

element-i

Pedagogical concept Brief version

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educational management of the element-i nurseries
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But first



Dear readers,

The birth of a child is a wonderful gift, one that comes with great responsibility. Anyone who accompanies a child through their life have conscious and subconscious expectations that guide their actions - with different goals: They want them to stay healthy and happy, to develop ambition and go their own way, to develop empathy and to stand up for others. When a child attends a nursery, the goals of the care provided should naturally match one's own.

We have an image of men and women that focuses very strongly on the individual in his or her interdependence with society. Our goal is to help children become free, mature and strong individuals who reflect on themselves and their view of the world. We want them to take responsibility for their actions and the consequences for society.

We see our nurseries as supplementary facilities that support families and provide reliable care for children. When children are placed in our care, the educators fulfill an independent objective of raising and educating the children, one that is orientated on our goals.

This brochure presents these goals and our approach. Thank you for your interest.

Waltraud Weegmann

Managing Director, Konzept-e für Bildung und Betreuung gGmbH



Dear readers,

People want to be free and make their ideas reality. They want to live a self-determined life, yet continue to strive for connectedness and recognition. This is expressed in element-i. The i stands for individuals, interests, interaction - inner freedom. Inner freedom is the human being's ability to decide how he or she sees and assesses the world and thus how he or she wishes to act within it. It is inextricably linked to assuming responsibility for the consequences of one's own actions. This is an ambitious and demanding goal. However, it establishes the right of children to early childhood education. Our educators are meant to be adult partners for the children, accompanying them along this path. These role models reflect on their actions and support the children in gradually discovering the freedom to make decisions and act accordingly. They do so by engaging with the children in a committed and interested way, by accompanying them with great sensitivity, by stimulating them to act, by challenging them appropriately, protecting them and ultimately releasing them step by step.

element-i pedagogy combines various pedagogical approaches and academic discoveries. We constantly adapt these to new challenges that arise from developments in society. The ideas of Gerd E. Schäfer, Janusz Korczak and Karl-Martin Dietz spur us on especially. Martin Buber, Immanuel Kant, Ludwig Liegle, Klaus Mollenhauer, Maria Montessori, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Rudolf Steiner and many others have inspired us. This brief version of the concept describes the framework of our pedagogical work. I hope you enjoy the read!

Carola Kammerlander

Managing Director, Konzept-e für Bildung und Betreuung gGmbH

1. Aim of element-i pedagogy

'EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION MUST RESIGN ITSELF TO THE FACT THAT THE CHILD CREATES HIM-/ OR HERSELF.'

LUDWIG LIEGLE

element-i is a pedagogical approach that promotes freedom and effects a specific educational mission. The goal is to raise children to become inwardly free, mature and strong individuals who reflect on themselves and their view of the world and take responsibility for their actions and the consequences. We see freedom not as being free from something, but in the sense of being free and open for something. Inner freedom as a personal goal in life is, however, inseparably connected with the freedom of the other. A free society lives and consists of individuals who are aware of their personal responsibility for the community and who live up to it.

element-i thus describes an image of man that focuses very strongly on the individual in his or her interdependence with society. Individuals are social beings; they need the community. A community, on the other hand, can only exist if the individual helps to shape it, stands up for it, contributes his or her interests, strengths and skills and thus contributes to the success of the whole. When 'It's all about me' becomes 'It's up to me', a new kind of individuality emerges. This is at the heart of element-i pedagogy. Guidelines serve as resources to fortify and boost the internal motivation. They offer orientation and facilitate the ability to act and make decisions in everyday situations.

We see health holistically –
in addition to physical well-being, psychological and social aspects are also important. The aim is to repeatedly restore a harmonious inner balance.

Promoting resilience – the psychological power of resistance –
of children is one of our basic preventive tasks. After all, they need this basic skill in order to cope with crises and changes in life.

Children enjoy learning from birth –
and the ability to perceive something without making a foregone conclusion remains the basis for approaching something new with an open mind throughout one's life. To discover what interests them, children need inspiration and role models.

