



TEACHING AND LEARNING POLICY

Rationale

At Costa Rica International Academy we believe in fostering a love of life-long learning and the idea that learning should be engaging, challenging, relevant and fun. Through the teaching at CRIA, students are equipped with the skills, knowledge and understanding to prepare them to make meaningful contributions to the world. We believe that through a structured plan for teaching and learning our students will be prepared to live fulfilling and rewarding lives.

Aims and Objectives

The teaching and learning policy is intended to promote consistency, high standards and the achievement of school aims. We strive to provide for the development of the intellectual, social, aesthetic, and moral values that satisfy the needs of our students and the requirements of today's world citizens. Through high quality teaching, we strive to:

- Serve students from the expatriate and local communities;
- Maintain high academic standards and foster a love of learning;
- Provide a program that focuses on basic skills in English and Spanish (literature, writing, speaking, and listening), math, science, history, geography, physical education and the arts;
- Maintain a structured plan for learning, which clearly articulates curriculum content;
- Evaluate student learning frequently with a variety of assessment tools to ensure that each child is progressing appropriately;
- Help students prepare for a world of rapid change in which continuing education, creative thought, the ability to use technology and acquisition of skills are essential;
- Value and teach cultural understanding and knowledge of the complexities of our world;
- Teach and model virtues such as honesty, compassion, diligence, kindness, fairness, loyalty, and the "Golden Rule"; and
- Prepare students for admission to universities in North America, Europe, Costa Rica and around the world.

Expectations of Teachers

- Teachers have a strong understanding of the principles behind best-practice, effective teaching and learning, and are able to demonstrate these principles in the classroom
- Teachers have high expectations of their students and are dedicated to inspire and encourage those they teach
- Teachers listen to students' ideas, involving individuals in their own learning and offering guidance in how to progress
- Teachers encourage students to take risks and model this in their own approach to teaching and learning
- Teachers assess students' work and provide regular feedback (in accordance with the Assessment Policy)
- Teachers are helpful, approachable, supportive and understanding of their students' needs. All students are treated with dignity, consistency and fairness
- Teachers are role models and model their behavior on that which is expected from the students, and show an open mindedness, courtesy and respect towards the students
- Teachers have sound subject knowledge and are enthusiastic about their areas of expertise
- Teachers are well organized and well prepared for the delivery of their lessons
- Teachers arrive on time to lessons
- Teachers demonstrate that they are life long learners in their profession by learning about effective teaching strategies and ways to utilize technology.

Best Practice Teaching and Learning

Best practice in the classroom is the aspiration for all teachers at CRIA. Effective learning takes place when students know:

- How to make good progress
- What they are achieving
- How to learn, including thinking and questioning skills and how they learn best
- How to work independently and collaboratively
- Skills needed to develop skills for inquiry, research, analysis and reflection
- Attitudes needed for the classroom and beyond, including mutual respect, interest, responsibility and positive response to challenge.

Good and Outstanding Lessons

In an outstanding lesson the teaching is exemplary in a number of ways. Difficult ideas and/or skills are taught in an inspiring and highly effective way. Learners make good progress and enjoy learning. Teaching is stimulating, enthusiastic and challenging. Teachers know their subject thoroughly and know how to teach it and how students learn. They use assessment effectively to build on students' previous learning. Classroom relationships and behavior are good and students work both independently and collaboratively. Time is always used productively. Tasks and activities are demanding and are well matched to individual student's needs. Teaching resources are deployed effectively and form an integral part of teaching, reinforcing and supporting learning in a very effective way. The teacher's management of difficult behavior and challenging moments is intelligent, perceptive and constructive.

Teaching methods are effectively related to the lesson objectives and the needs of learners. Teaching resources are well deployed and good use is made of time. Assessment of learners' work is regular and consistent and makes a good contribution to their progress.

Best practice teaching will evidence:

- Clear planning
- Assessment for Learning (AFL)
- Different teaching strategies
- Effective classroom management
- Monitored progress
- Pace and challenge
- Productive classroom relationships
- Regular evaluation and review
- Relevant homework tasks set (where appropriate)
- Stimulating environment

How the Policy is Implemented

a. Planning: long and medium term

Long and medium-term curricular planning, with the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) at its core, is aligned with CRIA's aspirations and expectations. Teachers utilize the standards in aspects of planning, teaching and assessing students' learning.

b. Lesson Planning

With the school's teaching and learning abstract in mind, teachers plan their lessons around progressively sequenced learning activities which typically will have a connection to prior and/or forthcoming learning. This connection may be

suggested through the selection of starter activity, relevant related activities and a plenary where learning is drawn together.

