

## MISSION STATEMENT

May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014

*I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living. I believe that the school must represent present life-life as real and vital to the child as that which he carries on in the home, in the neighborhood, or on the playground.*

John Dewey

### 1. Reasons for creating this school, and the community to which it is directed

#### 1.1. History

The Madrid Active School is a private school founded by a group of **families and teachers from all over the world**. We came together in 2010 to create a project that would fulfill two basic objectives:

- To offer an **educational model** following in the footsteps of the free, democratic and/or active learning schools, in which the central element of the learning method is the child him/herself: his or her individual interests, abilities and characteristics. For inspiration we look to schools such as the Pestalozzi School in Ecuador, developed by Mauricio and Rebecca Wild; we also have European points of reference such as the active learning schools of Reggio Emilia in Italy and the *Waldschulen* (open-air schools) of Northern Europe as well as Montessori and Waldorf schools all over the world.

- To accommodate families' desire to participate intensely in the education of their children. Our school functions thanks to the participation of its students' families, who take responsibility (to the extent possible) for the school's maintenance and other daily tasks. It is conceived as a small school with a family atmosphere, in which a genuine **educational community** is at work.

The Madrid Active School is a **continuation of the project "Nidia"**, a pre-school that has been operating in the Tetuan neighborhood of Madrid since 2011. Nidia has been

a school environment fully prepared to encourage and support spontaneous play and non-directed learning, with special emphasis on the children’s contact with the natural world.

Nidia has grown over the years and has been functioning **successfully**. It has become a point of reference for other educational projects not only because of its innovative pedagogy but also because of its **economic stability** and its **solid organizational structure**.

In **2014** the participants in this school decided to make a leap to a larger project. The two founding members of Nidia have established the limited liability company “Madrid Active Childhood” in order to provide an umbrella structure for this **proposed growth**. We have found a larger space for the school that will allow us to offer more vacancies. Starting shortly we will be admitting children over 6 years of age to the Madrid Active School, which is presently applying for access to the process of accreditation as an international school.

## 1.2. An international and multicultural context

Madrid is the administrative and economic capital of Spain, with a strong international presence and visibility. Historically it has strong links to both Latin America and the European Union. When Spain became a major destination for migration in the 1990s, its capital began to reflect this new **cosmopolitan** character, with residents from all over the world. In the Madrid region 41% of the foreign population comes from other parts of Europe, 38% from the Americas (30% from South America), 12.5% from Asia and 8.5% from Africa.

Today 15% of the population of the city of Madrid holds foreign nationality (see Table 1). This immigration has economic components as well as elements of proximity; most migrants come from countries with strong cultural and economic bonds to Spain.

**Table 1:** Non-Spanish population classified by nationality (countries with over 1000 residents in Madrid)

Source: Bureau of Statistics – Madrid City Hall, January 1<sup>st</sup> 2013

NATIONALITY	TOTAL	TOTAL %
NICARAGUA	2,632	0.6
HONDURAS	5,054	1.1
RUSSIA	2,421	0.5
PARAGUAY	20,693	4.4
EL SALVADOR	1,505	0.3
JAPAN	1,046	0.2
UKRAINE	8,136	1.7
PHILLIPINES	10,783	2.3
BOLIVIA	28,450	6.1
EQUATORIAL GUINEA	1,040	0.2
BRAZIL	10,179	2.2
UNITED STATES	5,884	1.3
MOLDAVIA	1,054	0.2
POLAND	7,113	1.5

VENEZUELA	8,892	1.9
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	22,828	4.9
MEXICO	5,377	1.1
COLOMBIA	26,104	5.6
ROMANIA	55,400	11.8
BULGARIA	10,240	2.2
CHILE	3,757	0.8
CUBA	5,781	1.2
PERU	28,176	6.0
ARGENTINA	6,481	1.4
GERMANY	5,356	1.1
FRANCE	10,281	2.2
URUGUAY	1,202	0.3
ECUADOR	49,373	10.6
CHINA	30,152	6.4
PORTUGAL	7,863	1.7
NETHERLANDS	1,683	0.4
MOROCCO	23,932	5.1
ITALY	16,473	3.5
UNITED KINGDOM	5,908	1.3
NIGERIA	1,445	0.3
INDIA	1,348	0.3
ALGERIA	1,136	0.2
SENEGAL	2,141	0.5
PAKISTAN	1,497	0.3
BANGLADESH	4,771	1.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>467,710</b>	<b>100%</b>

The Madrid Active International School's student body will be made up of Spanish nationals as well as students from other countries. The majority of students are children of foreign parents or bi-national families. Our present group include parents from Italy, Mexico, Costa Rica, France, England while several are from regions within the Spanish state in which other languages are spoken (e.g. Catalonia).

