

**AISR
ESL
PARENT
HANDBOOK
2008-2009**

**AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF ROTTERDAM ENGLISH
AS A SECOND LANGUAGE PROGRAM**

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WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The American International School of Rotterdam, also called A.I.S.R., welcomes you and your children to our school community. We trust that your time with us will be rewarding and enjoyable. In the past, students who have joined our school with little or no knowledge of English have quickly adjusted to our school, made friends and learned English while continuing with their educational development.

Close communication between the school and the home is essential to your child's success at A.I.S.R. This handbook had been written to help you understand the purpose of our English as a Second Language (ESL) Program and its place within our school. In addition, you may contact any of our teachers - class teachers, specialist teachers or ESL teachers - with any questions or concerns. Parent-teacher meetings can take place whenever there is a need. Please make arrangements through the office secretary if you would like to meet with one of our teachers.

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY

The program provides instruction with an ESL teacher that helps children to develop English proficiency according to their needs and abilities. ESL support is aimed at helping students to participate in the school's academic and social programs. We aim to make English learning an enjoyable experience. It builds on the student's cultural and language experiences. The program encourages Mother Tongue maintenance for the students.

JOINING THE SCHOOL

ESL students are enrolled through the same process as other students. This includes the completion of all Application for Enrollment forms and a meeting with the school administrator or guidance counselor. Admission standards are the same for all students. Generally, a student is placed in a class with children of the same age. There is no requirement that a student knows English before he or she joins the Elementary section of the school. However, a student entering Grade 5 will need to be evaluated at the end of the year to see if he/she is proficient enough in English to function in the Middle school.

When students apply to be enrolled in Middle or High school, they are tested both orally and in writing in order to determine their proficiency in English. After this, an admissions committee meets to discuss each individual application. The student must have had some previous experience for her/him to attain level 6 on the *Rojas* English Proficiency Scale by the time he or she reaches the eleventh grade.

THE ESL PROGRAM AT A.I.S.R.:

The A.I.S.R. ESL Program is designed to provide support to children as they move into a new school and a new language. All AISR teachers are ESL teachers. Students develop their knowledge and understanding of English in every class subject.

The ESL program at A.I.S.R. is a "sheltered immersion" program. Students are immersed (placed) in an English-speaking environment (our school) and are given support so that

they can interact meaningfully in the classroom. All teachers at the school, whose task it is to create an intercultural learning environment, complement the program.

THERE ARE FOUR TYPES OF SUPPORT PROGRAMS FOR ESL STUDENTS:

ESL Push-In Support

In many cases, the ESL teacher works with the subject area teacher in the classroom. This helps to promote the active participation of the student. This support can take the form of individual or of group work

ESL Language Instruction

In these classes, ESL students develop concepts, vocabulary and structures that allow them to receive (listen and read) and express (speak and write) the English language. Students learn both life and school English, which enables them to interact socially with friends and to be successful in their classes. Specific ESL support for grades 1 to 5 is given 4 times per week for 45 minutes. In middle and high School, students enrolled in the program receive two or three 80-minute blocks of support per week.

ESL Content Instruction

The language that is used in our content classes and subjects (science, mathematics, social studies, etc.) is more difficult and complex than social English. The ESL Content Instruction classes are designed to help your child, participate successfully in these content classes. Necessary vocabulary is introduced in advance of classroom work if possible, so that the ESL child can become familiar with terms used in the classes. The ESL Content teacher, communicates closely with the grade level subject teacher to make sure that the ESL student receives the preparation (s)he needs for the class. This communication and cooperation between the ESL Content teacher and the class teacher is a key element in this program.

Monitoring

Students' English proficiency levels are monitored and evaluated on a proficiency scale. Students remain in the support program until conferencing with all teachers involved indicates that the student no longer needs specific extra help in ESL.

TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

Depending on the type of support necessary, your child will receive two to four periods of ESL support during a typical week. The remainder of the school day is spent with classmates, participating in the standard grade level program. We realize that students who join us with limited English cannot participate in the same manner as native speakers of English. The class and subject area teachers modify their expectations for ESL students. It is important that you help your child understand that we do not expect him or her to do everything the English-speaking student does.

As the ESL child gains proficiency in English, the teachers' expectations will rise to reflect that growing knowledge of English.

PLACEMENT

Students in grades 1 to 4 are placed in their grade level classes. At the beginning of their

enrollment, informed evaluation by classroom teachers and the ESL team determine whether a student will receive ESL support. Students entering in grade 5 will be interviewed and evaluated on the students's aptitude to acquire enough English to be successful in Middle School. The school counselor gives students in grades 6 to 12 the Idea Proficiency test in reading and writing and an oral interview. The results of these are reviewed by a Placement Committee to determine if the student is proficient enough to be enrolled at A.I.S.R.

Each student's progress and adjustment are evaluated during the school year. As the student's English proficiency increases the level of direct ESL support is decreased. Our goal for each student is complete integration into the social and academic life at A.I.S.R.

