

Preschool  
concept  
rainbowtrekkers  
Kita gGmbH



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What we see changes what we know.  
What we know changes what we see.

Jean Piaget (1896-1980)





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## 1. Foreword

As children progress through the final year of kindergarten, they are presented with special challenges. The transition from being a kindergarten child to a school child changes the self-perception of the child. This passage is often accompanied by strong emotions: anticipation, curiosity, and pride, but also by uncertainty or fear. At the same time, skills are learned on a cognitive level: The child becomes more independent and learns new cultural techniques and behaviors.

Such transitions should always be seen from the child's perspective and take place from the bottom up. The primary concern should not be the "school readiness" of the child, but the "child readiness" of the two organizations, kindergarten, and school, which both must cooperate with each other on an equal footing.

That is why we at rainbowtrekkers do not see a preschool concept primarily as a means of helping children to become "ready for school". Our preschool concept is more about awakening the desire to learn with offers that are tailored to the special cognitive, emotional, and social needs of five- to six-year-olds. In this age group, the topic of school is important - but only one among many others.

Our approach is characterized by the idea of play-based learning and stands out from the more "school-like" approaches that are common in other cultures. This is especially important to point out in pre-schools with a bilingual orientation, because our group of parents is international, and their previous experiences and expectations are diverse.

The following pre-school concept was developed at the request of our parents' councils, and I would like to thank them very much for their initiative. The foundations for this concept were laid by a "Pre-School Project Group" during the time of the first "lockdown" in the spring of 2020. My thanks for this go to our colleagues Bernhard Ankly, Laura Allan, Nadja Kulasic, Tiffany Garcia and Tobias Teppe.

Upon returning from the lockdown, my colleague Samuel Armstrong agreed to weave together the threads of the project and to write up the results of our project work in a separate preschool concept, which we are pleased to present with this document. I would like to thank Samuel Armstrong very much for the many facts, ideas, suggestions, and standard descriptions that he has put into this concept over a period of months – "in tandem", so to speak, with his primary responsibility as principal of our kindergarten in Cologne-Widdersdorf. Our colleague Silke Blietschau contributed Chapter 4.7 on Movement. I would like to warmly thank her for this as well.

I wish this year's and all future school starters a successful start in their primary schools. I hope that we at the rainbowtrekkers have been able to contribute supporting this transition – as well as transitions in the preceding years – in a gentle and supportive way.

Cologne, July 2020

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joel Mertens". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Joel Mertens  
Founder and Managing Director  
rainbowtrekkers Kita gGmbH







## 2. Introduction

The last year in kindergarten is often an exciting time for children. Children are normally excited to finally be the “big ones” and enjoy the role of being the next children to head off to school. From a pedagogical standpoint there are quite a few challenges facing children in their final year of kindergarten and it is our job as educators to help these children navigate the transition from kindergarten to school. In many kindergartens there is often a “Pre-school Program” to help the children in an age appropriate manner to strengthen skills that are needed when going to school.

Education in Germany is run at a federal state level and in regard to “pre-school” there are no specific requirements or regulations set for this age group. This means that each kindergarten is able to decide for themselves how their pre-school program functions. On the one hand this is a great opportunity for the kindergartens as it gives them flexibility in the development of their own concept. On the other hand with no set requirements, it is up to the kindergartens through research and cooperation to figure out what is important for students leaving kindergarten and heading to school. Kindergartens have been and will undoubtedly remain a “non-school” institution here in Germany. At rainbowtrekkers, we definitely subscribe to this approach.

What do we mean by “non-school”? Over the years the expectations for pre-school in many countries have changed. In various countries and systems, the focus is no longer to provide a fun engaging social experience for children. But teachers are often held accountable to helping children achieve certain standards that define an expected performance. This is not just in social development, but with the introduction of more academic topics such as – literacy, mathematics, science and social studies.

How does the German system differ? In kindergartens children are encouraged, developed and nurtured. Kindergarten is about creating conditions and opportunities to learn. Children have freedom, flexibility, independence and autonomy. By the time children reach their final year in kindergarten they are faced with the task of learning how to leave this type of learning environment behind and focus on the transition to a more formal type of education

Why do we need pre-school? The purpose of a Pre-school program is to create a common environment of development and education for students, from different cultural and national backgrounds, who are preparing to move into primary education. A Pre-school program is in many ways a foundational program that provides initial exposure to school and sets the tone for an educational career. From a pedagogical point of view there are many challenges waiting for the children in this transition: learning through play becomes more explicit learning through guided exploration, from being the older children they become the youngest again, flexibility is replaced with structure, multiple caregivers are replaced often with one teacher and these are just a few. Therefore, it is important for us to provide a program that will build a bridge for these students and get them prepared socially for the challenges that lie ahead.



