in high school and post-secondary studies.

## *Definition of SIM:*

*Sheltered* means ESL students are supported by direct and indirect services. *Immersion* means ESL students are educated in the same classroom as their peers as far as possible and according to the ESL students' needs (= "push-in" & "pull-out" classes, all mainstream classes they attend).

Through this *Model* we strive to provide individualized access to the FIS Curricula for all students at our school, to best support them in their language learning, as well as to integrate them socially into the mainstream classroom.

Direct services for students include teaching of language and content through "push-in" and "pull-out" classes, team-teaching with mainstream teachers as well as receiving adapted worksheets and tests. English for Academic Purposes is offered for students at high school level. Indirect services are the co-planning of the ESL teachers with the mainstream teachers, teacher in-service to educate other staff members, collaboration with mainstream teachers as well as providing ESL students' parents with information about the ESL Program and the nature of the language acquisition process.

## *Intensive ESL for High School Students*

Due to the rigors of the FIS High School Program, it is highly recommended that new students who are beginners in ESL obtain private English tuition outside of school hours. Ideally, any student entering the FIS with ESL needs should attend an intensive English camp during the summer prior to school entry. Not only does this better prepare the students for the academic demands of high school, but it can also increase the students' self-esteem as regards their language abilities – a critical component of developing success in school.

## **Language Proficiency Scale**

The language proficiency scale defines and displays the ability level a student has reached in the process of acquiring a language. At the FIS we provide services for students who are beginner, intermediate or advanced level. The number of ESL lessons ("push-in" and / or "pull-out" classes) an ESL student receives per week is based on their proficiency level. Beginners receive seven to ten lessons of ESL support per week. Intermediate and advanced level students are provided with one to six lessons per week, as demonstrated by their ability to function independently and successfully in the mainstream, grade-level classroom.

Students who enter the school with little or no English are considered as being beginner level. Instruction for beginners focuses on establishing basic vocabulary and grammatical structures in order to assist them with becoming acquainted with school life at the FIS. Knowledge of the alphabet and the corresponding sounds as well as practicing their reading skills in guided situations using age-appropriate and basic-level texts (often picture books) are also part of ESL lessons for beginners. These students also receive support for establishing content vocabulary and for the work they have to do in the mainstream classes. Beginner level students are encouraged to write

simple sentences and text using taught structures and vocabulary in activities guided by the teacher. Intermediate students work on further expanding their vocabulary knowledge as well as on producing longer, written text. These students are taught language mainly through content related topics and often receive more “push-in” classes than “pull-out” classes. Advanced level students function quite well in the mainstream classes and are able to cope with most of the assigned tasks there. They only require a little support through an ESL teacher for the consistent use of tenses and correct grammatical structures in their written texts, as well as for answering comprehension questions in full detail. These students work towards exiting the ESL Program.

For some indicators defining and characterising the different proficiency or competency levels in the language acquisition process please refer to the chart below. Don't hesitate to ask one of the ESL teachers if you have questions about this chart or if you'd like to have some detailed information about the individual level of your child or your children.

RG-58

**Figure 5M: CAN DO Descriptors for the Levels of English Language Proficiency, PreK-12**

For the given level of English language proficiency, **with support**, English language learners can:

