

Worth a Thousand Words



Grade One students from KIS International School expressed themselves with a show of support and friendship.

By Kirsty Bennett

A well-rounded education is all about understanding the world around us, which is why the International Baccalaureate (IB) encourages students to think 'outside the box'. Working on their unit of enquiry entitled "How we express ourselves," Grade One students at KIS were encouraged to think about non-verbal communication.

Class teachers Delores and Lillian encouraged their students to think about the different ways in which we can communicate. They looked at signs around the school, and watched a children's cartoon programme called *Pingu*, in which the penguin speaks a different language. The children were still able

to understand what was happening without hearing a language they could understand. They researched Braille on the website, and learnt how to write different phrases in it.

"It was a really varied unit of work for the students," explained Delores, who first developed her teaching practices on non-verbal communication when teaching in Sri Lanka. "They learnt about Helen Keller, and were fascinated by her story." Lillian explained to me how the students implicated different skills in the project – for example, they conducted surveys and collected data to make bar graphs, recording the different sounds they heard in the playground. To think about what life is like for people who

are partially sighted, they tried 'pictureless stories', listening to a story and then trying to draw the pictures they had seen in their minds when they heard it. They also tried 'wordless stories', where they looked at a picture and came up with a story to explain what was happening in the picture.

"We wanted the children to understand that communicating without speech is a reality for a lot of children," says Lillian, "so we contacted a local school for the hearing impaired, The Setsatian School, to ask if we could work with them. The plan was to visit the school with our students, and then their students would visit KIS."

Working with The Setsatian

School gave the KIS students another valuable lesson as they learned that the school needed help to raise funds to buy enough stationery. With the KIS students and their parents on board, the school was able to raise 11,000 baht for The Setsatian School. "We also had a lot of donations of stationery, toys and gifts from the parents," said Delores. "The response was fantastic."

On the visit to The Setsatian School, KIS students 'buddied up' with Setsatian students and spent a full and happy day experiencing what life is like for students who are hearing impaired.

In class, the students worked together, learning the words for different items in Thai, English and sign language, using pictures to guide them on the whiteboard. "They all worked so well together, and it was clear that the students were so busy getting on with their new friends that they were forgetting that they were communicating without speech! It was wonderful to watch," said Lillian.

The students all ate lunch together and afterwards, had 'circle time', where KIS students learnt more sign language and had fun with their new friends. They looked at

picture books, played charade games, and built up their sign language vocabulary.

"As they were about to leave, everybody was signing 'I love you' to each other," recalled Delores and Lillian. "We knew that our students were really looking forward to welcoming the Setsatian students at KIS."

On their visit to KIS, they were all paired up with a student guide and went on a school tour. Everyone really enjoyed the visit to KIS' vibrant library and many 'buddies' spent some time looking through books together. KIS' head





librarian talked about the type of work the job entailed, and a teacher from The Setsatian School signed along with him so everyone could understand.

"In the afternoon, we had organised a mini sports day for the kids," explained Delores. "They played soccer, had sack races and jumped hurdles." Sport is a great way for children to interact non-verbally, and it only helped to reinforce the bond between the new friends.

The six-week project was such a great success that KIS and The Setsatian School hope to work together again next year. "An important part of the IB is that the students reflect on what they have

learned," said Delores and Lillian. "We asked the students to think back over the whole project and think about how they felt about their experiences. We couldn't have been more pleased with the response when we did our class reflection on the time spent with The Setsatian School."

The students were very pleased about making new friends, learning sign language and seeing how happy their partner was. The first thing they thought of when asked about what had made them unhappy about the project was that The Setsatian School students only stayed a short time at KIS – a surefire sign that the project was successful!

"It was important that they

thought about the problems they had experienced also," said Lillian. The students recognised that communicating wasn't always easy, and that they felt shy about using sign language in case they made mistakes. "This kind of thought really helps them to understand the implication of having a hearing impairment. Sign language isn't just a game, and our students realised that."

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