## 3. Considerations

### 3.1 Time

While it is important to encourage children to succeed, it is also important to make sure that they're succeeding at their own pace. It is our job as educators to let children gain skills at their pace in order for them to succeed. This is also something that should be considered by parents as to avoid comparison and competition between children. Allowing children to take their time and explore topics instead of rushing through them helps them feel more confident in what they are doing. This turn helps motivate them to learn much more. Giving time also helps children to avoid frustration. Frustrated children tend to disengage and then tend to give up when they feel like they cannot do something. We as educators will differentiate our teaching in order for us to facilitate to the different paces at which our students learn. Of course we want to continue with this freedom in the Pre-school year, but it is important for us to introduce children to time and time requirements. Soon these children will be expected to sit and learn for set periods of time, asked to focus on specific topics, required to complete assignments in a set time frame and so on. Within this final year of kindergarten, it is our duty to introduce and expose them to these concepts so that these children are not overwhelmed when they arrive at school.

### 3.2 Communication

Communication and language are one of the areas that we as teachers, and parents, can really make a difference in our students' preparation for transition. It is important that children experience a rich language environment in both German and English. We want our students to leave rainbowtrekkers confident in their skills to express themselves. We hope for our students to be able to speak and listen in a range of different situations.

Children listen attentively in a range of situations. They listen to our stories, accurately anticipating events and respond to what they hear with relevant comments, questions, and actions. They give their attention to what others say and respond appropriately. It is therefore key for us to understand how important it is for us to be very aware of what we say in our groups. We should be aware to focus on speaking clearly, deliberately, and grammatically correct. Our directions should be clear and easy to follow. We need to be good role models in our choice and use of language in the classroom. Rich communication skills acquired during the kindergarten years will greatly benefit the children in their new stage of life.



### 3.3 Role modelling

As we know children are always learning. From the moment they get up right up until they go to bed their amazing minds are processing and absorbing the entire time. Even when they sleep, they are processing the events of the day. Children have a choice here to adopt what they have seen or heard or choose to do something to the contrary. Through this practice children will start to form their own identity in an educational setting.

It is therefore important for us as educators to consider are we role modelling the kind of behavior you want them to learn? One of the main ways a child will learn about social interactions for example is by what they see so if you set a good example then this can help tremendously. Once the kids will be in school, they will remember us teachers how we spoke and how we solved conflicts. They might adopt our ways of behavior or deliberately choose not to, which is part of them growing up. Therefore, as teachers we need to be aware that the way we speak and act will have an impact on the child even at a time when kindergarten age has long passed.

### 3.4 Environment

*“There are three teachers of children; adults, other children and their environment.”*

– Loris Malaguzzi

The classroom environment can provide learning opportunities, create a sense of community and maintain a positive atmosphere where productive interactions occur among children and adults. Children take the lead in exploring the classroom. Teachers provide the structure for that exploration by the way they organize the areas of the room and the materials in those areas.

At rainbowtrekkers work according to the “partly open concept” which means that for part of the day which engage in cross age encounters amongst the children which particularly supports them in developing their emotional and social skills. During other times in the course of the day we work in groups that are relatively age homogenous. For this reason all our kindergartens house a pre-school room that specifically caters to the interest of the five to six year olds.

Our classroom environment facilitates a variety of group sizes and configurations: small group time, large group time, individual time, one-on-one with a teacher, and time to work with a partner.



## 4. Areas of exploration

Our Preschool program is an extension of our main curriculum. Our goal with this program is to bridge the gap between a strong play and project based curriculum and the first academic year of school. What areas do we focus on and why?

### 4.1 Social and interpersonal skills

Social and emotional developments are just as important for a successful school experience as they are for cognitive development. Kindergarten life, in particular Pre-school year, is important for this area of development; it is where the foundation skills for appropriate social behavior are learnt and embedded. There are a few social skills that are particularly important for a successful transition to school:

#### ➤ Learning to cooperate

In this transition to school our students will be introduced a new group of children many of which they did not go to kindergarten with. It is important that our children can navigate these new situations and cooperate with their new friends. Cooperating means working together to achieve a common goal. To be able to cooperate, a child needs to communicate, to listen to others as well as to speak honestly about their own needs and feelings. It is important that our Pre-schoolers have the increased vocabulary and listening and language skills to be able to do this. They need to be able to talk about cooperation and even plan ahead for a group activity, and if there is a problem, they need to be capable of hearing all sides of the issue and deciding on a solution cooperatively.

Fives and sixes want to please adults and make friends with peers, but they are still vying for attention and may knock others "out of the way" in their enthusiasm to be helpful. We can assist children with their transition from seeing "helping" as an individual accomplishment to a group endeavor by setting up classroom tasks as team or partners activities. In this way, children must cooperate to get the job done. Children of Pre-school age are becoming increasingly aware of fairness. They expect that everyone should be, and will be, treated equally-even if they can't agree on what that is. They like and want group rules, and they usually respect them. Children this age cooperate best with rules that they have helped to create as a team. Within our Pre-school planning it is important to create work/play teams for projects in our learning centers and such. Team up children that can learn from one another. You will begin to see which roles children take on naturally; role-model, leader, helper, observer and so on with their new friends.

