



Brochure on the Educational Curriculum for Saxony



You cannot teach people anything. You can only help them discover it within themselves.

Galileo Galilei

The impossible is often that which no one has yet tried.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe

Banality shall not triumph as long as amazement exists.

Andre Heller

Only he who smells sound can hear colours.

Michael Weisser

Only he who hears butterflies laugh knows what clouds smell like.

Novalis

Power cannot be communicated, just awakened.

Georg Büchner

Imagination is more important than knowledge.

Albert Einstein

Dear parents,

Child day-care centres and childminding facilities are places where children should feel comfortable, where they can make friends, and experience a sense of safety and security in a setting that also gives them enough leeway to play. They are also lively centres of learning and education.

Child day-care centres and childminding facilities are designed to accompany, support and supplement the education and raising provided by parents at home, but not replace it. They enable children to gain experience outside the family realm, and encourage children to step into the diverse world around them.

You will no doubt have deliberately chosen a day-care centre or childminding facility near where you live, and familiarised yourself with their concept. Many such centres have their own specific educational focuses, but all care services are bound by an educational requirement stipulated in the Saxon curriculum, and which have been established in the law supporting children at day-care facilities since 2005. This curriculum does not seek to restrict the work of the respective service providers, but serves as a basis and guide, and mentions important educational issues. It shows the way in terms of school requirements, and also lays the foundations for life-long learning.

Education can only be successful if the family home and day-care centre or childminding facility pull together. That's why the aim of this booklet is to familiarise you with the Saxon curriculum and provide you with an overview of its objectives and content. It does not contain a catalogue of targets or specifications, but rather a series of topics, and suggestions for teachers and childminders. It starts with a basic understanding of the child, taking into account his/her strengths, and respecting the child as a unique little personality. It should also enable the child, with the help of adults and in constant contact with the other children, to form their own opinion of the world, and test out their skills based on a positive feeling of self-worth. It is less about adults "teaching" the child their perspectives and experience, and more about the child making their own discoveries with teachers and other children. In this booklet, we endeavour to illustrate the above using examples.

The curriculum has set new courses, and sparked discussions about educational issues and teaching attitudes. Many parents have made positive comments about it. You too are of course welcome to have a look at the curriculum. The most important factor here is that you maintain good contact with the facility or childminder. Exercise your legal right to help the day-care centres and childminding facilities complete their tasks. The full version of the curriculum is available at www.kita-bildungsserver.de.

Letters and names

Learning by playing, Celina, age 5



Starting a few days ago Celina now writes her name on paper every chance she gets. She is very proud of her ability and very interested in the letters of the alphabet.

It is Tuesday morning. Celina arrives around 8 a.m. at the kindergarten. Just as on the previous days, she sits down at the table and writes her name. However, today she does even more. She takes a pencil and the paper on which she was writing her name and leaves the room, announcing, "I'll be back soon!" I let her go and wait for her to return. She is in the room next door where I hear her talking to the parents who arrive and letting them write down their names. "Just like I do it!" she orders. Then she disappears again. It takes ten minutes before she is back and presents the paper to me. Celina

has collected eight names. I'm astonished and read them out loud. Everybody who passes by is proudly shown her treasure.

When I thought she was finished with this, I was proven otherwise.

Celina chooses a calm place in the next-door room where she starts to colour in all of the identical letters. I sit down quietly next to her and watch her without saying a word. I grasp her system and wait with curiosity to see what will happen next. And indeed, once she has finished with the names, she presents me the result. "This letter (e) is there many times and this one (n) also, but this one (c) I didn't colour as often!"

I listen to her attentively and think, "What an accomplishment!" And then I'm allowed to write my name down, too.

Katharina B., teacher

Excerpt from the Educational Curriculum:

"The educational concept underlying this curriculum is oriented toward the idea of self-education. Education is considered to be a holistic, comprehensive process which relates to the overall development of the person with his or her different ways of perceiving, thinking, and responding. According to this, education is more than learning."

Upon which educational concepts is the Educational Curriculum in Saxony based?