The group of families itself therefore constitutes a multi-cultural and inter-cultural base, multi-lingual and pluri-lingual. It is to be expected that this base will only become richer and more diverse as the school grows. All of the participants find this a comfortable and natural situation and feel part of a **multi-cultural space**. The teachers and administration also reflect this diversity.

The school expects to admit a maximum of 40 students. The families involved will therefore be around this number.

There will be a maximum of 20 students in the pre-school (with 2 accompanying adults) and 20 students in the primary school (with 2 accompanying adults), assuring a ratio of approximately 1 adult for every 10 children throughout the school.

Faculty members speak both Spanish and English, and native speakers of each language will be present in each of the phases of schooling. The learning environment will also be provisioned with materials in the mother-tongues of the families which comprise the educational community, as part of the students' contact with other languages and cultures and the development of their awareness of language and culture.

The social profile of the school's students is likely to be from middle-class families of various different structures: traditional, single-parental, homoparental, reconstituted, monolingual, bilingual, pluri-lingual, etc., all with different beliefs.

### **1.3. A green oasis in an urban context**

The school is located in the Moncloa-Aravaca district, in the University neighborhood in the northwestern part of the city. This district has a lot of **green areas** such as the Casa de Campo or, closer to the school itself, the Dehesa de la Villa urban forest. The neighborhood houses most of the departments and institutes that form the Complutense University and the Madrid Polytechnical University, as well as some 30 student residencies, sports facilities and suburban single-family housing developments.

In the Moncloa-Aravaca district there are 30 day-care centers (5 public and 25 private), 9 public kindergartens and elementary schools, 6 public secondary schools, 19 private schools and 2 international schools in addition to the Madrid Active School.

As an **urban school** we hope to minimize some of the inconveniences of the big city, and take advantage of the opportunities it provides:

- Our location (Calle Antonio Reig 6) is easily accessible by both public and private transportation.
- Our school hours (9:15 am to 2:45 pm) are compatible with both childrens' needs and families' work schedules, and are offered at a reasonable price.
- Our *proximity to green spaces* (Dehesa de la Villa urban forest) allow us to use natural spaces as learning environments through weekly visits, making this contact part of the childrens' life-experience (in the spirit of the German *Waldschulen* or open-air schools).
- *Being in the city* allows us to be a "neighborhood school" to which the families and children may come outside of school hours in order to do maintenance and organizational work and otherwise support the school. From a pedagogical perspective this allows us to invite persons whose work is relevant to our school to share their knowledge with us, or else for us to visit other places in the city as real-life experiences (exhibits, visits, etc.) whenever these represent a meaningful and age-appropriate learning opportunity for the children. Another benefit of our urban location is the wealth of diversity which domestic and international migration brings to the city.

## **2. An educational project created by teachers and families for pre-school and primary education which serves as a foundation for the full development of the human being**

## **2.1 Our mission: a pedagogical project which provides a foundation for full human development**

Our learning model is based on respectfully accompanying children and facilitating non-directive active education in an international and intercultural context while emphasizing education for personal freedom. All of these goals form part of what we understand to be the full development of the human being. This is a project driven by an educational community in which collective work and the participation of families and accompanying adults (educators) in active collaboration within the school is essential.