#### ➤ Taking Turns

Taking turns goes hand in hand with sharing, but there's a distinct difference that many incoming pre-schoolers don't know just yet. When we're sharing, we have common materials that are available to everyone at the same time. For example, students might be sharing a box of Legos while they all build independently or together. When we're taking turns, one person is using an item or items while another person waits. For example, students might take turns using the swing. Or they might take turns reading a particular book. This is when students might need specific instruction on waiting strategies while they wait for their turn.



We can help children remember whose turn it is to talk by using a soft ball as a tactile and visual reminder along with the fingerplay/song. Explain that the ball is a "talk" object. Whoever is holding the ball can talk, while the rest of the children should look at him and listen. We can practice this by asking a simple question (such as "What is your favorite color?") and inviting children to silently raise their hands if they want to answer the question. Roll the ball to a child who is quietly raising their hand. After answering, they roll the ball back to the teacher who then rolls it to another child who has their hand raised. Eventually children learn to roll the ball to the next child who has their hand raised.

### ➤ **Following instructions**

The simple act of following directions is integral part of a child's success at school. Children are expected to learn and follow many new rules and systems when they start school. Kindergarten life for many up until this point has been very open with a lot of free choice. Children will be expected to jump into an entirely new routine filled with set times and expectations, therefore it is important that we have this transition in our program and help navigate children to learn how to start to follow directions. What are the ways we help children to follow directions?

When providing directions, we always make sure you are using an appropriate voice and message. Using the appropriate voice volume, tone, and even the speed, makes it easier for students to focus. When we talk too quietly or quickly, it can be difficult to follow directions. For us a bi-lingual institution we translate where needed or give directions in both German, English or sometimes another language.

We like to start each activity off with an attention getter. To start any activity with instructions might not be enough; we need to catch their attention first. This attention getter could be anything from introducing materials we are going to use, a song, a story or a finished product that we might have at the end of the lesson.

The use of visuals helps us to direct the students. For many students words might not be enough so we reinforce with visual aids: Flashcards, picture boards and so on. Step by step visuals help bring meaning to our words.

Check in with a question. We ask our students questions to check to see if they are following directions correctly. At this age if we ask "any questions?" most likely no one will say anything, but as soon as we have started, the questions will begin! So instead, ask specific questions, like "what's the first thing we do?" or "what color paint do we use next?" We also like to follow up with other questions: "What are you doing now? Where are you right now? Which one are you doing? What should you be doing right now?" We try to give students the opportunity to give us information on their understanding of the task and this in turn lets us know who might need help.

Countdown. We like to give students a time frame to do something. Time is a tricky concept at this age, but it is important for this transition between kindergarten and school that children get used to finishing within in certain time frames. It is important that we stay positive in this situation and ensure that time will be given to finish later on or that the next time we try this we can try and do it in the time allotted.

Most importantly when it comes to getting students to follow directions, we want to be consistent. The more routine we have with your procedures and directions, the more children will be able to follow them.



### ➤ **Stating needs**

Being able to ask for something or to say I need help is something that even some adults struggle to deal with, now imagine how that feels for a five- or six-year-old child. That phrase “use your words,” comes up a lot in kindergarten, but sometimes our students need explicit instruction in this because they don’t have the words yet or they just do not feel comfortable expressing this yet. Practicing asking for a break, some space, or help is big for school success. As kindergarten teachers we are often always at hand for children when something is needed, but in a school environment where there is only one classroom teacher and 20 students therefore the teacher is not always following up with every student at the same time. We want to prepare our students to be able to speak up for themselves when they need something rather than to wait for the teacher to ask what is needed. Encouraging our children to use “I need...” and “I feel...” statements will help prepare them for their first year in school.

### ➤ **Transitioning Activities**

Transitions are a part of every day in a program for young children. Teachers have to help the group move from one activity to another. Unfortunately, young children often do not always transition so easily. Children may be deeply engrossed in what they are doing at a station when clean up time is announced and therefore are reluctant to stop what they are doing. They might also be so excited for the next activity and run to be first in line. We like to help children be more successful at transition time by being intentional and planning ahead. Planning some learning goals into the transitions makes transitions a valuable teaching time in our classroom and things go much smoother. An example could be getting ready for garden time. Lining up is a chore for most adults and especially for children. Young children are not patient, so waiting in line for everyone to get ready is difficult. How can we make the best of this situation? First, we consider: is it necessary for all children to line up at once? If we are more than one teacher, could we not “divide and conquer”? We all know working in smaller groups is often easier for both us and the children. Sometimes though lining up is inevitable, here is an example of how we incorporate learning into our waiting in line time:

