
Sensory Opportunities through Baking and Cooking

— Marcia Marquis

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On the first day of school the Apple Blossom kindergartners bring a vegetable from home to add to our vegetable barley soup. This links their home life with their school life. It is a gesture of generosity and giving. The combination of all the vegetables together creating a warm and nourishing soup represents the Apple Blossom community. The children chop and dice and peel with small cutting boards and appropriate knives and peelers. There is much pleasure and laughter while we do this work, and yet there is a purposeful seriousness about the task at hand. It is real work being done. The next day, after the candle is lit and the blessing is said, the warm soup is ladled into wooden bowls and passed to each child and teacher. How warming and nourishing it is! The knowledge that we have all worked together to create such a meal rises in the steam of the broth and envelops us.

In the fall and spring, fresh market cream is churned into butter outside while the children grind the rye and millet into flour for the bread dough that they will make the next day. In the kindergarten a “master baker,” chosen from amongst the children, washes hands thoroughly and places her hands in the bowl. Over the hands is poured the warmed yeast (with oil, water, and a touch of honey). Then the soft flour is introduced and a bit of millet. The master baker mixes and squeezes and pinches the dough by hand. Then, when it can be formed into a ball, she divides it for the other children to knead. The master baker rubs hands together with flour to get clean.

It is hard to imagine that I was once doing all the work of the master baker myself, with a spoon, until a fellow colleague in another Waldorf school shared her bread day activity with me. I realized that I had overlooked the wonderful sensory opportunities in these activities. The children each get one “tidge” (pinch) of dough to eat when they are finished. The next day they devour the delicious bread with lots of butter and a bit of honey. Warm mint tea is a perfect accompaniment.

We cut apples outside before making apple crisp. Inside, one master baker mixes apples, cinnamon and maple syrup with bare hands, while the other one mixes oats, butter and honey in the same fashion. What delicious ooey-gooeyness! There are so many textures to feel and so many smells. The next day there is warm apple crisp to eat with chamomile tea.

Children are more open and have fewer defenses and disturbances when the senses are enlivened and supported. They have fewer anxieties and are less fearful, are more capable of giving and receiving love, and are more open to expressing gratitude for the daily gifts they are given.

There are so many wonderful opportunities to support the essential need for healthy sensory stimulation in the process of cooking and baking. The sense of smell, touch and taste are enhanced, as well as the sense of life—with baking there is rhythm and warmth. There is the rhythm of a spoon stirring round and round in a bowl, the warmth of the oven baking fresh bread. There is the gift of healthy food and attention given by the mother, father and teacher. Cooking is indeed a treasure to share. ♦

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