



# { parent-theses }

~ a quarterly journal for parents produced by John Allison ~

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## Editorial ~ the Body Senses

West of Alice Springs, last October, Bettye and I stopped to look at the ochre-pits where the Arrernte people had gathered ceremonial ochre for generations. We walk in from the road. The experienced world amazes, always... After marvelling awhile at the vertical striations of rich and varied colour in the stream bank, we decided to go on, up the track to the ridge and its eventual juncture with the Larapinta Trail.

Walking along the stony creek bed, Bettye suddenly paused and exclaimed, "This is why I love the wilderness! It's so enlivening to walk on these stones..."

We walked on in silence, making our way up the ridge. There's a deep well of attention, which envelops me sometimes when I'm realising something.

Thinking the body-senses...

This is ankle-turning country, this is snake country, and I'm all alert. Sensing... Seeing and hearing, of course, but these are less important at the moment. Rather, I am living especially in the body-senses of *touch, life, movement, balance*... Underfoot, the stones keep my attention held there — we feel our way along the track — even my eyes are fingering the terrain, while my feet are sensing the securely embedded stone, the stone that slips and slides, the stone that's wedged amongst the others... Thus we touch our way forward...

Bettye had already mentioned the revelation in her of the sense of life — that sense of well-being that opens awareness to the inner condition of the body. "It's so enlivening to walk on these stones." It's true. A walk along a city street is much more tiring than this. We sense the body's health in the wilderness — that it is hale and hearty.

Then there is movement and there is also the sense of movement. Without this sense we would be unable to experience and monitor our own body's movements. Contemporary science refers here to proprioceptive awareness. Walking along that creek bed, climbing that track to the ridge, I am more self-aware of being in movement than on a flat path. And of course there's the sense of balance. Couldn't manage without it, clambering along that creek bed. The deep relationship between movement and balance suddenly becomes

clear to me. Walking as the balance between impetus and the ability to pause — impelled out of balance, then catching oneself. Freedom is experienced in poise between impulse and constraint...

I stand and sense my feet on the stones, noticing the dynamic relationship between ball and heel, side and arch. Touch, life, movement, balance — and the essential experiences gained through these senses on the trail towards being embodied — yes, to sense the wonder of this particular homecoming. Of entering the home of the body.

As I walk on, I'm now thinking of Ghilgai, the Steiner school where I work. Of the playground, and its uneven slope... Of the steps, varied, unpredictable... It is a happy pedagogical accident that the drought, and then the rains, have eroded the hill, as we call it. The children are truly being educated in their body senses as they run about at playtime. Maybe I can relinquish my vain dream of seeing it levelled off and 'safe'... So much of our learning is incidental. It occurs through these incidents and instances of a good experience of being alive, registered through these body-senses in which we are mostly unconscious.

These are the senses that enable us to know our place — in the body, in the world. They are sometimes also called the 'lower' or 'inner' senses. We could call them the senses of orientation. The task in the early years of childhood is to exercise them, to live into the body through them, to know ourselves at home there. If we reflect for a moment on the lives that are lived by so many children in our society — lives spent indoors, or when outside on smooth lawns and even paths, inside cars, in front of flat screens, touching undifferentiated substances — then we will begin to recognise a childhood at risk.

## *Strengthening the Inner / Lower Senses*

*This article is edited from the Newsletter of the Association for a Healing Education. This newsletter is an excellent resource for pedagogical insights and suggestions. The AHE website can be found at <http://www.healingeducation.org>.*

All who work with children today see that they are changing in ways that concern and even alarm us. In the preschool and kindergarten classes, we often see tired children, thin and pale. Children are nervous, cannot sit still, and frequently fall out of chairs. Movement and play do not come so easily as they once did. Many children are disorganised in their movements and can appear clumsy. Some propel themselves forward with unconscious and uncontrolled abandon, smashing and crashing into their playmates. Others find a quiet corner from which they do not move, playing timidly and avoiding movement at all cost. The trained eye also sees indications of retained immature movement patterns/reflexes, which should have disappeared in the child's first year. Many children are 'touchy', often over-reacting to an innocent brush with another child, and are emotionally fragile. Dietary choices are limited as well; children often reject the healthy whole foods the kindergarten offers and insist on a narrow range of foods.