Connectedness and autonomy
mean experiencing a sense of belonging and reliability, but at the same time being able to shape one's life in a self-determined way. Children should learn to actively show consideration for others. Their freedom ends where that of others begins. In general, reliable relationships, well-designed environments and a clearly structured, understandable and valuable daily routine is required. This needs to alternate with specific periods that can be shaped freely as well as meaningful opportunities to get involved.

2. Our understanding of child care and early education

'FOR THE COMMUNITY DOES NOT ARISE AGAINST INDIVIDUALS, BUT THROUGH THEM.'

KARL MARTIN DIETZ

Children have the right to, but also the need for early education and upbringing. They require sensitive support, prompting and appropriate challenges for their educational and development processes.

The goal of early childhood education

The individualised society can only become a free society when individuals take responsibility for themselves and for shaping society. For this to succeed, we need individuals that recognise their importance as an indispensable part of the whole. This assigns one's own individuality to the goal and purpose of the social (individuality as a social principle).

Educational actions

Our educational work is characterised by the conviction that we are adult partners for children who enter into a relationship full of commitment, interest and engagement. We are in a dialogue with the children, orienting ourselves on their world view and letting them take part in our thoughts and ideas.



Our educational work aims at the further development and flourishing of individuality in the interest of a community. We design situations with children so coherently that they become understandable, manageable and meaningful for them in a manner that is appropriate to their development. By means of numerous ways to participate and the concrete engagement with people, things and situations, an internal image of the world is formed - depending on how significant the experience is to the individual. That way, the children experience that the world is connected to them - completely in the sense of 'It's up to me'.

Our pedagogical specialists see themselves as pioneers and companions of child development. Through empathetic observation, they grasp the children's state of development, provide a stimulating environment and are empathetic, enriching interaction partners for the children.

The youngest in the element-i nursery

The smallest children discover the world exclusively through sensory impressions. Thinking corresponds to concrete action in this 'precognitive time'. We create sensual, emotional, psycho-motoric approaches for them and accompany them verbally. But continuity and an appropriate stimulus dosage are also important. Our educators observe the child's actions and reactions attentively and sensitively (above all through eye contact and reassuring words) and interpret their signals (e.g. the child turning to and away).

Group structures as a dynamic framework for child development

The children spend their familiarisation time and their early phase at our facilities in the 'nest'. This space offers them a clear, protected framework in which to orientate themselves and to come into contact with others.

They are then carefully prepared for the next step and thus also for new areas. A needs-oriented, ritualised daily routine offers security on the basis of which they can access the entire nursery under caring supervision.

Step by step, the children detach themselves from their base group in an interest-orientated way and then increasingly independently come together in dynamic small groups, which can be both homogeneous and mixed in age. This way, they can shape their relationships with all other children and educators individually and self-determinedly.

With increasing age, children begin to abstract and control their interests and needs more consciously. In the daily children's conference they are asked 'What are you going to do today?'. This gives them the opportunity to formulate their current ideas and interests, to negotiate and thus shape their daily routine independently and democratically together with other children and the educators.



3. Our understanding of education

*'A SHIP IN HARBOUR IS SAFE,
BUT THAT IS NOT WHAT SHIPS ARE BUILT FOR.'*

JOHN AUGUSTUS SHEDD

Education is a process that is self-active and is shaped by discovery, problem-solving and being open to experiences. Education requires dealing with one's environment, actions and interactions. Through sensory perception and emotions, children learn what is important to them and the sense they see in it. Our pedagogical actions enable them to individually shape their day within a generally applicable framework for development. This development-oriented view promotes human individuality in the educational process.

Playing is joyful learning

Learning and playing are one and the same for children. What they perceive is moved, reshaped and playfully redesigned inside. Children do not have to be forced to learn. If they spend their day in a stimulating environment, and if they are involved in domestic activities in the everyday life of the nursery, this stimulates their imagination and their urge to take part.

