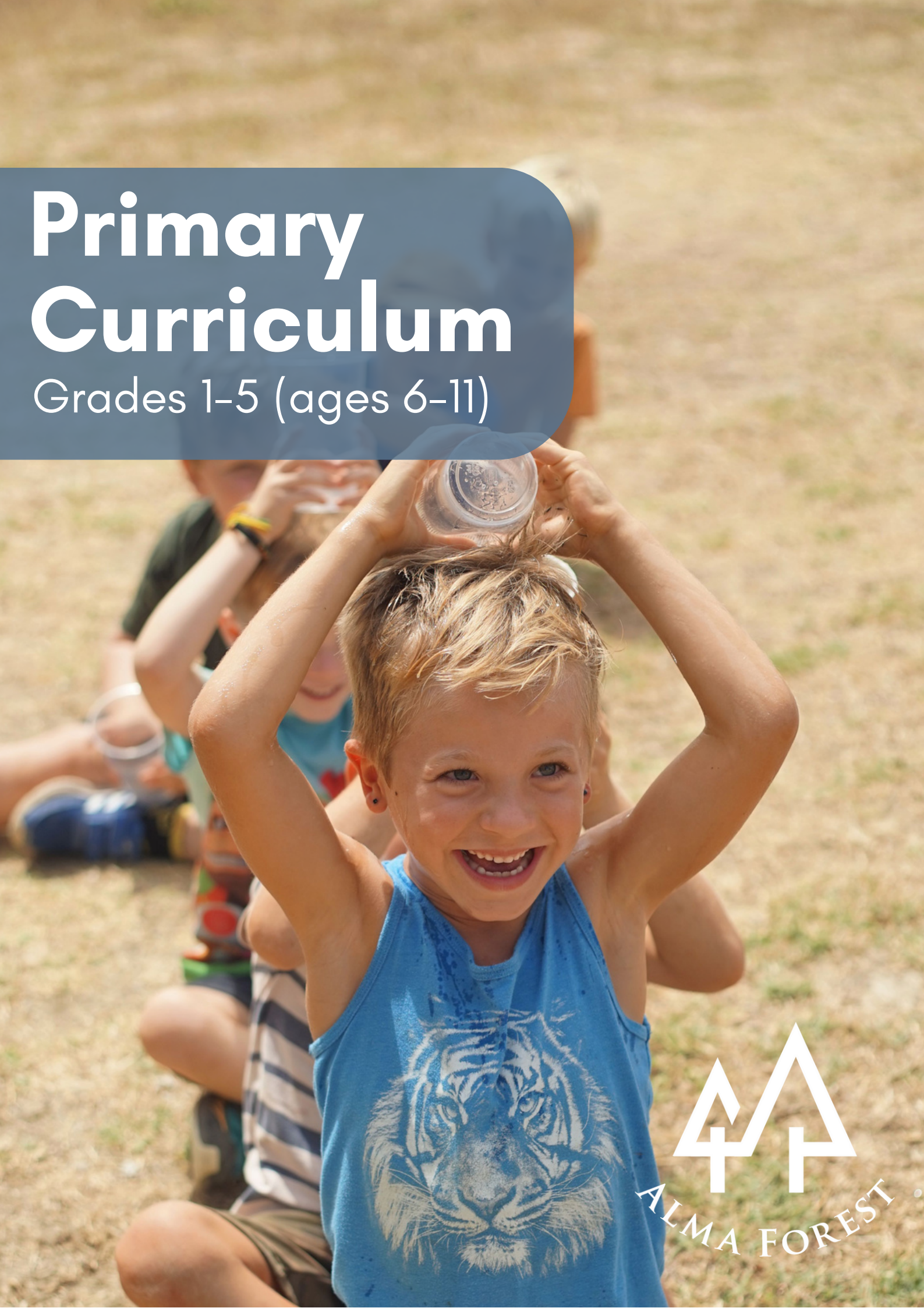


Primary Curriculum

Grades 1-5 (ages 6-11)



Mission

Each child will thrive in their discovery of self-knowledge, nature and ingenuity, applying their creativity and imagination as architects of a more resilient, collaborative and interconnected future.

An education for a people-yet-to come.

Ethos



Bioregionalism

Our education is rooted in our local environment. The forests, beaches and historical sites close to the school enable our students to explore and experience concepts first-hand.



Consent-Based

We believe in an unhurried school experience in which young people are able to learn at their own pace and become co-creators of the curriculum.



Radical Empathy

We engage in empathy-building as a way to authentically connect with each other and to become more compassionate individuals. This compassion and an acceptance of others then lay the foundation for taking action to improve the world.



Microschool

Alma Forest is an intentionally small school. We are a tribe of learners where everyone is known, heard and has the opportunity to contribute. This allows the school to remain flexible and be responsive to the needs of all community members.

