

Language  
and learning

Inclusive  
education

Global  
engagement

Multiple  
programme schools

*Learning stories from the IB continuum share examples of good practice from IB World Schools in order to promote inquiry, action and reflection by educators and school learning communities. School samples in this series represent a range of development and application of IB programme standards and practices.*

## Involving parents in the maintenance and development of students' mother tongues

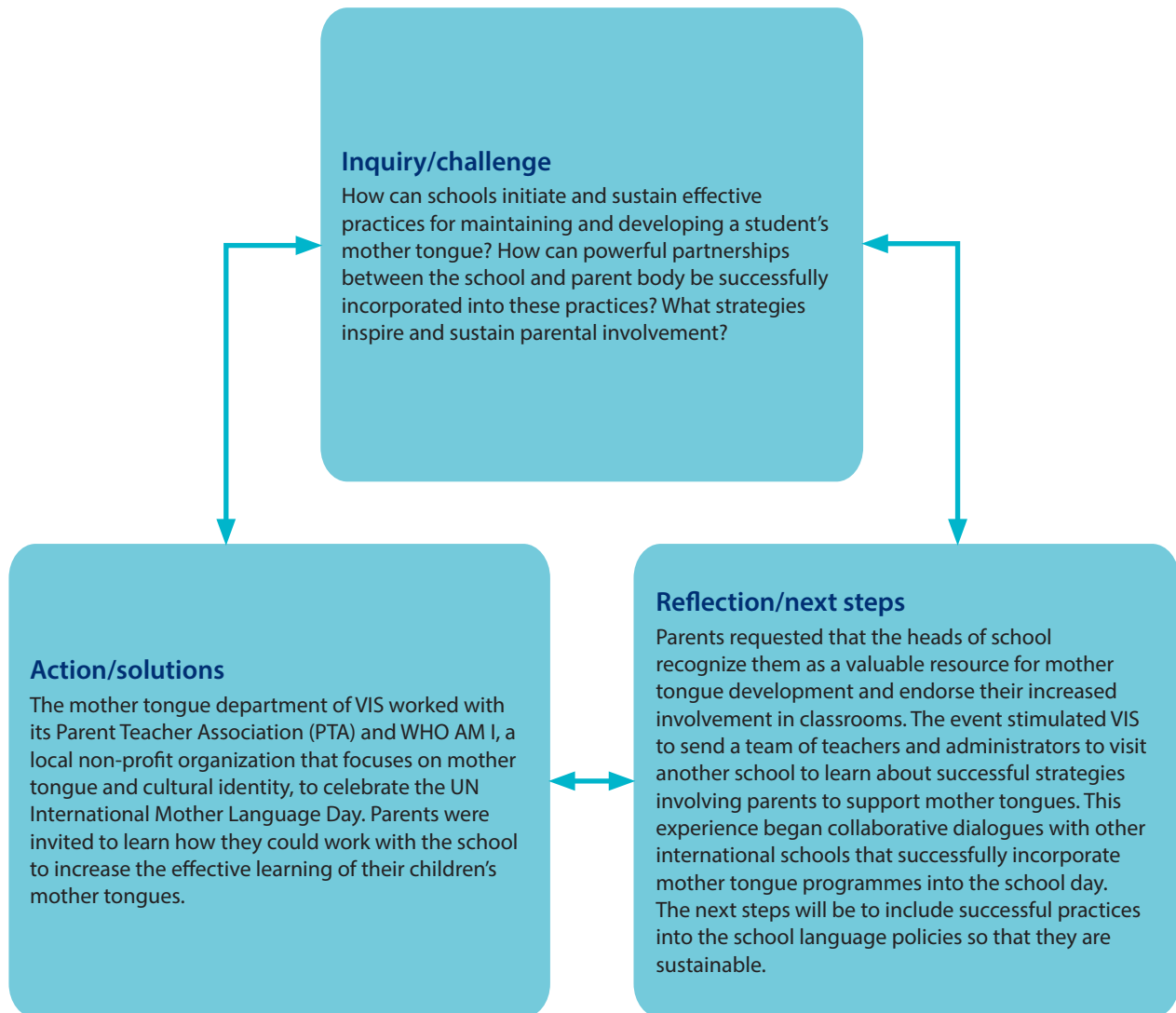
### Background information

The Vienna International School (VIS) offers the Primary Years Programme (PYP), Middle Years Programme (MYP) and Diploma Programme (DP), and was founded in 1978 to provide schooling for the children of the employees of the United Nations (UN) and the diplomatic community in Vienna. The school also serves children of the Viennese international business community, as well as local Austrian families. As a result, the student body is made up of more than 100 different nationalities. This in turn means that there are a large number of languages spoken in the school—83 different languages represented in a population of approximately 1,400 children, ages 5 to 19 years old.

