

The Day Dusty Gnome Took a Nap

It started out as an ordinary Wednesday in Lilac Kindergarten with the children engaging wholeheartedly in their play. They began by deciding what game and which roles they would play. Usually, that's when a dividing line is drawn (with some negotiation and often teacher intervention) between the boys' and the girls' territory. On this day, when the conversations ended, I observed the children began playing as a group; they bridged the gender gap. There were animals and caretakers in the game; some animals were boisterous and others quiet, but the children were all playing together. Then, when the sewing baskets were set out on the table and the stitching song was in the air, they sat down and got to work.

After they had used up all their thread and put their baskets on the shelf, a few children got up from the table and started to clean up. Others followed while I was still working with some tangled thread. Then a child announced that they were giving "Dusty Gnome" a break. He's

the one who comes down out of his basket above the Nature Table to lead the children in their room-tidying chores. He basically sings a song and delegates who cleans where. I wondered how it would work without any guidance during this time, but I continued untangling the thread, and, when I peeked up, it was quite a marvel to behold.

The children split up into small groups to put away the blocks, dress-up clothes and silks. They carried the play stands and boat back to their places, put the dolls in their beds and set our snack table with placemats, napkins, cups and spoons. They sprayed the plants with water, swept the floor and returned the saws and hammers to their place at the woodwork table. With my untangling done, I put my basket away and then brought Dusty Gnome down to thank the children before he returned to his basket to finish his nap. I am sure that Dusty Gnome will always remember that day and the kindness of the children.