#### *Sorting, Categorizing, Counting and Comparing*

*Knowing that children love to be first in line will sometimes lead to arguing over who gets to be in that position. Delegating the role of line leader daily is an easy fix to this problem (this role can be delegated in morning circle). The role of line leader should go further than just standing at the front of the line. Giving the line leader certain tasks to take care of will make this role and time much more valuable.*

*Game: The simple task of sorting is a fun game to start. “How will I sort our group today?” You can rolemodel this task firstly yourself or with a colleague in the room or in the line to go to the garden; “I am looking for anyone who is wearing shoes with shoelaces today?”, “Please sit down”, “I am looking for anyone with rainboots?”, “Please sit down”, “I am looking for anyone with a scarf on”, “Please sit down”, and so on. This type of game helps us make the transition much smoother and turn this difficult waiting time into a game. Once rolemodeled by teachers then the game can be passed on to the students.*

Using these types of strategies to turn transitions time into learning time will help students not only be better at transitioning but enjoy and learn something while doing it.



### ➤ **Being Flexible**

Not getting what we want is hard for children. But being able to accept alternatives, roll with changes, and accept mistakes are all important social skills. Setting up an accepting and safe environment where upcoming changes are communicated and mistakes are welcomed is key. Being able to offer alternative activities when something isn't available and that ability to redirect as a teacher is key in teaching children how to be flexible. Leading by example is key. Seeing a teacher or peer rolemodel this behavior will go a long way for children. Living and verbalizing statements like, "I can be ok with mistakes", "I can be ok with change", "I can try new things" or "sometimes I don't always get what I want" as a teacher will give children the opportunity to see that the world doesn't end when something goes wrong and even adults have to deal with these problems.

## **4.2 Self help and intrapersonal skills**

Building independence is part of an individual's social skills; self-reliance allows the child to feel they have control over their life. In becoming independent, the child also gains a sense of importance and belonging. They feel they can contribute to the world and social life surrounding them. They also feel more reassured in their friendship group. By offering children activities that make them more independent, you allow them to gain confidence. While teaching them new skills you also help them to develop qualities such as patience, concentration, self-help, cooperation, self-discipline and self-trust.

One of the best ways teachers and parents can prepare their child for school is to encourage independent skills. Actually, many schoolteachers are often more concerned about a child's ability to take care of themselves and relate to their friends than how many letters or numbers they know.

Here are a few ideas we use for helping children develop self-help skills that are particularly helpful in the classroom:

### ➤ **Cleaning Your Own Personal Space**

Whether picking up toys before coming to morning circle or putting away markers and crayons at table time, taking care of and cleaning an area is an important self-help skill. Little things like putting the cap on markers, the cap on glue sticks and throwing away paper cuttings will be helpful practice for the upcoming school year. Parents can help their child practice this skill at home by having him/her put away items after they completed an activity. Chores are a great way to help with independence and accountability.

### ➤ **Coats and Jackets**

Living in Germany, having children learn to dress and undress themselves for the outdoors is critical. In the winter months getting ready to go outside in the snow or rain is a daunting task. Just imagine 20 children putting on snow pants, coats, boots, hats and mittens. It certainly is an exercise in patience. As soon as our children are able to dress and undress themselves the better.

### ➤ **Bathroom Routines**

Kindergarten can be so much fun that some children even forget to use the bathroom when needed or they wait for the very, very last second before dashing into the bathroom. Then





they are so anxious to get to their activity that they forget the bathroom routine. We try during this pre-school year to make sure children are self-regulating this process. It is important that children start to think “ok we are about to go outside, should I go to the bathroom?” We also use a red light/green light system so that the children know when the bathroom stall is occupied or free.

#### ➤ **Classroom helper**

One of the goals of any good early childhood program is to teach independence, by allowing the students to be in control for the entire day they feel incredibly empowered and independent. We therefore usually assign the role of “group helper” to one or two children each day. Allowing young children to feel like they are “in charge” gives them a great sense of empowerment. Children who feel empowered are more likely to enjoy school and take more academic risks. What exactly does the helper do? Our helper does everything. Some of the jobs of the leader include calendar helper, checking clean-up at centers, pushing in chairs, turning on and off the lights, holding the door, or leading the line, helping set up lunch etc. Our students are always looking for ways to help out and to lead, and preschool classroom job helpers are the perfect way to do both of these things at once.

### **4.3 Language and Literacy**

*“I couldn't think without writing.”*

– Jean Piaget

Language development refers to children’s emerging abilities to understand and use language. Language skills are receptive—the ability to listen to and understand language—and expressive—the ability to use language to communicate ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Children's language ability affects learning and development in all areas, especially emerging literacy.

Emerging literacy refers to the knowledge and skills that lay the foundation for reading and writing. For infants and toddlers, emerging literacy is embedded in the Language and Communication domain. This reflects how closely connected these emerging literacy skills are to very young children’s beginning receptive, expressive, and vocabulary skills. For preschoolers, Language and Literacy are distinct domains. They reflect children’s growing skills as they begin to grasp differences between spoken and written language, as well as how they are connected.