Our Image of the Child

"It's necessary that we believe that the child is very intelligent, that the child is strong and beautiful and has very ambitious desires and requests. This is the image of the child that we need to hold. Those who have the image of the child as fragile, incomplete, weak, made of glass gain something from this belief only for themselves. We don't need that as an image of children." - Loris Malaguzzi



Young people are not vessels to be filled. They are already full human beings with complex inner lives, needs and desires. We acknowledge that this requires us to engage with young people as equals and partners, affording them our full attention and respect.

We understand that young people are experts on their own lives. Their emotions and motivations are real and no less valid than those of the adults in our community. We respect the affective states of our students and they have the time and space to work through them.

Young people are capable of evaluating risk and making choices. An environment rich in choice and offering opportunities to evaluate and take risks empowers our students to take ownership of their actions and decisions. Rather than deciding for our students, we aim to decide with them.

Learning Principles

Natural Environment

We believe in fostering rich learning experiences, ecological literacy, and healthy living by connecting children to nature.

Reciprocity

The entire community; teachers, students, parents and the environment, are understood to be both teachers and learners

Intrinsic Motivation

We understand that learning happens best when students are intrinsically motivated and have a say in the how, when and where of learning.

Context Driven Learning

Learning is most meaningful when it occurs in rich and relevant contexts.

Individual Paths

We make sure to accommodate students' needs and preferences, allowing them to chart their own learning paths without fear of being compared to others.

Culture Building

A strong school culture based on interconnectedness and compassion is the best foundation for learning.

Unhurried Childhood

"Learning to read and write makes little sense if you don't understand what you're reading and writing about. While we may have forgotten, most of our early learning came not from being explicitly taught but from experiencing." David Elkind

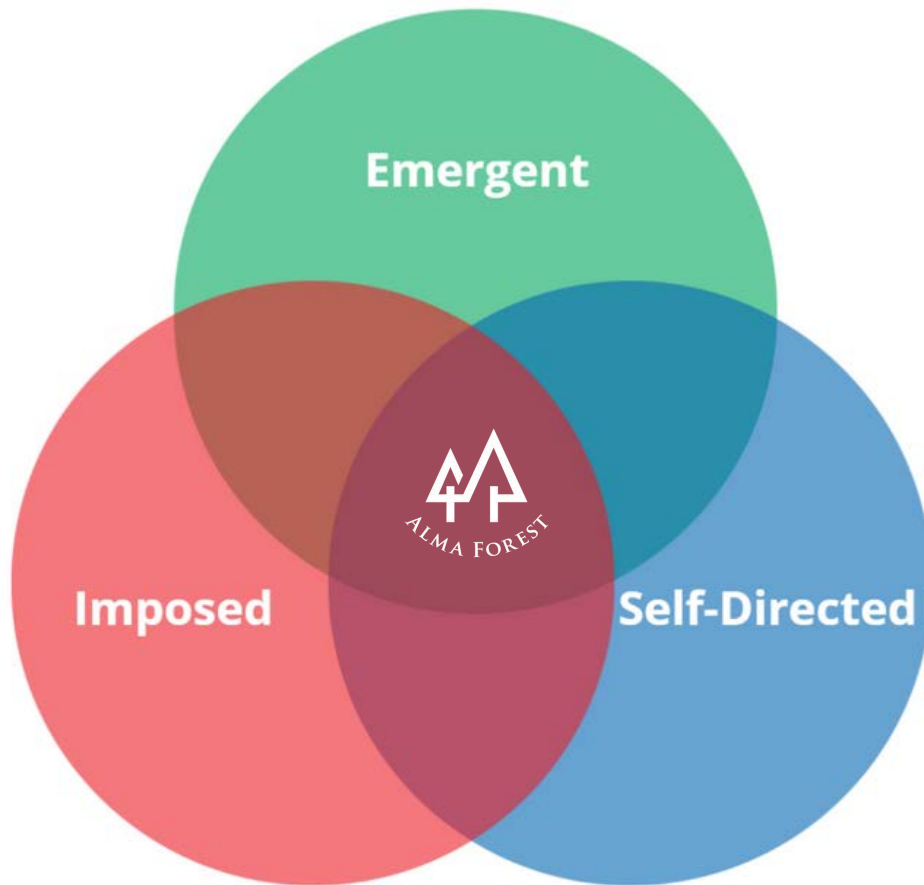
At Alma, our foremost priority is nurturing intrinsic motivation within our students. We firmly believe that when a child's innate curiosity is kindled, it paves the way for meaningful learning experiences that can foster a lifelong passion for education.



We carefully create an environment where learning is not only relevant but also engaging and enjoyable. Understanding that every child is unique, we adopt a responsive curriculum that allows students to advance at their own pace. Whether a child is already excelling or needs additional time to develop specific skills, our educational framework accommodates these varied needs.