Using the example of Celina, this can be clearly illustrated.

Right from the beginning, children attempt to access and explore their environment through their own initiative, strategies, and means and to gather their own experiences. In Celina's example we see how she approached the parents and asked them to write down their names. Children learn of their own volition and at the same time development occurs. Celina was not assigned to do what she did; she did it because she was genuinely interested.

Just like every child, Celina has many possibilities for exploring her environment which help her to orient herself, to discover and utilise what she finds. Thus, Celina recognises that the parents can be useful to her because they can write. In the course of her occupation with the letters of the alphabet, Celina felt a need to classify all the sensory impressions which initially appeared to be unorganised and chaotic. In view of that need, Celina was not satisfied with simply letting the parents write down their names. She found a quiet place and started to form her own system for ordering the letters. As you can see, children have their own way of doing excellent work while undergoing development. They use already acquired abilities, in this case writing letters, ordering objects and communicating. Celina can now bundle these abilities to pursue her goal, and as a result she realises that letters appear in different quantities in words and she develops her own system to find out which ones are frequent and which ones less so in the names she collected.

Like Celina, children should have the opportunity to touch and look at objects as long as they need to in order to understand them.

A diverse range of opportunities is necessary for this kind of investigation and comprehension of one's surroundings. To do this, children need a learning environment full of stimulation. How deeply a child delves into exploring an object depends, among other things, on the time allowed for making discoveries and on the adults who decide what knowledge children are able to assimilate.

Celina's teacher trusted her and gave her the possibility to move freely in the centre. Celina had enough time and materials to pursue her interest. Plus, she received the support and understanding from the teacher who was perceptive enough to recognise Celina's individual learning process. It depends to the greatest extent on the adults as to whether each child discovers his or her potential and can develop accordingly, and whether the child can learn to understand the world, other people and himself or herself with the "hundred languages".

In the course of making her discoveries, Celina experienced joy, well-being, and satisfaction. Everybody who passed by got to see her work. She found reason and meaning in everything she did and in the things surrounding her. Based on this, activities and objects gain a subjective, or individual, meaning for her and can as a result be more easily incorporated into her own existing body of knowledge.

All children develop their identity by coming into contact with and responding to other children, adults, and the objects around them and supplement their own abilities with those of others in a mutual exchange. For all aspects of

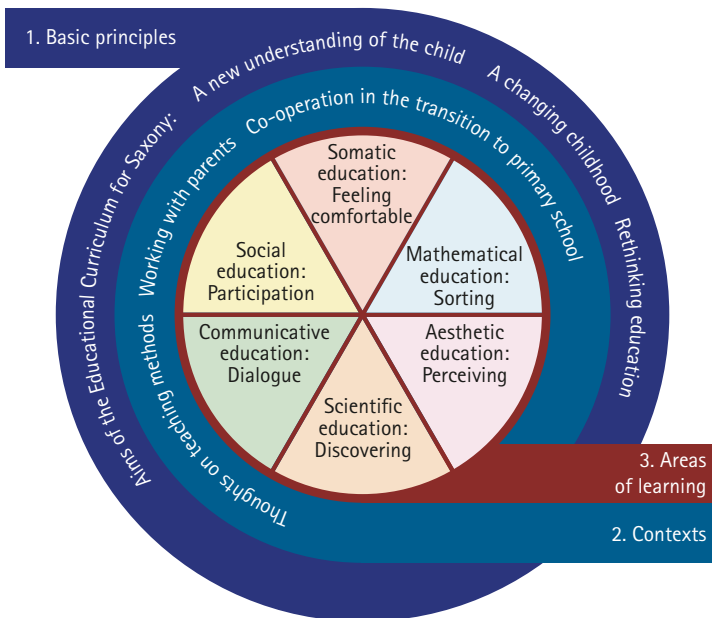
this development, every child needs the appreciation and respect of adults, who like Celina's teacher, should be in a position to express astonishment, listen attentively, and praise the children's achievements. It is necessary that the adults be open to and delighted with the doings of children. The educational approach based on this principle supports the children in their process of self-education and makes it possible for them to realise their own ideas and plans, just as Celina did.

