

From the Garden to the Table

Creating Kindergarten Festivals for Kenya

Susan Perrow

If you ask any Kenyan what their most meaningful childhood experience was, they would agree that it was linked to the shamba or garden where they would help to dig, plant, and harvest the vegetables for the table.

And so, when pondering ideas for celebrating the end of our kindergarten year at the Nairobi Waldorf School, one of our Kenyan teachers naturally pointed out that the many carrots that we had planted in our shamba would soon be ready for harvesting . . . so why not work with this theme for our end-of-year festival?

In East Africa, there are two significant times of year: the “long rains” and the “short rains.” Our children had planted the carrots during the long rains in May, and now in early July there were hundreds of wavy green carrot tops, along with a few different herbs and other vegetables, calling out, “Come and pick me and eat me!”

Our end-of-year festival was therefore planned along the theme, “Kutoka Shambani, Hadi Mezani” (From the Garden to the Table). Parents were also invited to bring food from their own shambas to add to the menu, and so we ended up with a large variety of fruits for a fruit salad, fresh salad veggies for a delicious green salad, and extra veggies to add taste and spice to our delicious, nutritious carrot soup.

We also planned a small concert for all the parents to attend before lunch, with the kindergarten children singing several gardening/shamba songs followed by a play with the theme of “The Enormous Turnip.”

I once heard it explained by a leading anthroposophist at an international Waldorf education conference that the meaning of a festival was “a sacred event where divine and human forces interact for the benefit of mankind.” In so many ways and on so many levels, this Shambani Festival embodied this. There was such a connection by the children to the divine nature forces through the ploughing, planting, watering, and then harvesting of the vegetables. Not to mention the delight they experienced in scrubbing and chopping

one hundred carrots, baking many loaves of bread, and setting places at the table for all the parents. Their ultimate joy was being able to serve the adults, wearing chef hats that they had made from painting paper and carrot rubbings!

There was also a reminiscence and appreciation by the adults who saw their children so involved in such a simple theme. Not once was there a sense of “what’s in it for me” or “will I get a present” — the difficulty associated with our more commercial festivals.

Our Kutoka Shambani, Hadi Mezani Festival was all about experiencing and appreciating the abundance of nature, and then sharing this with others. It was one of the most exciting festivals that the teachers, parents, and children have experienced in my three years at work in this country. We are already looking forward to a repetition of this event next July. We believe it has found an important place on our yearly East African kindergarten calendar.

Susan Perrow is a teacher trainer, mentor and parent educator, specializing in storytelling and creative discipline. She travels internationally giving workshops and training seminars. She was a founder of the Waldorf school in Byron Bay in eastern Australia, where she taught kindergarten for thirteen years. Currently Susan lives on the East Coast of Australia.