By avoiding the rush to meet arbitrary academic milestones, we eliminate unnecessary stress, thereby reducing the risk of children developing a negative relationship with education. Our curriculum is thoughtfully designed to provide students with ample opportunities to discover their interests, encouraging them to take ownership of their learning journeys. In this way, Alma Forest offers a balanced, real-world educational experience that supports every child and holds no one back.

Curriculum



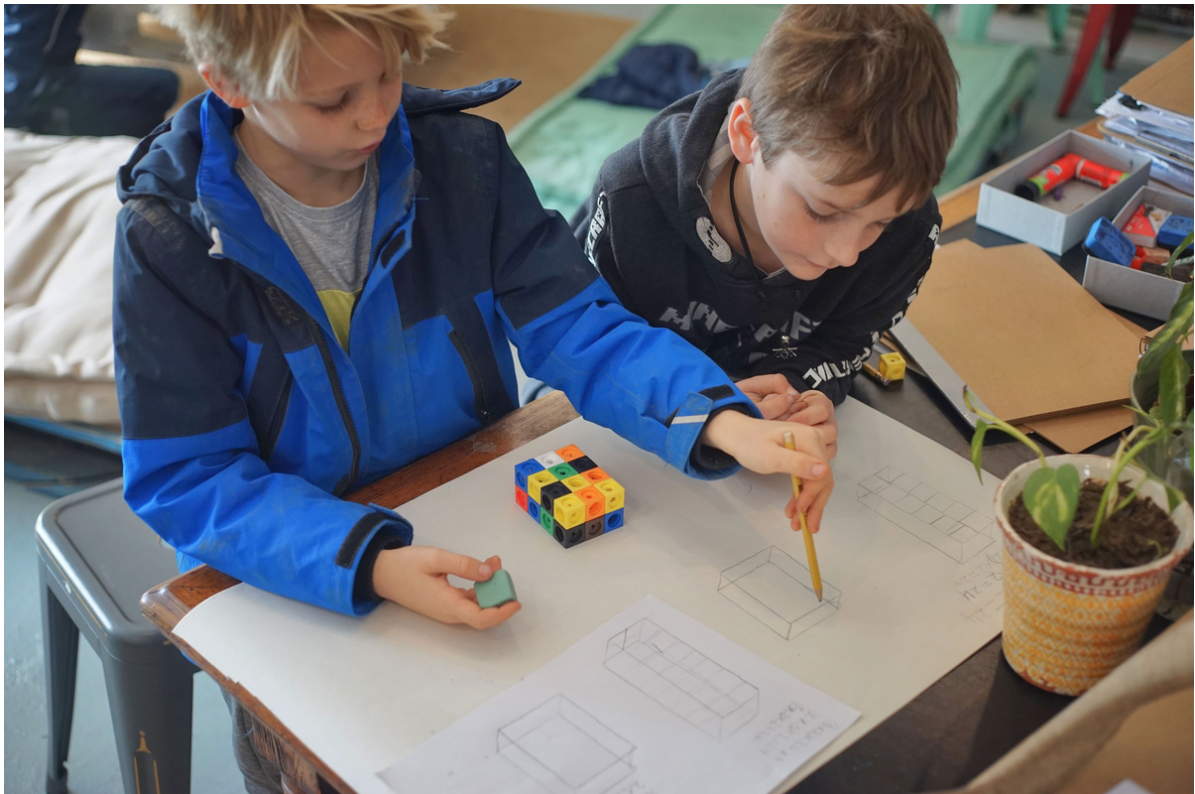
The curriculum is composed of three main strands that overlap and interact. Each strand is roughly equally weighted in terms of time allotment. This hybrid approach ensures that our students are able to have a say in their educational journeys while working towards international standards. It enables our students to develop into independent, intrinsically motivated learners and problem solvers.

Our curriculum draws from international, self-directed, democratic, project-based and outdoor education models, adapting their strengths to form a unique school experience for our students. Aspects of our curriculum will seem familiar while others are less traditional.

Our aim is to ensure that our students have a positive school experience full of wonder and exploration. Watching our students walk into school with a smile in the morning and leave with a sense of contentment in the afternoon is a testament to having achieved that goal.

Curriculum – Imposed

The Imposed strand of our curriculum consists of **Literacy** and **Numeracy** workshops. These form the only subject-specific 'lessons' taught at Alma. All other subjects (Science, Art and the Humanities) are taught through our transdisciplinary Explorations. It is an imposed curriculum in that lessons and topics are planned by the teaching staff using curriculum materials aligned with international standards. These workshops are essential to our curriculum, providing our students with the skills necessary to conduct independent research and work on complex personal projects.



Students working on a maths investigation.