In the social realm, the healthy hum of free play, which once filled each kindergarten day, is harder to create and sustain. Children have difficulty engaging harmoniously with their classmates. The children act out the TV and movie characters they have viewed in an effort to digest this experience through play. These media images are often 'indigestible', however, and cause disharmony in the playtime. Circle time, the crown of the kindergarten morning, finds children easily distracted and unable to imitate the teacher's gestures. And when story time offers its food for soul and spirit, some children cannot attend to the language nor create the mighty imaginative pictures inwardly. In simple terms, we can say that children are having difficulty finding their way into physical life in a comfortable, harmonious way, into a sense of well-being.

In a study of the Twelve Senses as described by Rudolf Steiner, we see that the soul and spirit of the human being find their way into the physical / structural body through the four lower senses — the senses of touch (tactile), life, self-movement (proprioception), and balance (vestibular).

Touch or the tactile sense is the first to be awakened in the birth process. The strong uterine contractions massage the baby and awaken and tone up the sense of touch. When touch is under-stimulated, sometimes through a very short labor, Caesarian-section, or lying naked in an incubator, the child can be very touch sensitive. What is normal touch experience to most is an assault to this child. Typical exploration of the world through touch is avoided. The child is often fussy and finickety about clothes, textures, and temperature.

On the other extreme, if the tactile sense is over-taxed, as in a long and stressful labour, the child's touch may have shut down in a gesture of self-protection. Such a child may be unaware that he has touched another child, that his hands are crusted with sand and mud, or that his shoes are on the wrong feet. Steiner describes that touch gives us our experience of boundary, telling us where we stop and where the rest of the world begins. A healthy sense of touch lays the foundation for a sense of social boundaries as well.

The life sense gives us our sense of organic well-being. We are aware of it mostly when we feel unwell or out-of-sorts. Disturbances in the life sense demonstrate themselves in the child's rhythmic life, waking and sleeping, eating and elimination. In the classroom we encounter difficulties here with food allergies and narrow, restricted dietary choices. The strong rhythm we maintain in our kindergarten day helps here. We can also encourage the child to widen his diet with tiny, non-stressful encouragement to try new foods.

The sense of self-movement or proprioceptive sense gives us awareness of body position. It informs where the body parts are in relation to one another. It also gives us the framework for developing body-geography. Information about the body's position is provided by the contracting and stretching of muscles and by compression of the joints. A child with weakness here may move through the room like a tornado, bumping into people and things. This may be the child who loves to be at the bottom of a pile of other

children to receive the proprioceptive pressure he craves. Without a healthy sense of proprioception, the child may be unaware of where the limbs are in space, sincerely incredulous that his arm has just knocked down the house that others spent the last 20 minutes building. Healthy proprioception also provides an ability to begin and arrest movement with control. Holding appropriate muscle tension in a task, such as lifting up a glass of water with the right force, comes from proprioception. Sustaining upright posture is also a function of proprioception. With difficulty here, often a child will collapse on to the floor at circle time, as standing upright is such a chore. Children who often bump into other objects and people, who seem a little clumsy, who slump or collapse, may have difficulty with self-movement/proprioception.

The sense of balance, known in the mainstream as the vestibular sense, gives the experience of stability and security in relation to gravity. Working with proprioception, the vestibular sense tells where the body is in space. The vestibular sensory organs, the semicircular canals, lie within the complex of the ear. With chronic ear infections having replaced childhood inflammatory illnesses, auditory and vestibular health are under constant attack. Vestibular health can be compromised by the infection itself. Some antibiotics used to treat the ear infections are actually damaging to the inner ear as well. Children with vestibular weakness can be of two extremes. They can be very movement-sensitive, avoiding spinning, swinging, or inverting the head, each of which stimulates the vestibular system. They avoid movement.