By doing things themselves, habits and skills are developed that occur so naturally that energy is released for new topics or further awareness for details, care and creativity. This fosters the children's thirst for knowledge and sustains their motivation to learn. At the element-i nurseries, children decide for themselves in various subject areas when, what, where, how and with whom they want to play. Self-managed playing promotes their social, emotional, motor and cognitive

development. They explore the environment, experiment, acquire knowledge, practice newly acquired skills, test roles, develop creativity and imagination. They learn to solve complex problems, interact with other people, manage conflicts and express and control feelings.

We provide them with free spaces in which they can play unobserved according to their age and development stage. We also provide toys that are appropriate for their age and development. We prefer to use natural materials, everyday objects and real tools.

element-i stimuli

Our offers are stimuli that are oriented towards the interests of the children and which are relevant to them. When adults trust them to do something, when they try something, sometimes fail and are allowed to find their own solutions and are supported in reflecting on the learning process, this leads to self-directed, proactive learning. Skills acquired in this way are retained long-term.

Multi-professional teams

The involvement of people with other professional qualifications, such as from the artistic, musical or craft fields, expands the children's experiential worlds. Multi-professional teams offer a creative, inspiring potential and add additional experiences, skills and perspectives to the children's everyday lives.

Media literacy

We want to make the world accessible to children in a developmentally appropriate and reflective way and enable them to use the media in a beneficial manner. In order to acquire the competencies that lead to media literacy, they need prior experiences such as sensorimotor integration, communication, production, reception, reflection and selection skills. Children need time and space to play with real materials and media that they can understand and handle. At the element-i nurseries we therefore deal exclusively with tangible suggestions, offers and stimuli.



Nature

Because most element-i nurseries are centrally located in inner cities, it is important to us that children can experience and enjoy nature. Spending time outdoors in almost any weather offers many opportunities to gain experience and further development. It fosters exercise, environmental awareness and closeness to nature - and it strengthens the immune system and the overall physical and mental health of the children.

Real world orientation and cooperation with other institutions

Our pedagogical work is based on the social and cultural reality of life. The children should explore their district, find their way on their own and be perceived as fellow citizens that participate.

We work with toddler groups, nurseries, other kindergartens, schools, eurythmists, companies and public institutions such as the police or fire brigade. Networking with technical colleges and participation in technical committees allows us to continuously optimise our educational and care work.

Topics of childhood education

The first years of life are the most learning intensive. The physical, psychological, cognitive, social and moral education and development begins here and later forms the basis for further individual development, differentiation and evolution of potential. Children must be sensibly supported in coping with their developmental tasks that have infinite facets. At the element-i nurseries we divide these into the following areas:

Exercise

Children discover the world through exercise. Through physical experiences and with all their senses, they learn to recognise and understand causes and cause-effect relationships. Exercise, movement and perception are therefore essential for the overall development and shaping of their personality. At the element-i nurseries they have space, playing material and the opportunity for diverse movement games.

Through stimulating movement, children experience moments of tension in which they have to use their bodies, begin to sweat and lose their breath. They are relieved by phases of physical relaxation. Children can only really learn whatever they try. This is not possible without little bumps and tears - they are part of it.

Language

Language and speaking are prerequisites and components of cognitive development and, as a key skill, a 'gateway to the world'.

They are needed to express thoughts and feelings and to gain insight into the thoughts and feelings of others. Language has a great influence on a child's world and self-image. We value natural multilingualism and include it - also in cooperation with the parents - in the day-to-day running of the nursery, for example by working with native speakers.

Language and the culture of writing are present in our nurseries in the form of materials for writing and scribbling, posters, books and audio media. We always pay attention to a communicative climate that makes speaking enjoyable.

In the children's conferences, the story-telling circle or during projects, the children are invited to express themselves, present facts or to plan. Fantasy trips and theatre plays encourage the creative use of language.

Symbols and pictograms encourage children from all cultures to develop language skills and to open up the world.

Body and senses

Children always experience stimuli for further development through sensory perception and physical activity. The aim is thus to stimulate all their senses and to support the children through affection and care, closeness and distance, tenderness and comfort. This is the basis for developing a positive physical awareness. Through nutrition, exercise, recreation, sleep and hygiene, children learn to pay attention to and express their needs. This also includes dealing with the development of gender identity, sexuality and the protection of one's privacy.