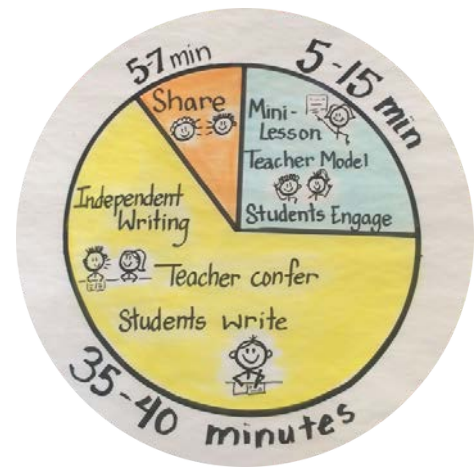
Ideally, these workshops are linked to the group Explorations so that learning happens in a rich context. For example, a recent Exploration (Where We Come From and Where We Are Going) involved looking at creation myths and we used this as an opportunity to work on narrative fiction during the literacy workshops. As part of the same Exploration, we conducted experiments to investigate natural selection and used the data that we collected to look at data representation and percentages in our numeracy workshops.

These workshops also represent the only time that our students work in age-level groups. For the Explorations and the Self-Directed Personal Projects, students work in mixed-age groups.

Literacy Workshops

Writing Workshop

The Writing Workshop forms the core of our literacy teaching. Writing Workshop is an instructional practice designed to help children become confident and capable writers. During Writing Workshop, children have time to work independently and with their peers. They engage in the writing process by selecting topics, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing their original work. They receive explicit instruction in the craft of writing from exploring genre, to organizing their pieces, to word choice, style, and mechanics.



Reading

Reading is an everyday occurrence at Alma. Our students have access to a wide variety of books and quickly learn to choose books that suit their interests and reading ability. We cultivate an approach to reading that encourages reading for pleasure and often read with and to our students. We get excited about books, share, discuss and write about books. We use books as mentor texts to highlight genres and writing conventions and children keep reading records that help them reflect on their reading.

Jolly Phonics & Words Their Way

To support our students in developing their reading and writing skills we use Jolly Phonics and Words Their Way.

Children will have already been introduced to some phonics in the Escuela Bosque and we continue phonics instruction for the younger Primary students. Once they are confident in their knowledge of phonics, our students begin using Words Their Way to support their spelling and vocabulary.



Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii
Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq
Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

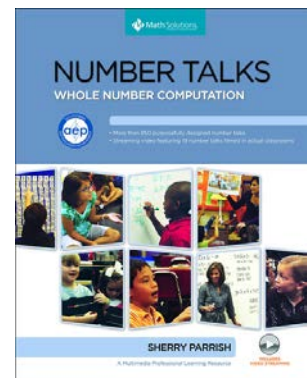
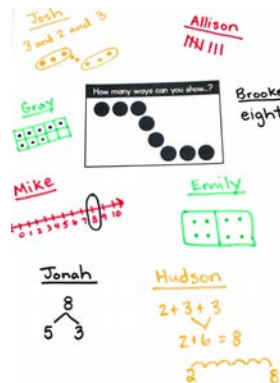
Handwriting

At Alma, our students are first introduced to writing in print. Once they are confident in writing in print, they may choose to learn how to write in cursive.

Numeracy Workshops

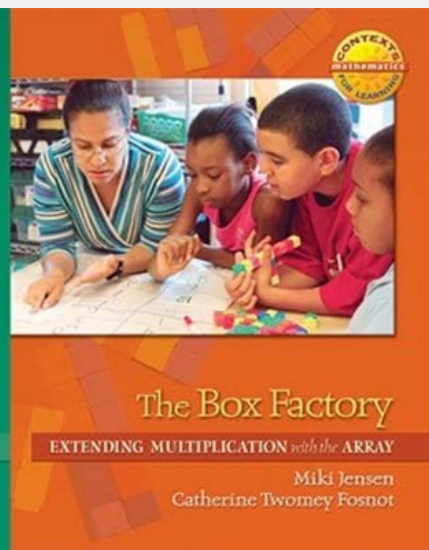
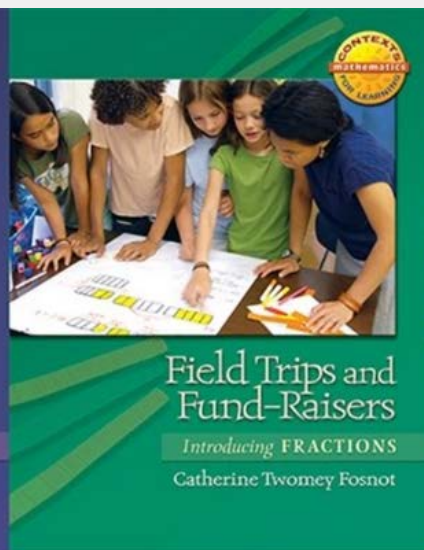
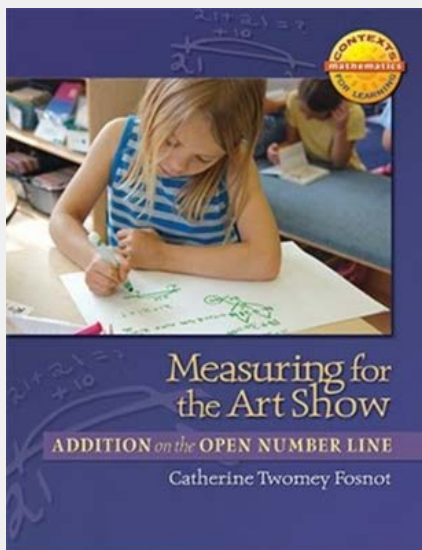
Number Talks