On the other extreme are children who crave movement at all times. They spin on the tire swing and never get dizzy. They fidget and rock in their chairs, seeming to need constant motion. They may also be daredevils who lack any appropriate sense of caution. The vestibular sense of these children is under-responsive, requiring a constant stream of vestibular stimulus to keep informed of where the body's center of balance lies. The importance of this sense cannot be over-emphasised. Jean Ayres in *Sensory Integration and the Child* states that the vestibular is the unifying system and provides a framework for other aspects of our experience. It seems to 'prime' the entire nervous system to function effectively.

The healthy strength and integration of these senses lay the foundation for all the higher-level skills, cognitive, social, and spiritual, for the rest of earthly life. When the lower senses are healthy, the individual has pleasure and joy in being in the physical body. Movements are balanced, coordinated, and integrated. Children are eager to explore the world, welcoming new experiences in all the sensory realms, being neither reckless nor timid. The child has good balance, both literally and metaphorically, and also understands appropriate physical and social boundaries.

~ Laurie Clark and Nancy Blanning

See the support checklist in this issue's Toolbox, *Nurturing the Body-Senses*.

## *Sensing the World and Ourselves*

Rudolf Steiner identified 12 senses — seven more than the normal five most people recognise — which he placed into three groups: Touch, Life, Self-Movement, Balance / Smell, Taste, Sight, Temperature / Hearing, Language, Concept, and Ego. In this article I will try to look at Steiner's ideas about the four bodily senses of Touch, Life, Movement and Balance that he grouped together in the context of events and experiences in today's world. Increasingly there is a tendency towards 'sense deprivation' — or at least a lack of 'sensory bio-diversity' — in our modern lives. These four senses are particularly badly treated. From my perspective as both a General Practitioner and a School Doctor, it is not only about the current needs of the young child that I have concern, but also the resulting deficiencies of teenagers and adults.

But first I would like to look at some modern advances in Neurology that have lent a new credibility to some of Steiner's ideas about early childhood. In 2005 the *New Scientist* published an article putting the current official count of senses at ten, with another eleven waiting in the wings.

When you look at some of these 21 different senses, they easily fall into Steiner's 12-fold model of the senses. Such things as 'bladder stretch' and 'cerebrospinal acidity' are part of a developing picture of the Sense of Life, while others contribute to a picture of the Sense of Movement, Balance and Warmth. The evolving picture shows that the way we become aware of our world is a lot more complex than the mechanical models of the past. Thus, seeing is more than a camera, and hearing is more than a microphone.

Advances in brain imaging techniques such as PET scans and functional MRIs, have made it possible to study the developing brain without the messy task of removing it! This has led to a whole new world of developmental neurology. Some remarkable facts have emerged, for instance that the brain of a child is affected by experience, both positively and negatively.

On the negative side, the brain of a child that has suffered severe neglect can be up to 30% smaller. On the positive side, a child who has learned a musical instrument (Sense of Movement) in early years will have a larger left temporal lobe than one who hasn't.

As Aric Sigman in his book *Remotely Controlled* said 'Experience becomes flesh'. This has fuelled the debate for real play as against TV and computers. In fact analogies of nutrition are very common now. 'Play Malnutrition' or 'Experiential Junk Food' are phrases being used in the early childhood debate.

Another concept that has come into use concerning the early child's brain is that of 'Plasticity'. The incredible organic vitality of the brain which remains in the developing growth and sprouting of the nerve cells during the early years has been a surprise to the static picture that existed before. Descriptions of the brain as still being very living with 'windows' of potential which will eventually close, has added more urgency to

what is right and wrong educationally for the young child. It only takes a small jump of imagination to see this as a sort of confirmation of the idea that there are organic 'life forces' within the brain, which are gradually being given over to the development of a child's mental abilities.

Putting these ideas together gives a fresh insight into the role of the senses in early years. The 12 senses Steiner spoke about work as a circle, as it were, surrounding the human being, and are all present all of the time. The four lower or bodily senses in the early years, upon which I am concentrating, are of foundational importance in the child under seven years old.