Aesthetics (art, creativity and music)

Children design and create individually, experimentally, creatively and playfully with all their senses. The desire to create is stirred by using different materials and tools.

Visual arts (drawing, painting, sculpting)

The children can paint, knead, do handicrafts, build or print and discover and try out a lot. We take up various themes to stimulate their imagination.

Performing arts (accessing the world through play)

By transforming objects, fantasy games and theatrical moments, transitions between child's play and performance are discovered and developed.

Music and rhythm

Voices, sounds, rhythm and melodies are often experienced and practiced by using your whole body.

Mathematics and logic

Children want to get to the bottom of things and understand the world. Mathematics in kindergarten gives children the opportunity to question phenomena, form hypotheses and thus develop a positive attitude and curiosity about mathematics. At the element-i nurseries, you can sort, count and categorise. The educational professional supports the child in his or her interest in mathematical thinking.

Research and discovery

Children are born inventors and researchers. They ponder questions and think up hypotheses according to their development in order to explain animate and inanimate nature. This is supported by the varying language skills. At element-i nurseries, a variety of materials that provoke questions are provided.



The pedagogical specialist is merely an active companion and takes a step back. For knowledge that is acquired through detours is remembered longer than explanations that are given readily.

Building and constructing

Little ones enjoy knocking over towers. Later, then, they like building them. The element-i nurseries offer a wide range of materials for this purpose. After all, when building, children intuitively learn how basic physical laws work.

The educational professional encourages the child and creates an atmosphere in which he or she can concentrate.

Being a human in the world

Children create their system of values by evaluating, classifying and generalising experiences. It is the task of pedagogical professionals to take the child's right to self-determination seriously and to support them in dealing with questions of values and meaning. At the same time, children practice dealing with personal freedom, rules and boundaries. They learn to decide what is important to them, to respect people and nature, and they experience mindfulness, tolerance and equality. According to their development, they participate in forming values and norms in their group, especially in the story-telling circles or at the children's conference. They can gain concrete experience in cultural or religious places and experience how their everyday life is formed by traditions, rituals and recurring festivals.

Social coexistence

We encourage children to contact others independently, to build up, cultivate or even end friendships. Positive experiences with regard to a constructive culture of discussion, representing one's own opinion and being allowed to say 'no' play a central role in building self-confidence and self-esteem as well as preserving one's personal and private sphere.

Children should deal with their feelings, get to know and understand each other. In this way they learn to solve conflicts independently and to make compromises. But we also familiarise them with forms of coping with aggression. They learn about rules, boundaries and consequences. As they evolve, we involve them in shaping the rules and encourage them to distinguish fair from unfair.

4. Cross-sectional topics

Appropriate forms of participation and complaint for children

We teach the children that every individual counts. In the educational work this becomes especially apparent through children's conferences, singing circles and other groups in which the positions, thoughts and wishes of the children are taken seriously. This encourages them to openly express their opinion. With increasing age, they are asked to participate in setting rules in the nurseries. Their feelings and ideas are sought. Topics are discussed and decided jointly.

In direct interaction (one-on-one situation) the feelings and thoughts of the children are reflected on and respected. A child's 'no' has the same weight for us as that of an adult.

Inclusion

All children are cared for together. We accept and value diversity. We practice and learn with the children to respect each other. Accessibility and the reduction of non-structural, linguistic, cultural, prejudicial and social barriers are important to us.

We develop and implement individual solutions for special life and care circumstances, also in cooperation with specialist services, counselling centres and medical staff. The prerequisite for this is the certainty of all those involved that the form of care is beneficial for the child and feasible for the employees.

Gender pedagogy

Girls and boys have different living conditions and lines of development in our society. We want to do them justice, offset gender-specific disadvantages and offer equal development opportunities for girls and boys. In that context, we consider and promote the different interests and life situations of all children. All children can construct their own gender roles; they do not necessarily have to be associated with role stereotypes and biological gender.

