

# Animal-Assisted Pedagogy

*"Young people need companions – namely animals, and more generally, elemental things, such as water, dirt, bushes, space. You can let them grow up without all of that, on carpets with stuffed animals, or on paved streets and in courtyards. They survive, but one shouldn't then be surprised if they never again learn certain basic social skills."*

Alexander Mitscherlich

**Animal-assisted pedagogy (AAP)** extends the concept of the FRÖBEL kindergarten "Daumstraße".

We see animal-assisted pedagogy as a great opportunity to provide children with natural access to emotional, social, cognitive, and many other topics, and to help familiarize them with themselves and their surroundings in sensitive and mindful ways.

With a holistic AAP, we build on the children's own enriching experiences with the dog Chowa, accompanied by a responsible educationalist.

## Behavior

Children who grow up with animals have a better self-image, are more sociable and considerate, and display fewer behavioral problems. Animals promote general well-being and relaxation, helping reduce stress. Children experience the feeling of unconditional acceptance, familiarity, and security that the dog gives them, but also come to recognize that others have needs and feelings as well.

- *Dogs always behave authentically, congruously, and free of prejudice.* -

The dog's authenticity teaches children that their behavior elicits certain reactions. This sensitizes them to their own behavior. They learn to be responsible for other living beings and grow with that responsibility.

## **Senses**

Experiencing animals with their own senses: feeling, smelling, hearing and seeing all enable children to enrich their lives.

## **Motor Skills**

Walking and playing with the dog, building and trying-out obstacles, stimulate physical activity and promote gross motor skills. Fine motor skills are enhanced by putting on the leash and harness, brushing and feeding.

## **Cognition**

Children build emotional and social relationships with animals. We know that learning is emotional and often takes place in social relationships. This emotional connection to animals leads to self-motivated acquisition of knowledge.

## **Communication / Language**

Animals elicit conversation. During and after their first encounter, children begin to talk about the animal's situation, reactions, and peculiarities. The dog's appealing character encourages children to speak with the animal, other children, educators, and parents.

## **Integration**

Children often find it easier to engage with one another through their shared interest in animals. This creates a community around the dog and unites very diverse children.