



SEVEN OAKS
SCHOOL DIVISION
community begins here

Community

B E G I N S H E R E

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Exploring a World of Languages

Culture and Curriculum Combine in Heritage Language Learning

I am enrolled in the Filipino/Tagalog program and I started coming to Heritage when I was in grade three. (That was four years ago.) It is about more than the language to me because I love learning culture too.

It is important to have these kinds of language programs because I think it is important for the younger minds of this generation to learn about their roots.

• Heritage Languages Program Student

Language may be about communication, but it can also be about connection – connection to cultural roots.

Language is an integral part of cultural identity, a living link to the history and heritage of our families. It reminds of where we came from, which in turn, helps us gain a sense of who we are. Language helps us understand that we belong to something larger: a global community shared by many races and cultures.

As part of this “global community”, the Seven Oaks School Division takes great pride in the cultural diversity of its students. The division believes it is important for students to have opportunities to explore their cultural roots, and provides those kinds of opportunities through its various heritage language programs.

Nine Languages Taught Under One Roof

One of the best examples of the division’s commitment to language and culture is its Heritage Languages Program.

For three days a week after school, from October until March, the nearly 400 students in the program are picked up from 20 different schools and taken to Maples Collegiate. There, students break into nine different language classes – Cree, Filipino, Italian, Ojibwe, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, German and Spanish – where they develop their oral and written skills. Those basic skills are often what students need to

open the door to their culture more widely.

Greg Sametz, Program Director of the Heritage Languages Program cites one example: “Most of the Punjabi children are already quite proficient in the oral language, but one of the things that I hear from Punjabi parents is that they value instruction in the written language, which means their child will be able to fully participate in religious experiences at temple.”

Students also learn about language – and culture – through special class projects. Some projects incorporate traditions or customs into the lessons, which can help introduce specific words that relate to a particular culture.

For example, as Spanish students learn how to make piñatas, they learn what a piñata is and how it fits into Spanish culture.

“Our teachers are all connected to their own communities and are ambassadors for them,” says Sametz. “So our students get to identify



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Ukrainian Language Comes Alive



The Heritage Language program isn’t the only option for families seeking schooling in a specific language. French Immersion programs are probably familiar to most people, as are dual-track schools where two languages are taught.

R.F. Morrison School is one of the division’s dual-track schools, but at R.F. Morrison, the second language taught is Ukrainian. Since the program was first introduced to the division in 1979, the English Ukrainian Bilingual Program has maintained a fairly steady growth. Today, there are 110

students enrolled in the program at R.F. Morrison and what’s interesting is that, for several of those students, it is the English learning that is highlighted.

“Most of the students in the program have a strong connection to the Ukraine,” explains Ruth Shrofel, Principal of R.F. Morrison School. “Some are immigrants who have recently arrived in Canada. Within a week they may be in school and starting our program. So they might not have the same level of English skills as other students.”

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(Nine Languages... continued from pg.1)

with a different person – someone outside their family – who can give them a different perspective on the culture.”

But what makes the Heritage Languages Program unique is the fact that no other school division offers after-school language programs to the extent that the Seven Oaks School Division does.

Not only are there numerous languages available, but the program is offered free of charge to all division students. (Students from outside the division are welcomed as well, but there is a small fee involved.)

“Many language heritage groups are offered in church basements or community halls,” says Sametz, “But they are usually driven by the ethnic community itself, not as part of a school division.”

“I am astounded at the tremendous support the Seven Oaks School Division offers this type of programming... especially in these days of cutbacks and budget restrictions. But if you believe and say that you’re a community of learners in several different languages on your brochures, you have to live that.”

(Ukrainian Language... continued from pg.1)

Yet, the different levels of language and different backgrounds of students add another valuable level to the learning environment. Language and culture are continually evolving, and students who have just come from the Ukraine can share some of the latest terms and expressions being used in the Ukraine today.

Having that kind of first-hand knowledge can go a long way in creating a more accurate and complete picture of the Ukraine, which in turn, helps students understand that Ukrainian is a language that is very much alive and used by people beyond their circle of family and friends.

“People sometimes tend to identify culture only with particular aspects or traditions with which they are most familiar. For example, they think about the traditional clothing worn during Ukrainian dancing and or pysanka – Ukrainian Easter eggs.”

“But having students from the Ukraine shows others that the Ukraine is a vital country that’s moving and growing. The students from the Ukraine are wearing modern clothes, listening to the same kinds of music and this really helps open students’ eyes to the fact that Ukrainian is very much a 21st century language.”

A Home for Hebrew Lessons

Margaret Park School is the home to the division’s English Hebrew Bilingual Program (EHBP), which first began in 1982. Today, there are 90 students in the program, bussed in from all over the division and, in some cases, from as far away as Selkirk, Oakbank and St. Andrews.

Like other bilingual programs, classes in the Hebrew program are taught 50 percent in English and 50 percent in Hebrew. The Hebrew teachers generally teach both components, which gives them the opportunity to integrate Hebrew learning into many of the lessons and themes being taught throughout the year.

“The EHBP is particularly exciting for the children in the program because a lot of the curriculum is centered around Jewish holiday celebrations and traditions of that culture,” says Pat Stefanchuk, Principal at Margaret Park. “For example, the whole school participates in the Purim



Carnival every March. This is a day of celebration when children dress up in costumes of kings or queens to celebrate a time in history when the Jewish people were given their freedom.



This is a day to play games, have faces painted and eat a wonderful cookie called hamantaschen.”

As students enjoy a day of fun, they learn about Jewish history... and other lessons that are important for people of any age or cultural background.

“We believe that the most important lessons students learn from being in the program are lessons of tolerance,” says Stefanchuk. “This is a dual track school and children from diverse backgrounds are interacting with a third of the population who come from one cultural background. Many families have told me that they would never have learned about the Jewish culture except that they have met other families through such programs as FAST and have become friends with these parents and their children.”

That’s the beauty of learning different languages; the more you learn, the more the world opens up to you.

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note: all phone numbers provided are home phone numbers