

dai



International Kindergarten

An extension of the
German-American Institute Heidelberg

Concept



The German-American Institute Heidelberg (named after its German initials DAI) provides a child daycare program. The language of communication is English. All activities are focussed on encouraging and developing the children's natural curiosity and imagination as well as their ability to learn.

Foreword

The International Kindergarten has been developed to meet the requests of many English-speaking parents who were seeking affordable child care as well as an environment where their children could also uphold and develop their English language capabilities even during their stay in a foreign country. These parents are concerned about maintaining and further developing their child's native language skills (i.e. in anticipation of their return to their home country, so as to ensure they have not fallen behind their classmates). Additionally, many German parents have showed interest in capitalizing upon their young child's second language acquisition talents and capabilities by bringing them into an English-speaking environment. The English speaking children will be given the opportunity to attend German Conversation Classes. It is also an ideal situation for the children to come into contact with and learn from children of other cultures and thus prepare for a life in a globalized world.

The city of Heidelberg is a very fitting location for such a model due to the high number of foreign language and especially English speakers in the area.



I. Educational Principles

1. Bilingual Education

The language used in the Kindergarten is English. German-speaking children with no previous knowledge of English should be able to adjust to the English language through constant immersion. English speaking children will profit from their constant contact with German speaking children as well as from the German classes.

The language, be it English or German will not be taught in the front of the classroom like in later school years. Instead, it will be taught through practice, according to the lifestyle of the children themselves, namely through games and communication. The toys available in the International Kindergarten encourage children to express themselves as well as interact with one another. The language is cohesively learned through activities (contextualization).

The same principles used throughout the International Kindergarten also guide language learning: the children should not only have the desire to learn, but it should also take place in a fun and pressure-free environment. The teacher's role here is to guide and support the children by giving them playful motivation.

2. Guiding Educational Principles

Personal Development and Respectful Etiquette

Bilingual education is embedded in the overarching goals and principles of the International Kindergarten. Healthy childhood development must be carried out between two ends of a spectrum; on one end resides the desire to develop the personality of a single child in a holistic manner, and on the other end it is necessary to encourage respectful interaction among all the children.

Many years ago a book was published and immediately became a bestseller. 'All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten' reminds us in a friendly and humorous way that good manners have become neglected in everyday western culture. It addresses topics such as our perception of other humans, sympathy, helpfulness, sharing, etc. In the meantime schools in Germany have begun to battle against the much-lamented degradation of manners by introducing class subjects about courtesy. Still, the earlier one can learn these values, the better. Our teaching practices are centered around friendly and considerate treatment of the children for this reason. The teachers practice certain fundamental skills from which all children profit equally. This includes children saying hello and goodbye (Morning Circle, Dismissal Circle), taking into consideration the weaknesses of individual children, helping one another, etc.

At the same time the teachers will see to the comprehensive development of each child's personality, taking into account their individual strengths and weaknesses as well as giving them challenges (see also the Scandinavian Model).



Small Groups

A common grievance in Germany is large class sizes and overcrowded learning groups in schools. It is only possible to strive for the above-named goals if learning groups are kept as small as possible. Our goal in the Kindergarten is not to exceed class sizes of 12 children.

This gives the teachers adequate time and space to give each child individual attention and follow the subject matter while the children will still feel like part of a group and improve their abilities through communication and play.

Surroundings

All groups will have access to a Common Room, a Creative Room, and a Learning Room, though all three naturally serve as playrooms as well. There are rest areas. The toys available for the children encourage creativity. The Creative Room has art utensils and crafts that stimulate independent work under adult supervision. The toys on hand promote communication among the children (puppet stages, hand puppets, merchant shops, farm, dollhouse).

Supervision Structure

The children's activities address various topics and are structured according to weekly and monthly lesson plans.

Curriculum

The International Kindergarten uses the highly praised Scandinavian model lesson plan. A toddler's natural desire to play is not suppressed; instead this is incorporated into the topic structure according to age groups.

Topics According to Age

The topics in the curriculum center around things in a young child's life to which they can relate, whereas as the children grow older their abstract thinking is being promoted more and more. For example, one unit entitled ,This is me“ will cover topics such as ,What I look like,“ ,Me and my family,“ and ,Look what I can do“ for our youngest age group, while the older children will discuss topics such as ,Friendship,“ ,Different People, Different Traditions,“ etc.

Topic Organization

The topics in the curriculum will be approached in multiple ways. This includes

- making information accessible through dialogue between the teachers and the children
- practical application of learned subject matter;
- immersion and retainment of topics;
- continual studies.



Example: Old MacDonald's Farm

Central Goal: How a farm is organized. Kids learn that farms produce many of the things we need for our daily life (food items etc.) On a farm we have many different plants and animals. The farmer and his family have a lot of different things to do each day.

The children will discuss this with the teacher and once they have an overview, they will immerse themselves in the topic through arts and crafts. One activity for the group could be to build a farm with all the various animals, etc. There will be a field trip to a farm in the area, where the farmer will be able to explain his job to the children. The children will also have the opportunity to plant something in school and will be able to observe and document its growth.

Little Bookworms

DAI's International Kindergarten places considerable value in incorporating books into a child's daily routine. Books are even helpful for children who cannot read yet; the children can practice concentration, have access to information, and their imagination is greatly stimulated.

II. The Teachers

The teachers are responsible for putting the teaching principles of the International Kindergarten into practice. The teaching team is on equal ground and through regular meetings they will discuss and evaluate the Kindergarten's progress; in the case of conflicts and differences of opinion, the teachers will collaborate in finding a solution. The teachers can demonstrate to the children how to interact in a respectful and friendly manner by example.

Linguistic Aspects

The teachers are all native English speakers, but should ideally be bilingual (English/German). Currently we are planning to give English-speaking children the opportunity to learn German. The teachers speak English amongst themselves.

Curricular Aspects

The teachers are responsible for complying with the curriculum.

Teacher-Parent Exchange

The teachers should communicate with the parents at regular intervals. This can be done when the child is being picked up or dropped off, and more thoroughly at parent-teacher conferences which are scheduled by the teachers.

Additionally, the teachers maintain a daily notebook where a short report of the day is recorded and any unusual behaviour or conflicts are noted. Parents will be informed of any incidents that may occur.