These are again the sense of Touch, Life, Movement and Balance.

The brain is an organ which most readily gives up its organic vitality for the purpose of mental development — in fact its whole form and function is like a permanent foetus! This picture explains why there is a variation in brain formation, for it is in proportion to how well it receives the sort of 'life nutrition' that the four lower senses provide in the early years. It is worth looking at these four senses in this light, not only in terms of an ideal healthy development, but also in the light of what we are seeing in young people and teenagers today, who increasingly have not had a rich life nutrition in these early years. Questions arise: what are the particular modern experiences and changes that provide the 'junk food' of the senses? What are the sorts of sensory 'malnutrition' symptoms and signs starting to emerge?

But before that exploration, I think it is very important to add at this stage that 'healthy' sensory nutrition does not only come from 'pleasant' experiences. It's of course a natural wish that children should be bathed in a wonderful, positive world of sensory delights; this is of course what we all want for ourselves and our children. But it is a fact of the human condition that we all learn more quickly through 'un-pleasant' experiences; this also counts as nutrition. This explains phrases like 'the school of hard knocks' or the Nietzsche quote 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger'. Or 'no pain, no gain', and 'practice makes perfect'. These are all about these body-senses. All of these Victorian-sounding adages, which are not going to be popular in a 'consumer' model of health and education, are also part of the picture, so let us look briefly at these four bodily senses in turn.

### *Touch*

Touch is easily recognised as a sense in its own right, and so needs little introduction. Nature is the 'touch resource' *par excellence*; it provides an endless variety of touch experiences.

In the medical practice where I work, constructed as it is of plastic, glass and steel, a corner has been made to include natural things like a few twigs, acorns and leaves. This is like a 'tactile oasis' and children are instantly drawn towards it, for children are utterly consumed by their need to touch things. Imagine the pleasure of the baby as it

breastfeeds or touches things for the first time. You can take children to some of the most dramatic views and culturally uplifting sights in the world and instead they will find a few old sticks, stones and some mud to play with — they want to get in touch with things.

But touch can teach through unpleasantness as well — the knocks and bumps that wake us up; the fall that teaches us to be more careful. These are also important tactile experiences that children wrapped in a 'totally safe' world may not have. Recently an unlikely area of support for Touch came via *Persil* soap powder. They started a 'Dirt Is Good' (D.I.G.) study and advertisement. After years of stigmatising dirt, parents and children have become somewhat afraid of touching things — 33% of children will themselves avoid play for fear of getting dirty. Add to this a world made of and wrapped in plastic. We have become strangers in a strange land. Whilst there may be nothing inherently wrong with plastic, it is an example of 'tactile junk food!' It may apparently provide a huge range of possibilities — brightly-coloured animals, exotic machines, fantastic toys — but on a tactile level it is all the same, it is all plastic, all the same tactile experience.

On a physical nutrition level this would be like feeding a child only on sugar. It can be made to look like all kinds of tempting foods, but in the end it's just more sugar. There is no bio-diversity of experience on a more profound level.

With some children today we find that there is the syndrome of being 'tactile defensive'. These are often nervous children who hate to be touched. Also in society we are seeing a bigger picture of a kind of cultural Aspergers, where people feel disconnected. In the film *Crash*, which won an Oscar last year, the opening scene has a character saying, "We don't touch, in this city we are so separate behind steel and glass that the only time we touch is when we crash into each other."

The desire for touch is life-long. In a study of dying people, carried out through the Hospice movement, one of the things dying people really wanted was to be physically touched. When you see adolescents getting their skin pierced or tattooed, is this a way of getting a skin 'threshold' experience? The phenomena of people who cut themselves is an extreme example of a seeking for tactile experience. And when young people do extreme sports or throw themselves at hard surfaces (like the content of the TV programme), is this an attempt to create a compensatory encounter?

