



GERMAN
INTERNATIONAL
SCHOOL
WASHINGTON D.C.

Pedagogical Concept: Preschool



Foreword

This document provides a brief overview of our daily work and our vision. By establishing this framework, we always have our professional goals in mind, can refocus our program and are able to make adjustments as needed.

We will regularly modify this concept to meet legal requirements and societal norms. Friedrich Fröbel, the outstanding educator from Thüringen and “father” of the German preschool system, called “Kindergarten” in the German language, emphasized our task with a simple statement, “Education is love and being a good role model, nothing more!” This statement remains valid to this day.

“In recognition of the primary responsibility of parents for training, education and upbringing of their children, childcare facilities have a mission to supplement the family in its training, education and upbringing and to get experience for the children extending beyond their family context. With training and educational offerings, the overall development of children is promoted in an age-appropriate and developmental-specific manner.”

(Thüringen Child Day-Care Facilities Act of December 16, 2008)

About us

GISW Preschool is guided by German preschool education philosophies, and therefore differs from American preschool programs. Children from many nations attend our preschool.

Our preschool is in a wonderful, child-friendly building where children do a lot of work by hand, through imagination, while having fun. We plant magic forests, build castles out of moving boxes, and go on imaginary trips. There are many activities that stimulate the senses and promote both fine and gross motor skills.

We have mixed-age groups of three and four-year-olds, as well as separate groups for two-year-olds. Every year, over 70 children attend our preschool to learn about, and begin to gain an understanding of, the world - and to master daily life. Our goal is to help children become strong, competent, and self-confident individuals. The children should feel comfortable, grow and develop their own rhythm.

German International School Washington D.C. Mission Statement:

Independent. Bilingual. *Weltoffen*.

Educational Goals

The Thuringian curriculum for children 10 and younger forms the basis for our program. Bringing up children is a deliberate process, in which the cultural heritage (knowledge, attitudes and values) is passed from one generation to the next. Education is derived through hands-on contact with the environment which begins at birth and remains significant throughout a person’s life.

“In particular, the acquisition of social skills, such as independence, willingness to take responsibility, being a team-player, tolerance and acceptance toward other people, cultures and lifestyles as well as creativity and imagination should be promoted.” (Thüringen Child Day-Care Facilities Act)

The following excerpt from “The Little Prince” by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry describes the core of our approach to education: “To see the world with all of our senses, not only with our eyes, because what is essential is invisible to the eyes.” We learn to think together, to feel together, to develop social skills and thereby tolerate conflict and frustration.

Areas of learning through experiences

We focus on four major experience areas in which education and upbringing relate to each other. The overall development of children is promoted in an age-appropriate and development-specific manner.



Our daily work

Your child’s level of comfort at the preschool is an indication of our success. A high comfort level indicates that we have welcomed your child, shown him/her respect for his/her own personality and individuality.

Education from the very beginning

Education has always been an integral part of our work. Each day, our teachers offer the children a variety of opportunities and activities which provide academic support and personal growth for all the students at the preschool.



Whether children are painting, cutting, creating, constructing, building, singing, dancing, getting dressed, climbing, balancing or digging in the sand, they are always discovering, researching, inventing and becoming familiar with the world. They are gaining experience in working with other people and learning how to fit in.

1. Personal skills – I am myself

All children develop confidence in their own physical and mental strengths and weaknesses and must learn to estimate them appropriately. On this basis, they learn to take responsibility and act responsibly.

2. Method skills – This is the way I do it

Children develop learning strategies and techniques for themselves and implement these to complete the task at hand in a suitable manner. Children develop both creativity and imagination.

3. Social skills – Together we are strong

Our preschool is a place for every child, regardless of age, gender, religion, nationality and background. All children will learn to develop trusting relationships with other children and their preschool teachers. In a group setting, children learn to cooperate, live together, and take on responsibility. In conflicts, our preschoolers learn to accept one another’s opinion and work together to develop problem solving strategies in a peaceful manner.

