



## Growing Team of Educators

We are incredibly privileged to have a highly experienced team of educators from various international teaching backgrounds. As our school grows we continue to attract talented and dedicated teachers from around the world.

This year we are joined by five new members of staff from Ireland, Spain and the UK who are moving to Spain from their current homes in Brazil, Sweden and the UK.

They bring with them experience in school and subject leadership, a willingness to learn how education is done differently at Alma, and a wealth of ideas to further enhance our provision.

Ana, Edel, Inma, Richard and Stephanie, welcome to the Alma tribe! Find out more about our new team members on our website.



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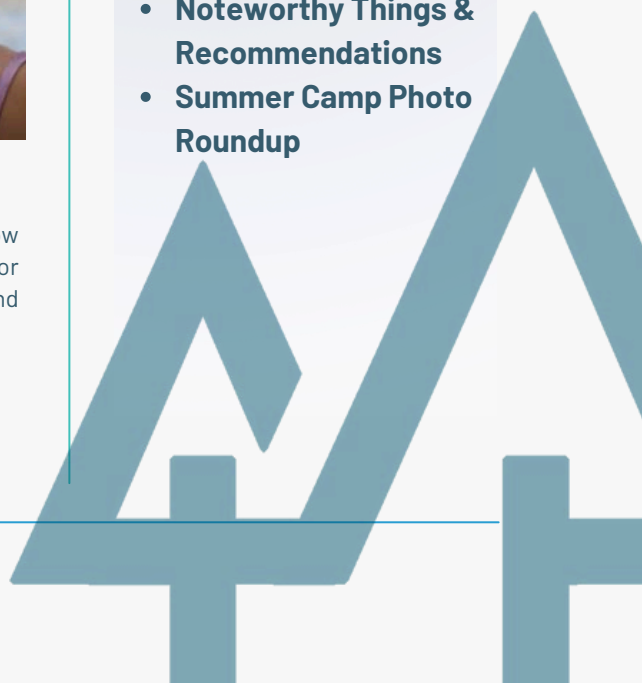
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# Thoughts from the Principal

## EDUCATION, CHILDHOOD, PARENTING



### What is a Progressive Education?

Progressive education is rooted in the belief that education is always a political act, inherently tied to the values and structures of society. It challenges the traditional models, advocating for a more inclusive, empowering approach to learning. However, **misconceptions about progressive education persist**, often portraying it as lax, anti-academic, or suitable only for those who struggle in conventional schools. Critics may dismiss it as hippy or esoteric, yet these views fail to recognise the robust, research-based foundations and significant historical contributions shaping this educational philosophy.

Key figures such as Paulo Freire, A.S. Neill, and Henry Giroux have profoundly influenced progressive education. Freire's emphasis on **critical pedagogy** underscores the importance of education in liberating oppressed groups, including children. Neill's Summerhill School exemplifies a child-centred approach, prioritising freedom and **self-regulation**. Giroux's advocacy for **transformative** education highlights the need to address social inequalities through schooling. Additionally, the Modern School movement, inspired by anarchist educator Francisco Ferrer, championed a radical, **student-focused** model free from state and religious control.

Contrary to the notion that progressive education is anti-academic, it is deeply committed to rigorous intellectual engagement. It values research over

tradition, continually adapting to new educational insights rather than adhering to outdated practices. This approach is **non-dogmatic**, emphasising student empowerment and choice, encouraging learners to take an active role in their education. In this way progressive education differs from approaches such as Waldorf or Montessori, which follow a more rigid approach to education based on a specific founders' set of ideas.

Progressive education shifts the focus from moral to **ethical education**. While moral education often implies a fixed set of rules, ethical education encourages students to navigate complexities and make informed decisions based on principles and empathy. This move towards ethical education supports the development of critical thinking and moral reasoning, preparing students to engage thoughtfully with the world.

Values play a central role in progressive education, guiding the educational process rather than pure pragmatism. It embraces uncertainty, acknowledging that education is not about imparting a fixed body of knowledge but about **fostering a love for learning, curiosity, and adaptability**.

Progressive education embraces change and innovation, not for the sake of following fads or being trendy but to enable insights from research and best practise to inform our approach and enable our students to live their best lives. Truly progressive schools also recognise that there is always room for improvement and that humbly reflecting on what a school offers will lead to a better outcome for all.



# School News

## Planting Trees



In Spring, students, parents and teachers got together to plant trees in an effort to reforest some of the areas around the school. This effort was organised by our Eco Committee and school neighbours and is part of a larger project, coordinated by our staff member Julia, which runs across the Cadiz province.