Often parents hear “Pre-school” and think that children must be sitting at desks reading and writing. For our program this area of emergent literacy is an accompaniment for our daily activities; the introduction of a book to accompany a topic, storytelling (where the teacher will write as the child describes), picture journaling to name just a few. Our wish is that children are exposed to these mediums, but not under pressure to perform tasks that will eventually be taught in school.

Some of the areas we will focus on in Pre-school:

#### ➤ **Listening**

Our wish is that children are gaining meaning through listening. By that we mean that children can listening attentively to stories that are read aloud or listen to audio books and understand the story and interpret what they hear. We look for children to be able to follow two or three





step directions. For example matching movements with actions to a song, following simple teacher directions to the class; “please fill up your cup and bring it to the lunch table.” Or “please pick up the pine cones, put them in the basket and then place the basket on the shelf”. We start to focus a little more on phonological awareness, for example; repeating familiar rhymes or songs, tell if two words begin with the same sound, identifying rhyming words and selecting objects that begin with the same sound.

#### ➤ **Speaking**

One of the biggest frustrations for children (and adults) is not being understood. Our wish is therefore that our children can speak clearly enough to be understood. We look for our students to be asking who, what and where questions. We encourage them to tell stories and invite conversations with peers and teachers. Morning circle is a great opportunity for children to have a chance to address the class and share something they have on their mind, but it is also a chance for them to maybe pick up new vocabulary from their teachers or peers. We will then look to hear and encourage the use of that vocabulary later on within the classroom.

#### ➤ **Reading**

Exposure to media such as books is a constant for us here at rainbowtekkers. We like to link our topics, themes and projects to literature. We hope to help children show and appreciation for books and reading. Choosing books that are of interest to the children, giving them the opportunity to choose their own books to read and even sharing books that are special to them or in their mother language are ways in which we hope to develop an appreciation for literature.

#### ➤ **Writing**

We want to provide an environment that encourages writing exploration. Exposure to writing in its different forms can create an interest for writing skills. We do this by providing a “writing center”. This includes different writing tools; different types of paper, crayons, pencils, markers, chalk and so on. The center is then a place for children to represent their ideas and stories through pictures, dictation and play; drawing pictures and telling us about it, dictating a story to a teacher who writes it down and drawing illustrations for a story to name a few. We also start to use letter-like shapes, symbols and letters to start to convey meaning. We want children to “scribble” on paper and describe to us what it means to them, start to explore writing their own name or even the names of their friends. With this then comes the progression to correlating sounds and symbols in writing. All of this is their as an impulse or exposure. We are not trying to teach “handwriting” but sparking an interest.

## 4.4 Mathematical thinking

*“Knowledge, then, is a system of transformations that become more progressively adequate.”*

– Jean Piaget

In Pre-school, mathematics is an everyday experience for the child. Preschoolers are using mathematics even though they are not sitting at desks with workbooks or memorizing multiplication tables. Pre-school mathematics helps them make sense of the world around them and teaches them



to reason and problem solve. We build on children's prior knowledge and capitalize on their spontaneous discoveries to further their understanding of mathematical concepts. Children will eventually use mathematical skills and knowledge several times in their day-to-day life. Therefore understanding the concepts is important. Counting, measuring, problem solving, logical thinking and decision making are just some of the mathematical skills they will learn and use.

When looking at child development it is shown that a child's intelligence develops qualitatively at different stages of development. You can think of pre-school mathematics in the same way. It is the building blocks for future education. These concepts help children to be ready to learn and the primary school level. The concepts of sorting and shapes help children to learn the space, shapes and geometrical concepts at a primary level. The concept of ordering is helpful in learning to handle different type of data. Measurement in preschool is a prerequisite to weight, length, volume and capacity later on. Exposure to numerals is foreword to learning number concepts, number patterns, decimals and mathematical operations.

Through daily routines, practices and projects we will use these concepts, meaning children without knowing are beginning to learn these mathematical concepts. For example:

- **Strategies to solving mathematical problems**  
How many plates are needed for lunch? How to we divide the playdough so that everyone gets some? How many blocks do we need to build a house?
- **Numbers and operations**  
Using one to one correspondence to place, count, compare things such as people, objects in the class
- **Exposure to numeracy**  
"Please take four steps forward", "can you hand me three pieces of paper", "are there more children in the group with rain boots on or with shoes."
- **Patterns, relationships and functions**  
Sorting or classifying objects by color, identifying the missing picture, sorting by shape or extending patterns.
- **Geometry and Spatial Relations**  
Matching, naming, describing or comparing shapes.
- **Measurement**  
Using words to describe (long, short, biggest tallest), using measuring cups or spoons or finding non-standard ways of measuring (child's feet, hands or a piece of string).
- **Measurement of time**  
Stop and start on signal, classroom routines (sequencing), rate of speed or comparing of time periods (short and long time, sooner or later, yesterday or tomorrow, morning or afternoon).



