

Section 1: Philosophy

Nearly 1,900 students attend Palmer High School each year, placing their trust in the school community of teachers and parents to prepare them adequately for success in the years following graduation. Foundational to this success is the on-going instruction they receive in accessing information, thinking critically about information and communicating their developing understandings of a broad range of information presented in various subject areas.

The Palmer High School IB faculty is united in its belief that explicit instruction in reading, writing, listening and speaking skills is critical to the success of each student. Therefore, the faculty seriously regards its responsibilities for integrating research-based best practices in literacy and language development into each course in every subject area and at all grade levels. Toward this end our school community follows a shared leadership model that includes professional learning communities in each department, a focus on literacy during whole-faculty professional development, a school-wide Response to Intervention (RtI) for all students, a Literacy Action Team populated by instructional leaders from each subject area, and close alignment to district and state core standards of literacy and language development.

As all students prepare for rapidly developing realities of global citizenship instruction in at least one additional language beyond their mother tongue is of highest priority. This begins as early as possible in a child's formal education, and continues with the finest of instruction and highest of standards for performance throughout high school and beyond. In keeping with Palmer's beautifully diverse student population, developing a school community that values and supports all mother-tongue languages requires that faculty be educated in culturally-responsive teaching practices and that they hold deep commitments to developing strategies which support on-going language acquisition.

Section 2: Definitions and Access

An important distinction is made at Palmer High School between language acquisition and literacy. Language acquisition is the natural process of perceiving, producing and using words in order to engage in comprehensible communications. According to Krashen's research, this process begins at birth and continues throughout life as increasingly sophisticated communications develop, both in mother-tongue and in second language learning.

Literacy is generally described as reading and writing and involves a myriad of skills needed to access information from a wide variety of sources and to communicate ideas, values, and beliefs in various forms and to different audiences (Graham, 2007). Furthermore, current

research shows that we need an ever-expanding definition of what it means to be “literate” in the 21st Century. In the National Council of Teachers of English’s Policy Research Brief on Adolescent Literacy, they write “Students should see value in their own cultures and the cultures of others in their classrooms. ... Similarly, they should see their home languages as having value” (p. 5). This convergence of valuing a students’ mother-tongue and the instructional language is conveyed in the NCTE’s findings that “Multicultural literacy is seeing, thinking, reading, writing, listening, and discussing in ways that critically confront and bridge social, cultural, and personal differences.” In short, all students benefit from effective literacy instruction that not only recognizes but embraces the diversity of language in today’s classrooms.

Students learning a second language initially process receptive input through listening and reading before developing output in the form of speaking and writing. World Language instructors at Palmer High School integrate instructional strategies based on Stephen Karshen’s *Theory of Comprehensible Input*, placing deliberate emphasis on supporting students in this natural order of language acquisition. Teachers make listening and reading in a foreign language comprehensible to students via visual aids, translation, actions, TPR, TPRS, circling, repetition and spiraling. North-Palmer IB World Language course selections in MYP include French, Spanish, Mandarin, German and American Sign Language. Palmer’s Diploma Program offers Standard Level French and Spanish as well as *ab initio* and Standard Level Mandarin. All World Language classes meet five times per week throughout the school year.

Students whose mother-tongues are not English receive structured support from highly-qualified English as Second Language (ESL) instructors who are trained to facilitate early exposure to English. The ESL faculty works closely with instructors in creating a structured framework leading to full student integration in subject-area classes. All faculty members integrate subject-specific vocabulary development into their instruction, using strategies tailored to assist developing students’ proficiency with the language of the discipline (Biancarosa, 2006). Additionally Palmer’s teacher-supported in-house tutoring center provides uninterrupted access to individual help for all students. Mandatory teacher websites and transparent grading practices are in place to support the efforts of the tutoring center faculty in accessing, understanding and facilitating students’ progress with learning assignments.

As part of Palmer’s robust community life, students may choose to engage in a variety of language-related clubs during lunch or before/after school. Each year the World Languages department organizes and promotes opportunities for world travel to help students connect languages with cultures.