Number talks are short, regular exercises aimed at building conceptual meaning around numbers. They encourage students to visualize problem-solving, calculate quickly, use higher-level thinking, and be flexible in using math strategies.



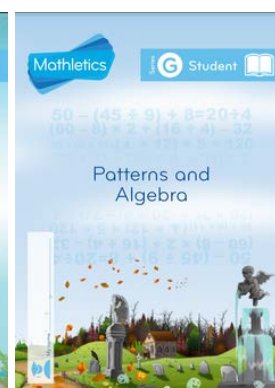
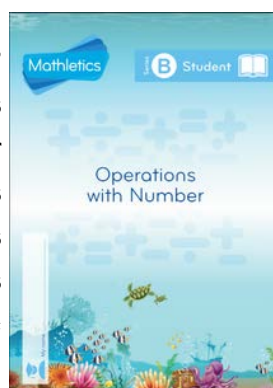
Context For Learning Mathematics

Contexts for Learning Mathematics (CLM) is a rigorous classroom resource that makes use of a math workshop environment to bring mathematics to life. Rich, authentic contexts provide a backdrop for fostering the use of mathematical models as thinking tools, tenacious problem solving, and the reading and writing of mathematical arguments and justifications to ensure the development of a positive growth mindset.



Mathletics

We use Mathletics workbooks to support students at their individual levels with skills practice and fluency. This allows each student to progress according to their specific needs.



Curriculum – Emergent

The Emergent strand of our curriculum is centered around class or whole school **Explorations**. These Explorations encompass all other subject areas and can run from weeks to months depending on the topic and interest of the students. Via our Explorations, our students are able to develop their understanding of Science, the Humanities and the Arts. Each exploration will include aspects of all three to ensure that our students are exposed to a varied and balanced curriculum.

These explorations have many different points of origin but are always created with input from our students. Sometimes a member of staff has an idea, something interesting is happening on the Finca, the students generate questions or a previous Exploration serves as the inspiration for the next one.



Sketching as part of the Beach Exploration.

Once an Exploration gets underway, every step is evaluated in terms of student interest and we consult our students on how we should continue. Many activities are still planned by the teaching staff but there is never a predetermined endpoint to an Exploration in order to keep learning authentic and focus on the interest of the students.

Another aspect of the Emergent strand is our ability to quickly respond to unforeseen events, visits, natural phenomena and spontaneous ideas. We embrace opportunities to diverge from the planned timetable to ensure that learning stays relevant.

Explorations – Conceptual Framework

In order to ensure that our explorations are driven by conceptual learning, there are a few key concepts that we keep in mind while planning the avenues our explorations will take, the activities we will engage in and the experiments we will conduct. We have adopted these key concepts from the IB PYP and the Common Ground Collaborative, curricula that share our approach to concept-based learning.



While the acquisition of knowledge still plays a role, we strive for our students to gain an understanding on a conceptual level. This allows for a dynamic learning environment where the context of our students' learning is adjusted according to their interests. Gone are the days when every 7-year-old learns the same things about Ancient Egypt year in and year out.

By identifying and investigating key concepts, students learn to think critically about big ideas. They begin to transfer their understanding of concepts to different contexts and make connections across time and space.

The benefit of conceptual learning versus an approach that focuses on transmitting specific knowledge is that students who acquire a conceptual understanding will be able to transfer this understanding to novel situations and problems. They end up with a conceptual toolkit that enables them to make sense of the world and competently navigate complex situations.

Example Exploration – The Beach



We spent two months exploring a beach close to the school. This involved spending two full days at the beach every week, research and experiments at school and various excursions.



Our students investigated rock pools and tidal changes, snorkeled and took photos of underwater life. Some memorable encounters with octopuses reminded our students of the film *My Octopus Teacher*.



Back at school, our interest in classifying what we found turned into an investigation of binomial nomenclature and the creation of their own sea creatures.



Our students collected their observations, sketches and research findings in their Exploration Journal. These quickly became sources of pride as they were filled with more and more discoveries.

We unsuccessfully searched for tardigrades with a microscope, became enthralled with abalone, learned about scorpion fish, began to understand the complexities of the global sand trade and marveled at the beauty of different sands when magnified.

We collected so many artifacts that a little cabinet of wonders had to be created at school but made sure to discuss the importance of not taking too much from the beach as this would negatively influence the habitat we so loved and grew to appreciate even more every day.