## *Life*

This one needs a little more justification! There are metabolic 'senses' that are increasingly being identified within physiology — a diverse group from 'bladder stretch' to 'Cerebrospinal pH'. Presently they are a growing but disconnected group. Whether or not they will ever be seen as one whole sense that informs us if we are 'well' or not is another matter. Together these would become part of Steiner's 'Sense of Life,' and just like the concept of the life-body, it is connected more to the whole than the part. This

means it senses the whole process in time within the human body and not individual steps. So time factors or 'process' begin to be relevant and important.

Only out of a connected wholeness is it possible to have a concept of 'enough-ness'. This is also the basis of a 'sense of proportion', a 'sense of enough' or even 'common sense'. In Nature, a sense of connectedness and process is paramount. Anything that brings children into connection with the organic world can bathe them through the sense of the processes of the seasons... growth, fruition, harvest and decay. Also the routines of the day... routines of the week... routines of the year are all nutrition for this sense, as well as festivals, rituals and celebrations.

But unpleasant processes are also Life sense experiences. Waiting for something, the whole experience of 'delayed gratification' and endurance comes in here. Boredom itself is a very powerful (unpleasant) experience of the Sense of Life — an experience that is denied to the over-entertained.

Processes such as illnesses are also often processes that we want to be finished with quickly. There is a reason why those who were ill used to be called 'patients!' A lot of my work as a doctor involves parents who want themselves or their children 'fixed now' when my job is to tell them 'it's just going to take time' — it is often hard to hear this. Yet the biographies of many great individuals reveal that they have had a major illness in childhood or even prolonged stages of development before people at large could recognise their abilities. People like Isaac Newton, Winston Churchill and Albert Einstein come to mind. In our modern world of busy people and over-timetabling, a Sense of process is a rare thing. The whole world of DVDs, fast forward, rewind, skipping the boring bits, avoids any sense of process and patience. How often might we like the use of a remote control for life in the same way we have for the DVD? A world of instant gratification and abstraction from the cycles of nature does not easily lead to common-sense or patience. Wonderful old sayings like 'what goes around, comes around' were spoken in an age by people who had a deeper appreciation of the cycles of nature.

Whilst complex to understand, a child where this process has not been able to develop is the ADHD child. Here we find there is no ability to wait or observe a process and this leads to children who are often unteachable. On a wider scale, the malnutrition of this sense leads to a sort of nervous anxiety in people today. Lots of information about bits and pieces, but no sense for the whole process. And if you cannot sense your own life forces, you can have no trust in your own ability to heal and repair — no trust in the 'wisdom' of the world. No trust in your own body. This is very much a picture of our times.

### *Movement*

Proprioception is the term given for one aspect of the sense of movement. The fact that you can make a decent attempt at writing your name without looking depends on a sense of movement independent of what your eyes are doing. And the eyes themselves

are a tool of the sense of movement. If someone draws a triangle in the air there is no actual triangle to see! The way you know what you are 'seeing' is through the sense for the fine movements of the muscles around the eyes. When we read, the same process gives us the ability to recognise the difference between the letters on the page. Even the early learning of a musical instrument is all about training this sense.

This is a huge background awareness that we usually take for granted, and children are the world's greatest movers and shakers! They fidget, jump, skip, run, all to the intense annoyance of adults! Being asked to do a thing repeatedly until it is done exactly right, through more practice and repetition, may be unpleasant, but is also a very real education of this sense. Yet we are becoming the 'Society of Stillness'. Children are told to 'not touch and keep still' from an early age.

We send them to school early, were they are trained to sit still. They come home and passively watch television or play X-Box (it has been estimated that on average an estimated 12 years of life will be spent this way). Then they go to University where they are lectured, and finally, if they are bright, they can get a job where they will spend most of their day staring zombie-like into a computer screen. Most of the muscular and back problems I see now are the result of these sorts of lifestyle, i.e. too little movement rather than too much.

The combination of a poor Sense of Life (where as with food, there is no sense of 'enough') and a poor Sense of Movement (where there is a blindness to the joy of one's own movements) can well lead to Diabetes. The epidemic of obesity and Type 2 Diabetes is a health disaster waiting to happen. The roots of that disaster are in poor, early, bodily sense development.