Section 3: School Resources

Palmer High School’s commitment to fostering instructional practices that promote literacy development is evident at every level of organization. Individual instructors participate each week in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The aim of PLCs is to review and respond to on-going data about student literacy achievement and develop intentional plans for integrating research-based best practices in daily classroom instruction.

Additionally Palmer's media center is available to support language acquisition and literacy development for individual students as well as for whole classes. Two full-time Library Technology Educators (LTEs) provide professional development for teachers on assisting students with accessing information and using technology to support language learning. Computer labs, including one equipped with Mandarin characters, are available for whole-class use. Our LTE's collaborate with staff to co-teach or mentor lessons in our new distance learning lab, making connections with other students around the globe possible, and so bringing new relevance to the process of language learning.

Finally, "Spanish for Spanish Speakers" is a set of offerings directly related to mother-tongue support in that specific language. We do not currently have sufficiently large populations in other, non-English mother tongues to support similar courses.

Section 4: Defining "Best Practice"

All students entering Colorado Springs School District #11 complete a survey on their mother-tongue and home language. Students choosing to study with any one of the three International Baccalaureate programs in our district also complete an additional survey about their language use and needs. Results from these surveys help inform faculty about languages spoken in the home, first languages, instructional supports needed in English and students' interest in receiving additional instruction in mother-tongue languages. Examples of differentiated language instruction available to students at Palmer include full- or part-time enrollment in our ESL program, reading and writing tutorials, additional assistance with vocabulary development, additional assistance with increasing content comprehension, and support with mother-tongues when numbers, interest and public school resources permit it. The school's electronic access to the EBSCO database provides access to articles, periodicals, newspapers in German, French and Spanish, with similar resources available in other languages as well.

IB MYP teachers, led by a team of instructors representing the various subject groups, map explicit instruction of study skills as part of Palmer's development of Approaches to Learning (Jacobs, 2006). Discussions among these teacher leaders help identify gaps in our program where skills might be assumed rather than carefully taught and so lead to developing corrective measures as needed. Building-level specialists (LTEs) or district-level facilitators consult with this team, providing resources and advice. Approaches to Learning includes 5 domains, one of these is specifically about communication.

Section 5: Accountability and Review

The language policy is formally reviewed as part of our IB program's five-year self-study and evaluation. Substantive changes can occur more frequently as changing demographics or other circumstances warrant.

Works Cited

- Biancarosa, Gina, and Catherine E. Snow. *Reading Next - A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy: A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York (2nd ed)*. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006. Print. The Carnegie Corporation's "Advancing Literacy" program serves to report on research findings regarding adolescent literacy issues in an effort to invigorate discussions about and reformed practices regarding classroom instruction of literacy.
- Graham, Steve, and Dolores Perin. *Writing Next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools - A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007. Print. This report examines issues central to the success of written communications in secondary students, identifies "eleven elements of effective adolescent writing instruction," and provides detailed support for schools working towards whole-school reform of writing instruction across disciplines and grade levels.
- Heller, Rafael, and Cynthia L. Greenleaf. *Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas: Getting to the core of middle and high school improvement*. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007. Print. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a national policy and advocacy group that believes that every child is capable of graduating from high school and prepared for further studies in college, work and citizenship. To this end, this report examines the data available about current literacy achievement in schools across the country and publishes suggestions and strategies for improvement and reform.
- Jacobs, Heidi Hayes. *Active Literacy Across the Curriculum: Strategies for reading, writing, speaking and listening*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education, Inc., 2006. Print. Active Literacy Across the Curriculum is intended for instructional leaders at any grade level and in any subject area. The book provides support for teachers and planning teams who are interested in mapping curriculum and integrating literacy skills across disciplines and throughout the school.
- Krashen, Stephen D. *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. internet version ed. 1981. N.p.: Pergamon Press, 2002. *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. Web. 31 Dec. 2010. <http://www.sdkrashen.com/SL_Acquisition_and_Learning/index.html>.
- The National Council of Teachers of English. *Adolescent Literacy. Adolescent Literacy: A Policy Research Brief*. NCTE, 2007. Web. 26 Jan. 2011. <<http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/PolicyResearch/AdolLitResearchBrief.pdf>>.