|           | Level 1<br>Entering   | Level 2<br>Beginning   | Level 3<br>Developing  | Level 4<br>Expanding   | Level 5<br>Bridging  |
|-----------|---|--|--|--|--|
| LISTENING | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Point to stated pictures, words, phrases</li> <li>Follow one-step oral directions</li> <li>Match oral statements to objects, figures or illustrations</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sort pictures, objects according to oral instructions</li> <li>Follow two-step oral directions</li> <li>Match information from oral descriptions to objects, illustrations</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Locate, select, order information from oral descriptions</li> <li>Follow multi-step oral directions</li> <li>Categorize or sequence oral information using pictures, objects</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compare/contrast functions, relationships from oral information</li> <li>Analyze and apply oral information</li> <li>Identify cause and effect from oral discourse</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draw conclusions from oral information</li> <li>Construct models based on oral discourse</li> <li>Make connections from oral discourse</li> </ul> |
| SPEAKING  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Name objects, people, pictures</li> <li>Answer WH- (who, what, when, where, which) questions</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask WH- questions</li> <li>Describe pictures, events, objects, people</li> <li>Restate facts</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formulate hypotheses, make predictions</li> <li>Describe processes, procedures</li> <li>Retell stories or events</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss stories, issues, concepts</li> <li>Give speeches, oral reports</li> <li>Offer creative solutions to issues, problems</li> </ul>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage in debates</li> <li>Explain phenomena, give examples and justify responses</li> <li>Express and defend points of view</li> </ul>           |
| READING   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Match icons and symbols to words, phrases or environmental print</li> <li>Identify concepts about print and text features</li> </ul>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Locate and classify information</li> <li>Identify facts and explicit messages</li> <li>Select language patterns associated with facts</li> </ul>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sequence pictures, events, processes</li> <li>Identify main ideas</li> <li>Use context clues to determine meaning of words</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpret information or data</li> <li>Find details that support main ideas</li> <li>Identify word families, figures of speech</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct research to glean information from multiple sources</li> <li>Draw conclusions from explicit and implicit text</li> </ul>                  |
| WRITING   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Label objects, pictures, diagrams</li> <li>Draw in response to a prompt</li> <li>Produce icons, symbols, words, phrases to convey messages</li> </ul>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make lists</li> <li>Produce drawings, phrases, short sentences, notes</li> <li>Give information requested from oral or written directions</li> </ul>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produce bare-bones expository or narrative texts</li> <li>Compare/contrast information</li> <li>Describe events, people, processes, procedures</li> </ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summarize information from graphics or notes</li> <li>Edit and revise writing</li> <li>Create original ideas or detailed responses</li> </ul>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply information to new contexts</li> <li>React to multiple genres and discourses</li> <li>Author multiple forms/ genres of writing</li> </ul>   |

Level 6 Reading

Variability of students' cognitive development due to age, grade level spans, their diversity of educational experiences and diagnosed learning disabilities (if applicable), are to be considered in using this information.

## Student Assessment and Exiting the ESL Program

### Student Assessment

Student assessment is an on-going process throughout the school year in both formal and informal situations (formulative assessment). All four skill areas, as well as the students' knowledge of grammatical structures and their ability to use these correctly, are assessed regularly at levels appropriate to the students' ability and age. A variety of formative and summative assessment measures are used. The FIS Assessment Policy applies to the ESL Program as well as the grading scheme used in the report cards of each school section.

An initial assessment of skills is administered to all new ESL students at the beginning of each school year, i.e. prior to or upon their enrolment at the FIS in order to determine student placement according to their proficiency level in English. For the initial assessment the W-APT (a standardized test for ESL students to determine their proficiency level), student observations and a writing sample (not for absolute beginners) are used. At the end of the year, students are assessed in all four skills by way of the WIDA MODEL, a summative English language proficiency level assessment. During the year, at the end of a unit, semester and / or school year final assessment will be given in ESL classes. Assessment tools for formulative and final assessment of the students' skills in English include

- Portfolios
- Paper and pencil quizzes and tests
- Teacher observations and anecdotal notes
- Rubrics
- Checklists
- Writing samples
- Recordings of speeches
- Presentations of project work
- Participation in class (orally)
- Exit Criteria.

In the report cards students may receive the mark "M" (Modified Program) in some subject areas, such as Social Studies, Science or Maths, depending on their language proficiency level and their ability to cope with the work and tests given in those classes.

For their performance in English and the ESL lessons the students will receive an ESL Report Card that will display their proficiency level and a narrative comment regarding each of the four skill areas: Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing. Students are not graded on their progress in English as a Second Language, apart from in High School courses where they will be externally assessed, i.e. IGCSE ESL and IB English B.

