Sowing the seeds of mindfulness
Emily Vera & Kate Dawson

It was a warm, spring day with a glimpse of sunshine streaming through the trees when we stopped along the pathway to look at the dandelions.

Ludwig, one of our preschoolers: “I want to pick one. They are beautiful.”

Brianna, turning to face Ludwig: “But only one, ‘cause we want to leave one for the bees.”

Ludwig: “Brianna, you too, only one.”

Brianna, blowing on the dandelion head: “I am planting more dandelions with the seeds. There are a hundred bees and only a few flowers. We need to take the tops off, take the seeds out and that grows more.”

The simple act of picking a single flower has sparked many conversations, theories and opinions amongst our students and our staff team. The picking itself is not particularly consequential, but it has forced us to reflect more deeply on our values and beliefs about children, childhood, and our role as educators.

Recipe for Dandelion Tea
Harvest some lush dandelions, play with the stems in the mud kitchen, and use the leaves in a salad, keeping just the flower heads for the tea. Wash the flowerheads very well and then steep in boiling water. Remove and compost the flowerheads. Add honey to taste. Chill in the fridge for 3-4 hours and serve over ice cubes.
Admonishing the children not to pick, or creating rules about ‘how often’ or ‘how many’ dandelions/apples/acorns to pick is an oversimplification that serves no one. Indeed, it seems only to encourage sneakiness amongst the children, and crankiness amongst the adults! We want the children to have the freedoms of childhood: to fall in love with the natural landscape as they explore sensorially, playfully, and with unencumbered joy. Seed heads, petals, and leaves are the loose parts of rich dramatic play and creativity, so the making of dandelion crowns, daisy bracelets and long grass swords is always encouraged!

If, however, a child yanks on a plant, pulling it out roots and all, we feel frustrated that their actions are needlessly violent. When a flower is picked, but discarded on the pathway just seconds later, we feel dismay at how quickly the child’s interest, and the flower, are abandoned, and at the apparent apathy for a life so quickly ended. We wonder if such acts, allowed to pass without notice or consequence, might contribute in adulthood to a worldview of oneself as a consumer, living all too comfortably in a disposable world?

While the lens of developmentalism offers some insight into children’s impulsivity and egocentric perspective, we think there is a bolder place in our role as educators for the teaching of reverence.

Teaching reverence is in keeping not only with our strong Image of the Child, but with our understanding of Indigenous Ways of Knowing (or Indigenous Knowledge frameworks), that are integral to our place-conscious practice (Greenwood, p.93). An Indigenous worldview sees all creatures living equally as part of a whole, with humans no more important than any other being. All creatures are revered for their gifts. Acting with humility, and offering our thanks, are ways that we can show respect for the more-than-human. In our school life together, we sing a short song before enjoying any harvested foods:

“Oh, the Earth is good to me, and so I thank the Earth, for giving me, the things I need, the Sun and the Rain and the Apple Seed, the Earth is good to me.”

(Based on the work of Paul Smith & Walter Kent, 1948)

Enjoy your landscape, but tread lightly and pick mindfully – even the weeds! Take time to address moments of apparent indifference, by teaching children to harvest in a respectful way that considers the needs of the more-than-human. Together, revere the dandelion, offer thanks for its gifts and its place in this bountiful world.

References


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