

# A Rolling Pin's Journey Home

— Anke Scheinfeld

The daily joy of purposeful work in our early childhood classrooms is revealed in the eager bright eyes of our children as they enthusiastically engage in “real work.” It is most satisfying for child and teacher to work together, keeping rooms neat and clean, repairing broken toys and classroom items, preparing shared meals, setting and cleaning tables. We create our own world, our own “gardens” and “kingdoms.” Together we take responsibility and feel deep satisfaction and pride for work well done.

How can we make our work together ever more enriching, so that it envelops and nourishes our children beyond the classroom? This question becomes even more paramount in an urban environment where life for all can easily become disconnected. I would like to share a simple woodwork project that naturally flourished, weaving its way lovingly from the classroom into the home, enriching both.

During an exchange of ideas on the subject of “real work” in the classroom, a colleague suggested making rolling pins from poplar dowels. Woodwork is a treasured activity in our mixed-age kindergarten. We enjoy using our strength and skill to saw thick branches gathered from Central Park. We next each sand a segment of wood until it is so smooth that delicate year rings are magically revealed. Creating something out of wood that could be used in the kitchen was an exciting prospect.

Work began in autumn. We obtained several five-foot-long and 1.5-inch-thick poplar dowels. Their arrival in class was met with much curiosity. We sawed them into ten-inch segments. As we usually work with wood gathered in the park, the long, evenly-shaped poplar dowels evinced a very different mood. The older boys were soon sharing knowledge of the major construction projects they pass daily in their Manhattan neighborhoods. The fledgling architects and engineers began in earnest to build tall apartment buildings using play stands, planks, large blocks, chairs and tables.

We then began the will-shaping, physically chal-

lenging work of sanding the dowels. The children were familiar with the process from prior woodwork. As we used first rough and then fine sandpaper, the pieces gradually became smooth. Sanding the ends of the dowels was especially satisfying. Working with vigor, the children held the dowel in one hand, keeping the sanding paper in place on the table with the other. Then we worked with fine sandpaper, rounding edges and smoothing the long sides of the rolling pin. These tasks required a summoning of strength, will and perseverance. The children would often approach the

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teacher while rubbing their piece of wood against a rosy cheek, inquiring “Is it smooth enough?” The answer of “Just a little more” was met with further effort to make it smooth all around.

During the entire process the children were unaware of the purpose of their evolving creation. This engaged their imaginations as many answers bubbled to the surface: a block, tree, trunk, sword. . . As Advent had arrived, it was time to bake our ritual cookies. On this special day we rolled the cookie dough not only using the big old rolling pin but also our new little ones. A moment of joyous revelation: We had made our very own rolling pins!

How could this wonderful moment be best shared with our parents and imprinted in the loving memories of our children? How could the rolling pins journey home and find their place in the kitchens and daily lives of our families? Could they avoid the toy cradle and gathering dust?

The theme of practical work in the kindergarten and at home is so important for the development of the young child and a healthy home environment. One of our central responsibilities is to help parents experi-

ence and understand the significance of what we do in our early childhood classrooms. Our success rests on the fulfillment of this responsibility. With this in mind I decided to devote an upcoming parent evening to our newly forged rolling pins. We began our parent evening by baking together in the same way we bake with our children in the morning. Measuring ingredients, kneading and then rolling dough with their child's own rolling pin, cutting out cookies of different shapes, and finally baking them created a warm, home-like atmosphere. Wonderful conversations arose, often centering on childhood memories recalled by a room filled with the sweet smell of home baked treats. During the following study and discussion these initial threads were taken up and woven into an enriched tapestry.

When the children took their rolling pin and a little metal star cookie cutter home the next day, they took

with them the joy of our work in the kindergarten and the happy anticipation of using their very own rolling pin at home. The parents were well prepared, and many homes were filled with the delightful smell of cookies baking in the oven and the nurturing warmth arising from families lovingly engaging in practical work on a cold winter afternoon. ♦

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*Teatime in a Russian kindergarten. Photo courtesy of Mary Lee Plumb-Mentjes (see report on page 27).*