In the Madrid Active School:

- We understand education to be a **shared process** between school and home.
- We support **active democratic education**, which is **education for freedom** and the **development of the whole human being** (physical, cognitive, emotional, moral, personal, social).
- We approach the school as a collective in which all the different parts must respect each other, coordinate amongst each other, and maintain an open dialogue in order to **respectfully accompany** the children in an **environment prepared** for their full development.
- We understand the school to be a **living and participatory community** in which each of the different sectors has an essential role, and should be listened to. We make this expectation clear to all participants.
- We respect children's capacities in each stage of their development, and we believe in their ability to develop in a framework which respects their desires and their learning pace (**non-directive education**).
- We consider that **the desire to learn is innate** and serves to **drive children's development**. Learning is based upon their internal motivation, which serves as their guide (**a curriculum created by and for the student**) with the help of the attentive observation of the adult facilitators as well as personalized attention (for example, the acquisition of materials according to the real learning needs shown by each student).
- We recognize **parenting as a process of personal development** for adults.
- We are committed to **economic and environmental sustainability**.
- We believe that, in the framework of this secular school, **international and intercultural education** is a tool that allows students to develop respect for

others and for other cultures, as well as a richer understanding of their own identities and cultures.

The Madrid Active School is and hopes to remain a small urban school, a family-driven educational center based on human warmth. At the same time, it aspires to play an important role in the local environment, as a point of reference for **learning methods that respect children** as well as in issues of parenting, education and personal development through courses and other activities for children, parents (Parenting School), experienced educators and teachers in training, and persons interested in education in general.

## **2.2 Our values: educating in community**

This school is conceived as a project for families: it is focused upon the all-around growth and learning in the family through the joint work of families and facilitators, with time for both adaptation and separation (regulating adult presence). The school is a place of transition between home and society. In an urban environment in which family bonds are often loose, the school creates a community around the shared life experience of education.

The **educational community** is based upon a continuous and fluid relationship between the various sectors: students, faculty, families, school.

In order to assure that the school's **structure** permits dialogue and attention to the children as well as the upkeep of the physical plant, a limited liability company has been formed. This **governing body** is responsible for the economic and logistical sustainability of the school. It defines the pedagogical project and selects the Head of School. It holds ultimate responsibility for the school's strategic planning, while delegating part of its governing powers to the Head of School and the School Council.

The Head of School applies the philosophy and the strategy, conducts planning and evaluation, and coordinates all the members of the project. She is responsible for operational decisions.

The school has a **School Council**, an official body the members of which are responsible for overseeing communication and coordination between the sectors of the school community. It is made up of representatives of the different working sectors of the school (faculty, staff), representatives of the families, of students (when age-appropriate), of the teaching team and the administration.

There is also a **Social Council** made up of persons outside the school's educational community who provide an external perspective.

Our **faculty members are trained in educational models which respect children's learning processes**. They provide expert perspective within the school. They have extensive experience in the field, their personal and professional quality and

commitment is extraordinary, and all the families involved in the Madrid Active School confide fully in their judgment and believe that their presence is key to the school's functioning.

The Head of School, the School Council and the Faculty work together to carry out the school's educational activities in agreement with its philosophy.

The management of financial, legal and labor issues is outsourced to a legal/accounting firm.

The school's administration oversees and coordinates the educational model and proposes structures for dialogue with the faculty, which in turn transmits the voice of the children themselves, who meet in a **weekly assembly of primary school students** and a **pre-assembly in pre-school** in order to express their learning needs. The school also hosts a **regular parents' assembly** in order to hear the voice of the parents and coordinate their collaboration in the project.

The **participation of families** is considered essential to various aspects of the school, and families are well informed on this matter. Our project requires the involvement of the families in the holistic education of their children within an international and intercultural context, as well as their collaboration in some of the services which support the school's operation. Likewise they are expected to collaborate closely with the faculty in order to enrich the school's educational practices, as part of a process of personal growth for both the family as a whole and for the educational community.

In the spirit of this shared educational undertaking, we have set in place participatory structures in order to guarantee that the relationship between families and the school takes place at various levels, producing exchanges and the sharing of both knowledge and effort in the education of their children. The school prepares a specific document each year: the Family Participation Program.

#### **FAMILY PARTICIPATION PROGRAM**

**Collective tasks:** The school's families take responsibility for the maintenance of the center as well as daily and weekly cleaning, to be organized in pre-established rotations.

**Parents' assembly:** The families come together in an assembly to establish a calendar of extra-curricular educational activities and to organize committees to carry out various tasks.

**Participation in committees:** Educational support, maintenance and cleaning, meals, events, communication.

**Participation in the School Council:** through representatives.

**Parenting School for Families:** Educational meetings with the Faculty (approximately every 6 weeks), as well as talks, training courses and workshops, principally organized by the Parents' Assembly.