Pre-kindergarten and Kindergarten students are not enrolled in an ESL support program. The language-rich and developmental nature of these classrooms is similar to what the students would receive in an ESL class. We believe that additional support or instruction is not necessary. When second language learners enter grade 1 they are individually evaluated to determine any need for additional English support.

PROGRESS REPORTS

Parents of students in the elementary will receive reports on your child's progress four times each year (quarterly). These reports will be completed by both the ESL teacher and by the class teacher. Their evaluations of your child's progress, adjustment, participation and socialization will take into consideration his or her level of English. Conferences between parents and teachers are scheduled in October and April. In addition, other appointments can be arranged whenever there is a need.

Middle and high School students are assessed throughout the year in order to keep track of their progress in English. They receive a quarterly progress report and a quarter grade in ESL. In consultation with subject teachers, the possibility exists that middle and high school students can receive modifications could be graded on a "pass" or "fail" basis in content areas.

TEACHING METHODS

Many different teaching methods and techniques are used in the A.I.S.R. ESL classes. Our program uses a wide variety of approaches, activities and techniques that help to create a comprehensive and dynamic learning experience for students. Concepts, topics and skills are integrated rather than taught in isolation. Skills are developed through a spiral approach where they are taught and re-taught in new ways over time. Active participation and involvement are stressed. It is through this involvement that children use and learn English.

Current teaching methods include:

Total Physical Response (TPR):

Easy, fast moving activities for beginners, in which the child must respond to language through body movements.

Language Experience:

This approach builds upon the experiences that children bring with them to school and their experiences during school. It develops the vocabulary and language structures that

allow children to express themselves naturally and completely

Whole Language:

In a Whole Language approach, skills needed in reading and writing are taught *through* reading and writing, and not in isolation.

The Natural Approach:

At every stage of language development, children are encouraged to participate and contribute according to their own level of ability. The emphasis is on the use of developing language skills. Language becomes alive for children when they use it. In this approach, children can practice the language that they need to use in school, with friends, and in the community.

Structural:

Students, at the appropriate age and level, gain an understanding of grammar and how the language "works".

CALLA (Cognitive, Academic Language Learning Approach):

This is a content-based approach to language that focuses on the materials, vocabulary and skills that students need in their content classes, (science, social studies, etc.).

LEARNING STRATEGIES

ESL students at A.I.S.R. take part in lessons which use a variety of learning strategies involving the child's visual (sight), auditory (listening), tactile (touch), and kinesthetic (body movement) skills.

Cooperative learning is used in both the ESL and grade/subject classes. Students learn from each other and have meaningful opportunities to use and practice their new language.

Students also learn important academic skills such as organizing and classifying information, taking notes and evaluating materials.

TEACHING MATERIALS

ESL is a support program not a language course. We use a wide variety of teaching materials: library books, reference materials, games, puppets, tapes, pictures, magazines, toys, computer software, etc. Since the focus of the program is the curriculum of the School, the grade level textbooks play a key role in ESL classes.

ESL PARENT QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

What can I, as the parent of an ESL student, do to help my child learn English?

Parents of ESL students should keep informed of their child's progress in the English language. You can also continue to support the development of your child's *first* language. One way to do this is to go over textbook readings with your child and discuss the material in your own language. You may also want to get books in your language that covers the

same concepts and topics that your child is studying in school. It is also helpful for students to have easy access to a dictionary that translates English words into the language of your home and visa versa.

How can I motivate my child to learn English?

Providing opportunities for your child to use English is important. You can invite English-speaking friends and classmates to your home for play, and you can rent quality videotapes for your child to watch. Playing family games is both enjoyable and worthwhile. It is helpful to your child when you become active in school through the P.T.S.A. or as a volunteer. Most importantly, parents should let their children know the value and advantages of gaining a second language in an increasingly multicultural world.

Should I speak and read to my child only in English?

Parents of ESL students should continue to use the language of the home to communicate with their children. If there are already two other languages in your home, continue to use them both. If parents are proficient in English, they should let their children see them using English to communicate with others. It is important that second language students see the value of bilingualism. Parents of ESL students should read to their children in the language that they feel most comfortable using. Reading practice in any language will help your child learn to read and use English, as reading skills transfer from the native language to the second language.

Should students' mistakes in English always be corrected?

Children learn a second language in stages. Mistakes happen at first, and then they gradually change and finally disappear. Successful language learning depends upon the freedom to make mistakes. By testing the limits of the *new* language system, they learn the rules of the language. Stressing perfection and accuracy in the early stages limits and slows down this natural process. (Children learn their first language in the same way.)

Are students required to speak English in school at all times?

Students have many opportunities to use their developing English (listening, speaking, reading and writing) at A.I.S.R. This is important because often ESL students have the chance to practice their new language only at school. They need to use their English with teachers and with classmates. However, it is natural for children to speak their native language to each other. While A.I.S.R. teachers keep an English-speaking environment in the classroom, students should not be made to feel that it is wrong to speak their native languages.