## Exiting the ESL Program

Students remain in the ESL Program until they demonstrate the language and skills necessary to work independently in the mainstream classroom. Some or all of the following criteria assist the

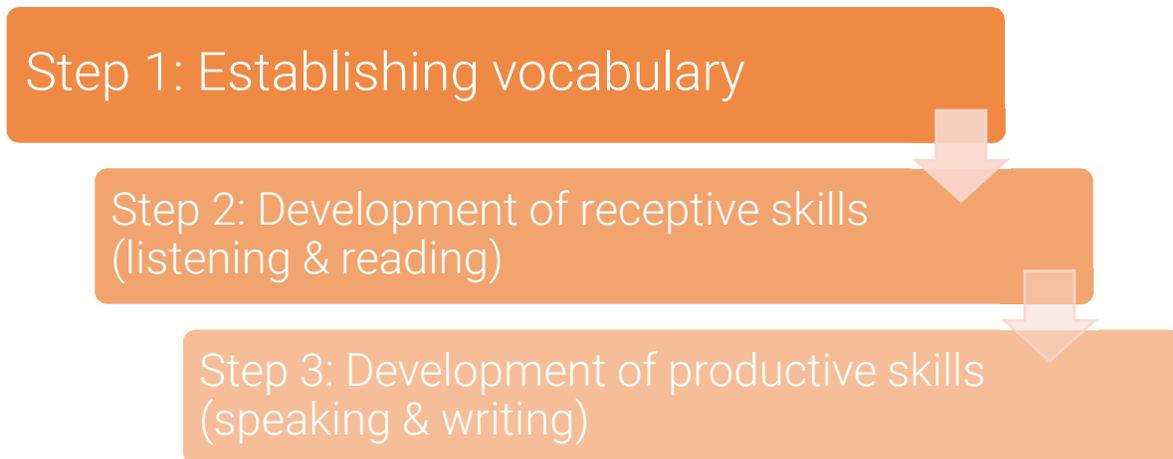
ESL Teaching Team in determining the students' ability to cope effectively in all mainstream classes and when they do not require any direct services from the ESL Department anymore:

- ESL exit criteria checklist
- Proficiency tests
- Teacher recommendations
- Mainstream classroom performance
- Socio-cultural adjustment
- Student / parent consultation (where appropriate)

Upon exiting the ESL Program, the students' language skills continue to be monitored.

## Second Language Acquisition Theory

Language acquisition process



The process of acquiring a second, third, etc. language is both conscious and unconscious. Therefore, student effort and teacher instruction must be consciously focused on language. However, at the same time students naturally acquire a new language by being exposed to it in natural contexts and meaningful situations. Provision of direct language instruction combined with a language-rich environment throughout the school assists students in developing English language proficiency by using the language in a variety of social and academic settings.

Students establish basic vocabulary in ESL lessons and outside of structured classes by listening to native speakers in meaningful situations. Through this, their listening comprehension is built up and practiced. Most students then produce speech in the new language by repeating words or giving one word answers. Going from there, they will soon speak in simple sentences. Some students experience a “silent period”, which can occur and is also natural in the early stages of learning a new language. This silence should not be mistaken for a lack of comprehension or learning. Newly arrived students sometimes only start to speak in English when they have worked out some rules and procedures of the English language and when they have gotten to know a range of basic vocabulary. It is highly important for the development of the productive skills, speaking and writing, that students feel confident to try using English. Students may experience some difficulty in pronouncing some English sounds that do not occur in their first language. With continued exposure to the language and some practice speaking it they will master those sounds after a while.

The students’ ability to read will develop as they establish vocabulary and learn to speak English. Factors influencing the rate of this development are the student’s age, literacy skills in the student’s first language and if they have already learnt a script that is different from English and if they consequently have to learn a new script to read English. Skills and knowledge from reading in the first language will transfer over into the new language. However, it should not be forgotten that students still have to learn most or all of the following:

- New sounds and how they are spelt (also different ways of spelling one sound)
- New intonation and stress patterns
- New conventions in the presentation of texts, as well as the organisation of information in texts
- New culturally specific reading values and behaviours
- If students need to learn a new script, they are also required to learn that English uses a phonetic writing system and they might also be confronted with getting used to new conventions, such as reading text from left to right.

