

## Second Language Learning, and Multiculturalism at the Novato Charter School



*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.*  
—Ludwig Wittgenstein

One of the main tasks of teaching a foreign language at NCS is to recapture the genius of language which – as we master it gradually – can further the understanding of another nation, another way of thinking, another way of relating to life. With such a bridge, language becomes enchanting and captivating, and can sow the seeds of trust and tolerance between peoples.

Teaching foreign languages is not merely of pragmatic use. Language is a means of communication between human beings, and it is perhaps one of the most important ones. It is also the gateway to understanding a particular folk, which has its own genius, its own individuality, its own musicality, and expresses itself in countless manifestations of everyday life. Our whole way of thinking is, to begin with, determined by the language we speak, and it is well known that once we start learning another language, we also begin to think differently. Every language has its own thought forms.

Experience also shows that through the learning of a foreign language, we become more subtly aware of our mother tongue. We rediscover its own particular capacities of expression in speech, prose, and poetry.

In addition, early and intense exposure to a second language is best for brain development. A recent study presented to the American Neuroscience Conference by researchers at the Department of Psychological and Brain Science at Dartmouth College concluded that an early age of first bilingual language exposure had a positive effect on reading, phonological awareness, and language competence in both languages.

Fluency in a foreign language requires years of intensive study, ideally while being immersed in an environment where the language is spoken constantly.

*“If we’ve been educated well, and if we take the gifts of each culture, we can then transcend the limitations of each culture. We become members of a new culture, a culture of free human beings.” – Jeffrey Kane*

Spanish at the Novato Charter School is taught in Kindergarten through Eighth Grade.

## Honoring other Cultures

In its Declaration of Principles of Tolerance, UNESCO, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, defines tolerance as:

“Respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference.”



The school observes *Día de los Muertos* on November 2nd. Mexicans celebrate this day by preparing sumptuous multi-level altars to welcome the dead. Later, families go to the cemeteries to clean family gravesites, and spend time together remembering the dear departed with prayers, stories, flowers - symbolizing the shortness of earthly life - *pan de muertos* (bread baked in the shape of bones), candy skulls called *calaveras*, photographs, mementos, candles, and incense-like copal to guide the dead home.

The week prior, NCS students make decorations for the altars and discuss the meaning of “The Day of the Dead”. They create *papel picado* (colorful cut-out paper) and *calaveras de azucar* (candy skulls). Each classroom creates an altar, where students place photos, written memories and other small tokens to acknowledge their loved ones.



Students have also observed the Hindu day of Diwali which means Row of Lights. In India, Diwali traditions include decorating with Rangolis, flowers, candles and lamps. One dresses more formally for the occasion and families exchange gifts, cards, and sweets. Families then visit a temple and light sparklers in celebration.

In the morning the class went outside and created beautiful Rangolis. Baskets were set up with fresh flowers and colored saw dust. Each child decorated their own lotus petal. Once satisfied with their creations, the children went back into the classroom and their teacher lit candles and told the story of Ramayana.

2nd grade then went outside for a great surprise. Each child was given two sparklers and each one lit the sparklers. The children pranced and skipped until their sparklers went out. They were then treated to a beautiful spread of traditional Diwali food, all lovingly prepared from their teacher’s family recipes.



In a deeper sense, the celebration of Diwali refers to the light of higher knowledge—with this awakening comes compassion and the awareness of the oneness of all things.