4. Specific skills – Show me something

Group activities stimulate curiosity and enjoyment through playing, learning and sharing experiences. All children need space and time to discover and develop their own manner of expression. Group activities are geared to develop motor skills, verbal and non-verbal communication as well as consciously experiencing sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch.

We support children's development by:

- accepting the individual circumstances of each child and observing his/her development,
- using age-appropriate methods and materials,
- structuring the daily schedule such that it offers a basic framework, while leaving room for something special,
- ensuring that there is a pleasant and stimulating atmosphere.

The structure of the Thuringian educational program is reflected in our daily work. We promote and support the following skills, abilities, and interests of all children during the school year:

- **Social and emotional competencies /skills**
- **Cognitive development and skills**
- **Nature, science and environmental knowledge**
- **Art, Music and Dance**
- **Movement and physical development**
- **Play, creating and experimentation**
- **Intercultural learning**
- **Media literacy**
- **Fantasy & role plays**
- **Building and construction**
- **Pre-Math concepts**
- **Food and nutrition**
- **Health and hygiene**

Facilitating education

All of this shows: Commitment, care and education are an integrated whole!

You will receive reports from your preschool teacher which will include information about activities, photos of the children, and a monthly schedule. Please note that we do not provide any written daily reports for individual children.

As the preschool teachers plan daily activities, they consider individual abilities, interests and individual circumstances (situation-oriented approach). We monitor this self-education process of small children.

Observation and documentation of educational work

In addition to observing the children, preschool teachers collect work in the form of a portfolio for each child and document each child's development. The resulting reports provide parents with a look into the

daily life at the preschool, an update about the developmental status of their child, and insight into their growing child, perhaps identifying a yet-undiscovered interest or ability.

Through this method of observation and documentation, the teachers are able to see the overall learning and development processes of children and thereby to expose the child to further educational offerings.

When a preschool teacher observes a child, s/he intensely watches the child and the child has his/her undivided attention. Part of this observation is to pay attention to the details of development so that the teacher can note progress, changes, deviations and delays. To facilitate our observations, we use the *Kompik* Observation Documents, which were developed for "Skills and Interests of Children in Daycare Facilities" and correspond to the Thuringian Educational Plan.

The portfolio of work collected by the teachers demonstrates the uniqueness of each individual child. A binder displays and stores the personal drawings, art work, projects, photos, and other valuable treasures from everyday preschool life. This binder is maintained by the child with the assistance of the preschool teacher.

Becoming a preschooler

As the children become comfortable with the group, each child's feelings and conduct are incorporated into the fabric of the day.

Motion, mental activity, targeted conduct, creativity and multiple forms of expression go hand-in-hand. An atmosphere of trust and joy is important for every child. This allows children to develop into happy, strong, balanced and self-aware individuals.

We know that every child develops differently. While one child goes happily and spontaneously into new situations, another child observes first or shows some anxiety. Some children learn at a slow pace, while others learn and adjust to new environments quickly. Even if your child has already attended another preschool, it may take several months before your child is at ease and fully participating in preschool life.

We describe a fully participating child as one who moves independently and with self-assurance in the group, makes friends with other children and takes

advantage of the opportunities available in the preschool.

What does entry into preschool mean for your child?

- Preschool is a part of your child's life and has a unique significance in his/her development. Good acclimatization gives children a successful start in preschool and can be decisive for an academic career.
- For your child, starting preschool means entering a new environment with different demands and a new structure.
- Parents are not immediately accessible.
- Your child must learn to trust a new caregiver, who is responsible for a group of children.
- Your child is expected to develop relationships other children in his/her group.
- Your child must learn and abide by new rules, e.g., toys don't belong to individuals; they belong to everyone.
- Your child must adapt to a new daily rhythm.

Will the child's relationship with the preschool teacher alienate him/her from his/her parents?

No! All children build multiple parallel ties, even in the family. Children rank these relationships and the relationship with the preschool teacher is typically of lesser importance.



Information for parents on acclimatization to preschool

The time has finally come. Your child will be going to preschool during the coming academic year. Although it is a joyful time, it can also be difficult for your child to separate from familiar people and surroundings.

