



*Education is not the filling of a pail,
but the lighting of a fire.
-- Yeats*

The ^dS Difference

^dS is alive with a caring, supportive, ‘possibilities’ environment which impels children to be co-active, self-directed learners who are creatively experiencing, exploring, discovering, inquiring, investigating, collaborating, solving, evaluating, expressing, and becoming. Students discover their talents and develop their skills while experiencing the joy and fascination of real human learning.

This palpable ‘^dS difference’ is rooted in our commitment to the development and integration of ‘the whole child,’ i.e., physical, cognitive, social, emotional, intrapersonal, and creative, within a ‘hands-on’ & ‘minds-on’ constructivist educational philosophy. We recognize and honor the uniqueness of each child and the multiple intelligences within: Linguistic, Logical/Mathematical, Visual/Spatial, Bodily/Kinesthetic, Musical, Naturalist, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, and Existential.

Activities which are [developmentally appropriate](#), as well as nurturing of children's multiple intelligences, honor individual growth, creativity, and generate successes which sustain children's natural enthusiasm for learning. Our small, intimate environment focuses on facilitating autonomy, relatedness, and competence in social, emotional, personal, intrapersonal, and spiritual development, as well as cognitive, academic, physical, and creative development. Non-graded, multi-age grouping, creative teaching and learning and a multi-disciplinary, emergent curriculum focusing on relevancy & meaning, are the rich soil to support children's diverse abilities, interests, and learning styles. Creativity and higher level thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and creative problem solving, develop as children apply their expanding knowledge and skills in meaningful contexts, supporting deep, integrated growth.

Our unique environment of freedom combined with exciting, well-structured programs allow us to foster the self-esteem necessary for the processes and products of [Creativity](#); the self-direction, involvement, and responsibility necessary for [Internal Motivation](#); the development of [Intelligences](#) in the use of a variety of thinking skills including analysis, synthesis, critical thinking, and creative problem solving—all built upon the foundation of positive [Personal Development](#). Children build strong relationships, not only with others but with themselves, through daily opportunities with friendship, helping, co-operating, negotiating, expressing needs & feelings peacefully, listening compassionately, solving problems creatively, and cultivating inner resources and skills for developing self-awareness, personal empowerment, moral character, and the honoring of one’s inner spirit. *It is our opinion that [true education takes place only when all four of these human potentials are tapped](#).* At *del Sol* we provide an educational experience which balances and integrates these key pillars, nurturing excited, autonomous, self-confident learners who love school and succeed in life.

In such a life-affirming environment children experience a breadth of human experience – feeling, thinking, connecting, creating, transforming – as the central process of living, which empowers one to related with the world confidently, intelligently, peacefully, compassionately, and enthusiastically.

OUR BELIEFS ABOUT CHILDREN AND LEARNING

del Sol's program is based on the assumption that children are important people. We believe that children have a right to be nurtured by teachers who honor them for who they are—unique, creative individuals, rich in being & potential, capable & powerful, loving & giving, possessing a natural sense of wonder, curiosity, desire, excitement, and joy in living & learning.

We know, from our own experience and from child development theorists, that children are impelled to learn, most effectively by *doing and reflecting* upon it. Knowledge is not something that is given to children, but is actually constructed by the individual child through a playful and purposeful use of his/her multiple intelligences when interacting with objects, people, and ideas. Because children are highly motivated to make sense of their world they do not need to be forced to learn. They are natural learners. Each child is viewed as a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth and development. Differences in abilities, development, interests, gifts, and learning styles are expected, accepted, and used to design appropriate activities which will nurture the development of 'the whole child.'

CURRICULUM

Experiences are provided to stimulate socially constructed learning in all developmental areas: physical, cognitive/academic, social, emotional, spiritual, and creative which will nurture children's development of R.A.C: *Relatedness* – connecting with self, others, and the world with ever expanding awareness of the inherent eco-systems in which we live; *Autonomy* – being the author of ideas and bringing them into manifestation, and *Competence* – acquiring skills, tools, and strategies for successful living. With the synergistic interaction of R.A.C. children joyfully learn *how to learn*, developing the necessary elements for being a lifelong learner.

Underlying all interactions and activities are our goals: to foster the development of self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-confidence, autonomy, personal empowerment, caring relationships, creativity, competencies, connectedness, meaning, and positive feelings toward learning. Our social constructivist curriculum is emergent and integrated, relying heavily on Gifted Education principles. Learning centers, short/long term projects, discussions, and playful/creative activities (initiated by the children as well as the teacher) reflect current interests of the children and our school community. Relevancy and meaning are fundamental qualities of our curriculum.

LEARNING CENTERS

Teachers prepare the environment so children can learn through active involvement with various materials, other students, and teachers. Numerous learning centers, both inside and outside the classrooms, are available on a daily basis, for children to choose from: blocks, hammer and nails, art centers (painting, clay), cut 'n color table, music/dancing/instruments center, homemaking, dress up, computer, gross motor equipment, animals to hold and care for as well as observe (besides the many insects and tiny critters in our flower garden), library/book corner, book making/writing center, table/carpet toys and manipulatives, outside play equipment, and sand & water play.

