
The Tiniest Seed

— Cindy Faught Sudan

Offering opportunities to young children to nurture their sensory development and cultivate the formative senses is probably the most important part of our work as caretakers of young children. It is even more critical in today's world, which is saturated with screens and where adults are increasingly fearful of allowing children the freedom to explore the world.

A walk in the forest, around a pond or even through the neighborhood park can rejuvenate, invigorate and enliven our senses and give us a feeling of being “full of life.” Feeling the breeze on our skin, smelling the sweet or pungent foliage, and hearing the sounds of the birds or insects have a way of stimulating our own senses that can bring levity, calmness, centeredness, and a sense of well-being.

In my efforts to integrate sensory opportunities into my Waldorf mixed-age early childhood classes, I try to be ever mindful and awake for possibilities that can be presented to the young children in a natural way. We are fortunate to be located on a rural campus with thirty-eight acres of school property and additional surrounding land for plenty of uninhibited natural movement and discovery on our daily walks and during our outside play time.

A few years ago, the early childhood parents created a garden with the children. The “Vegetable Soup Garden” has presented many opportunities for natural and healthy experiences as the seasons pass. We have been happy to embrace them. Watching the young children exert themselves with gusto, busying themselves with digging, filling baskets, hauling compost in the wheelbarrows while keeping them balanced, and then seeing the delight of their accomplishment of emptying the filled wheelbarrows into the garden has filled many watching adults not only with joy, but with the satisfaction that the children are fully engaged in developmentally appropriate activity. There is a communal sense of pride in knowing that the experience is a vital component of a healthy development.



Photos courtesy of Cindy Faught Sudan

*Willst du dich selber erkennen,
Blicke in der Welt nach allen Seiten.*

*Willst du die Welt erkennen,
Schau in alle deinen
eigenen Tiefen.*

*To find and know yourself,
Look all around you in the world.*

*To find and know the world,
Look into all the depths
within yourself.*

- Rudolf Steiner



Tending a garden requires large and small motor activity, both of which stimulate development through natural, fun experiences. The children can be found spreading and mixing compost, sowing the tiniest of seeds, weeding, and harvesting, all of which are superlative skills for developing healthy bodies and nurturing the senses.

A portion of the school property contains fields with native plants and weeds such as wild amaranth (also known as “pigweed”) and yellow dock. One spring, some amaranth reseeded itself into our garden. We left it there to grow. We watched and waited as the amaranth grew taller with the dark red, bulbous cluster getting larger at the top of the stalk. In the fall, we tested a few for ripeness and when the seeds easily fell from the cluster, the children could hardly wait to have their turn to shake the tiniest black seeds from the plant and watch them fall into our white bin. We then separated the amaranth seeds from the bits of the red fern-like seed head. Though the yield was not much, when all was accomplished, we washed and soaked the dark shiny seeds, added them to our oats for a special treat, and enjoyed them at snack time. Amaranth seeds are considered a complete protein, similar to quinoa.

One morning in the spring we were blessed with rain. Wearing our rain gear, we headed out for our morning walk with buckets in hand and traveled the gravel service road. As we headed down the road, there were squeals of delight as the children

ran back and forth across the road, quickly running from one wiggly, squirmy worm to another, picking them up and collecting them in their buckets. They probably collected over three hundred worms that day, which we happily delivered to our vegetable and flower gardens.

Harvesting garlic is especially popular with the children since the bulbs are not visible like many other vegetables. By turning over the earth, the children expose the bulbs, and they also delight in sifting through and finding the garlic bulbs, sorting some smaller ones to replant in the fall, and saving the others for Vegetable Soup Day.

There are endless possibilities to find sensory experiences for children, especially in nature, and being awake to these opportunities is a good practice for all of us. In the changes that present themselves throughout the cycle of the year, we have immense opportunities to share in nature’s beauty and bounty. Natural experiences provide us with moments in which we can both assist and guide children to live in a healthy way in a world filled with wonder and imagination.

In a 1923 lecture series published as *Harmony of the Creative Word*, Rudolf Steiner helps us understand the connection between the human being and nature. He says, “Yes, any walk in the world outside is in reality a true education in all questions of nutrition, of healing, of the spiritual; for in the world of nature illness is continually being induced and is continually being cured” (Steiner, Part Four, “The Secrets of the Human Organism”). Taking time to really observe what is happening all around us in nature will help us not only in our path as adult human beings, but also in our work with young children. ♦

Cindy Sudan has taught mixed-age kindergarten classes at the Kauai Waldorf School in Hawaii and Shepherd Valley Waldorf School/Boulder Valley Waldorf School in Colorado for over twenty-five years. Boulder Valley Waldorf School, PreK-8th Grade, is located in Boulder County, Colorado and has been in existence since 1993.

Resources:

- Steiner, Rudolf, Matthew Barton, trans., *Harmony of the Creative Word* (Great Barrington: Steiner Books, 2002)