What should be done with the native language of the ESL student?

It is helpful if students who are learning English continue to learn and develop in their first language. This support can be provided at home or in after-school programs. The skills that students learn in their own language can easily be transferred for use in English. The study of English is an addition to the child's native language and literacy development.

Does the learning of more than one language at the same time confuse students?

The human brain can store many languages at the same time, just as computers do. In some countries and cultures children become fluent in five or more languages. Having strong skills in one language helps children to learn other languages more easily.

Should my child be learning English and Dutch at the same time?

ESL students are usually enrolled in Dutch courses (or French or German courses at the middle and high school levels). There is no reason for students grounded in their first language not to take Dutch lessons at the same time that they are learning English as an additional language. The school feels that it is important for the child's social development that the student takes part in as *many* mainstream classroom activities as possible. In addition, this practice assists student in adapting to their new Dutch environment.

Why do some students speak English well, yet have difficulty with the English in their classes?

There are two kinds of language proficiency - social language and academic language. The ability to use English among friends or with teachers in a social setting is more easily learned than the ability to use English to read textbooks and solve problems. Students who have good social language skills in English can learn the kind of language needed in the English-language classroom with the aid of a content-based curriculum.

Should I worry if my child is not learning English as quickly as other ESL students?

Learning a second language is not the same as learning a native language. Whereas most children develop their first language at approximately the same rate, the rate of learning a second language varies greatly. Parents should not be concerned if their children are not learning English as quickly as other children. Remember, learning a second language to an academically fluent level, where second language and *first* language children perform on the same level, can take three to five years. Second language students are usually conversationally fluent in one-to-two years.

Why do children learn a second language at different rates?

Children show wide variation in their rate of learning a second language. Some pick it up very quickly, while others take longer. This variation in the rate of learning is due to a number of factors. Some of these are:

The student's motivation: Does the student want to learn the language?

The student's personality and learning style: Is the student shy or outgoing?

Does the child need to see something to learn ?

The type of language instruction program.

What methods does the school use to teach ESL?

Access to native speakers of the language.

Does the student regularly listen to and talk with native English speakers?

IN SUMMARY:

All children can learn a language that they are socialized into. The more they feel socially accepted and a part of the school, the more success they will have. With time, teacher assistance, parental support and motivation, their academic English will develop as will their overall progress in school.

THE A.I.S.R. ENGLISH PROFICIENCY SCALE

*This proficiency scale, shared with us by Dr. Virginia Rojas of Trenton State College in the USA, is used by the professional staff at A.I.S.R. to identify the functioning level of English for second language students in our school.

- 9 **BILINGUAL AND LITERATE** (Comprehends academic language with little difficulty. Speaks fluently with few errors. Reads and writes both concrete and abstract materials. Manipulates language with relative ease and evidences metaphorical expression. Able to work up to potential in all academic subjects.)
- 8 **FLUENT AND LITERATE** (Comprehends much conversational and academic language. Idioms still present a little difficulty. Make occasional spoken *errors*. Reads and writes materials commensurate with cognitive development. Works up to grade level.)
- 7 **NEAR ENGLISH FLUENT AND LITERATE** (Comprehends substantial parts of academic conversations. Sometimes requires repetitions in context reduced discourse. Has confidence in speaking but some errors are common. Reads and writes text containing complex vocabulary. Some difficulty expressing abstract language. Nearly up to grade level.)
- 6 **THRESHOLD LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY** (Experiencing dramatic increase in vocabulary recognition, both oral and written. Idioms are difficult. Knows what he or she wants to say but gropes for utterances. Frequent errors in grammar, word usage and pronunciation.)
- 5 **USES LANGUAGE TO EXCHANGE SOCIAL INFORMATION AND TO EXTRACT MEANING FROM SIMPLE TEXTS** (Some difficulty with comprehension. Speaks hesitantly, making frequent errors in grammar, word usage and pronunciation. Lapses into silence. Reads very simple texts. Writes with fairly restricted structures and vocabulary. About two years below native speakers in language skills.)
- 4 **ADEQUATE CONVERSATIONAL SKILLS USED IN HIGHLY CONTEXTUALIZED SETTINGS** (Decodes written symbols. Writes dictated items.)
- 3 **ROUTINE CONVERSATIONAL EXCHANGES** (Comprehends when speaker repeats, gestures and uses concrete referents. Speaks haltingly if at all. Shows some recognition of written segments. Not literate in English.)
- 2 **BASIC SURVIVAL ENGLISH** (Receptive and somewhat expressive. Occasionally comprehends chunks of discourse.)
- 1 **THE SILENT PERIOD** (Receptive vocabulary but depends almost entirely upon gestures, facial expressions, objects, pictures, a phrase dictionary and often a translator.)
- 0 **NO ENGLISH**