These non-teacher directed learning centers are designed to be creative, open-ended, process oriented experiences which span the ages, allowing each child to pursue self-directed activities which are appropriate to his/her development. Depending on the goals and needs of the activity or children, teachers observe and move among groups and individuals to validate and facilitate children's involvement.

BALANCE OF ACTIVITIES

Experiences with the self-selected and self-directed learning centers described above are balanced with teacher-directed activities, e.g., personal sharing, group discussions, project work, music and movement, story time, language arts, math, science, art, social/community living, self/intra-personal knowledge, P.E., etc. This balance allows children frequent opportunities to work as individuals, partners, small groups, and large groups.

With self-selection and self-direction come responsibility. Children's recognition of the impact of their actions increases through awareness, reflection, natural consequences, evaluation of positive and negative effects of their choices. Herein lies the difference between growth-producing freedom and chaos. Entrusting responsibility to the child encourages self-awareness, recognizing others' needs and perspective in comparison to one's own, de-centering, communication skills, problem solving, decision making, autonomy, and a feeling of competence and trust in oneself.

Since the pre-school child's development requires active, direct involvement we recognize that teacher-directed activities take on a secondary and perhaps for many pre-schoolers an uninteresting/unimportant role. Therefore, participation in teacher-directed activities by pre-schoolers is not expected. They are invited to participate in teacher-directed activities as one of the many opportunities offered. All of the children will never be interested in what a teacher has planned at any specific time. With support and guidance from teachers, pre-school children are able to choose those activities which best fit their present developmental levels and allow them to meet their own needs. Teachers are able to spot children's interests and follow them through, taking children's ideas one step further—to build on what's already there. Tremendous opportunities appear in "teachable moments." The pre-school teacher, when not tied down by an activity she must direct, can take advantage of the children's excitement in their environment. Mastery of academic skills are not stressed but are available for pursuit by the interested pre-schooler, along with other opportunities for development. The emphasis at the pre-school level is on constructing knowledge of self -- personally, socially, emotionally, physically, and extending that to relationship with others – with just one friend, with a small group, with the immediate classroom community, and with the entire school community. Everything from a snail in the garden, to what has been brought for lunch, to a conflict between friends, or even missing mommy or daddy, becomes a learning experience.

PROJECTS

The curriculum is integrated so that learning in all traditional subject areas occurs primarily through projects and themes of study which reflect children's interests and suggestions. For example, a social studies/science project such as creating and operating a classroom market provides a wealth of engaging opportunities for: working in collaborative groups; planning (discussing, dictating/writing or drawing plans); problem solving; categorizing merchandise; pricing; doing inventories; making uniforms, signs, advertisements; doing research by going on

field trips to real markets; reading books to gather information on where various food products come from—animals, farms, etc.; dramatizing farm life; creating plays/puppet shows; making fiction or non-fiction books on an aspect of study; singing, playing instruments, dancing, and creatively moving on an aspect of the project; working an adding machine/cash register; paying for merchandise; figuring out change; writing checks; studying/comparing nutritional qualities of foods; cooking/preparing meals the American, Chinese, German, or Hungarian way, etc. Skills are taught and used as needed to accomplish goals of the project, never as the goal itself. Art, music, movement, dance, active games, science, social studies, reading, writing, and math are all integrated in the project. (Parents wanting to know more about our integrated project approach are referred to *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach* by Lillian Katz & Sylvia Chard and to *The Hundred Languages of Children*, by editors Edwards, Gandini, and Forman. These may be ordered from a local or internet bookstore.)

Concepts and skills in reading, writing, and oral expression are presented in a Whole Language framework through relevant, concrete contexts which progressively move toward symbolic and abstract representation.

Math, also, is presented in relevant, concrete contexts which progressively moves toward symbolic and abstract representation as well. Our math program goes beyond arithmetic skills, enabling children to be real mathematicians inventing their own methods for problem solving. The sharing, analyzing, and evaluating of various methods, checking answers, and going over disagreements creates a real learning environment of social co-construction. Our math program also teaches children to represent real world problems using math symbols as a language. A variety of physical materials, manipulatives, games, experiments, story problems, station activities, puzzles, and pencil and paper activities are all utilized in our program.

NON-GRADED, MULTI-AGE CLASSROOMS

At *del Sol* (ages 3-12), children's individual development is honored as they are grouped according to developmental maturity rather than age. The multi-age grouping of each classroom allows children to develop according to their own timetable, decreasing the need to compare and judge progress by narrow, short term expectations. Children learn a great deal from each other. Often, they learn more than they would from adults. They often observe the struggle of their peers. They see their peers try and fail, try and succeed. Seeing others, they don't have to be afraid to make their own mistakes and learn from them, too. Another very important advantage is that the child's feeling of belonging and security is strengthened by not having to adjust to a new teacher and new classroom each year. There are many very positive aspects of multi-age grouping for the youngest to the oldest student. We invite parents who want to know more to read *The Case for Mixed Age Grouping* by Lillian Katz. You can order a copy from the National Association for the Education of Young Children or an internet bookstore.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

In living our belief that caring, committed, power-with relationships are the foundation upon which *del Sol* exists, teachers naturally focus students' attention, both spontaneously and with planned thought, on the importance of how we relate to each other. Not only are teachers in tune

with the “teaching moment” but also plan curriculum for social-emotional learning.