## 4.5 Social Studies

Kindergarten often gives children their first sense of community outside the home. Social-studies learning begins as children make friends and participate in decision-making in the classroom. Then it moves beyond the school into the neighborhood and around the world. In our pre-school program we have an opportunity to delve a little deeper

### ➤ The Classroom

Pre-school is a safe, caring community with an orderly routine, and each child is valued as an individual. Everything in the classroom lends itself to learning the concepts underlying social studies. When children play pretend games or build with blocks, and work together in small groups on class projects, they learn to accept differences, deal with their emotions, and practice resolving conflicts. They gain confidence as their social skills develop, and they learn to share, take turns, and practice being both leaders and followers. They develop a sense of personal responsibility by performing a variety of jobs, such as giving out the cups and napkins for snacks or opening the door and turning out the lights when we leave the room.

### ➤ The Neighborhood

Teachers help children apply the concepts they learn in their classroom to an understanding of their neighborhood. Children learn to observe their surroundings: the homes, banks, fire station, police station, restaurants, library, church, synagogue, mosque, senior-citizen homes, schools, and parks. They observe the kinds of stores in the area: groceries, bakery, flower shops and bookstores. They learn what each store sells, where the merchandise comes from, who the customers might be, and why each is important.

### ➤ Field Trips

The pre-school year is often filled with education field trips. Many of our students know what or where certain businesses are, but we want them to know how they work and why we need them. They may visit bakery and dentist, grocery stores and senior citizen centers. When the children return to the kindergarten, they discuss their observations and reinforce their learning through play. They may set up a bookstore, a grocery store, or a bank in the dress-up area, and act out the things they have learned.

### ➤ Holidays

Teachers take advantage of special holidays to teach children about history and to make them aware of different cultural traditions. We do follow many of the traditional German holidays, but we are so lucky to have such a diverse group of families and teachers that we get to share many of the important holidays of other countries. Children also learn to respect the traditions of others by understanding the stories and traditions of other nations.

### ➤ Special Visitors

Parents, grandparents, and other adults from the community, such as police officers, firefighters, dentists, doctors, and artists, may be invited to come to the classroom to share stories about their jobs and cultural heritage. A parent who grew up in Portugal or Korea might bring in pictures of traditional costumes, tell a folk tale, or teach the children a dance or song. They might also prepare a favorite recipe for children to taste and explain how it is made and where the ingredients come from.



#### 4.6 Scientific thinking

Science is not just for college chemistry courses or the high school student taking biology. Preschoolers, like their much older counterparts, are quite competent to understand scientific concepts and develop scientific thinking. As important as this topic may be to the advanced student, early science experiences are equally as vital to the young child's educational growth and development.

Teaching a child science topics at a young age during preschool can help to build a lifelong interest in the subject. Additionally, early science experiences can set a child up for school success by fostering positive attitudes toward learning. The foundational science skills that a preschool teacher imparts to the young child can help that student to think critically, problem solve and better understand the world around them. More specific concepts such as learning about animals, plants, weather and the physical world are also important components to the early science education that can benefit the child later in life.

Any lesson or project that relies on the use of verbal and written language can benefit this important area of academic growth. Group science experiments and projects invite discussion, which helps to increase positive language use. Making predictions, observations or coming up with conclusions provides young children with the opportunity to use critical thinking skills and verbalize what they mentally reason. In conjunction with class discussions, appropriate vocabulary use through science lessons also plays a pivotal role in increasing early literacy development. Teachers who use scientific vocabulary words such as microscope, life cycle, species or habitat help preschoolers to build new language skills to use in later schooling and beyond.

Young children are naturally curious about the world around them. We believe teaching science to preschoolers can enhance this interest and help them to learn to explore their environment. Hands-on science activities, experiments and projects allow the preschooler to make discoveries about natural phenomena, the outdoors and other scientific concepts. By engaging the young child in science exploration activities, the preschool teacher can help young children to focus on the discovery process and possibly even decrease unwanted behaviors. What will we look at?

- Questioning and using senses to observe and explore material and natural phenomenon
- Use simple tools and equipment for investigation
- Make comparisons among objects
- Identify, describe and compare properties of things such as rocks, soil, water and living things
- Observe and describe simple seasonal and weather changes.



## 4.7 Movement

Children need movement for their intellectual and physical development. Lack of movement can lead to impaired concentration and development. All children have a natural impulse to move. They are closely connected to movement, competition, and interaction with other children. The connection between body and mind is still particularly strong in our preschool children. Stress and psychological or emotional burdens can still be expressed very strongly in physical reactions.

In preschool age, it is an important developmental task to be responsible for oneself, to be able to self-regulate, to recognize and formulate one's needs, but also to be able to endure frustration, to be compassionate with others, to be able to act in a team, to think in a solution-oriented way, to find problem solving strategies and to try out different methods that can lead to the goal.

