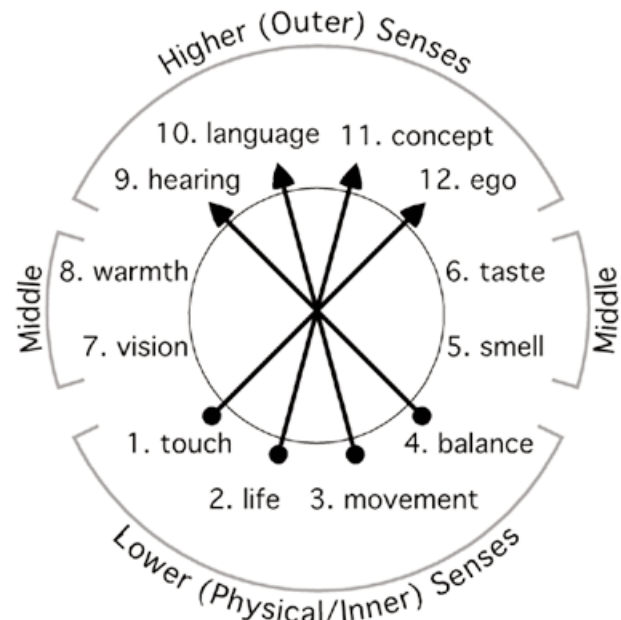


Working with the 12 senses

Touch, Health, Movement and Balance as a Foundation for Academic Progress

A helpful lens on human development was provided by Rudolf Steiner, the founder of the Waldorf education movement which now numbers some 1000 schools worldwide. We work with the picture that we have much more than the five traditional senses... in fact, twelve! If you're like most people, you might initially have a mystified or puzzled reaction to hearing someone say humans have twelve senses—not just the five that science usually describes. However, the twelve senses approach – first described by Rudolf Steiner 90 years ago – is similar in many ways to the “Multiple Intelligences” education theory popularized by Harvard professor Howard Gardner in the 1990s. In any event, the idea of the 12 senses isn't meant to be analyzed in a literal or scientific way, but rather to be carried as a picture that might shine new light on how parents and teachers can contribute to the healthy growth of children. The particular definitions for the capacities to be described as the spectrum of 12 interrelated senses, can be quickly grasped by placing them in the light of ‘common sense’ everyday expressions.

1. The **Touch** Sense is the inner sense of “where I end and the outer world begins.” Its development starts with the birth event itself. Touching any outer object changes one's inner state.
2. The **Life** Sense is the inner sense of one's own health and inner condition, and also of outer life. Examples: the heightened perception of one's inner state during running and then cooling down; sensing the nutritional difference between lightly steamed fresh vegetables and microwaved frozen vegetables.
3. The **Movement** Sense refers to the inner sense of one's own movement; proprioception. This sense begins even before birth, as the mother moves around, reclines, etc.
4. The **Balance** Sense (the fourth of the “lower” or “inner” senses) begins before birth and develops through the critical activities of rolling, crawling and struggling to learn to walk.
5. The **Smell** Sense – one of the ‘normal’ five senses, it is called a “middle” sense because it's at the boundary between inner and outer.
6. The **Taste** Sense – ditto.
7. The **Vision** Sense – ditto.
8. The **Warmth** Sense – distinct from Touch, takes place at a wide margin between inner and outer (example: placing a very cold hand under lukewarm water).
9. The **Hearing** Sense – one of the ‘normal’ five senses.
10. Sense of **Language** or Word, encompasses all that it is to sense and “be in” a language: hearing/perceiving the lan-



guage, speaking and reading, etc. Language represents the most amazing of all human achievements and is all the more astounding in that it develops in the first few years of life.

11. The **Concept** or **Thought** Sense is the ability to perceive thoughts.

12. The **Ego** Sense is the ability to sense another person's ego or presence (not as the development of one's own ego). Example: sensing when another person has entered a room (perhaps a teacher with good ‘classroom presence’). It affects the ability to wait for a parent or teacher to explain an activity, the ability to work in a group.

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Taking up the picture of twelve human senses can give us fresh insights into the task of nurturing healthy childhood development. One insight is that, for each of four “lower” senses—senses that appear in the first day of life and grow throughout childhood—there is a companion “higher” sense that appears later and represents a transformation or flowering of the lower sense. Another way of saying this is that “the Lower Senses develop the Higher Senses.”

Expressed in a positive way, this means that any activity that helps one of the four lower senses will also be vital to the development of its companion higher sense.

Expressed in the opposite way, so-called learning difficulties—such as inability to pay attention or stay with the class, struggles to form or remember thoughts, hindrances with language or listening skills—fall into the four higher sense categories. Therefore, if a child has a learning difficulty, you can look at this as a problem of incomplete

development of the matching lower sense, and work with that... rather than only working directly on the label or manifestation in the higher faculty. Because almost every child has at least a little difficulty here and there, developmental games and activities can be given to any child, or to an entire class, with the knowledge that a few children deeply need it as a hygienic experience, but almost all will benefit.

Development of the Smell, Taste, Vision and Temperature Senses is also fundamental to academic progress; just weigh the wisdom in common expressions like: “That [idea] doesn’t pass the smell test”; “I see what you mean”; “Let me chew on(or digest) that [proposal] for a while”; “that music left me cold;” etc.

So, in closing... “keep your eyes open” for other expressions that can “shed some light” on the twelve points of the spectrum of human senses.

Natural Companions in the Lower & Higher Senses

Touch & Ego	Life & Thought	Movement & Language	Balance & Hearing
Developing touch helps to develop the ability to connect to other human beings, pay attention	Developing health and appreciation for nature helps to develop thinking ability	Developing proprioception helps to develop language	Developing balance helps to develop listening skills
<p>Common expressions: hand-shake; a figurative “pat on the back”; how each child relates in a different way to others’ presence. It is worth wondering whether “ADD” is just that – a deficit of loving physical attention which has lead to inability to sense anyone else’s ego or to stay within a group activity.</p>	<p>Common expressions: a good idea; a lame idea; “That’s sick!”; “Deadly!”; “Math class put me to sleep”. Every young child needs to be told – often– “You look strong/healthy/well rested/ (etc.) today” or, when ill, “You are strong and will be well soon.”</p>	<p>Common expressions like “I’m not following you” or “I can’t grasp it” point to the shift of difference between our constructs for the Life/Thought senses and the Movement/ Language senses. In speech difficulties, careful observation of how the mouth is moving can provide clues for remedial movement activities.</p>	<p>Common expressions: Children who spin themselves around the classroom. Children who fall off their chairs.</p>
<p>Games in this category: Drawing on backs; Hand clapping games; London Bridge with rocking; Simon Says; Wrestling/roughhouse games; and all throwing and catching, especially with a partner</p>	<p>Games in this category: Any quiet individual activity - free play, running, nature walks, water color painting. Most of the work of helping to develop a healthy life sense must take place at home. Rhythm in daily, weekly, monthly and annual life is the key.</p>	<p>Games in this category: Tumbling Crawling games Jump rope (all kinds) String games (cats cradle) Blindfold games Ball bouncing games Jacks</p>	<p>Games in this category: Recreational Gymnastics, and ANY activity that rotates the inner ear in space (e.g. rolling down a hill) or depends on balance (e.g. blindfold games) will provide a terrific benefit.</p>