



World Languages Program

Introduction and Program Philosophy

The Prince William Academy World Languages Program is designed to prepare students to become leaders and active participants in a global society. To help them achieve this goal, PWA offers its students the opportunity to learn two of four world languages – Spanish, French, Arabic and Mandarin. These languages are four of the most widely spoken languages in the world, and comprise four of the six international languages used at the United Nations (Russian and English are the other two).

All students at PWA are required to study Spanish. Spanish is useful not only because of its prominence and popularity in the United States, but also because its Latin roots aid in boosting students' comprehension of English vocabulary and etymology. Students also choose one other language to study - French, Arabic or Mandarin. We offer classes in these secondary foreign languages twice per week, on Mondays and Wednesdays.

Goals

The goal of the world language program is to develop a student's communicative competence in at least two languages other than English. Since extensive research shows that children who are exposed to foreign languages early are more likely to achieve fluency and near-native pronunciation, PWA introduces students to foreign languages at age 2. The study of two languages continues through 8th grade. Classes for 2- and 3-years old are held for 30 minutes, while classes for all other students are 45 minutes.

Early language teaching is most effective when it focuses on engaging the learner in comprehensible but interesting and relevant conversations. Early on, grammar is not formally taught; students master basic language patterns through dialogues, role-play, songs, and skits.

Curriculum, Assessment, and Methodology

Prince William Academy follows the International Baccalaureate Program's themes when planning foreign language curricula and lessons. All the language classes follow a given theme, which changes every 4 to 6 weeks. (The particular themes may be found below.) Learning takes place in social and cultural situations that are relevant and comprehensible to the students. Teachers often use storytelling, music, and games to make lessons memorable. Students usually learn grammar by using the language in meaningful situations.

Our language program reinforces the goals of the general curriculum. Learners experience activities that take into account the characteristics of their cognitive, social, and psychomotor development. These activities may involve concrete experiences that include visuals such as picture flashcards, and hands-on experiences. In addition, teachers employ a variety of activities that appeal to the different learning styles of students. Students may be given age-appropriate reading and writing assignments in class, even in the early stages of learning a language.

Teachers assess students often in order to monitor their progress. Formal assessments, such as quizzes and an end-of-the-year test, administered in May, help gauge the success of our program and aid in placing students in language classes the following school year. More informal assessments such as observation and homework are given on a regular basis. Teachers may also use culminating performance assessments at the end of a thematic unit to evaluate student language development. Checklists that itemize what the student can do inform the teacher and, even more importantly, help the student develop skill in self-assessment.

At Prince William Academy, various approaches are used when teaching a second or third language. For example, students may be taught using Total Physical Response (TPR), or the Natural Approach. Total Physical Response is often used at the earliest stages of language learning, but can also be used at later stages to develop a child's listening skills and vocabulary. The teacher gives commands in the target language asking for a physical response, and the students perform the actions.

The Natural Approach is a communication-based approach to language learning. When the teacher engages students in comprehensible but interesting and relevant conversations, their communicative skills increase. This approach is modeled on the way a person living in a foreign country "picks up" the language by communicating with people in everyday situations. It is also the way small children learn their first language. The parent often engages the child in everyday conversation using simplified speech. Gradually, as the child's confidence and experience with the language increases, s/he begins to speak more fluently.

International Month

The World Language Program is designed to prepare its students to become global citizens, so students study the cultures of numerous countries. Its goals are

manifested every year when PWA celebrates International Month. Each class chooses a particular country to study, and throughout the month they conduct research about their chosen culture. The preparation for International Month is interdisciplinary, as students gain knowledge of history, geography and other peoples. By creating and displaying posters, flags, costumes and artifacts pertinent to their country, students transform their classroom into the particular country they are studying.

International Month culminates in an Around the World Celebration. Each class transforms their classroom into the country the students have studied, and invites the other students to visit. Students create passports, which are stamped in each “country.” Students develop their artistic and culinary talents as they create souvenirs, such as small flags from popsicle sticks, to give to their guests, and cook food from their particular country.

Music Programs

Language teachers engage their students in singing songs that develop a child’s musical talent and ear for correct pronunciation and intonation. Three times a year, students participate in special performances--during our Winter Program, Mother’s Day program, and an end-of-the-year program—for their families and one another.