

Outdoor Education Concept at Little Daisies Kindergarten

1. Preliminary considerations and objectives

Our goal is to make nature and the environment more tangible and understandable for children. Direct contact with nature is very important for little ones. Many who grow up in cities today are largely cut off from natural environments, such as streams, ponds, meadows and forests. Their world is dominated above all by buildings, streets and cars as well as a multitude of audiovisual media. Opportunities to experience nature more intensively in gardens, parks and green spaces are often not used. As early childhood educators with ample experience with children, we are increasingly aware of our desire to compensate for their sometimes very unfavorable environmental surroundings and living conditions.

Our classroom is not limited to the premises of the daycare center, but also includes the surrounding area. Children as well as the adults get to know our neighborhood better and have the opportunity to discover and explore a wide range of outdoor areas. In addition, regular half-day or day-long field trips, for instance to Perlach Forest that's easily reached directly by tram, take us to somewhat further out.

We prepare for all field trips by first exploring the area ourselves, looking for suitable paths and rest areas, and planning enough time for targeted and spontaneous activities for the children. Which paths to take or places to visit depends largely on the daily schedule and the weather. In addition, it must also ensure we keep a manageable daily schedule because a reliable kindergarten setup and familiar distances are very important for the children.

The children's safety is guaranteed on our excursions. We make sure our teachers search the area we are spending time in for broken glass, cigarettes and other items that could be dangerous for children, and dispose of them if necessary.

2. Type and scope of the group

2.1 The group

Our outdoor group includes 14 children aged 3 to 6 years and 3 caregivers (1 primary teacher, 1 assistant teacher and 1 intern). This group either goes on field trips every day from around 9:30 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. or stays at our outdoor center in the Hypopark. Our outdoor preschool children

have a slightly different schedule. After spending the morning in nature, they return to the indoor kindergarten for lunch three days a week for the preschool curriculum. During these lessons, some indoor children join the outdoor group to spend lunch and quiet time there and to freeplay. This way all children in the kindergarten have chance to spend time in the outdoor group.

If a child from the outdoor group arrives late, for example due to a doctor's visit/preparatory course in German or similar, it's possible the child will spend the day with the indoor group. If no indoor child wants to join the outdoor group, the staff would look after 26 indoor children on that day.

2.2 Organizational matters and other educational offerings

Children in the outdoor group are brought to the daycare center in the morning by their parents or grandparents, just like our indoor children, where they can have breakfast. At this time, a maximum of 39 children are at the indoor center. Then a snack and tea are prepared and packed up. Before leaving, the children use the toilet, and depending on the weather, the group sets out at 9:30/10 a.m. to explore the neighborhood for around three hours, or takes a trip to the outskirts of the city.

Between approx. 12:00 and 12:30 p.m., children and caregivers typically return from their trip. The children eat lunch and rest in the outdoor center in the Hypopark. We find this relaxation phase necessary for children and adults in order to process the impressions of the morning and to relax. The house is equipped with tables and chairs, a toilet and a heater to warm up in it in bad weather. After lunch, the children can rest, look at books, paint, do handicrafts or play freely. Around 3:00 p.m. they return to the facility or meet up with the indoor children and teachers at a nearby playground. During pick-up time, a maximum of 39 children are at the facility; by 4:00 p.m. at the latest, there are a maximum of 25 children.

One or two times a week, longer trips are planned, for instance to the Perlach Forest. Weather permitting, we spend our lunch break in the Perlach Forest on these days and also have lunch there. We return to the indoor center by 15:15.

Three days per week, the outdoor children have lessons in the house facility. Once a week, during the hour before pick-up, a mindfulness lesson takes place in the indoor center and once a week the group has music with our music teacher before setting out on a field trip. One morning a month, our art teacher visits the outdoor group to draw with the children and experiment with colors. Our outdoor children also have a chance to do arts and crafts in our outdoor center, which is equipped with various crafting material, paints and brushes.

2.3 Educational space

For such an outdoor group to work, familiar places, long-distance field trips, a manageable daily routine and an overall stable group of children and reliable caregivers are necessary.

For morning drop-off and in the afternoon before pick-up, the outdoor group uses the rooms in the indoor center (Kirchenstrasse 38). The outdoor building in the Hypopark is used for lunchtime and to provide shelter. Various materials and aids can also be stored in the outdoor center.

Depending on the season and educational needs, different locations in the immediate vicinity of our facility are visited on half-day and day trips. Staff visits the routes traveled and places to explore in advance to ensure they are suitable.

3. *Care*

3.1 Eating and drinking

After breakfast, the children can take a drink to-go; a morning snack is also provided as is warm tea when the weather is cold.

A larger meal usually takes place at noon in the Hypopark in the outdoor center.

3.2 Toileting and medical care

Before leaving in the morning, the children can use the washroom and toilets at our indoor center. They may wear diapers if necessary. The group's portable equipment includes drinking water and clean towels as well as a first aid kit.

The teachers have a mobile phone to ensure rapid help in the event of an emergency.