How is the Educational Curriculum for Saxony organised?

The following diagram presents chapters on basic principles, areas of education, and contexts for the Educational Curriculum.

The curriculum describes six different areas of learning: (somatic, social, communicative, aesthetic, scientific, and mathematical). Following a subject-oriented introduction, each area is described using guiding terms, whereby these terms are classified under concrete, practical topics.

Even if the areas are differentiated in the descriptions contained in the curriculum, they cannot be considered separately in terms of practical teaching methods since childhood development occurs in a complex fashion. Learning processes always refer to multiple areas simultaneously, which however does not mean that in each everyday situation every area is equally recognisable. The variety of learning situations cancels this apparent imbalance out. The following examples demonstrate this.



Cooling food with the ventilator

Learning at lunchtime, Luis, age two



Excerpt from the Educational Curriculum:

"Adults are not released from their responsibility when learning is considered to be auto-didactic and an active individual activity on the part of the child. On the contrary: the world in which girls and boys live and the experiences they gather in it shape each child's sense of self."

It is a hot day in July. The children are seated at the table for lunch. Semolina pudding steams in the bowls. Luis serves himself. Very carefully with outstretched arm and serious expression, he balances the ladle and brings it to his plate. Some children start blowing on their plates. Luis tries some food and then puts the spoon down with the words, "Food is warm!" His friend Paul does the same.

Luis sits at the table calmly. He looks at the ventilator positioned on the floor and which is supposed to cool the room down on hot days. Fascinated, he observes the rotating device.

All of a sudden, he stands up with the plate in his hands and goes to the ventilator. He stands in front of it and looks down at it.

The teacher now curious, asks, "What are you doing?" Luis answers: "should get cold" and squats down. He remains alone in this position for a bit. Then Lisa and Paul join him. They also want to cool down their food.

In this daily situation Luis sees that his idea to cool his food using the ventilator is taken up by others. He not only receives acknowledgment from the other children, but also experiences his integration into the group and his acceptance there (social education). These kinds of shared experiences and activities among the children give reasons for oral communication ("Should get cold") and action (Paul does the same) – (communicative education).

When Luis stands up to go cool his food, it is not his aim to bother anybody or show a disregard for basic table manners. He wants to eat and chooses an effective way of cooling his food. He takes responsibility for satisfying his basic needs (somatic education). By allowing for this behaviour, the teacher gives Luis the possibility to discover a clever use for the ventilator. He has the chance to scrutinise physical processes and is encouraged to analyse and apply what he notices (scientific education). Luis explores and discovers his surroundings with all his senses: audio, visual, tactile, etc. (aesthetic learning).

Two year-old Luis is already able to fill his plate and work with amounts and weights. When carrying his plate, he must keep his balance and estimate how much strength is necessary (somatic and mathematical education combined also with scientific education).

This detailed illustration shows the multi-faceted learning experience Luis has had and how the educational areas are complexly connected to each other – learning at lunchtime!

Transparent coloured sheets

Experimenting with materials – invented by Luca, age three

Last summer we received coloured plastic sheets from Ms. N., the mother of Lisa. We were happy to give these to the children so they could work with them.

With interest, the children investigated the material. First, its characteristics: how flexible is it? Can you cut it? What is the surface like? Can you look through it? – So many questions and the children were eagerly looking for answers.

After a while we could still hear the children talking and discussing with enthusiasm: "Look! Everything I see is red!" "And for me everything is blue!"

On the same afternoon, the children taped the transparent sheets to the window and with each new sheet we all admired the coloured reflections appearing on the floor.

A couple days later...

It is a quarter to three; the low winter sun is shining through our coloured window. Some children are still sitting at the snack table. Luca is already finished eating and stands up. He gets himself a chair and puts it on the carpet in front of the window and sits down. But why is he sitting with his back to the window? The coloured sheets aren't really of interest to him anymore. Instead, he is intently watching the coloured spots on the floor. After a short while, Luca gets some wooden blocks out and fills in the coloured forms on the floor with them. What is he up to? He then goes back to the chair and sits down and inspects the result of his work. He does this several times.



