

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 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 learning one’s 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
 - Developed by Rudolf Steiner, 1920’s Germany
 - Focuses on acquisition and ability to communicate and includes the belief that foreign language acquisition raises one’s social conscience and interest in and respect for others
 - Sometimes includes learning songs or poems that are not yet completely understood, based on 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.