3.3 Clothing

The choice of clothing for children and teachers must be adapted to the weather conditions. It should be wind- and waterproof as possible while also being breathable, warm or temperature regulating and offer sun protection. The clothing should also be comfortable and easy to change.

Research suggests that regular, continuous stay outdoors helps to strengthen and stabilize the immune system: The body (re-)learns how to adjust to different and changing temperatures.

3.4 Rest periods

Tired or exhausted children can relax at the outdoor center in the Hypopark. Depending on the weather, the children can also rest outside. In summer, blankets and insulating mats are taken along, so longer trips are possible.

3.5 Technical equipment

It goes without saying that a group of (small) children that more or less on the go for a few hours every day needs certain equipment and materials. However, due to the educational concept of the outdoor group, it's not just about toys, but rather everyday materials for the basic care of children and for protection against certain events.

The group's equipment includes:

- Beverage bottles and food storage containers
- Diapering material, if necessary
- Some toys and activities such as (picture) books for reading aloud, etc.
- Sunscreen
- First aid kit
- Mobile phone
- Blankets and insulating mats in spring and summer

4. *Paths and places*

The following locations have been explored together with an expert during a curriculum day and the options and risks were discussed. On another day, we visited Perlach Forest.

4.1 Johannisplatz, Wiener Platz and neighborhood streets

- Location: in the immediate vicinity of the daycare center
- Accessibility: depending on the exact destination, up to a maximum of 15 minutes on foot with the children
- Type of site: predominantly densely-built, inner-city settlement with partially low-traffic streets, historically significant architecture
- Additional requirements: none

4.2 Hypo playground, Johannisspielpatz, green area at Haidenaupark (playground with tunnel slide) and pirate playground

- Location: in the immediate vicinity of the daycare center
- Accessibility (Johannisplatz): about 10 minutes on foot with the children

- Type of site: small park with a designated children's playground, historically significant architecture, social meeting point for different population groups
- Additional requirements: none

4.3 Green areas along the Isar

- Location: between the block perimeter development on the Inner Wienerstrasse and the Auer Mühlbach as well as in the vicinity of the Maximilianeum
- Accessibility: depending on the individual destination, up to a maximum of 25 minutes on foot with the children
- Type of site: landscaped gardens; various types of lawn and meadow as well as ruderal vegetation; partly on a slope

4.4 Perlach Forest

- Location: forest on the southern edge of Harlaching
- Accessibility: approx. 20 minutes by tram No. 15 and 25 from Johannisplatz (to Harlacher Krankenhaus station, Menterschwaige or Großhesseloher Brücke); depending on the exact destination, up to 30 minutes by foot with the children
- Type of terrain: extensive forest with different tree/plants, meadows and smaller clearings
- Additional requirements: somewhat higher expenditure on meals; due to the distance from the daycare center, this is especially nice for stays of several hours; food delivery box at Großhesseloher Brücke lets our caterer deliver a hot lunch here

5. *Educational activities*

There are countless possibilities for organizing a day with children outdoors. The following are just a few examples to show how children can experience nature. In any case, many ideas spontaneously through the observations and actions of children and caregivers, shaping children's education.

5.1 Your body

- Perceiving your own aptitudes and skills
- Challenging security of movement and sense of balance, especially on rough, unknown terrain and new/changing floors
- Experiencing how your body adapts to the season (temperature, light conditions...)

Examples activities for a day:

Motion games; tactile and gripping exercises; using wood to build things; various games and experiments with light and shadow, heat and cold, proximity and distance.

5.2 Mental processes

- Dealing with changing and surprising situations
- Experiencing behavior and reactions of others (including the teachers)
- Promoting a strong group feeling, in particular through the feeling of having achieved/experienced something together
- Experiencing and learning solidarity and helpfulness

Examples activities for a day:

Observing (social) life in the neighborhood, finding, reading and designing traces and symbols; search and orientation games; observation of (small) animals.

5.3 Dealing with things

- Finding and getting to know things and structures that also develop a life of their own and arouse the children's curiosity and desire to try something out
- Discover properties and peculiarities of different (natural) materials, fine motoric and other challenges

Examples activities for a day:

Building and designing together using objects they find; handling garbage; getting to know wild plants (poisonous plants/useful plants); nature experience games such as nature memory or olfactory and tactile games.

5.4 Spatial and temporal perceptions

- Promoting spatial and distance perception
- Being conscious about and experiencing different weather conditions
- Experiencing temporal dimensions of tension/effort versus relaxation
- Setting goals and trying to achieve them

Examples activities of the day:

Working on long-term projects such as building a tippy out of logs; tracking and monitoring seasonal changes at certain selected points/locations; exploring of new paths and rediscovering previous locations.

6. Collaborating with parents

The parents of the children we care for are, of course, included in the considerations, plans and activities listed above. Their tips and suggestions enrich our educational concept and support its evolution. Regular exchange is very important to us.

In addition to regular one-on-one interviews and parents' afternoons, parents also have the chance to participate in different group's activities. This, however, must be discussed in advance with the teachers. Like the parents, we are convinced of the value of the outdoor group and believe gives our children important and meaningful opportunities to develop and experience life.