We look forward to more of these events during the coming school year with more trees already ordered. Reforestation with native trees is especially important as monoculture farming has taken over much of the land around the school.



## Residential Trip

For the first time, our Primary students went on a residential trip in winter. On one hike, we even had a tiny bit of snow. It was certainly a change from hiking in the summer sun.

This year we visited Huerto Alegre in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains. There were a wide range of workshops exploring the environment around the site. They learned about flora and fauna, made sundials, harvested plants to produce fragrances, cooked some local specialties and investigated a stream fed by the snow melt.



When we arrived, the site staff were surprised to see us eat and spend time with our students rather than choose to hand them over as much as possible. As we spent the evening playing games and socialising by the fireplace they would often peek into the room with smiles on their faces. As we left, they remarked on having never hosted a group like us, so tight-knit with teachers engaging so much with their students. It always fills us with a sense of pride when people notice these things.



# School News

## Visit to Estero Natural



One of the most memorable excursions our Primary students went on this year was our visit to Estero Natural just outside of Cadiz. Led by passionate volunteers, our students were able to help harvest, sort and taste oysters; check fish traps and identify a wide range of sea life in them; learn about an invasive species of crab; explore the local flora; and perform various experiments focused on water salinity.



After the workshops we were able to sample fresh oysters and camarones, small shrimp, from the farm. We had previously asked our students who wanted to try an oyster and two thirds had indicated that they would like to, which we thought was a very optimistic response. To our surprise, even more students were eager to give it a try on the day and we were lucky to have ordered a few extra.

A final highlight was discovering a sea hare, a creature we had not previously come across during our coastal explorations.

## Capoeira

As part of our rotating extracurricular offering, our students have begun Capoeira lessons. Once a week specialist teachers provide an engaging introduction to this non-contact martial art. The music and dance elements of Capoeira made the transition from our previous music classes easy.

We appreciate that Capoeira refers to itself as a game and that the focus is in cooperation rather than beating or harming an opponent. There are a strong set of ethics underlining the game which include:

- **Respect:** Maintain respect for ourselves, each other
- **Freedom:** Create a safe space to express ourselves as unique individuals.
- **Equality:** Acknowledge everyone's contribution as valuable. Never underestimate anyone, especially ourselves.
- **Integrity:** Be fair, impartial, and true to our word. Admit when we are wrong and strive to make it right.
- **Community:** Share experiences—hard and easy, joyous and frustrating. Foster a sense of belonging, camaraderie, and wonder. Meet new people and have fun!

As we continue with Capoeira for another term, we are on the lookout for other great things that our students could explore next. A series of circus workshops might be next.



# School News

## Moving to Grade 1



Towards the end of the school year, our oldest Preschool students spent time exploring the Primary School and getting to know their new teacher for the upcoming year. They watched a delightful video recorded by their new teacher, Inma, which had them all laughing and excited to meet her in person. Following the video, they had the opportunity to ask questions and learn about the new routines they would experience in Primary School. They were reassured that many aspects would be a continuation of what they were already familiar with in Preschool.

To welcome them into the Primary School and help them feel at home, some older students shared stories they had written and performed songs, including "Send Me On My Way" by Rusted Root and a heart-wrenching a cappella version of "Somewhere Only We Know" by Keane.

It was wonderful to see the preschoolers full of excitement and curiosity about their upcoming move to Primary School.



## Power of Role Play

Our Grade 1 and Grade 2 students ended the year with a literacy-focused role play. Both happened to take place on an island, with Grade 1 searching for a missing person and Grade 2 investigating a mysterious case involving dinosaurs and secret laboratory experiments (pictured above building a raft to escape the island). Both groups initially designed their characters, including giving them various strengths and weaknesses, and then they packed their bags and set off. Through their journal entries, dice rolling and intricate storylines created by the teachers, they navigated the game over several weeks. There was a buzz every morning as the students came into school and wondered what would happen during the game-play time that day.

These role-play adventures **help students find a way into writing and reading that feels immediately meaningful** as their voices and ideas directly contribute to the game-play experience. There are preplanned versions that can be found on the internet but we recommend creating your own. We are happy to share our resources and experience of role plays with other educators. Just get in touch via [philipp@almaforestschool.com](mailto:philipp@almaforestschool.com).

# Alma Explained

## Why Beach School?



Beach School is a fundamental part of the Alma educational experience and a core part of our outdoor education provision. Spending time on the beach or in the forest is a key part of what sets us apart from other schools. That said, it is not the location that matters, but the way time is spent in these locations.

