

BMS SPANISH PROGRAM QUICK-FACT GUIDE

Why offer Spanish?

Research shows that a large area of the cerebral cortex is “uncommitted” at birth, and is developed for the use of language and perception until the ages of 10-12 (Dr. Wilder Penfield, 1965). This area of the brain can be utilized for retaining vocabulary and for perceiving past, present, and future. However, if during the developmental stage a NEW language is introduced, including acquisition of the first few hundred words, this re-engages that part of the brain and extends its development later into childhood years or even beyond.

The Curriculum: Bloomington Montessori uses the Sonrisa (“Smile”) Spanish Curriculum. This curriculum offers Montessori and Waldorf-compatible lessons for Early Childhood and Elementary students, and has been aligned with National K-12 Standards for Foreign Language Learning. There are two primary goals for the Spanish Program here at BMS:

1. To offer a positive foreign language experience for each student, and
2. The second, wholly dependent on the first, is Spanish language acquisition.

Teaching methods built into the Sonrisa Curriculum:

- Total Physical Response
 - An ESL method developed by Dr. James J. Asher in the 1960s in which gestures accompany the introduction of words
 - This enables language acquisition to occur without the need for verbal translation and mimics how one learns their native language as a baby
 - The kinesthetic engagement involved mirrors Montessori’s believe that children “learn through the hand”
- The Natural Approach
 - Developed by applied linguists Dr. Stephen Krashen and Spanish teacher Tracy Terrell.
 - Focuses on acquisition (absorbing the meaning of words) vs. learning (studying the form of word, i.e. grammar); can also be called “mother-learning”, as it mimics the acquisition of language from parents at birth
- The Waldorf Foreign Language Approach
 - Rudolf Steiner, 1920’s Germany
 - Focused on acquisition and ability to communicate and believed foreign language acquisition raises one’s social conscience and interest in/respect for others
 - Sometimes includes learning songs or poetry that is not yet completely understood, based in the idea that until the age of 6 children relate more to sound than meaning
- Reading Children’s Spanish Literature
 - Allows students to connect with the content of the lesson
 - Books are written by native speakers
 - Allows review of previous material, opportunity to check understanding, and gives children a window into Spanish-speaking cultures
- Engaging the Imagination through the Senses
- Circling
 - Part of the Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling method developed by Blaine Ray
 - Repetition to achieve fluency with short phrases (repetition being a cornerstone of Montessori philosophy, as well)
 - This is a group meeting with a predictable agenda
 - Lista (go over the plan for the day)

- Calendario (the day, month, date, and year)
- Circulo (short interactive activity to review previous material)
- Cuento (story to introduce new material)
- Arte (art activity to reinforce new material)
- Juego (short game before dismissal)

Teaching

- Immersion is provided as much as possible (a minimum of 90% Spanish)
- Each level of the curriculum is taught for 2 years
- Previously learned material is spiraled into the curriculum through games and songs, allowing for repetition and deeper learning (as is done in all areas of Montessori)
- Teachers establish a consistent routine to allow for repetition and success

Second-language acquisition is a long-term endeavor, and the positive experiences built here at BMS will help pave the way to conversational fluency.