

Nourishing the Sense of Taste

— Laurie Clark

‘To have good taste’ is a metaphor that describes a human capacity that can be applied to all areas of life—artistic, philosophical, and practical. It is important that children learn to taste well. Children who have learned to taste nutrients well may also in other situations have a sense for the quality of a situation, because they learned to perceive the ‘inner side’ of things.

—Edmond Schoorel, *The First Seven Years*

When the children come into my classroom in the morning, beautiful teapots filled with fruit tea mixed with a little honey are set upon the table. To welcome the children with warmth and sweetness, I open the “tea shop” and am ready for business upon their arrival. “What kind of tea is this, Mrs. Clark?” I am often asked. In response I ask the child what kind of fruit it tastes like. The child often recognizes the taste after several sips and exclaims the name of the fruit with great enthusiasm for all to hear.

Snack time can be of great pedagogical importance. For the young child, to really experience the sense of taste is a kind of preparation for important abilities to develop later. To “have good taste” as an adult means to have fine-tuned judgments in determining the qualities of life. We even use certain “taste terms” as descriptors of people or situations, such as “What a sweet child!” or “She had a sour expression on her face, or “That was a bitter experience.” Through the language that we use, we begin to understand that the sense of taste has a deep relationship to the feeling life of the human being.

Taking substances from the earth into our body is an intimate and formative experience. As teachers of young children, we have many opportunities to open up possibilities in the realm of taste for the children in our care. By offering them varied tastes in the foods we serve in the classroom, we are giving them a way to practice expanding their boundaries around food and refining their relationship to the world around them. There are many children in our times that have difficulty with various food textures, having to do with the

sense of touch in their mouth, and have limited their diet to very few foods. Also, there are numerous food allergies and sensitivities to contend with that require our attention in planning our menus. Giving tiny “ant” portions on tiny doll-sized plates to the “texture sensitive” and “food limited” children as encouragement sometimes works.

To entice the children into tasting vegetables on soup day can be a real adventure! The children cut the vegetables to help prepare the soup in teeny, tiny pieces. I add delicious soup cubes and butter to the soup as well as many noodles, putting some of the soup in a separate pan for the dairy-sensitive children. This way, the “noodle children” feel somewhat “at home” eating the soup and are often willing to try it. I use various noodle shapes, often related to various festivals, such as stars for Michaelmas, hearts for Valentines Day and bunnies for Easter. I use the image of “diving” into the soup with our lovely oriental spoons to see what noodle shape awaits us. It can be very exciting! Finding ways to entice the children to bring the earthly gifts of food into the body is a way of enhancing the sense of life, helping them to feel that what the world has to offer is good. It is worth the effort that the teacher gives to this essential part of life.

Offering a full protein each day for snack allows the child to stabilize the blood sugar, which gives mood stability as well. When we only give a carbohydrate, only grain, it is like filling a bathtub up with water but forgetting to put the plug in the drain. Energy flows out quickly, especially if the child has had little or nothing for breakfast. Cheese cut into small sticks that fit into the child’s hand easily is one idea if dairy allergies are not present. Seeds and nuts also add protein, as does whole-milk yogurt with oatmeal. Providing the allergic and food-sensitive children with alternate protein foods is essential. Even the birthday cake can be improved with the addition of almond flour for protein.

To make the food flavorful and give it a beautiful presentation is an art that can develop the children’s experience of taste. Serving the food with reverence,

saying a verse that offers gratitude, and using beautiful plates with proper child-sized utensils opens the way to a successful snack. Practicing using forks and butter knives to cut pancakes is a wonderful opportunity to develop fine motor skills with the hands.

The sense of smell is interwoven with the sense of taste. When I make pancakes for the children, there are many teachers who come in as the smell permeates the hallway. I always make extra pancakes for the hungry visitors who are pulled into the classroom through the enticing aroma. The children also smell the pancakes cooking and come into the room excited for the delicious pancake day.

Taste and smell are also connected to memory. In the fall we pick the raspberries and make many jars of jam. When we eat it on our pancakes there is often a remark from a child about the day we spent picking (and eating) the raspberries that now are on top of our pancakes making them extra delicious. The food that is served at festivals often holds the heart of the memory of the celebration, and when that particular food is eaten a remembering of the event is stirred.

The following circle about the activity of the honeybees was my first attempt to bring the sense of taste into our movement activities. The honey-bear hides in

a basket covered with a silk cloth, and at the very end of the circle the work of the bees with the flowers culminates in a taste experience when a drop of honey is given to each child. A little honey in the tea and a taste of it after creating the life of the honeybee is a lovely experience for the children.

If any children come in sad, I sometimes offer a drop of honey on their finger so that they can have a “sweet” day. This almost always is a cure for the situation and brings a smile.

Rudolf Steiner advises not to give honey to babies, but says this about consuming honey in the prelude to his lectures on bees, given on February 3, 1923:

At the moment when you eat honey, it creates the proper connection and relationship between the airy and fluid elements in the human being. There is nothing better for a human being than to add a little honey in the right quantity to food (Bees, Anthroposophic Press, 1998, p. 3).

The process of rethinking nutrition and the food we serve the children requires innovation and creativity of the teacher. To bring joy and surprise to the taste buds is a wonderful way to invite the life of the child to integrate in a healthy way within the world. ◆