In order to learn more about how the sea has influenced our local culture, we visited the Barbate Tuna Museum on the Atlantic coast. Our students had the opportunity to watch a tuna being butchered and then tried some local tuna delicacies.

We also visited a local fish market to have a look at the huge variety of fish being sold. This inspired us to buy a selection of seafood and cook it at school. All were brave enough to try everything and some surprised at how much they enjoyed the fish and seafood.

Once we came to the end of this Exploration, our students began to reflect on their learning journeys. This involved looking back at their Exploration Journals and writing about their findings. Other students created interactive posters that displayed their research and understanding.

Throughout the two months we spent on this Exploration, our students were able to use our local beach as a gateway to investigating historical and scientific concepts. They now look at the sand under their feet and the fish on their plates a little differently.

Of course, we did not miss the chance to go swimming and build some sand castles as well.



Example Exploration – Where are We From and Where are We Going?



As one Exploration ended we asked our students what they wanted to learn about next and which questions they wanted to find answers to. It turned out that many questions revolved around the origins of the world and humanity followed by an interest in where we are headed.



We began our Exploration by looking at creation stories from around the world and how each explained aspects of the world as we see it now. We looked at how these stories were told and shared, leading us to cave art and the invention of written language. Taking their lead from Sumerian cuneiform our students created their own alphabets and inscribed clay tablets with messages.



As many creation myths involved celestial events, we realized that we needed to take a step backward and look at the geological history of the earth and the evolution of life that lead to Homo sapiens emerging.



To understand how evolution and natural selection function, we conducted experiments based on Darwin's finches, looked at the peppered moth, traced the evolution of the eye from its origins as light-sensitive cells to the rich variety of eyes that exist today and looked at how prey and predators evolved different features in various habitats. Of course, we also had to look at genes and the structure of DNA.

Once we arrived in the present, it was time to look at the Anthropocene and how humans impact the world at this moment. We focused on the main aspects of human life on earth that define the Anthropocene: plastic pollution, nuclear energy/bomb, extinction, urbanization, and large-scale farming.

We conducted experiments on various types of soil around the Finca, looked at the structure of the atom, studies some extinct species, and looked at how animals have adapted to life in cities.

Following a quick stop in the present, we embarked on imagining a better future. We started by looking at some projects that are trying to clean up the ocean before giving our students an idea of how the world has changed in just the lifetime of their teachers. After a brief introduction to the WalkMan and other obsolete devices, we asked our students to imagine possible futures.

Our Exploration culminated in a sleepover at school that turned into a mission to mars, where students had to solve problems we might face as part of settling on Mars.

Throughout this Exploration, we often challenged our students by introducing complex concepts and theories they would not have encountered in other schools until much later. They rose to this challenge and it was incredible to see our students make connections and ask insightful questions.



Curriculum – Self-Directed

The Self-Directed strand of our curriculum involves **Personal Projects** and times when our students get to freely choose how they spend their time. By giving our students the space, time and tools to develop their own learning journeys and follow their interests we give them opportunities to assume responsibility, experience success, fail well and discover what they are passionate about. They learn how to manage their time and how to persevere when faced with challenges. The skills and confidence our students acquire during their self-directed time enable them to thrive as scholars.



Students presenting a project to their peers.

Students freely choose their projects but we ask them to plan them before starting and to reflect on them once they have completed a project. The planning involves considering the tools and materials that are likely to be needed, what support is needed from others, what the motivation for the project is and what they hope to learn or gain from embarking on the project.

Once a student has completed or abandoned a project, they record a reflection in their digital portfolio. These reflections enable our students to look back at their learning journeys, focusing on how challenges were overcome and what they gained from the project.

In addition to the Personal Projects, our students also have many opportunities to choose how to spend their time. While at the beach and in the forest our students are able to freely explore for substantial periods of time. There are also 1.5 hours of break time every day.

Personal Project Examples



Probably the first of many, here a student presents his recently completed skateboard to his friends. A project that involved many steps and some precision work with power tools. Has since been seen on the streets of Sotogrande, London and Los Angeles.

Some of the older students built an electric go-kart. There was a lengthy research phase followed by trips to the hardware store. They quickly diverged from various plans that they had found and needed to improvise. In the end, even our younger students enjoyed a ride down the school driveway.



Not all projects involve students making or building something. In this case, one student wanted to become better at giving massages. He conducted online research and watched tutorials, always making sure to practice his new skills on his peers. A project that many benefited from.

At one point a boat-building fad swept through the school. Pictured here is a student in the process of completing her catamaran. It all started with learning how to build electric circuits that would power the propeller.





One of the first larger projects ever completed was this doghouse. It was sawn almost entirely by hand, taking a lot of time and perseverance. It is now the home of one lucky dog.

