



The Importance of Mother Tongue

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Introduction

At Southbank there are more than twenty-five languages spoken by the students. This diversity makes Southbank the exciting and stimulating school that it is.

A child's language is not just a tool it is the key to a child's identity; it is who they are and where they come from. As research has shown if a child's language is not valued the child feels not valued.

Jim Cummins a world famous expert on the importance of mother tongue emphasizes how easily a child's mother tongue can be lost in the early years of school if it is not kept up at home. Playing games, reading books and watching films and television in the mother tongue, going on Skype, phone calls and visits to the family in the home country are all fun ways of maintaining the mother tongue. At Southbank there is a well-stocked multilingual library so please encourage your children to bring books in their home language home to share with you. The facility with which the bilingual or multilingual students switch from one language to the other is a demonstration of the great brain flexibility that having more than one than one word for the same thing develops.

At Southbank the students are encouraged to use their cultural experiences and mother tongue in natural and meaningful contexts within the IB program in EAL and LE (Language Enrichment) when possible. They look at explorers, constructions, beliefs, celebrations, food, artefacts and sculptures from their home countries.

The skills they learn in their mother tongue are transferable; for example reading, maths, telling the time and many other skills. English sentence structure is easier to understand when compared to their home language. In LE they examine identical sentences in English and in their mother tongue, they can then identify the differences and similarities in sentence structure; for example the use of plurals, tenses, articles etc. This gives them a deeper understanding of English grammar as they work out their own rules.

Basic communication skills in English can take up to two years to develop whereas academic proficiency can take up to seven years to develop. These two levels are well catered for at Southbank. There are two EAL classes – beginners and intermediate. Once the students are sufficiently proficient in their English speaking, reading and writing they exit EAL and join LE. The small groups help increase the confidence of each child and allow for more individualized teaching which helps the students reach their full potential. It is amazing to see the progress of students who came to Southbank with little or no English and are now high achievers in Westminster.

The celebration of language is a way to encourage tolerance, open-mindedness and an understanding of different cultures around the world. An acceptance and respect of all languages and cultures is at the centre of the Southbank philosophy and each student feels respected and valued for who they are.