

The Nature Effect

*Personal, professional &
community development
connecting people to
their earth*

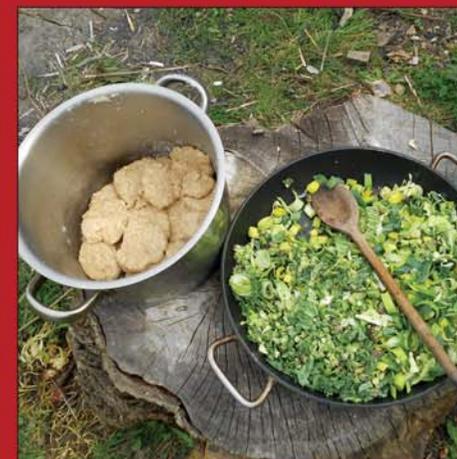


Schools Projects: Bread, Butter and Soup

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Bread, Butter & Soup

A project for schools

Within an hour of the children arriving, **Barracks Lane Community Garden** was a hive of activity. 27 Year 3 children were milling flour, mixing and kneading bread, churning butter, splitting wood, chopping vegetables and soon the soup was bubbling on the open fire. Alongside, bread rolls were rising and creamy yellow butter coalescing in preparation for a 'We made it ourselves!' lunch.

The Bread Butter and Soup project was conceived to enable local schoolchildren to learn about where everyday food items actually come from – no packaging, no shops, freezers or microwaves: this was about preparing food from ingredients, using human energy and reflecting on the energy that had gone into the production of the ingredients themselves. Thanks to generous funding from the Midcounties Co-operative and the Edina Trust, The Nature Effect was able to work with local charity Barracks Lane Community Garden to pilot this project with **five local schools - over 150 children from Years 3, 4 and 7.**

Following an exploratory romp through the garden, the classes were divided into three smaller groups and allocated to their first activity.

Bread

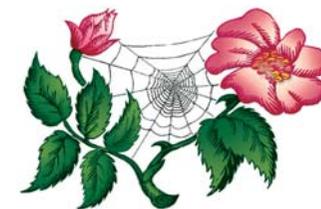
Milling, mixing and measuring: using a small hand mill, the children experienced turning the ears of wheat into fine flour which they mixed together with yeast and water to make a deliciously messy, sloppy batter. Making sure the temperature of the water was hand hot (by testing it with their hands) led to a discussion about the “liveness” of yeast which we fed with a small amount of sugar. The bubbling mess was set to one side while the group was summoned to their next station.



Butter

By milking Rosy the cow, the children encountered again how ingredients are produced (though this 'milk' was in fact cornflour and water). Quickly replaced by double cream milk from a local dairy, the work of turning this into butter began. Containers were passed round and everyone shook and shook and shook ... stories were told and songs were sung,

tapping into the theme of transformation. And then... the cream duly transformed itself into lumps of butter and liquid buttermilk. Time to move on....



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Soup

Beginning with splitting logs to make a fire, children lit and blew on kindling before moving their attention to the vegetables. These were peeled and chopped and added to the cauldron on the fire. Now, how's the bread getting on?

Back to bread

Tipping the sticky dough onto the table covered in flour, everyone pulled, pushed, stretched and kneaded their piece before shaping it into individually designed rolls: hedgehogs, snails, initials and spaceships appeared, and were left to rise before cooking in the (wood burning) oven in time for lunch. After 15 minutes in the oven, these were ready to eat, with everybody eager to reclaim their own small handmade loaf.

Butter again

The final step with butter was squeezing out the buttermilk and washing the butter with water, before adding a pinch of salt. Then the children played a game to demonstrate the science of how cream transforms into butter and buttermilk.

More fire and soup...

The cauldron kept bubbling as the fire was tended and fed with more wood. Once the vegetables were cooked, children took turns to mash – and the soup was made.



Food is served!

For many of the children, it appeared that the food they had spent the morning creating was quite different to what they normally ate – but they were all prepared to give it a go. Opinions varied, inevitably, about how tasty organic bread, butter and soup were. Some pronounced it absolutely delicious, and it definitely went down well with the teachers!



What was palpable was a sense of achievement, and a community eating together as everyone sat balancing bowls and rolls in the warmth of the cabin or around the fire. Helping themselves to freshly churned butter to spread on their still-warm bread, to accompany their steaming vegetable soup, straight from the fire, there was no doubt that this was a *“we-made-it-ourselves lunch.”*

Bringing it all together

Sated, adults and children formed a circle to make links between the activities they'd undertaken and the fundamental elements from which their food came. We first asked them to go and find the pictures which we'd hidden around the garden and bring them back to the cabin.

We used these to help the students make connections as between seeds, wind, and wheat, for example; sun, cowpats and compost; earth, rain and pasture, linking growing knowledge about scientific and ecological processes with their encounters during the day. Rosy the cow and her calf were incorporated along with the human energy that had gone into making the food: shaking, churning, chopping, kneading, stirring, blowing, milling, mashing. We also considered what other structures are used to bring food to our table: transport, packaging and storage and the relationship these too have with the planet. Food for thought...

What we learnt as facilitators

As we delivered the five pilot workshops we became more familiar with each other as facilitators, improved our timings and refined the activities. We discussed in particular the plenary session at the end of the day and tried a number of ways to run this. The secret to this was that the children had to move to make connections. It was also important to avoid being overly didactic or directive in communicating a specific 'message'. What worked best, in fact, was standing back and letting the children's realisations and synthesis grow through their experience of the elements we provided. As we became more confident we were able to let go more, and trust the process; midwifing the children's learning at a number of levels. We gave them ingredients, time and attention; they made Bread, Butter and Soup.

And finally... what they said...

The reaction of the children was an important part of what they 'said' throughout the day. Their eagerness, curiosity and energy were apparent at each of the three stations, even amongst those who were most insistent that they didn't like soup! One child asked as they were leaving, *"Can we come again? This was the best day ever!"*

A teacher added that she felt it was a *"truly invaluable day which everybody loved"*.

Lily (Year 3) wrote: *"Thank you for teaching us to make bread, butter and soup. Even though it was raining I still loved it. My favourite part was when I made the bread with Kirsten. And when we cut up the vegetables. I loved eating the soup and bread at the end. The cream took a long time to shake but I still enjoyed it. I loved when Hannah told us the story about the King who really liked butter. I liked milking Rosy too. And thank you Stuart for helping us make the fire."*

*"Can we come again?
This was the best day ever!"*

Feedback from teachers was equally encouraging: one remarked *"They absolutely loved it – thought it was magical!"* and commented too on the real buzz that followed on from the day afterwards.

Another teacher observed that the energy of her class seemed more *"grounded"* in the days following the workshop.

She used the day as a springboard for follow-up work: Ms O (Year 3 teacher) wrote: *"We were able to extend the activities for a further week, ending with our class assembly, which was largely based on what we had done at the workshop and covered a range of curriculum topics including English and maths. The children also wrote a recipe (an instruction text) for making bread, which we used as part of our assembly. In maths the children did follow up work on dividing by 10 with a 750g ball of dough, which was made into 10 rolls and the children were able to work out how much each roll of dough weighed. Perhaps the most successful part was follow-up work on learning the story of The Little Red Hen for performance. Along with pictures of our day out we had a great assembly which held our school audience riveted."*



For further information on our work please visit our website: www.TheNatureEffect.co.uk or email: TheNatureEffect@gmail.com