### Cultural context

The language of instruction at VIS is English. Because students speak a wide variety of languages when they arrive at VIS, the school offers an extensive English as a second language (ESL) provision that aims to help them acquire and develop the language of instruction. German, the host country's language, is also important to the school community. However, students are further encouraged to continue studying their mother tongue and, therefore, VIS has a comprehensive mother tongue programme (MTP) that promotes *additive bilingualism*. The secondary school MTP began in 1980 and the primary school MTP was added in 1994.





## Standards and practices

VIS's inquiry, action and reflection on mother tongue awareness and increased provision through parental involvement shows growth towards these IB *Programme standards and practices* (2010).

A: Philosophy

7. The school places importance on language learning, including mother tongue, host country language and other languages.

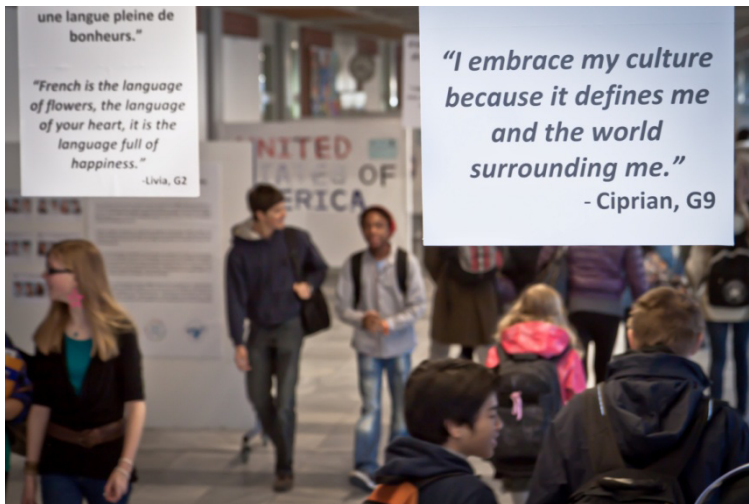
On their IB journey, schools reflect and report on their implementation of these standards for programme authorization and ongoing programme evaluation.

### A report on how VIS celebrated the UN International Mother Language Day

On Tuesday morning, 21 February 2012, the morning crowd trailed through the front doors of VIS, not knowing they were in for a unique surprise. To their astonishment, their eyes were met with a long procession of bilingual quotes hanging from the ceiling and extending to the end of the corridor. Representing over 47 languages, the entire school community of students, parents and staff defined “who they are” by writing brief one-sentence quotes in their mother tongues. This dramatic display highlighted the plethora of identities and mother tongues of the international community at VIS and marked the UN International Mother Language Day.



The display was organized by the school’s PTA, which lies at the heart of the school community. At VIS, the PTA encourages and promotes international-mindedness by supporting mother tongues and cultural identities, as well as empowering parents to help make a difference in the school community. The whole-school celebration of multilingualism was designed to bring about some real change.



International and Viennese dignitaries attended a PTA-funded kick-off celebration. Their journey down the corridor was filled with colourful work created by both primary and secondary students. Individually or in groups, students were challenged to transform their identities and mother tongues into a work of artistic expression. Over 47 countries in 42 languages were represented. At the end of their path, invited guests and parents found themselves at a welcome breakfast to commence a series of awareness-raising workshops about topics such as multiliteracies and international-mindedness in a globalized society.

The main target group for this year’s UN International Mother Language Day talks were parents. Parents, as the key stakeholders at the school, can help school leaders establish priorities and take action.



Event planners chose the six largest language groups at VIS as target audiences for parent sessions. Parents from Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian and Spanish language backgrounds learned about:

- strategies for parents to support their children in their mother tongue at home
- myths and facts about additive bilingualism
- the important role that parents and culture play in an international community.

The presentation was also offered in English.

## Additional information

<http://www.un.org/en/events/motherlanguageday/>

Gallagher, E. 2008. *Equal Rights to the Curriculum: Many Languages, One Message*. Clevedon, UK. Multilingual Matters.