Children master the multi-hour separation from their closest caregivers and come to terms with another daily routine. They build trusting relationships with other adults. These relationships are the basis for exploring the world when the parents are not present. However, they do not replace the close ties to the parents. Just as the teachers respect and support the relationships between the children and their parents, it is important for the parents to respect the relationship which their children develop with the preschool teacher.

Parents accompany children during the transition from the family to the preschool. They support the integration of their children into the new situation by their presence in the group during the first few days (as previously coordinated with the preschool teacher).

During the integration process, the preschool teacher is guided, in part, by the individuality of the child: S/he respects the presence of the parents during this phase. S/he is sensitive, accepts the needs and interests of the child and guides the parents, helping them determine the right time to leave.

In order to make it easier for the child to enter the preschool routine, we have established a gentle integration procedure (based on the Berlin model). The parents play a very important role in this process.

The integration phase can last a couple of days to a few weeks, depending on the individual child. Some children adjust quickly to the new environment while others react with separation anxiety and uncertainty. If a child cannot calm down, one of the parents must be easily reachable either to calm down the child or take the child home. It is therefore very important to us that the adjustment begin with the parents (caregiver) and that it be for a limited period of time.

We ask parents or caregivers to remain with their children at preschool during the **first week** of school. In the daily discussion between the caregiver and the preschool teacher, the teacher will identify the timing

for the parents to slowly withdraw and the best method for doing so.

Please come to preschool with your child the first day and be prepared to stay. You will become familiar with the preschool, and the preschool teacher will get to know both you and your child, including your child's habits and stage of development.

Generally, by the third day (and in coordination with the preschool teacher), the first attempt at separation can occur (if it has not already). Initially, the caregiver will leave the preschool for a very short time - after saying goodbye - and will remain reachable by phone.

On the last day of the integration phase, the child will accept the preschool teacher as a caregiver and will be comforted by him/her.

Nap Time

We recommend that the child takes his/her nap at home through the second week - if possible - until the child feels secure in the group.



Every child's adjustment period is distinct and must fit the needs of the child and the family.

The interests and the needs of the child are our primary focus. Something familiar to your child (such as a stuffed animal) is welcome and will make his/her first days in preschool easier. During the adjustment period, there will be regular discussions between teachers and parents.



Important ground rules

Please bring your child to school regularly during the integration phase and avoid extended absences. Long absences may lengthen the integration phase.

- Abide by the recommendations and instructions of the preschool teachers.
- Say goodbye after the agreed upon time.
- Try to remain in the background during the adjustment period. Remain in one area of the room and observe; remember that you are not a playmate at this time. Through your presence, you demonstrate to your child that, "I'm aware of what you are doing and I'm there if you need me. Everything's okay; you are safe to explore."
- Your child's teacher will coordinate the separation steps with you.
- Further steps will be discussed with you in detail. Longer separations will be discussed. Please make sure that we will be able to reach you by phone should the need arise.

We rely on a lively exchange of information with you to become more familiar with your child. Please don't hesitate to ask us questions.

We look forward to getting to know you.

What reactions can you expect during the acclimatization period?

During the first week:

- Initially your child will take time to get used to the new surroundings.
- S/he is more likely to stand back and observe mode.
- His/her playing is not yet in-depth and long-lasting; he/she is first scoping out the group space.
- At home s/he may be tired and out of sorts. This may be exacerbated if this is the first time the child has heard the German language.

Starting in about the second week:

- Your child will try to find his/her place in the group.
- There may be frequent conflicts with other children during this period.
- The child's need for rest may continue a bit longer.
- Your child may not want to come to preschool in the morning or may not show much enthusiasm.

All of these reactions are normal. Each child will adjust at his/her own pace.

How can you support your child?

If your child already has played with other children and has learned to play without his/her parents, s/he is well prepared for preschool.

You can help us make your child feel secure in the preschool. It is important during this adjustment period that your child understands the environment and the predictability of the schedule. This means, for example, attending regularly, being on time each morning and being picked up on time at the end of each day.