As a natural part of every day children have many opportunities to develop their social skills through talking, listening, negotiating, helping, cooperating, making suggestions, voting, taking turns, sharing space and/or materials, being the leader or follower, standing up for one's self, expressing needs and feelings in pro-social ways, etc. *del Sol* teachers understand the importance of facilitating and promoting these social skills at all times, as part of the curriculum. Invariably, children run into conflicts with people and other obstacles. The teacher's role in these difficult situations is not to take over and distract, judge, shame, or punish, but to serve as a magnifying glass for others by empathic listening, clarifying, exploring, and guiding. The teacher's goal of facilitating the construction of each involved person's understanding of their own and every other involved person's valid needs, allows the child to evaluate the situation for him/herself and construct a moral belief system within the context of pro-social values. Acceptance, respect, and trust from caring adults are essential to the learning and growing process. Experiencing acceptance, respect, and trust from important adults helps children to develop these qualities in themselves. Believing in oneself is the basis for all growth.

Conflicts between children are **not** seen as problems that teachers must solve, but as opportunities for children to learn the skills necessary to become responsible problem solvers in their own lives. Therefore, children are encouraged to work out conflicts among themselves from a non-power based approach with teachers serving as facilitator, assuming a less directive role as independence grows. We model/teach the children to use “I- messages” in a form of communication called Nonviolent Communication (See *NonViolent Communication* by Marshall Rosenberg) which focuses on expressing and listening empathically to the facts, feelings, needs, and requests in a situation. We also utilize a technique called ‘mirroring’ to check, clarify, and validate understanding (see *Giving the Love that Heals* by Harville Hendrix) and Thomas Gordon's win-win Creative Problem Solving method (see *P.E.T. Parent Effectiveness Training 30th Anniversary Edition*). Various techniques are used as the situation calls for it. Children know they can always call upon teachers to serve as facilitators in their problem solving and conflict resolution experiences. Fostering nonviolent communication and peaceful conflict resolution impacts the children's lives in *very* positive ways.

Parents wanting to read more about effective communication and how to address a conflict in needs between them and their children or between children or within themselves (negative emotions/reactivity), are encouraged to read *NonViolent Communication* by Marshall Rosenberg, *Parent Effectiveness Training*, 30th Anniversary edition by Thomas Gordon, *Giving the Love that Heals* by Harville Hendrix & Helen Hunt, *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Faber and Maslich, *Inner Bonding* (book or video) by Dr. Margaret Paul (also see www.innerbonding.com), and *Social Intelligence* or *Emotional Intelligence*, by Daniel Goleman. These items are core literature for *del Sol* parents and contain the fundamental relationship principles and approaches which we embrace.

NURTURING STUDENTS' INNER LIVES

Note: del Sol does not espouse any particular religion or spiritual path, but does not avoid “existential” or “spiritual” questioning and discussions. Our goal is to honor and integrate all aspects of life experience and development into a holistic philosophy and program whose

mission is to facilitate optimal self– development and self– investigation in an environment of social constructivism.

Children, as well as adults, naturally ask life’s big questions as life unfolds. Discussions spring up based on the children’s interests and questions of events in their personal life, with family and friends, their studies of science, history, and awareness of current events. We support this pursuit of meaning-making, of grappling with life’s complexities. *del Sol’s* role is not to ‘hand-out’ definitive answers, but to honor the pursuit of questioning, reflective thought, and the sharing of one’s paradigm in an environment of social co-construction.

As a part of our goals for the development of Emotional and Existential Intelligence, we encourage children to investigate their own answers for understanding life and their relationship to it is through an intrapersonal time after lunch. Students devote up to 20 minutes using various techniques of “turning inward” with the goal of developing a strong sense of an empowered self – understanding feelings, needs, intentions, choices, behavior, strengths, dreams, and finding joy & purpose in one’s life. Relationships between peers and teachers become intimate with the opportunities for sharing one’s self awareness, growth, and personal truth in an environment which is supportive and honoring.

We invite you to come observe our children’s day school and experience ‘the ^dS difference’ for yourself.

*(Please note that *del Sol’s* program is not for children with learning, behavioral, or social/emotional difficulties, special needs, or for children that have been identified by concerned parents, educators, or professionals as having too much difficulty, or would likely have too much difficulty, with ‘fitting in’ to traditional school environments and expectations. It is our experience that such concern indicates that the child, even though extremely bright, doesn’t have the level of flexibility, adaptability, disposition, or problem solving capabilities necessary to create success for themselves at ^dS either, even though parents/professionals think ^dS would be the perfect place for the child. It is our experience that such children have some degree of special needs (usually unrecognized) and we cannot successfully integrate such needs into our daily experience. If you think your child ‘needs’ ^dS please contact us for professional referrals for a developmental assessment and recommendations.)*