We promote a positive physical awareness and individual (emotional) expressiveness as well as the healthy self-confidence of all children. As part of the partnership in raising the children, we address both parents, consider the whole family and respect the different approaches, interests and possibilities of mothers, fathers or other caregivers.

Observation and documentation

In element-i nurseries we use a variety of observation and documentation tools, such as development milestones, passports or portfolios. They are the basis for the regular parent-educator meetings.

It is important to us to accompany the child appropriately in his or her developmental steps by offering him or her impulses that will advance his or her development. We use the element-i sheets for all educational areas and the passport, which gives an overview of the interests of the child in the educational areas. If we know his or her strengths and skills in the various educational areas, we can align his or her pedagogical environment in such a way that strengths are expanded on and fields of development are further promoted.

Understanding of care

Day-care centres for children are institutions that supplement the family and have an independent educational mission. For us, this means giving parents the greatest possible flexibility and offering the highest care quality. To this end, the parents' needs must be aligned with the needs of their child and the group. Particularly sensitive issues in this context are, for example, the length of care time, especially for young children, or their daily health condition. Requests for exceptions (also with regard to nutrition) place children in a special role. That is why educators carefully weigh whether or not to meet these.

Shared responsibility

The basis for cooperating with parents is mutual understanding, acceptance and an open exchange of thoughts. We would like them to play an active role and carry out their own initiatives. Compatibility with the daily work in the nurseries and alignment with the pedagogical concept are of decisive importance here.

Although we respect the positions of the parents, as experts, our educators make their own independent decisions in the care, raising and education of children during their work in the nurseries.

The educators regularly have individual discussions with the parents about the development of their child. Parents' evenings take place two to three times a year.

The parents elect a parents council once a year. It represents the wishes of the parents in joint meetings with representatives of the nursery's team and is an important contact partner in discussing the pedagogical work.

Familiarisation

Based on the findings of attachment research, we believe the children's acclimatisation phase is crucial and thus design it with the appropriate care. Close cooperation with the parents is essential.

The development of an attachment system can only be successful if accompanied by a familiar adult. He or she acts as a safe care-person until the child accepts a caregiver as an attachment figure with whom he or she feels safe, trusts, and who can provide support and comfort. We work according to the 'Berlin Familiarisation Model', in which the children normally need between two and four weeks to establish such a relationship. This time frame is individually adjusted in consultation with the caregiver/ educator. As a rule, parents plan to commit four weeks for this.



Attendance time

To ensure that the children experience structure, orientation and safety, the daily routine in the nurseries is firmly regulated. Phases of tension and relaxation, of doing things together and of free play alternate. Every morning and afternoon there are longer, continuous periods during which the children can meet and interact on their own.

For the development of each child, such undisturbed phases, in which they can intensively immerse themselves in a game, develop topics, pursue projects, concentrate and enjoy the atmosphere, are indispensable. If they arrive too late or have to leave early, this not only reduces the quality of the pedagogical work, but also disrupts and impairs all other children involved, because it also ends the interaction for them. This also applies to the shared meals. We therefore attach great importance to observing these quality periods (intensive phases) and insist on them. The designated drop-off and pick-up times extend over longer periods of time. Exceptions can be arranged with the educators.

Nutrition

We pay attention to a healthy, child-oriented diet and only use high-quality, in part regional and seasonal products, which are prepared on site in a balanced and nutrient-friendly way. It is important to us that the children develop a positive understanding of nutrition.

A varied buffet is available for breakfast, where the children can help themselves. Within a time frame of about two hours, they can decide for themselves what, when and with whom they want to eat. This way they learn to pay attention to their needs and to make decisions independently.

Lunch is enjoyed in groups at a fixed time. Water and tea are always available throughout the day.

Design of the rooms

Carefully designed themed rooms, such as studios, workshops, building rooms as well as exercise and rest rooms, support the children's urge to explore and their need for community and rituals. They are linked as far as possible by a central 'marketplace' and are each designed and continuously developed by a responsible employee. The 'nest' offers a homely and sheltered atmosphere for especially young children. Where possible, the utility rooms can also be viewed by the children. The facilities have direct access to the outdoor play area.

