

The Kindergarten Day

by Rena Osmer

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The Kindergarten is a busy, joyful place. For those of you who have never had the opportunity to visit us, I offer the following description of a day in the life of the Kindergarten.

Free play is the first order of business after jackets and boots are shed. There are so many things to do! Most can hardly wait to get started. In the kitchen area is a family, perhaps, cooking and playing house. Nearby three other children may be moving tables and chairs to make a fort, or is it a spaceship they are creating? In another corner a persistent “princess” is using paper, scissors, and glue to make herself a crown. Near the season garden, a puppet show is being enacted upon a stage of colored cloth. Wandering through it all are hungry “kittens” who mew from one location to the next until they are tended by mothers, pirates, spacemen, and princesses, each in turn.

The Kindergarten teacher is there in the center of it all. Like the mother of a big household, she is cooking, baking, washing, ironing, mending, sawing, sanding, polishing--and caring for the children. Some of those children are inspired by her activity and want to “do it too,” so there may also be a crowd gathered to work. Vegetables are chopped, paint cloths are washed or new toys are crafted with the saw at the workbench. An atmosphere of purposeful, happy occupation pervades the room. It is peaceful, it is industrious, and probably someone is singing.

Then, the teacher completes her work of the day. The saw is returned back to the cupboard; the sawdust is swept from the floor; the table is set for snack time: clean-up time has arrived! Moving men, maids, or mothers now tuck the dolls into beds, fold the cloths, and move all the heavy furniture back to its rightful place. In the end the room looks the same as it did when the children arrived two hours ago (well, almost).

It’s time to use the bathrooms, wash hands, and board the train for “circle” on the big rug. Then songs are sung, dances are done, hopping, and skipping, galloping, and jumping, all to the theme of the season of the year. Sometimes the group imitates the farmer who knows how oats, peas, beans, and barley grow. Sometimes it changes into gnomes, gathering up seeds to bring to the arms of Mother Earth before the freeze. Sometimes woodcutters emerge with footsteps firm and bold, chopping wood for the winters cold. But eventually this circle adventure, too, comes to a close and a hungry bunch gathers around the table for snack. Delicious, nutritious, warm snack awaits! Organic vegetables or homemade buns that busy hands have helped prepare, are passed around for all. The food is blessed and heartily eaten. Conversation springs up, about new puppies at home, or what was done at Grandma’s, or what might be played outside. Places are cleared; the time is ripe to go outside.

With shoes changed, coats zipped, hats on heads, the children burst through the back door to the wonderful world outside. There are shovels for digging in the sand pile, and rakes for gathering the crispy leaves. There is a great fallen tree for climbing and dangling, and a wealth of acorns, and beechnuts, and pine cones. For an hour or so, the children run and work, laugh and play.

At the close of the day the class returns to its cozy room. The ending is quiet. The bird in the cuckoo clock sings his song, a candle is lit, the children settle down, and the teacher tells a fairy tale. With words, with puppets, or with gesture and movement, the story unfolds. The children listen closely until “happily ever after”. The candle is snuffed, it’s 12:00 and time to go home.

And so you have the story of a typical morning. What may not be apparent within this description are the weekly activities of baking, beeswax, watercolor, and eurhythm that are woven into the course of the morning depending on whether it is Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday. What is also not mentioned are the “Outward Bound” field trips we take when weather permits to pick blueberries, or apples, or to visit pond, forest, mountains, and farm. Then there are the seasonal highlights, our festival celebrations, and birthdays, too, for each child.

Finally, there is the real work that is going on behind the scenes. The children are finding their way into the world through physical skills that are stretched and exercised daily, and through language skills that are developed with verse and song, speech, and conversation. They are learning new social and emotional skills with each new encounter with another. Childhood qualities, all too quickly lost in the rapid growth toward adulthood, are treasured here. We encourage the children’s sense of wonder, we work to develop creative imaginations, and we cultivate enthusiasm for moving and doing and taking initiative. At the same time, we work in a family-like group and we learn that everything we do eventually affects the other. Give and take, confidence, trust, and gratitude are all important.

It is a very rich and full life in the Kindergarten, and a busy, joyful place to be.

*In sun and moon and star and stone,
I feel the power of light.
With beast and bird and flower so gay,
I greet the brand new day.*