

An Afternoon Program at Pine Hill

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Considering that the children have been in Kindergarten since 8:00 a.m., my approach to the afternoon program is a sane, quiet, restful one. I come at noon to set the table for lunch. The children come in one by one with their inside shoes on, lunch bag in hand and sit down to unwrap their lunch, eager to share their surprises from home. Our group consists of eight to ten children, ages five to seven.

We wash hands as soon as most of the lunches are unpacked, and as I dry their hands, I can get the feeling of how tired or spunky each individual is. When all is quiet, the candles are lit, and we say our verse (in German). We start to eat for a short moment in silence. To guide a table conversation, I will bring an observation or experience in nature from my trip to school. Or I might tell an anecdote from my childhood, which usually leads into lots of stories (that are told uninterrupted!) Everyone loves to share. There are times when I feel (Mondays, for example) that I have a knot in my stomach. But then there are those moments of delightful conversation and wonderful tales, and I wish the children's parents could be part of the conversation and experience the moment with us. I try to remember some of these tidbits, but too often, unfortunately, I forget to make notes.

When half of the group is finished (all leftovers go back home so the parents know how much and what has been eaten), two children blow out the candles. Everyone who is finished eating may bring their dishes to the sink, and the lunch bag goes back to the cubby. The slower children can take their time, while the others bring their bundle of mattress covered with a sheet, pillow and blanket and build their "nest" with a "roof". I find that giving them a little privacy like this is more rest-inducing. We take three chairs for each child and place them at the head end. A cloth is draped over these, and a little extra gauze or silk. A sheepskin and a hot water bottle on cold days makes it even more cozy. Until everyone's bed is made and the eating area is cleaned up, the children may help with the set-up or spray the flowers, look at a book, play with a few toys, put their kitties or dolls to bed, or go to the bathroom. A certain song sung while drawing the curtains shut is the signal to get ready for rest at 1:15. A doll or a kitty may cuddle up with anyone who wants to.

While singing lullabies, I rub their backs with a little Rosemary oil. Most of them love it, but some still do not want to be touched. They might want their hands to have a drop, though. All of the children lie facing against the light, toward me and cannot see each other, waiting for a quiet story to come. These stories are again restful, sleep-inducing, a continuous kind of story about nature or the Tomten - a "nesting" bedtime story, tailored to the social needs and the seasons.

While singing lullabies - perhaps in a different language - I knit, embroider, or do something quiet. Some of the children fall asleep. After a half hour of rest, I get up and prepare the tea, open the curtain and then tap each of them lightly to get up. Everything is put away, and we have tea, preferably with a guest like a mother or anyone who wants to join us.

During tea time we might play a guessing game. At 2:15 we get ready to go outside. Sleds, snow shovels, rakes, balls or jump ropes keep us warm outside during the cold season. But when the peepers start peeping we are very busy in the swamp and at the brook building bridges and jumping from island to island. Sometimes a mother comes early and accompanies us on our expedition.

Pickup is at 2:45, and a short exchange of impressions with the parents brings the afternoon Kindergarten program to a close.