Students who are able to read in the new language use all kinds of text to establish their vocabulary and practice their reading in the foreign language. This furthers the development of their speaking skills and lastly of their writing skills. Like learning to read in English, learning to write in English is closely linked to the student’s ability to produce speech in English. Students will first write simple sentences using taught patterns and words they are familiar with or some might try on their own when feeling confident enough. Having mastered the first stage of guided writing, students will become more independent as their knowledge of how the English language works in writing grows. The last hurdle that needs to be taken is the use of correct grammar structures in their language production (speaking & writing). Usually, this hurdle will first be taken in speaking and at the very end of the language acquisition process in writing. Vocabulary expansion assists students in the process of learning a new language and should be seen as a continuous process.

We would like to stress that the language acquisition process is unique for each child and it is possible that some students may make more progress in some skill areas than other skill areas. Therefore, it is possible that a student may advance to the next level of proficiency based on their

strengths in some skill areas, but still need practice in other skills at a lower level. Naturally there exist some factors that influence the acquisition of a new language, such as first language proficiency, learner characteristics, instructional Program and the amount of time spent learning the language (See also in chapter 4 “Why do some children learn English more quickly than others?”).

Students develop two different levels of language ability – Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency (CALP). BICS are needed and used for conversational fluency in order to interact with peers and teachers and join in classroom activities demonstrating social confidence and competence. Establishing BICS can take up to two or sometimes even three years. CALP must be developed to be able to learn effectively about content subject areas. Students must be able to reason, hypothesize, discuss abstract ideas and extract information presented in school texts, as well as use this information to create presentations. Academic language is closely related to the topics and is also more abstract and formal. It takes a student five to ten years to acquire CALP as research in North America in public schools has shown.

A fully developed first language is a great advantage to second language learners. They can build on the cognitive and linguistic knowledge of their native language as well as their experiences as learners. Being bilingual, i.e. being able to speak more than one, two or three languages can be educationally enriching and has a positive effect on intellectual performance. This should be valued as a special achievement.

## Some Frequently Asked Questions & Supporting the ESL Students at Home

In this chapter the ESL Department would like to give some answers to some questions frequently asked by parents. Of course, there are always exceptions to group-like generalisations and it should also be considered that other international schools might work in a different way. Therefore, answers to some questions might vary from school to school.

## How long does it usually take a student to become fluent in English?

According to research done in North America and Australia there are rates for the development of Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and for Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency (CALP) when acquiring a new language:

Social English skills (BICS): 1 – 3 years

Academic English skills (CALP):

National Systems: 4 – 7 years

With continued literacy development in native language: 5 – 10 years

Without continued literacy development in native language: longer

International Schools: 2 /3 – or more years

Developing academic English depends on various factors, such as learner characteristics, the type of language Program, time spent on learning the language, etc. Therefore, it's difficult to make predictions and research still works in this area. It definitely takes more time than developing BICS.

## Why do some children learn English more quickly than others?

The stages and rates of second language development vary depending on factors such as learner characteristics, first language proficiency, the amount of time spent on learning the language and the type of language Program provided. Learner characteristics include the following:

- Personality  
Children who are outgoing tend to learn languages more quickly than children who are shy.
- Background experience & exposure to the language  
Background experience: When parents take their children to museums, galleries, the cinema, zoos and talk to them and read with them in their native language about the places they have been to and experiences the children have made, children are able to make connections more quickly to content taught in English.  
Exposure to the English language: Children, who have many opportunities to experience and practice a new language in natural contexts and meaningful situations for different purposes, will acquire that language naturally and more quickly as compared to children who only speak the language in a language learning environment. Providing children with these opportunities will assist them greatly in their language learning! (See also point 4.3)
- Self-esteem  
Children with high self-esteem are more likely to take risks, to engage others in conversation and will worry less about making mistakes. Therefore, it is important to value the child's efforts to learn the new language and give them a lot of praise. High tolerance

for making mistakes and valuing those as a means of language learning and development as well as for personal development is important, especially in the early stages of acquiring a language.