After school activities could be an excessive demand on your child. Please, keep in mind that children are at an increased risk of accidents during this period, because of the increased demands on them. Particular caution is required.

The success and speed of the adjustment period is influenced not only by what happens during the school day and with the support of the parents, but may also be impacted by other factors in the child's life (e.g. changes at home such as the birth of a baby sibling or a move).

Please let the preschool teacher know if something unusual is happening. The preschool teacher appreciates any information you pass on about your child and your family; this will help her to be very responsive to your child.

Parents become preschool parents

While your child is at the center of our attention at the preschool, your child's entry into preschool is also a special event for you. There will be changes and new challenges for you as well. You have to get used to being without your child for certain parts of the day and not knowing what he/she is doing, thinking or feeling. How will s/he feel without you being there?

How will you use this time for yourself?

In fact, parents also need a period of adjustment to absorb and process a lot of new information and to learn to trust their child's teachers.

Parents will gain confidence in the growing independence of their child. Together we will watch and support your child as s/he develops and grows.

Parents are expected to

- build a trusting relationship with the preschool,
- accept that your child has the same rights and responsibilities as any other child in the group,
- support the academic work of your child and respect the work and needs of others,
- support all the children through your active participation in preschool life,
- promote the interests of all children and parents, possibly as a member of the parent association.

Every new beginning, even when anticipated with curiosity, may also mean saying goodbye to something familiar. These feelings are strong for both parents and children and are particularly apparent during the drop-off time. If you are unsure about procedure or how to support your child during the separation, seek the advice and support of the preschool teacher. Do not worry, if the separation seems difficult at first.

Your child will grow, become more secure and self-assured, and become a fully engaged preschooler.



Mixed ages at the preschool

As the children meet other children, they gain valuable experience. In mixed age groups, the preschoolers learn to communicate, build self-confidence, deal with conflict, and hone their social skills. This is true whether a child is an only child or has several siblings. All children benefit from learning to deal with others across a range of ages.

Through play (and also through conflict with other preschoolers) children develop empathy for one another. Having one's own opinion, presenting it audaciously, and learning to revise based on input is important for each developing personality.

Younger children learn from older ones and older children learn from younger ones. They work to understand each other and learn that their playmates have their own interests and often other levels of experience. We support the children in developing their abilities to assert themselves and to act with a sense of fairness.

The preschool teachers pay special attention to the way children of different ages play together, intervening in a supportive manner when necessary. During this process, children learn to consider each other's needs, support one another and resolve conflicts without using force.

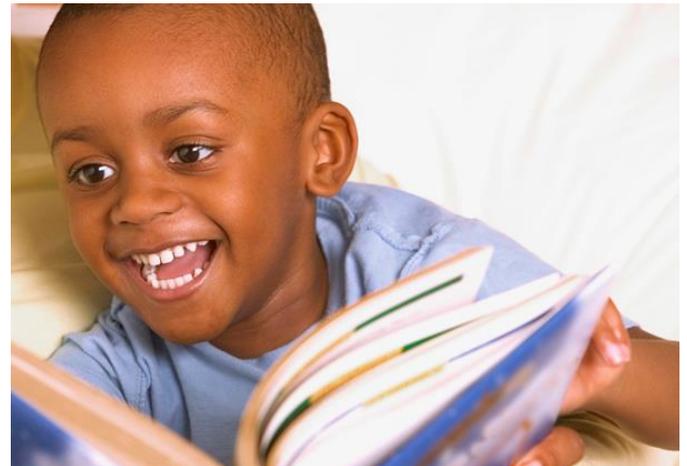
The preschool prepares the children for the next school level (School Entry Level) - where smaller children deal with older children every day. At the SEL, the children interact daily with other Elementary-School-age children through play.

Morning circle and noon circle

We are a community. The children gather as a preschool community in the morning and the noon circles to talk about topics that introduce them to many aspects of life.

