

Clean-Up Time: Chaos or Co-operation?

• Barbara Klocek

When I began teaching I dreaded clean-up time with my mixed-age kindergarten class of twenty-four children. It was definitely a time of chaos as I tried to pretend it was a smooth continuation of play. I had the sense I was trying to impose my ideas on top of the children's play, with very limited success. I was giving out directions on the fly to whoever was close by and then moving on to another area and trying to direct the flow towards cleaning up. When I had an experienced teacher come to evaluate me, I was given some direction. She sensed the chaos at this time, and suggested bringing them out of play and then starting to clean up. I was very open to trying this.

I had a few small house elves languishing in a box and brought them out in a basket that sat on a shelf with our candle. I made up a song to bring the children together.

D' B A G A, D' B A G A
With a voice so tiny, and with eyes so shiny,

B A B A B A B A, G A B
Our house elf says, "Let's clean our house." Can I help?

So began a new way of doing clean-up. I have been doing this now for quite a while and it has evolved into one of the nicest times of the day. It has opened a time for pedagogical stories as well as a rhythmic practicing of tasks by the children.

At 9:30, after circle time and free play time, I have cleared the tables. Then I sing out, "Older children may come." This means that they leave their play and come to set the table, count and push in the chairs. Then we gather big sheets, marbles, etc. and sing the song, "With a voice so tiny (see above)." The children have learned that means to come and hear a story from the house elves. They sit around the teacher's chairs and listen as elves tell about what adventures they had when the children were gone. Sometimes they go out the magic door and play with the water

fairies if it is raining, or go and play with the owls. This is a great opportunity to bring in seasonal pictures or an image about being kind or co-operative.

Then the children hear what their jobs are. They have the same job for three weeks. Many tasks require two people so this is an opportunity I have to pair up children for social or organizational interaction. I also have the time to teach them how to do a task. The chores include pouring water from a pitcher (by an older child) and the cup placed in front of each chair by a younger child. The older child then goes around with a towel to clean up spills and the younger child puts a napkin beside or under the cup. What wonderful opportunities to learn to work together! Other tasks are putting the blocks away, ordering the puppets, rolling up the scarves, ordering the sandbox and sweeping the cubbies. After about four days I sing, "If you know your job, you may go to it!" Most of them remember easily and I help those who are not sure.

As the room begins to come into order, they come and ask what else they can do. I will send them to help their friends if there is something that needs more helping hands. The younger ones soon are sent off to wash their hands and lie down on the red rug for a bit of a rest. The older ones love to be "scouts" and go around and find something that is not in place. I soon join those on the rug and sing, "I'm looking to see, who's quiet as can be." They know that if they are quiet and still they may have a turn playing the kinderharp. My colleague is helping the last children settle down and then I sing a lullaby for them. The clean-up time has gone smoothly into a rest time and we all take a long breath and rest for a quiet moment before snack.

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