

Warum unterrichten wir so?

Waldsee's Philosophy of Language and Cultural Learning

Waldsee is a learning community in which opportunities to interact in German and experience German-speaking cultures permeate life at the village. The village goal is to create a safe, positive and caring environment that motivates participants to use the German language, learn more about German-speaking cultures, better understand themselves and relate to others, and be responsible citizens in our global society.

Villagers may not become fluent in German after one, two or four weeks at Waldsee, but every villager should leave Waldsee wanting to learn more German, and more about German-speaking cultures, for years and years.

1. Waldsee creates a language and culture immersion environment in which German is used continuously by the staff so that villagers are hearing German naturally and constantly in various contexts within the village. From the moment villagers arrive active listening is encouraged as part of the natural progression of language development.

Villagers will be listening to us all the time. What will they be hearing?

What does this mean for us?

- ❖ It means German is our language of choice. We use German when cleaning the bathroom or eating a meal, when we're waiting to go into the Gasthof for lunch, walking from the Strand to Worpsswede or from the Marktplatz to the Märchenwald, or canoeing to die Grüne Welle.
- ❖ It means we use German even when villagers use English.
- ❖ It means we are given an opportunity to learn and use a variety of language immersion techniques such as speaking more slowly, simplifying our vocabulary, and contextualizing our use of German with gestures, facial expressions, visual aids and other culturally-authentic village realia. Such techniques enable us to continue communicating in German in ways that are motivational, rather than frustrating, to villagers.
- ❖ It means we want to be overheard.
- ❖ It means that all large group announcements or interactions are always conducted in German, and staff are trained in techniques that enable them to impart important information while staying in German. There is no need to revert to English for "important" announcements, or to translate such announcements once you have said it in German.
- ❖ It means we want to use language continuously with each other and with villagers so participants are exposed to natural situations, a variety of vocabulary, dialects and usages.
- ❖ It means the use of English is clearly separated from the use of German. Use of English at Waldsee is kept to a minimum and is used when necessary to meet the safety and emotional needs of the villagers.

Tips

- ☞ Use everything around you - props, draw pictures, pantomime, clock, fingers, posters, and pictures. Have props ready and handy.
- ☞ Be patient. Be stubborn. Don't give up. Villagers really can understand more than you think.
- ☞ Be imaginative. Invent (This doesn't come naturally, it takes practice).
- ☞ Think in German. Dream in German. Think of many ways to communicate the same thing in German.
- ☞ Don't make excuses to use English.
- ☞ Pretend you don't understand English or Farsi. Pretend the villager only understands Farsi or German.
- ☞ Use German villagers don't understand, but make sure they often hear something they do understand.
- ☞ Think about how children learn their first language - they listen intently and search for clues to understand the meaning and then they strive to communicate their wants and needs with individual words and short phrases.
- ☞ Repetition is important to listening comprehension - basing your conversations on the Waldsee patterns reinforces aspects of language the villagers are familiar with and have begun to use themselves.
- ☞ Think about your own experiences learning both your first language and other languages. Weren't you able to understand and read far more than you could say or write?
- ☞ Use German even for informal or "relaxing" activities.
- ☞ Yell in German. Whisper in German. Sing in the shower in German. Talk in your sleep in German.
- ☞ Reinforce the Waldsee patterns in a variety of settings throughout the entire day.

2. Situations in which villagers need to use German to complete tasks and meet personal needs are a natural part of Waldsee's daily routine
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Villagers need opportunities to practice what they know or try out what they are learning. How can you create these opportunities?

What does this mean for us?

- ❖ Examples include asking for milk or food at meals, exchanging money at the Deutsche Bank, buying Gummibärchen or Fanta at the Kiosk or Laden, asking for a paintbrush in Worpswede, or choosing teams for Fußball.
- ❖ The purpose of Fußball is not Fußball. The purpose of Basteln is not Basteln. It is German.
- ❖ The purpose of the Waldsee Laden is not to make money - it is to provide for another kind of a setting to communicate in German.
- ❖ Making a T-shirt sale is less important than helping the villager use German to choose and pay for the T-Shirt.

Tips

- ☞ Structure activities and create routines so that villagers interested in that activity must enter into a conversation with a counselor or another villager before they can do the activity. For example, there might be an equipment check-out station at an arts and crafts activity, at which the patterns are practiced. Even at the beach German can be practiced at the Kontrollbrett, where all villagers must come before they can swim.
- ☞ Role play a villager who wants to buy a T-Shirt at the Laden, but who is reluctant to use German - how can *you* create a situation in which the villager is motivated to use German?
- ☞ Encourage German by using clarification requests to villager use of English. "Wie bitte?" is part of every counselor's standard repertoire.
- ☞ Use wait time. If given a chance, villagers can often tell you what they want.
- ☞ Many times during a typical day villagers will feel unsure about themselves - either about the language they are hearing or using or about what they are supposed to be doing. Uncertainty often leads villagers to use English. Try to use German to reduce uncertainty on the part of villagers.
- ☞ Praise. Encourage. Motivate. Use humor. Catch villagers using German and celebrate their efforts.
- ☞ Respond in simplified German to "I don't understand." Help villagers learn how to ask questions - especially phrases like, Wie sagt man ...? - in German.
- ☞ Have villagers ask questions in German. Remind them that they know how to ask for information.
- ☞ Add language rules to regular game activities - a free kick for the other team as penalty for speaking English in soccer.
- ☞ The toughest issue is how to build community and get to know villagers while still feeling you have to stay in the language - how can we overcome this dilemma?