Excerpt from the Educational Curriculum:

"People who explore new things tended to take on small tasks which were restricted in terms of the questions raised; however, in the course of making discoveries, new questions arose. It is similar with children because they are curious and need to gather their own experiences regarding the surrounding elements and natural phenomena, culture, and religion."

I observe Luca, wondering what he is doing, but with enthusiasm and attempt to understand his actions.

It is already a quarter past three. Children from other groups are coming over. Nobody interrupts Luca, but some watch him expectantly. After fifteen minutes, Luca and his friend Nora are surprised to see that the coloured spots have moved. They try to find an explanation for this and Nora thinks the already visible moon is responsible, "because it is pushing the sun away". But this doesn't bother them at all, because the coloured spots can still serve as an "illuminated Autobahn"!

So many colours! What effect do the sheets' colours have? With Ms. N.'s donation the children have materials which do not just make them curious, but also encourage them to explore the possibilities. "I see everything red"; "For me everything is blue!" The children immediately find a way to engage with the material at hand and as a result get ideas which neither the teacher nor Ms. N. could have expected in advance.

Freedom to work with the material is the reason why the children can explore and discover. To independently examine the objects and discover how they can be manipulated, children must have the freedom to experiment and also then be shown the practical uses. By exploring the possibilities offered by the transparent coloured sheets, the children were also interested in the coloured spots reflected on the floor. Several days later, the coloured spots still excite the children's interest. The coloured spots on the floor are filled-in with toy blocks and the children recognise that the changing angle of the sun's light also changes the shapes of the spots (mathematical and aesthetic education). The resulting conversation among the children also has its use because it allows them to make connections between new and already acquired knowledge.

Here, it is not important whether the children have a "right" or "wrong" understanding of their environment, but rather that they describe what they observe using their own experiences. Out of the reflected shapes and the toy blocks an "illuminated Autobahn" can be created. The

explanation for the movement of the coloured spots on the floor is the already visible moon (social, communicative, scientific, and somatic education).

When the children find their own explanations, it is important that adults show support for their ideas, encourage them, and are willing to allow the children enough time for their experiments. The children can then break new ground, much like scientific explorers. In this manner, they develop hypotheses and assumptions ("because the moon pushes the sun away") which they test for accuracy and can expand into new theories.

In that the teacher and Ms. N. are willing to go along with the children's evolving ideas, they make it possible for the children to find explanations with them through new experiments. For example, exploring the different angles of light and how they shine through the transparent sheets, painting the sheets, hanging them up to divide the room, etc.

Discovering worlds

The castle – created by Karl, age four



Hustle and bustle in the children's group:

Elsa is decorating the furniture in the room with colourful glass beads; Laura, Paula and Caroline are busily painting paper laid out on the floor. Colourful princesses, flowers and suns take shape. In the front room some children under Felix's command have erected a castle out of chairs, foam blocks and all sorts of other things which they now occupy and defend against imaginary enemies. Visits to this big castle at the edge of the city appear to leave lasting impressions on the children.

Karl wanders around the groups without apparent aim and seems happy when the focus later shifts to the garden.

Outside, I see him again: he is sitting in the sand box and in front of him are several buckets and a large container with coloured chalk. He is busy rubbing the chalk through a kitchen strainer so that it comes out in a fine dust and falls into the buckets – blue, green, yellow, violet, pink, and orange. His concentration is so strong, he hardly

notices when I sit down next to him. He rubs, blows, and frowns when his little hands slip. I watch for awhile. The buckets fill. "Do you want to make colours?" I ask. He shakes his head; he doesn't have time for chatting with me.

After a while, Karl takes the buckets to a large pile of sand in the sand box and sprinkles the dust over it. Pink circles, green and blue stripes, violet and yellow shapes and orange dots are visible. "A castle" he says to me.