### Community Building

At Alma we aim to create a **sense of tribe**. A community that does not just coexist in the same space but does so together. Achieving this takes concerted effort and time. It is not something young people can be taught but needs to be lived. The beach gives us a chance to do this. It is a space outside of the school that lets our students interact in different ways than in the school setting. Often a location change can introduce a different mindset and it breaks down certain 'set' ways of being.

It is not just an opportunity for our students. Teachers value this time as a time to join our students in play, a crucial part of our approach to **teacher-student interactions**. As one teacher mentioned, it's an ideal opportunity to spend time with a student with whom there might have been some difficult moments during the week, allowing for a chance to reset and reconnect.

### Social Skills

There is more unstructured time at the beach and in the forest. This can sometimes challenge our students because they are not used to making decisions about how to spend their own time. Overcoming this challenge and dealing with boredom are important skills to be learned. Making the most of the Beach School setting, which is full of potential, especially in regards to opportunities to interact with others, really strengthens our students' ability to be **positive agents in their social environment** rather than waiting passively for others to make decisions for them.

Beach and Forest School provides a unique opportunity for students to interact with peers they wouldn't usually engage with, thanks to a diverse array of activities available. They may find common interests in activities like sketching, playing the ukulele, skimboarding, creating shell jewelry, exploring life in rock pools, climbing, or building sand castles. Beach School significantly broadens the social arenas in which our students can interact, fostering new connections and enriching their social experiences.

### Teamwork & PE

A specific social skill that we aim to develop in our students is the ability to work in a team with others who might not be their best friends. Besides developing their motor skills, this is the main aim of our PE provision at Beach School. Recently I had a conversation with a class about 'attitude' and 'sportsmanship' when they struggled to work together during a handball game. Just like their ability to throw and catch a ball, **being able to collaborate successfully with others**, is a muscle that can be developed and strengthened.



# Alma Explained

## Why Beach School? *continued*

### Risk Taking

Beach and Forest School offers a safe environment where children can take risks and challenge themselves, both physically and emotionally. Whether they are navigating waves and cliffs or trying new activities, these experiences are crucial for building resilience and confidence. This occurs in a relaxed atmosphere, free from pressure, allowing children to explore their limits comfortably. **Our teachers provide support and encouragement**, stepping in when they feel it could help a child overcome any hesitations. Often, it's the students themselves who take the lead, helping each other through difficult climbs or cheering each other on during new sports activities, fostering a supportive community spirit.

### Free Play

Beach and Forest Schools offer plenty of opportunities for free play, which is critical for creative thinking and problem-solving. This unstructured time allows children to explore their interests and learn to manage their time and actions independently. It is a great time to practice conflict resolution and peer mediation.



### Nature Exploration

You might find it surprising that this point is mentioned last, but being at the beach is not the most crucial aspect of Beach School. While we make exciting discoveries, observe seasonal changes, and go snorkeling—activities that align with our mission to strengthen students' connection to the natural environment—these are merely the backdrop. The real significance of Beach School lies in the opportunities it offers for personal and social growth. It is opportunities for this growth that sets Alma apart from other schools.



# Summer Camp 2024



## Maker Opportunities

Our camp was buzzing with creativity, innovation, and unforgettable experiences as campers dove into a wide range of maker opportunities. From building intricate models to designing custom t-shirts, our campers showcased their talents and teamwork, making this summer truly remarkable.

One of the highlights was the Egg Drop and Egg Car Challenges. Campers tested their **engineering skills**, designing contraptions to protect eggs. These challenges were not only fun but also a fantastic introduction to basic **principles of physics** and engineering. Our campers built boats, swords and many other intricate miniature models using a wide range of tools. Additionally, sewing and needlework sessions enabled campers to learn stitching basics and produce some really great stuffed toys.

A standout group project was the collaborative effort to build and paint a tree house. This project not only imparted practical building skills but also **promoted teamwork** and a strong sense of accomplishment. Creating their own juggling balls and learning to juggle was a hit among campers. Working with clay allowed for **artistic expression**, resulting in unique and impressive sculptures. Jewelry making sessions were particularly popular, with campers designing stunning pieces.

Our summer camp maker opportunities truly inspired creativity and fostered collaboration, creating an enriching environment for all participants. This summer was filled with making, building, and countless memorable moments. We look forward to continuing this tradition of innovation and fun in future camps!

## The Sleepover

Always a highlight for our campers is the Thursday sleepover option. Often for the first time, campers choose to experience camping away from home with their newly made camp friends. Campers as young as four surprised their parents with their wish to participate and were very proud when they managed the sleepover without a hitch.