5. Structural elements to carry out the pedagogical work

Quality development

Our pedagogical specialists regularly take part in training courses specially designed for them. The goal is to qualify them and to advance current pedagogical topics. But we also feel responsible for promoting young talents. In cooperation with our Free Dual Technical School for Pedagogy, we train young professionals to become educators and pedagogical specialists. We provide measures for voluntary services as well as for the post-qualification of employees in the extended range of skilled workers.

A quality management manual is available to all employees in our nurseries. All element-i facilities are internally audited at least once a year. In addition, annual parent surveys and self-evaluations of employees take place. We use the online platform TopKita.de for this purpose. Twice a year, the results are analysed, evaluated and discussed at the management level and the necessary measures are derived and initiated.

Our specialists can fully concentrate on the educational work in the children's homes. All organisational tasks such as child admission or book-keeping the parent contributions are controlled centrally by the administration.

Working in a team

Each child is assigned a pedagogical specialist. He/she takes over the familiarisation in the group and functions as a fixed reference person until the child feels so secure and cared for that he or she can open up and entrust him-/herself to all other educators. One person remains responsible for the parents as a contact point when it comes to the development of their child in the facility. This person gathers all observations and documentation; he/she conducts a parental meeting at least once a year.

Our teams regularly receive expert advice, coaching and conceptual and organisational support from the management level and administrative departments.

In their daily work, the employees demand and are provided a great deal of space for manoeuvre in making decisions, which is connected to assuming responsibility. Team meetings take place outside business hours every week.

Staff ratio

The staff of the respective facility depends on the official staff ratio set locally and fulfils state legal requirements at all times. This is monitored by the regional youth welfare office. We adjust the number of caregivers needed everyday to the number of children present, in accordance with national law. In the event of a temporary shortage of staff, we will conscientiously monitor the situation within the framework of the concept for dealing with personnel bottlenecks. We will then do everything possible with a view to reliability and in compliance with legal requirements. To do so, we cooperate with the association 'Vielfalt in Sport und Kultur e.V.'. (VSK) and with day-care personnel.

Child protection

Within the framework of the agreements to ensure the implementation of §§ 8a, 72a of the 8. Social Code for the Welfare and Protection of Children with the relevant local youth welfare offices, there are protection concepts for all element-i nurseries. It is specified that employees

must perceive indications of health hazards, violence against children and neglect and discuss these with the parents. Appropriate assistance options are pointed out and a plan of action is jointly defined. In addition, all nurseries cooperate closely with specialist counselling centres, which they can always access if they need help in assessing the risk or require specialist advice and support in working with parents. For these cases, the Konzept-e network has its own so-called 'Insoweit erfahrene Fachkräfte (Kinderschutz)' (IsoFaK - Insofar Experienced Specialists in Child Protection) as well as a specialist pedagogical management with a focus on child protection.

In the interest of the protection of the children in our facilities, all employees must provide an extended certificate of good conduct before starting work. In addition, the 'Concept for dealing with employees in cases of suspected abuse' regulates the corresponding approach.

Opening hours

Our facilities are generally open from 06:00 to 18:00 – depending on demand, staffing and financing. During the opening hours the children are looked after either on a full or half day basis (optional lunch) or flexibly according to an individual agreement. We require attendance at least three days a week.

The closed days correspond to the municipal specifications and are during the school holidays. The facilities are also closed on certain days for training.

Daily schedule example

06:00, 07:30 or 08:00	Nursery opens
07:00 – 9:30	Free play/free breakfast/drop-off time
09:30 – 10:00	Children's conference
10:00 – 12:00	Intensive phase with activities and projects
11:50 – 12:00	Drop-off/pick-up time
12:00 – 12:30	Lunch
12:30 – 12:45	Drop-off/pick-up time
12:45 – 14:30	Relaxation phase/sleep
14:30 – 15:00	Snack
15:00 – 16:00	Pick-up time
16:00 – Closing time	Intensive phase with activities and projects
17:00, 17:30, 18:00 or 20:00	Free play, the children are picked up gradually
	Nursery closes

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element-i

Pedagogy for free and
strong children



