Learning German at Seaford Rise Children’s Centre

Dear Parents and Caregivers, Monday, 7 February 2011

We will be teaching some basic German to the children at Seaford Rise Children’s Centre as many experts believe that introducing children to a second language as early as possible fosters healthy brain development, encourages positive social skills, and lays a solid foundation for effective communication skills that will last a lifetime.

Why German you may ask? Audrey has a German background and Kim learnt German in high school for 2½ years. Also, German is a language which is closely linked with English being that English is itself a Germanic language. In fact, “Old English” is sometimes referred to as “Anglo-Saxon,” the Angles and the Saxons being two German tribes that invaded Britain about fifteen hundred years ago. The presence of such familiar German words in English as “kindergarten” and “waltz” makes German for kids seem less daunting.

Research suggests that language learning is more productive when it is linked to other areas of the curriculum and used regularly in real experiences such as routines, songs, and games. (Taken from a UK document called ‘Foundation stage: guidance for early second language learning’).

We will teach children German in the following ways:-
- using every day routines to immerse the children in learning German. For example, when the children want scissors or glue etc., we can use this opportunity to teach the children what these objects are called in German.
- intentional teaching at group time - where we teach the children some of the specific concepts that have been mentioned in the above box.
- offering small group learning experiences, where the children will have the opportunity to work one on one with Audrey.
- maximising incidental learning opportunities.
- if possible, inviting people with a German background to share their language and culture with the children.

The children will be learning some of the following concepts in German over their year in Kindergarten.
- Simple greetings
- Everyday kindy objects
- Names of colours
- Days of the week
- Some animal names
- Yes, no, please and thankyou
- Numbers from 1-10
- Simple foods
- Parts of the body

The Benefits of Second Language Learning
In addition to being able to communicate with people from other countries and cultures, research has shown that learning a second language enhances intellectual development and improves overall school performance. Students of foreign languages tend to score higher on standardized tests, including both verbal and math portions of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) in the USA. They show more advanced problem solving skills and a clearer understanding of English structure and vocabulary.
“There are all sorts of wonderful advantages to (teaching) a language early,” says Nancy Rhodes, Director of Foreign Language Education at the Centre for Applied Linguistics in the USA. "It introduces a child to another culture, another way of saying things, and the idea that we're all living in a global society." Besides, many experts believe it's easier to learn a second language--or third, or fourth--the younger you start.

“One of the best reasons for starting early is that young children are learning language anyway," says Rhodes. “Their brains are geared up for that.” She adds that the best way to learn a language is through hands-on activities, such as games, songs, and stories -- the types of lessons young children are often more receptive to than adolescents and adults.

Boosting Brain Power
There also appear to be neurological benefits to starting second language learning as early as possible. Research conducted by neurologists at University College London indicated that learning a second language increases the density of grey matter -- the brain tissue essential to processing information -- in one area of the brain. They found that the degree to which the grey matter increased was directly related to how proficient a person had become in the second language and the age at which he or she began learning. The younger the subjects were when they learned a second language, the denser their grey matter.

According to Dr. Jeannette Vos, an educational trainer, researcher, and co-author of The Learning Revolution (Network Educational Press Ltd, 2001), “Before the age of eight, eighty percent of your neurological pathways have been formed, so if you take advantage of this explosion that's going on in the brain then obviously you're going to have more brain power. The more you learn as a young child the more intelligent you will be as an adult.” She likens brain development to the branches of a tree, saying, "When a child is young, any (neurological) pathways that aren't being used will be pruned.”

The More (Languages) The Merrier
Some parents worry that learning a foreign language too early might interfere with a child's ability to master English. Not so, say the experts. "For almost all children," Rhodes explains, “(learning a second language) actually helps a child's native language skills. It helps them with vocabulary and understanding what language is in general. So there's no negative side and a lot of positives for learning their native language."

The most current study recommends that the capability to learn languages is at its peak between birth and age five. The advantages of learning languages at an early age are numerous. The following are a few of the most astonishing study reports:

- When children learn second languages at a young age, they extend a lifetime love of communicating with others.
- Children who learn a second language early in life read faster.
- Bilingual children experience enhanced communication skills. It enhances their ability in English when young children learn about the structure of other languages. These children prove superior cognitive growth.
- Children learning two or more languages have a keen awareness of other customs. The score of bilingual children are generally higher on the math and verbal sections of educational tests.
- The earlier you begin the second language learning, the more apt your child is to learn it quicker and retain it better.

If you have any questions, please feel free to speak to Audrey or Kim.

Kind regards,

From the staff at Seaford Rise Children's Centre
Kim, Audrey, Maree, Anita and Heather