



Curriculum Connection

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EXPANDING MINDS. BROADENING PERSPECTIVES.

A Word on Excellence

by Christophe Bonnet, Head of School

Excellence.

It is a word largely used and sometimes misused. For some, Excellence is a level of achievement only a few can reach. It is absolute and definitive. There are students who can reach that level and then there are the other ones. In order to promote excellence we play the strengths of every child to his or her maximum and make each one perform at his or her best in one particular area.

We all know that in order to be successful in the 21st century one has to be “smart” in many different ways. One has to have the capacity to think creatively, to build connections between ideas, to have developed strong interpersonal skills so as to thrive on collaboration, to be comfortable to work with people with different cultural backgrounds. Simply put, our world requires more than ever before well-rounded people. People fully grounded in their community but open to the world around them. At AIS we are proud to think of ourselves as educators with that vision in mind.

At AIS, we strongly believe that every student has the capacity to succeed and that it is our responsibility as educators to create conditions for each student to realize his or her potential. We definitively raise the bar – but we simultaneously make sure that all students pass this bar.

Success for all requires a team of fully dedicated teachers who share that vision and are working hard to create those conditions for success. This means teachers who can work as a team, who share research-based strategies, who develop tools to monitor students’ progress from one year to the next, who strongly believe that parents are partners in the education of their children. At AIS we are very fortunate to have such a team of teachers.

The nature of our trilingual program requires of us also to make sure that we develop a harmonized curriculum to avoid redundancies and gaps so that we build on each others’ teaching and develop a seamless curriculum for the children. Three languages, one curriculum. Three languages, one class.

By developing such a coherent curriculum we are building on the benefits of learning different languages: flexibility of the mind or ease in developing abstract ideas or concepts. By setting proper expectations we make our curriculum transparent and involve parents in the success of their children.



Christophe Bonnet
Head of School



A Work in Progress: How We Continue our Project in Excellence

by Fabrice Raud, Coordinator of French Pedagogy

Your kids are the future, and our faculty is always planning with this thought in mind. One key point in our consideration of excellence is always to develop with an eye toward the future. Since its inception, Austin International School has made ongoing improvements and modifications to the way our teachers obtain the resources they need, communicate with one another, and implement the latest technology within their teaching environment.

First, as we are a unique school, teachers will continue to receive tailored training through various means which reflect the pedagogical style that defines us:

- During regular meetings of two hours per week, teachers meet either by cycle or by grade level to plan and harmonize their education action plan for the following weeks.
- We share skills in a particular area during internal workshops which are led either by other teachers, by the coordinators, by our director, or occasionally from specialists from the outside professional world. These workshops enable teachers to rethink and improve their practices of differentiation.
- We defined what “excellence” means to us in our unique school environment during the October training day.

We will meet again in February to continue this effort of designing an instructional framework which takes into account the best practices to make all students successful, and elaborate tools to better communicate clear curriculum information and student progress to the parents.

Secondly, teachers now have been exposed to new technology that enables them to better share important data with each other. Such tools make it easier to follow each child’s progress across the language spectrum. It improves the speed of decision-making as related to educational choices to be made for each student. Having more data “in the cloud” makes it possible for teachers to access up-to-date information at school and at home around the clock, which makes everyone more efficient as they prepare for school. Teachers from the same class can also rely on this system to simultaneously combine content and prepare their weekly newsletter.


Already in place in some classes are advanced technologies whereby children communicate with peers in France (as with the blog in CE1 with Mélanie Vincent) or do their homework online (as with me in CE2). We will continue to develop these practices so that your child has access not only to another way of learning content but also learns to collaborate on projects



with peers around the world. The future will certainly offer further opportunities for your child(ren) to be actively exposed to selected French, Spanish and English educational material at home via the Internet. We strengthen our commitment to provide your child with multilingual opportunities at school and elsewhere by facilitating access to such materials.

Additionally, as elaborated in Teresa Gisbert Pomata’s article, our teachers have trained in harmonization techniques to optimize instructional time and which avoids redundancies in the children’s curriculum.

In this same spirit, we are also working on a better way to synchronize lesson plans and the homework load across languages. New tools will keep you, parents, in the loop so that you can instantly check that what your child is doing at home reflects assignments given to them at school, and so that you may communicate your concerns to the teachers. Various classes are already sending parents complete and accurate information regarding homework through email or the web.

Achieving excellence starts with implementing an ever-evolving instructional framework. With efficient technology in mind, the school has reached a level of professionalism that enables us to put this into practice for the sake of the students’ futures and with the participation of all the different elements within the school community. 

Setting our Students Apart: Differentiation in the AIS Classroom

by Christine Christy, English Teacher, Coordinator of English Pedagogy, Admissions Director

Educators have been talking and writing about differentiating instruction in classrooms for many years. But how does this really work? We all know that students have different requirements to help them to achieve success, but how do we use this effectively in the classroom? As a teacher of English and coordinator of the English programs at this school, I believe that differentiation is the key to ensuring students are successful at any grade level.

When I am planning my lessons, one of the first things I must think about is the needs of each of the students. There is no point to planning a differentiated lesson until I am aware of the needs and differences of the students in my class. I then start to think about the different aspects of the students' level of skills and interests along with the desired learning outcomes in order to plan for their instruction, not only in the short term on a week-to-week basis, but also looking at the year as a whole. Using this as a starting point enables me to think clearly about the different types of learning opportunities that should be available in my lessons.