- Attitude towards the target language & culture  
When children feel comfortable and welcome in a new environment and when they think “I like it here and I like the other children and people” – they will have the wish to communicate with the people in their new environment. Therefore, their motivation to learn a new language will be higher as opposed to students who did not want to move to the new country and who feel homesick or not welcome in the new environment. A positive and friendly atmosphere in both environments at school and at home will assist students here.
- Attitude towards the teacher and the classroom environment  
When the children like the teacher and like the school and if they want to work with the teacher and their peers, they will acquire new language more quickly. A friendly, welcoming atmosphere and a positive attitude towards newcomers combined with a language-rich atmosphere and colourful displays that can be used for reference will greatly help new students.
- Motivation  
If children did not want to leave their home country or if they feel angry, frustrated, nervous or anxious, the language learning process will be slowed down. The higher their motivation is to learn, the faster they do learn.
- Anxiety level  
The more worried a child is or the more worried parents are, the more slowly a child will learn. Pressure does neither accelerate nor improve the rate of language acquisition.
- Age  
Young children are enthusiastic language learners and have more time that they can spend on learning a new language than older students. However, they lack the advantages of first language literacy and a wide range of life experiences. Children who are literate in their first language and who have made sufficient life and educational experiences (age range 7 – 11 years) have an advantage and usually do have more time to spend on their language learning than older students who are highly challenged by the academic Program at high school level. Their advantage lies in greater life and educational experiences, a higher proficiency in their native language, maybe having already started to learn another foreign language and therefore, they are able to learn a new language faster, also using learning strategies that they might already know. However, these students need to “catch up” with their peers while these also make progress in their academic skills. Older ESL students face a challenging task (acquiring a new language, getting used to new school routines, catching up on academic skills & learning new content in all subject areas) which does not only require perseverance and use of learning strategies, but also sufficient support by their peers, teachers and parents.

- Academic ability & cognitive style  
Students who already know a variety of learning strategies can transfer these over to learning the new language. Other factors are also organisational skills, background knowledge about content areas in the native language (use of materials in their native language) and what kind of a learner they are, such as visual, kinaesthetic or aural.

It also needs to be mentioned that many learning disabilities will slow the language acquisition process or may cause further frustration in students. However, limited English proficiency or a slower language acquisition process should not automatically be misdiagnosed as a learning disability. If there are any doubts about the causes for slower language acquisition, careful and close analysis of the student case must be made by a team of experienced teachers, as well as involving the parents in this process.

Proficiency in the native language plays a very important role in the language acquisition process. When students read books in their first language and write in their first language, they build a strong background knowledge which helps them to make connections to reading in the new language. Strategies and concepts learnt in the native language can be used and will transfer over into the new language. Often the students “thinking language” still remains their first language for several years, even if they have already reached a certain proficiency level in the new language. Therefore, it is important to assist the students in keeping up their native language and to talk about work done in school at home in the native language to avoid that wider gaps in the vocabulary knowledge in the students’ first language will develop. The more time students can spend on focused language learning, the faster they will learn a new language. An effective instructional language Program should expose students to an adequate amount of language-rich experiences and should provide them with many opportunities to practice language in meaningful contexts for different purposes. The rate of acquiring a new language is accelerated when the language used in the classroom is comprehensible for the students but also challenging.

## How do I best support my child at home and is it important to keep up my child's native language?

This question has been asked frequently by parents in the last couple of years and we have looked through several ESL journals and we have discussed our ideas and suggestions. The ideas and suggestions below are key ideas to best help your children, but are not the only way you can help your children.

You can assist your children in acquiring English through

- Ensuring mother tongue development  
Reading to your child in your mother tongue is very important (ES level), i.e. children should always be given opportunities to read books in their mother tongue. Speaking the first language at home is also extremely important.