**Parent Visits to the School:** a) visits during the adaptation period, b) visits to observe the school space, to accompany their child and to become acquainted with active educational methods, c) visits to contribute to the space, whether as experts on a given topic or else to organize a workshop or experience.

**Parent/Faculty meetings:** at least once each trimester, and more frequently at the request of either party.

There is also a **working space for parents** and a continuously updated **parents' library**.

The Madrid Active School is **self-funded** by the parents, and gives great importance to making sure tuition is affordable. The economic sustainability of the project depends upon the active participation of the families in various tasks, organized through committees or working groups whose job is to contribute to the school's maintenance, the acquisition or creation of hand-made pedagogical materials, the organization of fund-raising events, etc. The Parents' Assembly will establish a structure through which to coordinate these efforts.

Our school is committed to improving the quality of the service it offers in an ongoing manner, and to taking into account the different needs of each one of the parts which comprise the educational community.

### 3. Our educational goals

Our school proposes **an innovative urban pedagogy** which is still relatively unknown in our region and our city.

Our **innovative learning project** has the following goals:

- The holistic development of each student's physical, intellectual, social, creative, personal and emotional abilities and skills within a multilingual, international and multicultural context.
- The development of self-esteem as the indispensable element that drives each student's desire to learn.
- The development of critical and independent thinking.
- The development of students' autonomy— the foundation for lifelong learning — as well as their responsibility for themselves and their actions.
- Respect for others and for diversity (physical, functional, linguistic and cultural, social, sexual and emotional, as well as of different beliefs).



- The ability to work together with others, generating dialogue and mutual understanding across difference: putting into practice an experiment in cooperation and comprehension between the parts of the educational community in general and between the children in particular.
- Respect for the environment.
- The capacity to take action in the world and drive changes in society.

These goals will be pursued through:

- A school model made up of mixed-age groups (3-6 and 6-12) in combined classrooms.
- A curriculum centered on the student, who guides his/her own process of learning. We understand that each child is unique and we attend to his/her genuine learning needs, pace and life processes.
- Non-directive pedagogy, which should be understood as a methodology which facilitates self-directed learning, accompanied by respectful adults who do not judge the children, their ways of learning or their pace, and who do not fall back on stereotypes or labels, respecting the children's dignity. Within this framework, spontaneous play is considered a key tool for learning, as well as for the children's self-expression and personal development.
- Methods which promote active learning in which the student carries out his/her own education on the basis of a rich array of lived experiences. These methods allow the student to develop skills of inquiry, experimentation and discovery, to solve problems, and to seek multiple strategies for different types of learning. Students cultivate a close relationship with their creativity, their capacity for invention and for divergent thought.
- Project-based learning (derived from students' own interests) in the educational stages in which this kind of cooperative methodology can be carried out.
- Personalized education through a system of tutoring and individual follow-up, continuous emotional support, and an emotional accompaniment which allows each child to feel safe and free to develop all his/her abilities, as well as an ongoing relationship with the families in order to support the growth processes of each child.
- Work with the families in the interests of each child.

- Bilingual, international and intercultural education as a base for familiarity with human diversity and the children's own linguistic, social and cultural identities.
- Creative education based on individual expression and communication.
- Learning in contact with the world, in the spirit of outdoor learning and green pedagogy, with a specific focus on open-air learning in natural spaces. We understand this to be necessary to a balanced development of mind and body.
- The involvement of the student in decision making which affects him/her directly: classroom rules, subjects for group work, etc. The assembly serves as a means of channeling student opinion.
- Qualitative evaluation of the experiences and progress of each student.
- Collaborative work with the educational community and a shared commitment to ongoing improvements in quality.

The holistic education provided in the pre-school fully prepares each child to enter the primary level in any English or Spanish-speaking school.

The holistic education provided in the primary school prepares each child to enter the secondary level in any English or Spanish-speaking school.

The Madrid Active School is preparing for the evaluation of its services and is applying to begin the accreditation process conducted by the US-based Commission of American and International Schools Abroad (New England Association of Schools and Colleges). In doing so we commit ourselves to an ongoing process of assessment and improvement in the quality of our school.