When planning a lesson, faculty consider the following intentions:

- To get the lessons off to a **good start**
- To set realistic and progressive **Learning Objectives** for the students, based on the course's published curriculum.
- To select and organise suitable **resources**
- To check **student understanding**
- **To differentiate** for the individual needs of students
- **To stage** and **pace** a lesson
- To bring the lesson to a close with a **plenary**

c. Introduction/Starter Activities

Starter activities ensure that the lesson is introduced clearly, sharing the intended Learning Objectives (LOs) and success criteria with the students. Starter activities are devised to relate to prior learning and to link with the main activities of the lesson and success criteria.

d. Learning Objectives

Learning Objectives will indicate what students should know or be able to do by the end of the lesson, to include knowledge, skills and/or interpretation. LOs are an intended result of instruction rather than the process of instruction itself, and will support the overarching goal of the unit or course (the wider context).

LOs are simple, unambiguous and clearly focused as a guide to learning. The purpose of a LO is not to restrict spontaneity or constrain the vision of education but to ensure that learning is focused clearly enough so that both students and teacher know what is going on.

LOs should be communicated to students at the start of the lesson by having the LO visible to students on the board, a handout, ppt, etc.

Students should be encouraged to engage with the LOs: They should know what it is they are aiming to achieve, the benefit of achieving it, how the gains will fit into the bigger picture of their learning and how they will know they have achieved the objective.

e. Teaching and Learning Strategies

The range of teaching and learning styles and strategies used at the school is extensive and caters for the varying needs, abilities and aptitudes of our diverse student body.

The strategies include the following (non-exhaustive) list:

- Collaborative tasks
- Identifying similarities and differences
- Summarizing and note taking
- Reinforcing effort and providing recognition
- Consideration and practice
- Non-linguistic representations
- Generating and testing hypotheses
- Use of advance organizers
- Demonstration
- Discussion and debate
- Inquiry and enquiry
- Extended writing
- Independent learning

- Direct instruction
- Investigation
- Listening
- Making judgments
- Modelling
- Observation
- Oral and written feedback
- Peer and self-assessment
- Problem solving
- Questioning
- Research
- Revision and consolidation
- Use of ICT

f. Differentiation

This is a pivotal structural element of lessons to enable all students to benefit from a classroom experience. Teachers should deploy a variety of means to differentiate ex) flexible and ability grouping, seating plans, adapted resources, questioning and assessment. There is organizational differentiation, additionally, in that students are 'set' in certain subjects.

Teachers plan their lesson with consideration of the learning needs of the students. With this in mind, tasks will be varied.

Students can be seated according to a seating plan aimed at maximizing progress. Learning Support and ELL students are also suitably placed in class, where appropriate, to maximize progress.

g. Inclusion: Learning Support and ELL

The school makes every effort to ensure that all students can access the curriculum as fully as possible, with their individual needs met, allowing them to work towards their full potential. We also expect very able students to be challenged, yet assessed based on the standards of learning appropriate for each course, as defined through the VA SoLs and/or a student's IEP.

h. Plenary

The plenary returns to the objectives of the lesson and can refer to success criteria. Strategies of assessment, to include feedback/peer and self-assessment/extension activity, may be appropriate to ensure that learning has been effective. Students' achievement against success criteria will inform planning of the subsequent lesson or lesson sequence.

i. Assessment and Marking

See also full Assessment and Marking Policy.

Assessment procedures expect that all work assessed for the purposes of reporting must use the published VA SoLs criteria.

- The criteria are communicated to students in a form appropriate to each grade level.
- Guidance specific to particular tasks is used to give students clear information about strategies for achievement. The use of exemplars is encouraged.
- Teachers should aim for a reliable and valid assessment of the students' work against each criterion. The number and type of assessment tasks required to achieve this should form part of the school assessment policy.

- Assessments are aligned to the VA SoLs and do not vary in difficulty based on aptitude of students.

Marking

Student work is marked in order to:

- Help the student improve
- Identify and correct mistakes
- Provide feedback
- Provide information for grades on reports
- Support the student's confidence

j. Learning Environment

While many classrooms serve multi-functional cross-subject purposes, classroom and corridor displays are intended to celebrate and share students' achievements and to enable students to understand what skills and knowledge are needed to attain levels or grades. With this in mind, teachers create classroom displays which feature, for example, inspiring student work as well as success criteria.

Acknowledgements

CRIA expresses appreciation to the following organizations, schools and individuals for assistance in creating the Teaching and Learning Policy:
Robert Marzano's *Classroom Instruction That Works, 2nd edition, 2012*; Virginia Department of Education; United Nations International School; Southbank International School

Teaching and Learning Policy drafted: July, 2016

Teaching and Learning Policy approved: August, 2016