Increasingly, I see teenagers who have been put on anti-depressants. My impression is that often this is more a kind of 'wooden-ness of soul' — a kind of joylessness and 'stuckness' of the emotional life. It is through the joy of movement, as for example when we dance, that motion and even 'e-motion' arises. This would explain why exercise is as effective as anti-depressants in many cases of mild depression.

### **Balance**

The Sense of Balance is connected to our spiritual identity. As the Sense that is connected with the Ego, it is like a lynch pin that holds the other three together and weaves through them into an experience of 'bodily egohood'. Through this we become truly a 'citizen of space'. Again, most of the time we take this experience for granted — a foundational back-drop to being human and present in your body in space. Only if you have had an 'out-of-body or 'near-death-experience' do you know what it is like to be without this experience. So this is more than a 'sense of balance' in the orthodox understanding of the term.

This sense gives us the possibility of a 'point of view'. This is the basis of Attention, as well as a unique way of 'being there'. We are able to see the world in a unique and

particular way. Getting children to attend either to a moment or to a task is a challenge. Entertainment is like the filling of that space with something else. Boredom is an unpleasant, but very educational experience.

It is a sense that is educated in children through focusing on a task with enthusiasm and especially through risk. This is not a popular idea in an age of 'risk aversion!' Watching that moment when a child is just about to jump, dive, cycle or try a new skill is an amazing and beautiful experience. On the other hand there is now a world of 'virtual reality'. When children are tested before and after playing video games, it can take hours for them to get their basic orientation and co-ordination skills back again. They are literally 'dis-embodied' for a time. In these electronic games, children experience a world where you can do amazing things, from war games to street crime, but there is no real risk involved. You are not really on that edge. It is 'virtual risk'. And the sense for this is another understanding of 'balance', A child can be too fearful of life situations and therefore wanting always to control circumstances, or be foolhardy and reckless, forever hurting themselves. As parents, watching over our children, we have all had the playground dilemma.... to let them go or to stop them.

Finding a right balance for the child in this is helping them in their 'education towards freedom' on the physical level. For the child, with this first meeting with the problem of risk comes a dilemma on a physical level. It will come again at around the age of 14 on a more emotional level, but this time fuelled by 'sex, drugs and rock'n'roll'. Then again at 21 on a more existential/vocational level — will life be very safe or very scary?

A lot of these sorts of ideas are actually becoming part of the mainstream debate around education and child development. Although there are a few semantic differences of language and terms used, concerns over diabetes, teenage depression, youth suicide and anxiety are 'societal' and affect us all. Whether the concepts of the senses shared here have something practical to contribute to this debate remains to be seen.

*~ Jeff Green (lightly edited for this issue of parent-theses by John Allison)*

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Although this is the final issue of *parent-theses*, at least for the time being, I do talk on local radio on the 2nd Monday of each month about an aspect of parenting. Tune in around 4.45pm into *What a Wonderful World - the healthy & sustainable lifestyle show* presented by Kay Watts on Melbourne radio 3WBC 94.1 FM.

From time to time there also will be further articles and lecture transcripts posted on my website [www.johnallison.com.au](http://www.johnallison.com.au).

## *In the Toolbox ~ Nurturing the Body-Senses*

In presenting the following suggestions of the character of each sense and how its development might be supported, I am grateful to Nettie Fabrie whose *Observations Based on the Lower Senses* can be found on the website of the Association for a Healing Education [www.healingeducation.org](http://www.healingeducation.org).

The ***Sense of Touch*** confirms our boundaries and allows us to sense many aspects of safety. Among the qualities experienced through touch, we can find security and trust in the physical world, which establishes a base from which we can look out into our environment; and also security and trust in the social world, through which we are affirmed in our being and enabled to confidently engage with others. Thus, secure in body and soul, secure in our judgments and those of others, we can look trustingly towards a spiritual world and the divine ordering of events.