3. Villagers are motivated to use German through active participation in a variety of activities and experiences reflective of German-speaking cultures. Culture is woven into Waldsee's daily routine. Cultural information is experienced actively in evening programs and thematic presentations, and is shared through authentic experiences throughout the daily schedule. Temporal, spatial and aesthetic aspects of German-speaking cultures are reflected in many aspects of the Waldsee program.

We aren't just teaching language - we are helping villagers learn about other cultures and are working to build our community.

What does this mean for us?

- ❖ Try to make every activity culturally authentic and reflective of German speakers' practices, products and perspectives.
- ❖ Try to structure and decorate your Haus in a way as culturally authentic as possible.
- ❖ Don't just teach German as an abstraction. Give it meaning. Give it life. Make it relevant to each villager in your group.
- ❖ Brainstorm ways to integrate culture more effectively and naturally into the entire program.
- ❖ Use all five senses to teach language and culture. See in German. Hear in German. Taste, touch, and smell in German.
- ❖ Always connect the activities you lead to German culture. Don't allow yourself to just put a German gloss on activities that are really American.
- ❖ Structure your activity, your Familie, your Klassenunterricht, your Hausgespräch in a hands-on fashion.
- ❖ It takes a whole village - make use of the village environment. Waldsee is far more than simply a classroom in the woods.
- ❖ Draw on the cultural expertise of native German speakers on our staff and become familiar with the rich resources available at Waldsee in our Videothek, Bibliothek, etc.
- ❖ Make the German language and culture become real.

4. Language learning begins with phrases and vocabulary useful in daily village interactions. As villagers become familiar with these village-centered patterns, the interactions are expanded to broader contexts and more detailed discussions within and beyond the village.

*How do we not **overwhelm** the villagers? How can we immerse the villagers in German without **submerging** them in it?*

What does this mean for us?

- ❖ Become familiar with the Waldsee village curriculum.
- ❖ The village curriculum is composed of daily topical and grammatical themes revolving around question and answer formats geared to building natural language proficiency and challenging to all levels.
- ❖ The curriculum is community-based and rooted in meeting communicative needs in the daily-life of the village.
- ❖ The curriculum is flexible, integrated, and responsive to different learning styles/speeds.
- ❖ It lends itself to content-based and task-based applications and activities geared to every aspect of the day.
- ❖ It combines small group practice and review sessions with language-enriched activities for individual language or age levels, cabin groups and interest groups.
- ❖ It is open to experimentation and changing talents of staff.
- ❖ Villagers are encouraged to communicate in German using vocabulary and patterns of the language that they know.
- ❖ Language use is not grammatically sequenced.
- ❖ Language in most situations is the tool of instruction, not the object of instruction.

Tips

- ☞ Use the daily patterns and themes in every possible situation.
- ☞ Use the same words and phrases more than you want to.
- ☞ Show, give, perform an example of adapting a language use in a situation (Laden, for example) for three different villagers who differ in language level and age (distinguish between the formal Sie and the informal du).
- ☞ Discourage villagers from translating each new word. Encourage them to focus on getting the gist.

5. Errors are addressed in ways that support and encourage the villager toward more accurate language, rather than in ways that inhibit communication.

Villagers and staff both make language mistakes. How do we deal with these?

What does this mean for us?

- ❖ Model! Don't correct - converse.
- ❖ Rephrase an inaccurate statement, for instance, in response to "Ich habe an den Strand gegangen" you might say "O ja, ich bin auch zum Strand gegangen" instead of "Nein, das ist falsch. Du mußt sagen, 'Ich bin zum Strand gegangen.'"
- ❖ Don't interrupt the villager's flow of talk with multiple corrections.
- ❖ Listen to villager language for commonly made mistakes. Structure your Familie, Familienausflug, Hausgespräch, Veranstaltung or other opportunities to learn in ways that address these recurring errors.
- ❖ Be patient. Take time to elicit responses from the villager.
- ❖ Be supportive. Be dramatic.
- ❖ It is appropriate to attend to error correction and accuracy during Familienzeit and then to be forgiving during informal language time.
- ❖ Prompt the learner to rethink their own language use, e.g., "Reich mir die Salz, bitte!" "Sagt man *die* Salz?" Learners are less likely to make the same error again, if they have corrected their own language before.
- ❖ Errors are normal, natural and unavoidable part of language learning. They can show us that a learner is on the path to gaining control of the language.
- ❖ Target errors that are particularly annoying to native German speakers.
- ❖ Error correction among staff is a sensitive subject. As a rule of thumb do not correct fellow staff in front of villagers, and if possible do so in a motivational way - we are all language learners! If you want to point out common errors by staff, use the sheet posted in the staff lounge.

6. While Waldsee emphasizes listening and speaking ability, reading and writing German may accompany or support the development of listening and speaking in the two-week program, and is central to instruction in the credit program.
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Does a focus on speaking and listening preclude reading and writing?

What does this mean for us?

- ❖ The written word in the form of labels and signs is an integral part of Waldsee's cultural atmosphere. Label everything. Use these words a lot.
- ❖ Try to use authentic written materials in the village curriculum, to promote greater understanding of life in German-speaking Europe, and to broaden intercultural skills.
- ❖ Use the Internet - for projects, for information, about a particular topic of interest or to post news (in German) from Germany, America or around the world.
- ❖ Have your villagers - at any level of language ability - maintain a journal.
- ❖ Read and review texts of lengthier songs.
- ❖ Create brochures, catalogs, menus, train schedules, "wanted" posters, "how to" guides in German. Remember that written documents evolve over time and typically require multiple drafts with opportunities for self-, peer-, and teacher/counselor input.
- ❖ Start a cabin, class or village newspaper. If you are not producing the newspaper, help your villagers read it.
- ❖ Use Hausgespräch time to have your villagers label items in the cabin, write out cabin rules, daily memories, etc. Work with them to understand the Dienstliste.