Excerpt from the Educational Curriculum:

"The term 'aesthetic' is often used in connection with the concept of ideal beauty, although it also stands for the capacity to feel and its functions. In a larger sense, it implies harmony between nature and art and harmony among the human senses. In terms of boys and girls, for example, this is demonstrated in that they think in images and wish to give aesthetic expression to what they imagine."

The many new impressions the children had of the castle led to very different ideas, fantasies, and activities. This makes it possible for us to see how children assimilate experiences into play differently. Each child processes the experiences he or she gathers with their own imagination. In doing this, they combine a known topic and already acquired knowledge with new topics and new information gleaned from experiencing the castle in diverse ways. These different ways of assimilating are reflected in the differentiated and creative expressive forms of the children; for example, in decorating with different materials and things (coloured glass beads) or in the assumption of different roles

(knight, princess). Through this mutual exchange, the children not only share experiences, but also knowledge already gained and are able to expand upon these through play.

Karl took sand, coloured chalk, and an old kitchen strainer. He made "pictures" based on his personal experience: from experiences at home, at his grandparents', and also from the activities with the children and teachers at the daycare centre. On this basis, he can develop the idea of a castle in his own individual way.

He classified the coloured chalk according to colour (aesthetic education). He counted the same number of buckets as there were colours (mathematical education), and he tired himself out by rubbing the chalk into coloured dust (somatic and social learning). With the words, "a castle", he shows how proud and satisfied he is with his accomplishment.

Karl astonishes us. A new, different kind of castle was created.

Contexts

In the previous pages, everyday situations involving children were presented as illustrations of the educational concepts and the areas of learning underlying the Educational Curriculum for Saxony. It is possible that in the course of reading this, the idea is implied that childhood learning happens on its own, is only instigated by the children, and adults are relatively inactive in the process. Is this indeed the case?

The answer to this question is addressed in the third chapter of the Educational Curriculum for Saxony in which particular focus is given to the responsibilities of teachers in daycare facilities and to providing daily childcare. According to this, the main task of teachers is to allow for active auto-didactic processes on the part of children in that they observe and document learning processes, create appropriate settings, make decisions regarding teaching methods, as well as cooperate with all those involved in the educational process.

Observation and documentation

The pedagogical basis is formed by the observation of children's learning processes. In making these observations, the emphasis is not on whether the children possess concrete skills and whether these correspond with their particular ages. It is more important that observations are made which recognise and appreciate the resources, strengths, and developmental processes of each individual child.

Even if a number of observational methods exist, these always follow the same objective: to recognise and document the subjects and interests of the children. The documented results do not contain any test values dependent on the situation, but rather very different histories of learning for each child within the context of everyday situations. In this way, the teachers are able to recognise and encourage the individual developmental processes of each child.

In order to ascertain the developmental steps taken by children and better understand the learning processes of the child, it is important that the teachers use methods of documentation. The documented observations form the basis for constant exchange among teachers and with the children and their parents. Different forms of documentation are suitable for recording childhood development. For instance, these can be comments made and actions taken by the children that are written down as anecdotal evidence, as well as sketches, photographs, and creations produced by the children. The mutual exchange concerning these offers the opportunity for all those involved to experience how the children discover the world and give the children the possibility to talk about their own activities and forms of expression.

This kind of exchange is the basis for supporting the development of a child.

General conditions for learning

Based on this, the conditions for childhood learning processes are created with:

- the intentional creation of spaces which stimulate the children to learn,
- the organisation of a daily routine in which the children are given sufficient time, freedom, and independence, and
- a methodically diverse pedagogical approach on the part of the teachers who challenges the children to draw upon their own creativity, guides the learning process, and moderates the dynamics within a group of children.

The short sequence involving Celina, observed and recorded in writing by her teachers, shows us what is important to the child. How can Celina be

encouraged further in terms of learning? How does Celina spend her time at home? These and similar questions in a dialogue with the parents help the teachers find new ways of challenging Celina, for example with materials like the type writer in the neighbouring room, a box of stamps, newspapers and books. Other possibilities for expanding Celina's experience are offered by the public library, playing "I spy" around town with the letters of the alphabet (such as finding the letter "A" in the word "Apothecary"). With these materials and settings, the teachers has assumed that Celina is interested in letters, but it is also possible that she is interested in shapes and colours. The offering of activities could then be supplemented. Which materials are actually put to use is decided by the child independently.