So how does the theory turn into practice in the classroom? This is where it is important to fine tune the tasks and activities to the needs of the students and understand the next steps required at every part of the learning process in order to move students along, ensuring they are making progress appropriately. As well as the students working on differentiated tasks that I have already prepared for them, I take a proactive approach in the classroom, giving support to those that need it in any particular area.

In math, French teacher Cédric Hervé uses differentiation to accommodate the needs of all of his 4th and 5th Grade students. For example, in geometry, if the assignment is to reproduce a shape, some will have precise information to support the activity along with a provided vocabulary, while others will have just the shape to help them. Cédric carefully plans his instruction this way, beginning where the children are and moving them upwards. It is this bottom-up approach to pedagogy together with the teacher's sensitivity and insight into his or her students – and then adapting the lessons accordingly – which plays such a large part in the meaning of excellence in teaching.

French teacher Mélanie Vincent knows that children do not work at the same pace or in the same way. Her instruction is based around the students' needs as individuals but also challenges them at the same time. An example of this is when students work on their cahier d'écrivain. During this time the students develop their ability to write in different genres. Mélanie uses this as an opportunity to differentiate what the students needs are with regard to syntax, grammar, spelling and vocabulary. She can evaluate their progress on an ongoing basis and the students are provided opportunities to share their writing with others and improve on it together in many ways. This reflection in their own work also helps them to improve based on their own individual needs.


PS teacher Mathilde Pissonnier understands that differentiation is very important in pre-school in order to work with children according to their developmental needs.



There can be such a range of abilities within the class when working on the fundamental skills of pre-school such as fine motor skills, autonomy and language development so it is the careful attention to individual students' needs that ensures all students are engaged and making progress.

In MS, Marion Bigache further supports this by using differentiation when she focuses on oral language development. She carefully organizes the children into small groups so that she can work on specific language skills. Sometimes she organizes the groups so that there is a mix of French speakers helping and giving new vocabulary and sentence structures to their classmates who are more recently exposed to the language. On another day the groups may be organized by friendship in order to encourage the shiest students. Her groups differ depending on the skills taught and which students they involve. Taking the time to decide on class groupings and making the students feel involved in the learning process is very important in supporting excellence within the classroom.

Lucia's classroom environment in CP supports differentiation by using workshops and learning centers for reading and writing. This organization allows her to help the children who need extra support. It also allows her to touch base with each student in her class to make sure they are on task and progressing. This type of classroom setup makes differentiation very much an integral part of learning within the school.

As a teacher I believe that it is the right of every student to be taught in a way that enables him or her to learn most effectively. All students are individuals, so teachers will always need to make adjustments to differentiate within the classroom in order to facilitate successful instruction at school. Whether the differentiation is carefully planned or is at times simply intuitive, it is very much a part of what defines excellence in education and should underpin good classroom practice. 



Behind the Scenes: Harmonization of the Trilingual Programs

by Teresa Gisbert Pomata, Spanish Teacher, Coordinator of Spanish Pedagogy

One of the pillars of our work is harmonization. We are an International School, with three languages. Therefore, our work is unthinkable without a real and organized coordination among the three language teachers, among the cycle's teachers, and among class teachers. Taking the curriculum as a starting point, where this harmonization is clearly reflected, the school has generated mechanisms to coordinate teacher teamwork, which is essential to achieve our objectives in harmonization. Our goal is the success of the students; with harmonization this success is an easier and simpler task.

Cycle 3 students in our school have to study grammar in three languages; with an adequate coordination between the cycle and class teachers this task is clear and efficient. Although the grammar is different in the three languages, with harmonization (of both curriculum and teamwork) teachers find:

- Concepts or structures that are common and simple and no need to be reviewed in all the languages.
- Concepts that being common to two or three languages should be reinforced in each language to support assimilation.
- Elements that are different and need to be taught carefully in each language.

So students acquire the concepts better and teachers make the best of their class time.

Our goal is to create a solid vocabulary base in three languages. With teamwork, which includes the sharing of materials and experiences and the coordination of content delivery strategies, this goal is more attainable. For example:

The PS classes have implemented an attendance control system in which the students learn colors and geometric shapes in the three languages. Each morning, at the beginning of the class, students sit on the floor on a colorful geometric shape. Later, they take turns putting their pictures in the corresponding shape that is represented in a poster on the wall.

The MS classes have been working on the "forest" topic in the three languages and students have even practiced a short play, called "The man of the woods", with parts in the three languages.

The GS classes have been working on the "five senses" topic in the three languages, therefore facilitating student comprehension and helping teachers make the most of materials and time.

The CM1 and CM2 classes have been discovering the solar system during the science class in English and French. They have also shared a field trip to the science department of The University of Texas at Austin, in both languages. The responsible coordination between English and French teachers has been the key to the success of this project.


With harmonization we also want to transmit to the students the concept of globalization and the importance of knowing different languages and teamwork.

In CE1, English, French and Spanish teachers have worked together on a play for Winterfest in the three languages. Students have participated in this experience with easiness



and great motivation, and we know that motivation is a key factor to reinforce the idea of the importance of speaking several languages. Teamwork has also been an essential piece of this activity.

In CE2 we have shared an outing to visit the neighborhood stores, including interviewing the business owners. Before, during and after the field trip, the students have been doing related activities in the three languages, such as crafting questions, organizing collected data, or orally sharing information.

There is a wide range of creative harmonization within our school. These experiences and projects are only possible due to the intense collaboration among educators outside of class time and during meetings, using the shared documents, experiences and strategies we have developed. 



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