German and English language enrichment at the preschool

Our German and English enrichment is embedded into daily life at the Preschool and runs as a common thread through the Elementary School and all the way up into the weekly schedules of ninth grade. The preschoolers who are beginning to learn their second language attend age-appropriate language enrichment sessions twice a week to gain German or English language skills as well as to learn about culture, values, and traditions of Germany and the US.



The two programs for playfully acquiring language skills in a foreign language, "Finki, ich & wir" and "Hocus & Lotus", are designed for early childhood. Both programs speak to a preschooler's imagination. The child is at the center with his or her interests and experiences, though individually often at different developmental stages and abilities. Individual instructional modules can be combined in diverse ways as they are integrated into daily life at the Preschool. The modules are complemented by media such as video cartoons (DVD) and sing along CDs with picture books. The materials are suitable for large and small groups as well as for individual sessions and they facilitate targeted enrichment in order to support children with a variety of competencies and different levels of previous knowledge.

These programs are implemented by the teachers in our 3 / 4 year-old groups as well as by the special

enrichment teachers who work with children in small groups twice a week. Our two-year-olds do not have separate targeted language enrichment sessions, but the children soak up the German language by being immersed in a German-speaking environment.

The emphasis of our enrichment programs are on:

- Talking and telling each other stories
- Creating connections and sequences of events through language, i.e. sorting by sounds/by affiliation, finding umbrella terms, sequencing parts of a story, identifying similar items
- Learning to listen
- Gaining basic vocabulary / expanding and strengthening existing vocabulary
- Learning and using simple sentence structures
- Practicing visual and aural senses
- Recognizing colors and shapes
- Recognizing quantities and numbers
- Develop fine motor skills

What does the change from Preschool to School Entry Level mean?

The transition from Preschool to School Entry Level is easy. Even when a child goes from a group of children in which s/he was among the older ones to a group of children of the same age, s/he will find his/her place.

High-quality work “behind the scenes”

Teachers regularly participate in team meetings, professional development (both at the school and in the community), and broader regional discussions. We use these opportunities to reflect on our daily work, further develop our educational concept, and strengthen our program.

Conclusion

This document may be modified by the school due to a review of new educational findings or in light of new ideas. It may be supplemented and expanded, if necessary.

Our preschool faculty will accompany your child for only a short time. The family and the family environment remains the primary influence on a child’s personality. We are here to support you as much as possible.

We are pleased to accompany you and your child, along this journey and look forward to a year full of pleasant experiences.

The following are excerpts from the educational plan of Thuringia, which our Preschool implements:

Our Seven Educational Areas

1. Language arts training, spoken and written

“The limits of my language(s) are the limits of my world.”

(Ludwig Wittgenstein, 20th-century Austrian-British philosopher)

Language training, spoken and written, permeates what children do everywhere and at all times.

Children grow up in a society saturated by media. They experience pictures, text, and spoken language in high volume, quick succession and various manifestations. Challenging language training processes are thus an all-embracing goal of our educational work. To achieve this goal, we offer stimuli in multiple forms, including:

- conversations with children, individually and in groups
- linguistic accompaniment to activities and games
- games, accentuated by rhythm and music
- rhymes, verses, and finger games
- picture books
- stories, both through reading and oral storytelling
- differentiation of sounds and combinations of sounds when heard or spoken
- hearing and speaking syllables
- painting
- familiarization with the letters of the alphabet

2. Physical activity and health training

“Physical activity and health are the foundation of the process of educating children.”

(from the Thuringian educational plan for children 10 and under)

Physical activity and health training are closely associated. Health is related to a person’s activity level. Health training in preschool goes well beyond washing hands and brushing teeth. It includes multiple opportunities for movement and healthy eating along with care for a healthy environment.

Movement is expressed in ever more precise interactions between gross and fine motor skills.

Physical activity includes aspects of both conditioning

and coordination. This can develop only under suitable social and psychological conditions with enough room and when the individual is in the right frame of mind. Indeed, movement is an important component in the development of intelligence.

The development of body acceptance and body awareness is decisive for well-being and long-lasting health.