Methodological didactic approach

In early childhood, learning takes place primarily through play. It has its own priority in the life of a child and is not yet viewed in terms of "relaxation" or "free time" as opposed to work or educational activities. Playing as a means of learning is the most complex form of childhood learning. It offers the possibility to discover independently and in a self-determined manner, to conquer and to experiment. For children, playing means actively examining and acquiring knowledge about the social, material and natural environ-

ment. In doing this, children display a high level of motivation regarding their interests, experiment with roles and materials, learn to plan and organise processes, realise their intentions, and talk about what they witnessed. As a result, they acquire key competencies (for example, teamwork, problem solving, communication skills), which they will need in school and later in life. Through playing, they learn about limits and rules, to negotiate these, to respect them, and to monitor their observance.

Along with opportunities to play, other forms of learning are available to the children in the course of the daily routine. For example, projects give the children opportunities to learn in a playful way, to seek answers to their own questions, to talk about their interests, to have a part in planning the projects, and to be involved in making decisions. Even in terms of projects, the

teachers do not provide solutions, but rather offer the children support in the active learning process where the children can apply knowledge already acquired to make their own connections. Children not only learn methods for acquiring knowledge in this manner, but they also practice cooperating with each other and accepting differing opinions.

Educational partnership

Parents are the most important figures in a child's life. They are the primary care giver and the persons with which the children form the most intense relationship. This bond gives the children a sense of security and confidence. Only on this basis can the children learn from birth on and gather the experiences which they will later bring with them to the daycare centre and constantly expand upon. In the course of this, it is important for the child that he or she

is able to form a relationship with a new care giver and that the family and daycare centre jointly assume the responsibility for the development of the child. In order to make a smooth transition possible for the child, it is important that those involved in the educational process strive for and form an educational partnership. The first day at the daycare centre or the first day at school is an occasion that has great and far-reaching importance in the life of a child.

Cooperation between daycare facilities and primary schools

Even if the range of experiences must be widened as children grow older, preparation for school does not only take place during the final year at kindergarten. Preparing children for school means, in particular, to actively organise the switch from kindergarten to primary school. If this transition is to be successful, child minders, primary school teachers, and parents must communicate their expectations and cooperate equally in realizing the transition.

In terms of the children, cooperation concerning the transition means, among other things:

- getting acquainted with the new spaces and ways of learning,
- forming new relationships, and
- being able to apply acquired knowledge and key skills.

For adults, this means:

- recognizing the developmental processes of children and maintaining a cooperative exchange of information regarding them, and
- finding topics for the children based on this communication that lead to the organisation of joint projects.

This is not simply viewed as a working basis for educators in daycare centres and home daycares, but also as an orientation aid for parents in assuming the shared responsibility regarding childhood education and participating in a cooperative partnership to this end.

What is entailed in implementing the Educational Curriculum for Saxony?

- Children are allowed to take on increasing responsibility for fulfilling their basic needs.
- Children have the freedom, time, and ample opportunity to play.
- The educational objectives are formulated based on observations of the individual child and of the group of children as a whole.
- Based on the documentation, regular conferences are held with the parents to inform them of the child's interests, needs, and development.
- The children's surroundings are such that each child is able to pursue his or her own learning and be challenged.
- Children participate in the daily routine and assume partial responsibility for it.
- Preparation for school is viewed as learning which starts at birth.
- A willingness to cooperate with all those involved in the educational process must exist.

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Layout and Typesetting:

Ö GRAFIK, Dresden

Photos:

Frankenberg, Waldkirchen and Coswig day-care centres

Circulation:

2,000 copies

Printing:

Stoba-Druck GmbH

Press date:

December 2012, amended edition 2023

This brochure is available free of charge from:

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This publication is co-financed with tax funds on the basis of the budget passed by the parliament of the Free State of Saxony.