

Laidlaw Leadership in Action (LiA): Caring for Recently Arrived Immigrants and Neurodivergent Children in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany

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Introduction:

For my Leadership in Action project, I spent six weeks in the Casa Dei Bambini Ebnet, a Montessori kindergarten in Freiburg im Breisgau, Baden Württemberg, Germany. I worked as a teaching assistant, where I used my existing skillset as a former carer to care for kindergarteners, focusing particularly on recently arrived immigrants and special-needs neurodivergent children.



Responsibilities and Objectives:

- Aid in the learning processes of children through direct application of Montessori methods
- Recognise and attend to the needs of children, focussing particularly on those with special necessities assigned to me
- Be proactive to help other staff members with their tasks



Description of Activities:

I engaged in multiple activities with the children, from pedagogical Montessori work such as building items using material sets, matching activities using concepts and images, and creative work e.g. painting; to outdoor activities such as organised play, gardening, and even local field trips to churches and farms.

Additionally, I was responsible for caring-related tasks such as serving their lunch and helping them with other necessities on a need-to basis.



Challenges:

As a non-German speaker, I had to find alternative ways of communicating with the children. I also found it difficult at times to adapt to certain cultural differences, namely the different ways in which German parents and teachers interact with children.

Accomplishments:

My largest accomplishment was finding a way of communicating with children through pedagogical activities and play, something which I also did nearly 20 years ago when I joined an American school and did not speak English.

I am also proud of my 1 to 1 work with Jan, a neurodivergent child who I cared for who significantly improved his behaviour following a more individualised, tailored learning approach.



For more detailed descriptions and reflections, see my additional LiA outputs in the Laidlaw Scholars Network.