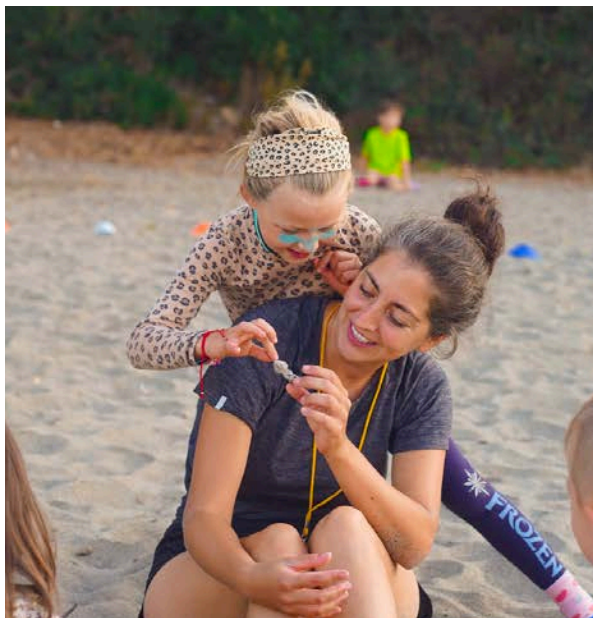
Every sleepover always includes some extra pool time, games, s'mores, a sunset walk and lots of excitement about sleeping in tents. Since the sleepover takes place in a different part of the school than the camp, there are also a lot of new things to explore and areas that inspire new ways to play.



# The World of Education

## IDEAS AND INSPIRATION

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### Professional Love

There is ample empirical evidence that shows how caring educational settings have a **positive impact on student well-being and academic achievement**. And since this is not a recent development, it is surprising how many schools still hold fast to a structure and atmosphere that is based on coercion, Pavlovian ways of motivating students and aged-based hierarchies that foster antagonistic relationships.

Professional Love, a term coined by Jools Page, emphasises **compassionate and respectful relationships** between educators and students, crucial for emotional and academic development. Professional love manifests through warm interactions, attentive listening, and a caring attitude, creating a safe and supportive space for children to explore and learn.

Jools Page's research underscores the importance of loving interactions in educational settings and highlights that parents value professionals who show genuine affection and care for their children, **helping build resilience and security**. Nel Noddings' work on the Ethic of Care supports this, emphasising that caring involves stepping out of one's personal frame of reference and deeply understanding the child's needs. Fostering a **culture of care** ensures that children's emotional well-being is prioritised, facilitating better learning outcomes and overall development.

The Ethic of Care developed by Noddings, actively distances itself from a mathematical, hierarchical, and logical ethics that once stated can be applied to all situations and supplements it with an ethics that is based on "human caring and the memory of caring and being cared for". This is a response-based ethics "**rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness**" that "begins with the moral attitude or longing for goodness" that is radically specific since "so much depends on the subjective experience of those involved in ethical encounters [and] conditions are rarely 'sufficiently similar' to declare that you must do what I do".

Affect theory, based on the work of Spinoza, posits that encounters should be evaluated according to their ethical tone. The quality of an encounter is determined by whether it has increased or decreased an individual's capacity to act. Evaluations based on affect lead to an ethical conception of action saturated with noble, that is, transformative, energy. Hardt & Negri draw on this when outlining an ethics of love. Love, not as sentimental love, but as **a force of production that is 'joy'**, an increase in our power to act while "forming new, more powerful bodies and minds". Following from this, Alma aims to be a caring environment that focus on empowerment and love rather than control and hierarchy.

Hugo Paul, who visited the school as part of his *Into the Tribes* project, recognised exactly this aspect of our school. Read his full article [here](#).



# The World of Education

## IDEAS AND INSPIRATION

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### Independence Therapy

Too often, we try to help and teach children by taking over: doing things for them or micromanaging their efforts. Despite our good intentions, this approach often creates **bundles of anxiety**. Imagine being in their shoes: you are about to do something new or something you know you are not good at. This already anxiety-inducing situation is now further amplified by an observer who is better at the task and regularly points out what you are doing wrong.

Anxiety levels among young people are on the rise, with 10-20% of all children struggling with clinical levels of anxiety. One might think that helping them by reducing their workload is the answer, but the opposite seems to be true. In our [March 2024 edition](#) of this newsletter, we examined how making accommodations for students with school anxiety actually heightens the anxiety rather than alleviating it.

Echoing this finding, [Independence Therapy](#), developed by Dr. Camilo Ortiz, focuses on increasing children's independence to reduce anxiety. This method contrasts traditional exposure therapy by incorporating activities unrelated to specific fears but **aimed at building resilience and confidence**. Children engage in "Independence Activities" (IAs) such as riding the bus alone or cooking a meal, which are designed to enhance problem-solving skills, social competence, and risk tolerance.