- Reading in English and discussing it in the mother tongue  
Books that are read in school are often available in many other languages. See if you can get those for your child as reading a book in the native language and in English will promote your child's understanding of the content of the books highly.
- Providing children with rich learning experiences (books, audio-books, tapes, cds with stories or songs, video tapes, language learning games and / or software, cinema, theatre, holiday in an English speaking country, day camps or summer camps in an English speaking country)
- Don't pressure your child to speak English
- Give your child time to learn the new language and allow sufficient instruction time for your child to achieve CALP in the new language.
- Give your child a lot of praise for their learning efforts and progress that has been made, even if just a tiny step forward has been made
- Don't compare your child to other children. Remember that the process of language acquisition is unique to each child and that therefore, everybody learns a language at different rates.
- Be supportive of bilingualism  
If both parents support the decision to provide bilingual education for their child, the language acquisition will be definitely more successful than in case of one parent not backing up this decision. Doubts about this can certainly be felt by children and many children react to these.
- Provide opportunities to socialize with English speakers (play dates, meeting friends, holiday in an English speaking country, day camps or summer camps in an English speaking country, After School Activity Program at the FIS)
- Ensure that your child has a good dictionary appropriate to their age and proficiency level
- Obtain materials in the mother tongue on themes related to the child's studies in school (using friends and family in the home country as a resource might be a good idea, as well as getting together with families at the FIS who come from your home country; "Encarta", the CD-ROM encyclopaedia, is considered to be an excellent and valuable resource for ESL students and is now available in several languages)
- Maintain contact with the school (Parent Info Evening, Parent Teacher Conferences, emails, ESL communication book, FIS Newsletter)
- Ask your child's ESL teacher for more individualized recommendations or lists of recommendations appropriate to your child's age and ability level.

## What can students do to help themselves?

Students can do a great deal to help themselves in class

- Listening
  - Always listen carefully to the teacher. Try not to be distracted by other students.
  - Listen for words you do know while others are talking.
  - Listen for new words that you hear many times.
  - Ask questions. Tell the teacher when you don't know what to do.
- Speaking
  - Practice to speak English whenever it is possible.
  - It's okay to make mistakes. If you are not comfortable with making mistakes, write down your thoughts so that you can check what you would like to say before you speak.
- Reading
  - Don't worry about every single word. Try to guess the meaning of the text by concentrating on the words you do know.
  - Try to guess the meaning of words from the context.
  - Underline, highlight or circle ideas while reading your own book or handouts to help you understand better.
- Vocabulary
  - Ask teachers or classmates about the meanings of unknown technical terms from Maths, Science or Social Studies.
  - Use a thesaurus or the Longman Language Activator to learn new words.
  - Try to use new words when you're speaking or writing.
  - When you write use words that you're familiar with and write at your own level.
- General Classroom Behaviour
  - Show interest and listen attentively by maintaining eye contact, nodding your head and making appropriate facial gestures.
  - Volunteer ideas in discussion by raising your hand to ask questions and make comments.
  - Watch what the other students are doing as you may need to be doing the same thing.
  - Ask questions and tell the teacher when you don't understand or when you don't know what to do, either in class or after class.
  - Try to understand the big ideas, not every little detail. Key words may be explained or written on the board. These key words need to be learned and used as much as possible. Write these down in your notebook so that you will have time to revisit

- them at your own pace. Find these words in your dictionary and keep them as new vocabulary to learn. This is especially important at the middle and high school level.
- Write outlines or webs, draw maps or charts or use images in your mind of what the teacher is talking about to help you remember things. Listen and ask questions. Do whatever you feel helps you the most to understand and to show what you do know to the teacher.
  - Get help from other students. Sometimes a simple explanation from them is enough to get you started on an assignment.

## Suggested Readings

A Parent and Teacher's Guide to Bilingualism

Colin Baker  
Multilingual Matters  
ISBN 1853594555

Guia Para Padres Y Maestros De Ninos Bilingues

Alma Flor and Colin Baker  
Multilingual Matters  
ISBN 1-85359-511-X

The Bilingual Family Newsletter

Editor: Sami Grover  
Multilingual Matters  
One year subscription: € 20.00

Raising Multilingual Children

Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa  
BerginGarvey Greenwood  
ISBN 0897897501

Language Strategies for Bilingual Families

Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert  
Multilingual Matters  
ISBN 1853597155

Second Language Students in Mainstream Classrooms

Coreen Sears  
Multilingual Matters  
ISBN 1853594083