Most of our students are now proficient at using not only tools but also sewing machines. They are used regularly to produce stuffed toys, clothing and parts of other projects such as the seat for the go-kart. Certainly a useful life skill.



Some projects originated from an interest in a subject. In this case, a student wanted to learn more about WWII. He researched and took notes until he felt ready to share his understanding via a poster.

Why not start with the goal to make things blow up, bubble and fizz? This idea turned into a project investigating chemical reactions. This often smelly project drew crowds whenever fire was involved. It was a great time to discuss the scientific process and fair tests.



Beach/Forest School



A fundamental part of the Alma curriculum is spending time immersed in our natural environment. Besides the daily time spent outdoors at the Finca, at least once a week we head out to the woods or spend the day at the beach. When an Exploration focus on a certain habitat the time outdoors might increase. For example, during our Beach Exploration, we spent two full days a week at the beach.

Some of this time is structured and resembles what we might do in a classroom but much of the time is dedicated to exploring the habitat around them. Our students begin to casually recognize seasonal changes and become familiar with the flora and fauna. They form relationships with the life that surrounds them and start to recognize how they are connected to it.

Our students have a chance to learn classic forest and beach school skills such as knots, shelter building, fire making, snorkeling and foraging for food. They are also made aware of possible risks and how to manage these.

Personal, Social and Physical Education

PSPE is interwoven with everything we do at Alma. We have created an environment that fosters radical empathy and allows our students to discover themselves. We put a lot of emphasis on school culture building so that Alma feels like a home where everyone is part of a tribe and can express their ideas and feelings freely.

We address many topics explicitly during our Morning Circles. There we discuss conflict resolution, healthy relationships, bodies, and community. We also use these circles to engage in philosophy and examine current affairs.



Our approach to discussing topics such as relationships, sex, race, gender, consent, bodies, inequality, religion and political opinions is age-appropriate yet honest. We challenge prejudice and discriminatory language, making sure to explain our reasoning rather than just establishing taboos.

We encourage a healthy lifestyle at school. This includes children bringing in healthy snacks and lunches but also preparing food in school on a regular basis. Our school vegetable plots, fresh eggs from the chickens, homegrown mushrooms and foraged greens broaden our students' palates.

We employ a non-violent approach to conflict resolution rooted in restorative practices. This enables us to find constructive resolutions to conflicts and become fluent in empathetic interactions.

An important aspect of our PSPE approach is that our teachers model a human, honest and humble way of interacting and being in the school. Our teachers extend unconditional positive regard toward all students and overcome challenges via a shared humanity.

Spanish



Our students receive regular Spanish lessons during their academic workshop time. These lessons are based on a conversational approach to learning Spanish and involve games and other vocabulary-building activities. Whenever possible, Spanish lessons are connected to the topics we are investigating as part of our Explorations. Besides these 'formal' lessons, students also encounter Spanish while singing songs or playing games. Our Spanish teacher also includes Spanish vocabulary when students are at the beach, in the woods or while working on activities related to our Explorations. This way Spanish acquisition happens in a more meaningful context. Although we are not a Spanish immersion school, we encourage students to appreciate learning the language of their host country.

English Language Learners

As an international school, we welcome students that are new to learning English. There are no requirements in regards to the level of English a student needs to have before joining. Given our very active curriculum and focus on social interaction, students very quickly pick up the language. Within the school community, there is usually someone who can help and translate if hands and feet fail. With over 20 nationalities already represented at our school, many students have had to learn English as an additional language and are happy to support new pupils joining us. Having such a diverse student body also means the common language of the school is English and spoken inside as outside the classroom.



Excursions

**"Traveling - it leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller."
Ibn Battuta**



Our school is situated in an incredibly culturally and environmentally rich part of Spain and we endeavour to connect our Explorations to local places and events. Between Phoenician archeological sites to lush cork oak forests and experimental coastal agriculture, we are spoilt for choice. Our excursions aim to cultivate a love for exploration by gaining understanding from first-hand experiences. Sometimes we travel further afield while other excursions are short visits to local markets, the river or a neighbouring farm.

Our excursions are chosen with different intentions in mind. While some are linked to our Explorations in school, others might be trips linked to seasonal events or natural phenomena and some just strike us as a fun thing to do. No matter what the initial inspiration might have been, our students always come away with expanded horizons.

Guest Workshops



A workshop on ocean conservation by Nereide

Our students benefit from our partnerships with local organisations. We regularly invite passionate people to share their projects and knowledge with our students. Learning from experts in their field is contagious and also provides our students with a broad spectrum of possibilities regarding future jobs and ways to make a difference in the world. As the school grows we would like to develop Alma Forest into a hub where local organisations can host workshops and courses for a wider audience beyond the school community.

Our parent community is another valuable resource with a wealth of experiences to share with our students. Parents have shared their professional expertise, travel stories and home cultures with our students.



