

Language philosophy at ISN

“Language serves not only to express thought, but to make possible thoughts which could not exist without it”
- Bertrand Russell

At International School of Nagano (ISN), we believe that languages are not only essential tools for thinking, communicating, teaching and learning but also expressions of culture and identity. At ISN, the majority of our students speak Japanese at home. We believe that this native language acquisition is essential and requires a strong foundation. To this end, we support mother-tongue communication. We also believe that in a global community, the need for bi- or multilingualism is a necessity for success and that a command of English is paramount in global communication and information access. [global citizen] Therefore, our language of instruction is English. At ISN, we believe that the teaching of language is the responsibility of all staff.

We are committed to providing an inquiry-based approach to learning and believe that reading, writing, speaking, viewing, listening and presenting should be encompassed coherently.

- Differentiation based on language.

Since our main language of assessment is English, and each student is at a different stage of their English learning journey, students should also have their own set of assessment criteria, tailored to their ability to express themselves in English. This means they will be able to use whatever tools are available to them to express their feelings, and connect with the subject matter, without being constricted by materials too advanced for them, or worrying about meeting too advanced expectations in terms of language use.

- Strengthening of mother-tongue

It is clear that students who are proficient in their mother-tongue find it easier to pick up additional languages. Also cognitive skills are enhanced, and the ability to understand concepts and the connections between them. Not only that, but one’s mother-tongue is inextricably linked to the individual’s culture, and the culture of one’s family. Having proficient command of one’s mother-tongue is essential.

- Individualised approach to language learning

Every person goes on their own journey as a language learner, whether that be their first language, or any number of additional languages. At ISN, each student is at a different stage on their English language learning journey. Accordingly, they must have their own individual plan for their own situation, needs, and ability. This plan must also be continually evaluated, reflected upon, and updated by teachers and individual students.

- Language is essential for accessing inquiry

Planning, exploring, investigating, processing, and creating, all require the essential tool of language. The very process of questioning and formulating ideas is shaped by how we conceptualise information. To conceptualise information, it is necessary to make concepts concrete with one's own mind. While these ideas are processed, investigated, and new ideas created, communication acts as the canvas upon which concepts are moulded, and the link by which they are shared. Both in our minds, and in the forum of communication, it is language which forms the fundamental basis of the entire process.

- Language is a form of creativity

While languages have certain rules such as grammar and syntax, the capacity for creativity within languages is almost boundless. The nature of playing with language, whether than is in poems, creative writing, singing, or any other forms of language, is one of joy. This is both the joy of expression and the joy of connection.

- Language empowers and gives independence

When a person can truly make themselves understood, and express their feelings in a free and clear way, this naturally leads to an increase in confidence. That is to say, confidence not only in one's ability to clearly express oneself, but also confidence in one's ability to formulate thoughts. Possessing a clarity of thought is a necessity whenever trying to find solutions to problems, or understanding who we are, and what our hopes, dreams, and goals are.