In the guided movement units in the kindergarten, it is precisely these skills that are important for the upcoming transition to school that are nurtured and encouraged. This happens in a playful way and without pressure.

Examples of the areas on which we place particular emphasis in the pre-school program:

### ➤ **Independence / Self-Responsibility**

The children should be capable of dressing and undressing themselves and be able to take responsibility for their own personal belongings. For this purpose, they have their own gym bag, which always contains all the sports equipment they need. They know which clothes are theirs, they can find them again after the "gymnastics lesson" and can put everything on by themselves and store it in their gym bag. Tying bows, fastening zips and buttons should not be an obstacle.

### ➤ **Frustration tolerance/ self-regulation**

Similar to the transitions, when preparing to go outside, the children must also learn to wait patiently. For example, if there is a queue in front of a piece of exercise equipment, one must be able to wait until it is their turn - but during this time, one should not push or shove other children or lie down on the floor out of boredom. Another aspect of this exercise is respect for others, for example, paying attention to the child who is doing an exercise and not interrupting or laughing at them. This is still a big challenge in preschool, but it becomes more and more important in the transition to school, where being able to wait determines a large part of the day.

### ➤ **Follow instructions for action / develop problem solving strategies**

In physical education sessions, obstacle courses can be set up for the children, with different levels of difficulty and tasks that can only be solved as a team. The children must listen carefully to the instructions on how to complete the course and, for example, remember in which order which exercise should be done. They may need to ask for help with an exercise or work out how to do it. A small course offers a variety of development opportunities here, which the children can then transfer to other areas. If one finds the solution at which height one needs to jump over a pole in order not to touch it or conversely, how low must one bend down in



order not to touch a pole at a height of 50 cm, then one not only learns spatial thinking, but also how to develop solution strategies for mathematical tasks. In conversation, one can discuss with others how low to bend, and the other children can support by giving instructions, such as “bend even lower!”. There is the possibility here, not only to find solutions, to accompany an action linguistically in order to express oneself linguistically and understandably.



## 5. Transition to elementary school

Moving into a new environment is a time of change and adaptation for children, their families as well as for the schools. The child shifts from a predominantly play-based environment to more organized and structured learning. Children have to form new relationships and to take on new responsibilities.

Each child progresses and develops in their own unique way and responds differently to change. Transition from kindergarten to primary school is a deciding period during which children need to get significant support for the coming changes. Kindergarten educators, teachers and parents can all play a crucial role in facilitating a smooth shift, by assisting the child until they are fully accommodated in the new learning context.

The transition period from pre-school to school is said to be the starting point for purposeful learning. A successful start in school is strongly linked to academic performance and acceptance children's future social consciousness. Children's experiences at this stage will have a lasting impact on children's ability to adapt to change. Our pre-school program is there to assist with the effective transition to entering primary school, by helping to prepare children physically, intellectually, linguistically, and socially-communicatively. To do this, there is a need for unity between the two levels of education the kindergarten and school, but also in conjunction with the families.

In other words *“supporting children from preschool to primary school is the responsibility of the whole society. When the community joins hands for children, their attendance at school will be a positive and enjoyable experience”*. (Dockett and Perry, 2001)

The challenge of the transition period is not simply getting a child into school, but more importantly, make sure we achieve the following goals:

- Help children not be overwhelmed and surprised with the change of the new learning environment.
- Create a close relationship between the kindergarten and the families so that the relationship system becomes more cohesive and that all sides are responsible for the child preparation for school during this period.
- Help preschool and elementary school teachers come together to understand the similarities and differences between two levels of education to form a cooperation to help ease the transition of the child.

### 5.1 „School readiness“

A child's readiness for school is often linked to a range of behaviors and abilities, that have often been worked on since day one of kindergarten. These behaviors and abilities are found throughout our curriculum in our Areas of exploration. When it comes to “school readiness” we have some additional factors to consider. As known, not all children are ready at the same time or in the same way, therefore looking at each child on an individual basis is key.

Through our own observations and through cooperation with many schools in our area we have come to understand what schools are indeed looking for when it comes to readiness.



The below are some specific suggested criteria, but not all children are guaranteed to be full meet those criteria and that does not mean that children will not have initial successes or that they are not ready for school! Determining that a child meets certain specific criteria is only subjective, because the skills a child acquires can be altered in different circumstances. So these criteria are only for reference and are not decisive.

➤ **Motor skills**

Children can walk, run, jump, climb alone; know how to use knives, scissors, pencils and other learning tools, can draw humanoid and various shapes;

Children can use the toilet, prepare and change clothes as well as some self-care skills

➤ **Cognitive learning**

Can speak their name; recognize a number of different shapes and distinguish which is large, which body is small.

Distinguishing different or similar colors.

Have an interest in stories told in books.

Know how to count numbers in the range 1-10.

Recognize the alphabet and pronounce it correctly.