Catching and ringing local birds with Tumbabuey Grupo de Anillamiento

Residential Trips and Sleepovers

At the end of the school year, we ask our students to reflect on the year and share moments they remembered and enjoyed. Our school sleepovers and residential trips always take the top spot.

Throughout the year we have several sleepovers in school that, depending on the weather might take place in tents or in our classrooms. The main purpose of these sleepovers is community and relationship building. They also give our younger students a chance to develop their sense of independence and confidence. The sleepovers are fun-packed Friday nights that occasionally link to our Explorations.



Roasting marshmallows during a school sleepover.

We also have at least one multi-day residential trip every year. These trips usually focus on being immersed in nature and often take place in the Alcornocales National Park. We spend days on long hikes, swimming in streams, telling stories by the fire and watching the stars. We discover creatures and their tracks, hope to capture something on our wildlife camera during the night and make friends with toads, spiders and ants.

Watching our students' personal growth over a few days away from home always amazes us no matter how many years we have experienced it and it is guaranteed that they will speak about these trips for many years to come.

Structure of the Day

Our timetable changes throughout the year as we adapt it to suit our Exploration, Beach/Forest School days and the needs of the students. Due to our small size, we are flexible and can adjust the timetable when something interesting happens at the Finca or we get carried away with an activity.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:00 - 9:30	Home Room	Personal Project Presentations	Home Room	Home Room	Beach/Workshops
9:30 - 10:15	Personal Projects / Music	Workshops	Workshops	Workshops	
10:15 - 10:45		Snack Break			
10:45 - 11:30	Personal Projects / Music	Workshops	Workshops	Explorations	Beach/Workshops
					Early Lunch
11:45 - 12:30	Personal Projects / Music	Workshops	Workshops	Workshops	Beach/Forest
12:30 - 13:30	Lunch Break				
13:30 - 14:30	Explorations	Explorations	Exploration	Personal Projects	
14:30 - 14:45	Afternoon Break				
14:45 - 15:30	Workshops	Workshops	Workshops	Personal Projects	

Circle Time: We start every morning with a circle focused on discussing PSPE topics, engaging in some philosophy or playing an empathy-building game.

Academic Workshops: This time is used for Literacy, Numeracy and Spanish workshops. This is the only time during the day that students spend in class groups.

Personal Projects: Students spend this time designing and working on their own projects. They manage their own time and seek help from their peers and teachers when needed.

Explorations: Mix-aged groups engage in activities linked to the current Exploration.

Beach/Forest School: Some activities will be linked to the Exploration of Academic Workshops but most of the time is spent exploring and learning about the habitat.

Assessment and Reporting

**"Educational success should be measured by how strong your desire is to keep learning."
Alfie Kohn**



There are no formal assessments at Alma. Given our size, there is simply no need for testing. Our small class sizes allow our experienced teachers to have in-depth knowledge of their students' needs, progress and ability. A robust formative assessment framework allows us to track how our students are progressing over time and to quickly recognise any barriers to learning that need to be addressed.

We believe that students have the right not to be compared to each other so we do not assign grades or marks to work. Our focus is on the progress each student makes measured against their own starting point. Many of the resources we use are levelled for specific age groups so that we are always cognisant of how our students are performing in the context of the wider international school world.

At the end of each academic year, students receive a formal report. This report celebrates their achievements, comments on the progress they have made and highlights some areas for further development.

Home & School Communication



Being a small school, our parents always have direct access to their children's teachers. We value regular informal exchanges as children are dropped off in the morning and picked up at the end of the day. In addition to this, there are a few slightly more formal ways we make sure that parents are informed about their children's progress and the curriculum.

Parent/Student/Teacher Conferences: Twice a year we have a formal meeting with parents and students to discuss their life in school.

Curriculum & Ethos Evenings: Four times throughout the year we hold evening information sessions for parents to explain the philosophy that underpins our educational approach.

Open Mornings: Parents are invited to spend a morning in school and students explain what they have been learning and complete some activities with their parents.

Monthly Class Newsletter: Once a month parents receive a newsletter outlining what the class is working on and what will come up next.

Quarterly School Newsletter: A whole school newsletter highlights things happening throughout the school and informs about any schoolwide updates.

Cluster: Parents have access to a password-protected photo site that is regularly updated with photos showing what happens in school.

Middle School Transition

Our oldest group of students will form the first Middle School cohort with the start of the 2024/2025 academic year. The transition from Primary to Middle School will be seamless as students will already be accustomed to working independently and taking a large degree of responsibility for their learning. In Middle School, the focus on transdisciplinary projects will increase while students are supported by specialist teachers to further develop their academic skills.

The Middle School will provide an education for young people aged 11-14 and be comprised of 4 classes. At the end of their journey at Alma Forest students will have a substantial portfolio of work that shows their skills and achievements. They will be ready to continue their studies at a high level, having matured into competent, confident and aware young scholars.



