

What Did You Do in School Today?

A Translation for Parents

"I played. I made a doggie out of clay. I strung beads on a string. I did a finger-puppet thing."

Using the small muscles of the fingers and hand in a variety of purposeful activities fosters the dexterity necessary for good handwriting control. Today your kindergartener may have also practiced printing alphabet letters or numbers on paper. You are less likely to hear about this activity.

"I played. I made a picture of a truck. I played duck, duck, goose. I got to use the wagon and I built a castle in the blocks."

The control of the large muscles of the shoulders, arms and legs help improve general bodily co-ordination. This co-ordination is necessary to further development of spatial awareness, organizational and patterning skills required for math, reading and appropriate social skills.

"I played house and baked a cake. Teacher wrote a story about our walk. We sang a new song today. I'll teach it to you."

Language development is the foundation for competent and creative reading and writing skills. A strong language storehouse is built in the brain through direct experience translated by the teacher orally and visually. The more language patterns available to the child *prior* to formal reading instruction, the better reader that child will be.

"I played in the blocks. Billy made a garage, but it was too big so I made a ramp. Suzie made a sign to show IN and OUT. We got to drive cars and park 'em in our garage."

Blocks in kindergarten and the primary grades are used to teach mathematical concepts and social skills. A garage and its ramp yield understanding of proportion. A simple question from the teacher can teach fractions $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{1}{4}$. Children measure, count and compute real problems from their block structures, often doing it co-operatively, just as they do their constructions.

"I played in the sand table. There were beans in it! My cup had more beans cause it was higher, but Mary said she had more cause hers was fatter."

What goes on at a sand table in kindergarten is much different than in nursery school. A variety of measuring devices yields comparisons and active thinking about size, volume, equalities. Fractions are again available to the teacher in a highly concrete form. Social learning and co-operative working continue to be enhanced.

"We cooked. We made dough and shaped it out. It was fun."

Today, the children made the letters of their names in playdough with cookie cutters. The teacher will take them home and bake them tonight. Soon they will be made into beautiful signboards that some day will come home as presents. Until then, the children can copy the letters onto paper, practicing letter formation over and over in a natural way.

"I just played and did nothin."

Some days are like that. Not every moment of every school day is memorable or productive. However, there may be more behind this common statement than meets the ear. It may have been one of the best learning days of all, so filled with different activities and events they are too many to recount right away. Be patient, don't probe and insist on a blow-by-blow account of each day. You're liable to learn more if you wait.

"I did my work. I did papers. Here."

Do expect some papers home in kindergarten and the primary grades. Paintings, writings and math work belong on the front of your refrigerator. But be alert if your child brings home only purple dittos with happy faces and talks only about his work. Seat work in workbooks and dittos may not be all that's being done, but it would be good to find out how much. A healthy balance between experience and reinforcement is the goal of a good elementary teacher.

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