We nurture the sense of touch in children from the earliest time through:

- holding, cuddling, caressing;
- games and play which include loving physical contact;
- encounters with the natural world, dressing in natural fibres, playing with toys made of natural materials;
- loving authority that sets boundaries;
- active work in the practical world;

The ***Sense of Life*** grants us feelings of well-being, that "all is right with the world and with myself". We may then experience the whole as a harmonious interconnected entity, for which we feel wonder and reverence. Secure in our own well-being and aliveness, we can knit a capacity for resilience that enables us to grow through adversity.

The sense of life is nurtured through:

- healthy diet;
- rhythm and order in each day;
- walking and playing in nature;
- varied experiences, but well within the extremes;
- humour, delight, and surprise;
- patience in anticipation;

The ***Sense of Movement*** is healthily responsive to all purposeful activity. As an inward sense it enables us to monitor the body's movement, and together with the sense of balance grants an awareness of statics and dynamics. In the young child the sense of movement is deeply connected with the impulse for movement through which a child learns to stand up and walk, and to orientate him/herself in space. This is essential as a basis for all judgment; first in the physical world, and then in the social world.

We nurture this sense of movement through:

- creative play and games;
- healthy risk-taking (eg jumping and being caught);
- predictable yet challenging physical environments;
- rhythmical, sustained activity;
- physical activities requiring judgment (eg stepping stones).

The *Sense of Balance* enables us to experience outer and inner equilibrium; through it we find our orientation between polarities — between impetus and poise, tension and release, concentration and relaxation, reverie and activity... in other words, we have a sense for the middle ground, a sense of appropriateness, a measure for ourselves, for others, for the world.

We nurture the sense of balance in a child through:

- rhythm and predictability as stable elements within change;
- proportionate humour and seriousness;
- self-composure in all kinds of life experiences;
- the passage of seasonal changes;
- stories narrating steadfastness amidst turbulent change.

These lists are by no means comprehensive, but are intended to indicate the range of possible approaches to the nurturing of the body-senses. I would add here that as a moral basis for engagement with children, especially in their first years, the quality of enacted *goodness* supports each and all of these senses in their development. The child needs to experience the world as good.

Bearing that in mind, reflect again on the editorial of this issue. Conduct an experiment: go for a walk in a wilderness area, or along a forest trail, or in a park... But do not walk on beautifully-formed paths — experience your engagement through the body-senses of touch, life, movement, and balance.

You might then choose to walk in an area sealed and bound by tar and cement. Is there a difference? Certainly there is stimulus in the city — it can be exciting, but it also is exhausting. The soul is sold to sensory attractions projected by all those who want to enslave your desires, to own your pockets...

Last evening I watched a young child walking through long grass across a hillside at the Hamer Arboretum. Her mother encouraged her, and occasionally helped her, but did not deprive her of the task — that wondrous task of making one's way in the world.

So after you conclude your experiment, decided that your child's birthright is to make his or her way, supported in a wholesome, encouraging way, into life. Nurture the senses — they are the windows for the soul to enter the world.



## *Farewell....*

Further west of Alice Springs, Bettye and I came towards the end of the MacDonnell Ranges, and the end of the sealed road; from Tyler's Pass Lookout we gazed out across vast blue-purple spaces to the distant clear curve of the horizon. In the near middle-ground, the walls of a huge meteorite or comet impact crater — Gosse Bluff (Thorala), the only feature in all that space...

The aboriginal story tells of celestial women dancing across the constellations, and the child that one of the women carried who fell to earth in his wooden carrier (a 'turna')... This is the dish of the crater...

I remember this story again as I complete this final issue of *parent-theses*, thinking of Bettye's vocation — as a homebirth midwife, the manager of maternity units, and latterly a maternal child health nurse and consultant continuing the foundational work of Joan Salter in the Gabriel Centre. This deep devotion to childhood...

I travel in my imagination again to the centre of Australia, to Gosse Bluff, and there I lay this impulse down in its *turna* — when it reappears, what might it have grown into...?

