

## IN PERSON

# She Has a Green Thumb for Cultivating Young Minds

By LEN HALL  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

LAGUNA BEACH—Anneliese Schimmelpfennig is, believe it or not, a household name in South County.

Thousands of students—"too many to count"—have attended her three private schools in Laguna Beach since 1968. Nearly 400 students attend now and there is a waiting list through mid-June.

Do not expect only liberal, free-form schooling from Schimmelpfennig. She has her rules, including no television time and no calculators or computer games.

"I wish there wasn't a television. It's so destructive," said Schimmelpfennig, a German immigrant known to her students simply as "Frau Anneliese."

"Television is too passive for learning and too fast. The same with computer games. I have organized computer classes but we don't play the games."

Nor are there "time-outs," the concept of isolating children as a disciplinary measure. That only avoids the problem, she said.

"We try to teach the child to solve the conflict with the others," said Schimmelpfennig, relaxing in the dining room of her sprawling, 75-year-old hillside home on Manzanita Drive, a converted monastery. "I ask them, 'Why do you do that?' They tell me and we go from there. We talk things out, not ignore them."

Her home also serves as a campus for kindergarten through fifth grade. Children's art is tacked on walls throughout the house, which is kept cozy by wood-burning fireplaces in many of the rooms.

Schimmelpfennig started her educational empire with a single day-care center in a Laguna Beach home. Today, in addition to her Manzanita Drive school, she has two other campuses—a former elementary school in South Laguna for preschoolers ages 2-5, and a preschool for toddlers and private school up to third grade in Laguna Canyon she calls Willowbrook, housed in what used to be the Utsava Rajneesh Meditation Center. The school is known for its menagerie, which includes a llama, some peacocks and a few chickens.

The popularity of Anneliese's Schools, as they are known, is based on her straightforward philosophy of teaching self-



Left: Anneliese Schimmelpfennig; below: original drawings Anneliese created to help her students learn foreign language



### Profile: Anneliese Schimmelpfennig

Age: 57

Hometown: Tussling, Germany

Family: Husband, Paul, and two daughters

Residence: Laguna Beach

Education: Master's degrees in education and child development

First day-care center opened: 1968

**On teaching:** "Children here are encouraged to exercise self-discipline, that leads to self-direction. They learn that if they behave themselves in a civilized manner, they don't have to be controlled, and children don't like all that control."

Source: Anneliese Schimmelpfennig. Researched by LEN HALL / Los Angeles Times

discipline and a willingness to learn while nurturing a child's self-confidence, she says.

"This is my art, to develop what is good in a child and build up their confidence," said Schimmelpfennig, who still speaks with a thick accent.

"It is like a garden, a child develops slowly. . . . We don't

stress competition here. The individual's will to learn comes from within themselves. I ask them why they come to school and they answer to learn. They are their own best teachers and that's something they carry on in life."

But students "are not babied here," Schimmelpfennig said. "We teach them that if you fall

down, you get up strong."

Discipline is a common word in her vocabulary. It's a fundamental product of her German upbringing, she explained, which began when the Nazis controlled her native Tussling. Her mother helped protect a Jewish family who lived in their attic.

She still remembers the thrill when she was 6 years old of seeing the victorious American soldiers arrive in her hometown in 1945.

"It was such a relief when the Americans came. I remember them laughing and giving us bubble gum. For us in Nazi Germany, everyday was survival. We were just happy to be alive. The Americans were surprised at how disciplined we were raised. It was very, very harsh, no music or art, just math and reading."

In contrast, Anneliese's Schools are alive with music and art, in addition to daily math and reading. But reading is a skill she approaches gingerly, at least at first.

"Early reading can be harmful if the children are not ready. It frustrates them and can become a nagging thing. It can cause them

to not want to read if this is not done in a sensitive manner. We wait until they are ready, maybe by 5 or 6, not at 4 years old."

Sometimes it is best to teach young students to write before they read.

"I find it works better. They first write something, then they learn to read what they wrote. That way they are in control, it is their creation."

One of the hallmarks of Anneliese's Schools is the emphasis on foreign languages. She offers a sprinkling of five different languages—German, Japanese, Russian, French and Spanish—the first thing every morning.

"Every day we learn a different language with a native speaker. On Monday it is Russian, Tuesday it is Japanese and German, on Wednesday we have French, Thursday, Spanish and classical music education—the children learn the composers—and on Friday we have German. Languages open up communication and enlarge the mind."

No language is more fun for the children than Japanese.

"The kids love Japanese. It sounds romantic and isn't harsh. The children can pronounce it easily and it suits them, maybe because it's an old language."

Then they move on to academics, early in the day "because their mind is clear. Math has to be done every day. It gives them confidence and security. Two plus two always equals four."

Schimmelpfennig said she was destined to come to America, particularly after seeing the American soldiers as a child. She and her husband came to Laguna Beach when he landed a job on the UC Irvine staff, teaching German literature.

It was the Laguna Beach of the late 1960s, the peak of the hippie era and it offered a dramatic change from Germany.

"For me it was a nut house when I first came over here, all the flower people. They stole my sunflowers. It was very, very liberal. I had a hard time convincing them we need a little structure in learning. It doesn't work without it. Children become destructive if they are allowed to run around all day."

The parents of the 1990s more easily adapt to her rules, she said.

"The children haven't changed in all these years, but the parents have."

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