This approach empowers children to face life's challenges independently, leading to decreased anxiety and **increased self-esteem**, ultimately fostering happier, more confident kids.

For those familiar with Alma, you will recognise that this approach mirrors our ethos and educational philosophy. Starting with our core understanding that children are competent and capable agents, we allow and encourage our students to figure things out themselves, **take risks, and fail well**. They design and complete their own projects, teach lessons, manage their own time, and challenge themselves. All of this takes place within a strong school community underpinned by professional love, as outlined on the previous page.

Allowing children to work things out by themselves is not a form of abandonment; it is a **generous gesture of trust and empowerment**. It is a caring act that opens up space for growth and discovery.

While the vast majority of children do not need therapy, we can certainly use these findings as a basis for examining how we interact with young people in school and at home. It is a good idea to take a pause before following the urge to step in, help, assist and explain.



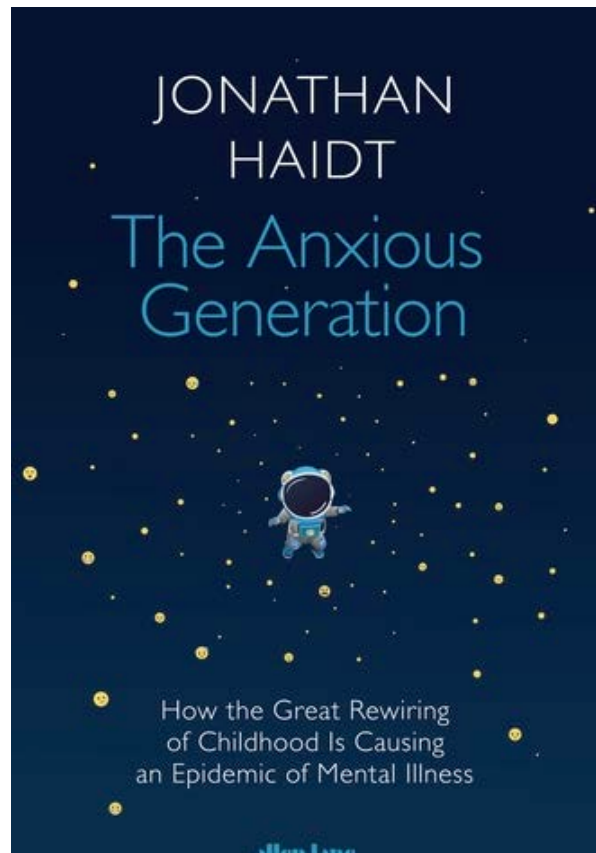
# Noteworthy

## Young Plato

This documentary about school life recalls Nicolas Philibert's "Etre et Avoir," focusing on a caring teacher in rural France. It features Kevin McArevey, the dynamic headteacher of Holy Cross Boys' primary school in Belfast, a community once affected by the Troubles.

Mr. McArevey, a fan of Elvis, martial arts, and classical philosophy, introduces his nine- and ten-year-olds to Ancient Greek maxims. These lessons aim to teach new thinking strategies, defuse violence, and promote peace, culminating in his plan to replace traditional sectarian murals with those of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. He believes Belfast's men of violence learned their mindset in school playgrounds and wants to instill a new way of thinking.

The film is open and good-natured, featuring poignant scenes of kids reflecting on their anger and solutions. It explores the rational disavowal of violence and penitence following off-camera outbursts, occasionally revealing underlying dysfunction. However, the school is no more dysfunctional than any other and is notably intelligent and self-questioning. A very engaging film.



## The Anxious Generation

The British millennium cohort study found that girls using social media over five hours daily were three times more likely to become depressed than non-users. Other studies link social media with poor mental health, showing worse outcomes on campuses with Facebook and a correlation between high-speed internet and rising mental illness.

Smartphones distract teens, who are online "almost constantly," promoting shallow interactions and social comparison. This exacerbates adolescence's challenges with constant online scrutiny. Critics also suggest global event coverage on social media fuels anxiety by amplifying perceived threats.

"The Anxious Generation" supports banning smartphones in schools and restricting young children's social media use. Haidt calls for tech companies' legal responsibility, raising internet adulthood to 16, and implementing age verification. His concerns highlight smartphone distractions and missed interactions. Paraphrasing Blaise Pascal, Haidt suggests filling our lives with noble pursuits instead of digital distractions.

# Summer Camp Photo Roundup

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People who have no hope are easy to control. ◆  
G'mork - The Neverending Story

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