

Calculated risk



Children are curious and inquisitive. They naturally gravitate towards forms of play that can be risky. From climbing tree branches, jumping off surfaces, to playing in an unfamiliar/ different space, we encourage the exploration of play in all its forms. Our teachers, who have experience in risky play management, are able to balance between what's risky and what's dangerous, without restricting opportunities for challenges and excitement. That being said, we take calculated risks, so that children are able to acquire motor skills, coordination, and explore their limits in a supervised, safe environment.

Intentional teaching



Creating an impromptu 'treasure hunt'.

Intentional teaching is “planful, thoughtful and purposeful. Intentional teachers use their knowledge, judgment, and expertise to organize learning experiences for children; when an unplanned situation arises (as it always does), they can recognize a teaching opportunity and take advantage of it, too.” (Epstein 1)

- Epstein, Anne S. "Introduction to Intentional Teaching." *The Intentional Teacher: Choosing the Best Strategies for Young Children's Learning*. 1-10. High Scope. Web.

Here is an example that Megan observed recently: “A small group of Estrellitas and their teacher were entering the Art Studio to explore the woodworking corner. The children went straight to the wall where the ukuleles and guitars are hung, and asked to play them. The teacher arranged an impromptu ‘circulo’. They played their instruments, taking turns leading the group in songs like “Hola, Hola, Amiguitos” and more. They were content, captivated and accompanied by the savvy teacher who sat with them and helped guide the experience. It was joyful, magical, and unplanned- my three favorite things about preschool learning!”

Intentional teaching truly functions on being adaptable, flexible, and observant. Our teachers embody this skill by being open and creating profound experiences for the children in the moment. This allows the teacher and the student to create their own learning experiences, based on interest and environment.



Outdoor & play-based curriculum

Our curriculum is both outdoor and play-based, which means we are outside every day. Whether rain, snow, or shine, playing outdoors allows children to learn about and nature and fosters a connection to their environment and their community in a variety of sensory and hands-on methods. On a daily basis, we walk to parks, play in the jardín de colores and the playground, where students can jump, run, explore, and invent games. Beyond motor skills, children are able to express themselves freely and interact socially. Additionally, studies show this is imperative for children’s health, immune systems, and positive mood. Not to mention, it helps develop critical thinking, creativity and imagination.

Creative problem solving

Through our materials and activities, we hope to encourage children to construct their own knowledge. It is our belief that children learn a great deal by having the ability to make choices and express their individuality through play. Thus activities and environments are a direct reflection of the children and teachers who spend their days together at Escuelita. Creativity is given a place of honor in our program. Exploring freely with art materials, dancing, singing, story telling, and problem solving are all encouraged and nurtured. We seek out materials that are open-ended and allow children the chance to explore and

interpret as they choose. On a daily basis, the children have opportunities to explore classroom materials, and various items for developing muscle control, from puzzles, play dough, and straining activities to beanbag tossing, creative movement and yoga activity.

Emergent curriculum

Our curriculum is loosely based on children's interests, themes and the current season and is presented entirely in Spanish. We are consistently attentive to each child's individual needs, interests, and ideas. Responding to these improvisations helps us maintain the vibrancy and spontaneity that keeps our program growing and changing. We provide a framework within which children explore, participate and communicate their needs, keeping a balance between child-inspired and adult-guided activities. We instill a trust in our students, encouraging them to participate fully in the activities of their school. They respond by exhibiting confidence and a sense of contribution that stays with them as they grow.

Constructivism

Instead of giving our students answers, we encourage that they make their own conclusions. We assist and guide them through the process, but their own critical thinking skills evaluate the situation and find the answer or solution to a problem. This idea encompasses a teaching philosophy and methodology, as well as an epistemology---how people learn, and the nature of knowledge itself. The construction of self and the knowledge of the world around children are constructed by their own experiences and subsequent reflections through trial and error. Therefore, each learner constructs knowledge for themselves. Our teachers and environment are able to nurture this learning process and challenge children to make their own conclusions after hands-on, engaging activities and reflection.

Rough & tumble play

Often, the values of rough and tumble play are underestimated. Although, there are misconceptions and fears of physical play, there are incredible benefits. Some examples are chasing, running, wrestling, sword fighting, etc. Attempts to discourage and limit rough play "are ill placed because children's rough play has different components and consequences from real fighting (Smith, Smees, & Pellegrini 2004). Rather than forbidding rough-and tumble play, which can aid in increasing a child's social skills, teachers' and parents' efforts are better directed toward supporting and supervising this type of play, so that young children's social skills and friendship-making skills can develop (Schafer & Smith 1996)." There are guidelines and boundaries on what is rough and tumble play, and what crosses the line to an expression of aggression. Our teachers supervise and will intervene as needed. Children learn about themselves, their physical limits, motor control, develop language skills, practice signals and nonverbal communication, turn taking, negotiating, and developing friendships.

Immersion

Immersion is an exciting and powerful experience for anyone, but especially for vital young minds open to thinking and speaking. By providing a warm, engaging environment where preschool and kindergarten children play, learn, and interact in Spanish, we foster the development of a second language without the formal trials and tedious effort of traditional language studies.

Over the course of two to four years, Spanish easily **becomes a natural way of interpreting the world** when children are given consistent exposure, context, and support. Our goal is to give children the opportunity to understand firsthand the value, beauty and voice of the Spanish language and the culture embedded within, and to welcome it as part of their own self-knowledge. We instill a sense of global appreciation and participation that positions children to embrace our constantly shrinking world.

“The bilingual child learns to see his language as one particular system among many, to view its phenomena under more general categories, and this leads to awareness of his linguistic operations.” (Vygostsy).

The ability to think flexibly and abstractly about language is known **as metalinguistic ability**. With this skill, children who are exposed to more than one language at a young age have been shown to better grasp the nuances of their first language.

Immersion is a long-term project. Our goal is to have children stay at Escuelita through age five for the highest level of comprehension possible. Furthermore, it is imperative to continue to be involved with the Immersion experience with our after-school program, alumni days, and summer immersion camp.