3. Science and technology training

“Amazement is the beginning of science.”

(Aristotle, Greek philosopher, 384-322 BC)

Using all their senses, children explore their environment, set up their first scientific experiences and pose further questions. A lot of the “why” questions which children ask are about scientific and technical phenomena.

Children experience animate and inanimate nature by observing, holding, smelling, hearing, tasting, describing, comparing and evaluating.

Children cross disciplines, moving from biology to chemistry to physics to technology, using their own logic, following their own interests.

It is a traditional component of our work to include the world around us by learning about plants, people and animals. Dealing with chemistry and physics is still something unusual, but is increasingly included in project work and activities because this is precisely what stimulates a child’s joy of discovery. In addition, children acquire physical knowledge through play, building with Legos and wooden blocks as well as constructing in sand.

4. Mathematics training

“Mathematics is the language of patterns and solving problems.”

(from the Thüringen educational plan for children 10 and under)

Mathematics is a basic building block of our culture and is used to solve practical everyday problems through counting, measuring, weighing and computing.

However, mathematics can also be understood as the science of patterns, where the concept of “pattern” is broadly construed. It relates to visible patterns (such as decorations and ornaments), to abstract structures (such as the sequence of even and odd numbers), and to regular and irregular geometric forms.

Patterns occur everywhere in nature, and they may take on all sorts of forms.

In preschool, basic mathematical experiences are presented as part of everyday life and can be detected in our children’s questions. Every child constructs his/her own picture of the world, this includes how each child understands numbers, quantities, and symbols as well as the structures and patterns derived from them.

5. Music training

“There are parts of the soul that are only illuminated by music!”

(Zoltan Kodaly, Hungarian composer and music educator, 1882-1967)

Music is an important way for children to communicate with others and express themselves. Children appreciate music by creating vocal and instrumental music and by simply listening. Not only does this help to develop the child’s musical ear and voice, but also impacts the child’s spirit and touches his/her soul. Music promotes intelligence. Such mental balance is an important component of our in-depth language courses. Musical offerings are essential because they expand each child’s ability to sense his/her world and express himself/herself.

Children explore the world of music through singing and playing instruments; indeed children discover that they can use more than their voice as a musical instrument (e.g. hands for clapping, feet for stomping). By singing with their group, and experimenting with all sorts of noisemakers and instruments, the children continue their sensorimotor discovery of the world. This exploration in a secure environment promotes their musical development. Both music and movement contribute to the integrated processing of a wealth of sensory input.

6. Artistic creation training

“Being artistically creative is a basic need!”

(from the Thuringian educational plan for children 10 and under)

As children start to learn about the world and try to understand it, they pursue their own paths. By drawing, painting, making collages, using malleable materials (clay, dough, sand ...), exploring natural materials and everyday items, or experimenting with water and paper, they discover their environment. As the children process their experiences, they express their impressions anew and continue to unleash their imagination.

Children will work with clay, scissors, pencils, paint

brushes, colors, glue, natural materials, and other similar items. In addition, they will experience a variety of creative techniques and develop their manner of expression.

This is very important for us: Each individual creates as well as s/he can, and different styles and different levels of ability are celebrated.



7. Sociocultural and morals training

“Children need roots and wings!”

(Goethe, German poet, 1749-1832)

Our preschoolers are part of a larger community of children. Children are accepted without regard to appearance, abilities, strengths or weaknesses. In return, they learn to accept and tolerate both themselves and others as well as appreciate the uniqueness of each individual.

Core to our work is helping the children discover similarities and differences, recognize rights for themselves and others, handle conflicts independently, identify what is fair and unfair and pass on the values and traditions of our community.

Social and cultural educational processes are shaped through individual family situations, the structure of everyday life, and the holidays and rituals that the children experience. Social relationships, friendships, kinship and contact to important people in the children’s life are all part of the child’s journey to adulthood.



I have received the pedagogical concept of the Preschool of the German International School Washington D.C.

Parent's/Caregiver's Name (printed)

Signature

Date