➤ **Self care and social relationships**

Be independent in group activities and actively participate in collective activities.

Can play by yourself.

Can focus attention for short periods of time (from 5-15 minutes).

Can play with other friends.

Understand some school rules.

Can make some simple decisions.

Ability to take responsibility for their own actions.

➤ **Language and communication skills**

Can express his/her opinions clearly for others to understand, yes (may still have errors in wording).

Know how to follow simple rules.

Can speak in short and clear sentences.

Know how to ask questions (why, who, what, what...).

Know how to converse with others.

Know how to listen to others speak, tell stories in collective activities.





## 5.2 Cooperation with families

Parents are a wonderful resource for us as teachers. Parents know the latest likes and dislikes, ups and downs, and all those little quirks that sometimes we do not get to see in the kindergarten. Building a cooperation with parents helps us meet the individual needs of children. It also helps us provide consistency and security for our students. Our goal is to develop that relationship with the parents that will make the transition from kindergarten to school the smoothest. We here at rainbowtrekkers encourage this from the moment a child comes into our kindergarten, but sometimes overtime it is easy to take that relationship for granted during the last year of kindergarten. Therefore, maybe rekindling or intensifying that cooperation with the parents in the Pre-school year will help make that final year more production and the transition easier.

Our year will start out with a parent evening for those families with children who will be in their final year of kindergarten. The goal of our parent evening will be to introduce parents to the type of activities and projects we will be working on throughout the year in our Pre-school program. This is an opportunity for parents to ask questions and get information regarding curriculum, school readiness and transition. In addition, our teachers invite families for an individual appointment to discuss their child on a more personal level at the beginning of the year. This is a chance for teachers and parents to together to establish some goals for the Pre-school year. What is important for us as a kindergarten is that parents understand our “open door policy”; parents are welcome to come and speak with us, drop by the classroom and see what is going on and are welcome to participate in projects and events. In addition, we will meet officially twice a year for parent teacher conferences where we will discuss the personal development of the child and will provide written communication of each child’s progress throughout the year. We end our year with a kindergarten diploma presented at our graduation ceremony.

Building a strong relationship with families strengthens our program itself. Families are our biggest allies and the best advocates for their children. They contribute to the success of the child. Making sure that clear communication is ongoing, with a truly welcoming and respectful attitude will pay off in the long run for all our students. Teachers and families are on the same team: we are both on the child’s team.

## 5.3 Cooperation with schools

During the Pre-school year, parents will begin to look at which schools their child might attend the following year. This choice of school can be based on many criteria, for example location, siblings or language. Parents will have the opportunity during the beginning of the year to attend “open days” to get a feel for what school might best suit their child. Soon thereafter the application process will begin and parents will then submit their interest. During this time here in kindergarten our students will be well into the Pre-school program working on the many areas of exploration that we focus on. It is normal then at the end winter/beginning of Spring that parents will then find out if their child has a place at their school of interest. In late spring we then will start our cooperations with the school teachers. Schools will then contact us with a list of students who will be attending their school. We will then meet in person with the teacher to discuss our students; it is imperative that the school teachers have an understanding of each of our students in order for them to prepare for the school year beginning in August. This process is not mandatory and parents must sign a disclosure with school in order for us to share our information.



The rainbowtrekkers family center coordinator is in process of setting up official co-operations with elementary schools in Cologne. Our vision is to provide the following services within official framework cooperations with both German speaking neighborhood schools as well as bilingual, international schools in town:

- Kindergarten children visiting the school in order to get to know the building or to see a live class in action
- Joined parent evenings of kindergarten and school
- Professional exchange programs for educators and elementary school teachers
- Joint projects of the kindergarten and school children
- Elementary school children visit the pre-schoolers in their kita
- Mentorship program: Each preschooler is twinned with an mentor child from elementary school

## 6. Conclusion

Pre-school curriculum is everything that goes on in a program from the preparation of the last year to the graduation at the end of the year. Planning, implementation, observation and reflection help us make adjustments to each preschool experience depending on the child's needs. Collaboration with parents helps us understand the child better and helps us to work together as a team to prepare for the first year of school. Cooperation with schools helps us understand what qualities are expected or needed for the first year of school. This collaboration helps to develop our program to be more specific in preparing children for what is to come. When we bring all of this together, we are left with children that will hopefully find joy in their final year of kindergarten and that are prepared for the exciting first year of school.

## 7. Literature

Europäische Kommission (1995): *Die Vorschulerziehung in der Europäischen Union. Ein Problemaufriß*. Downloadbar unter <https://op.europa.eu/de/publication-detail/-/publication/5afe231c-d210-4515-a531-c83fa672fa14>

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Sam was born in Ireland but spent most of his life in the United States. He holds a degree in both Early Childhood Education and Business Management.

His background in education is quite diverse having spent many years both playing and coaching tennis professionally as well as teaching kindergarten in the U.S.A. He is a strong believer in learning through exploration and play.