

Integrating it all:

"Integration is what turns sensation into perception" ⁸⁶

In recognition of the importance of the senses in learning, recently much attention has been given to sensory stimulation – virtually all this focus is on the higher senses. It has become popular in many circles to fill a young child's world with sensory stimulation. New findings in the field of brain research that show the importance of sensory nourishment will probably further intensify this trend. However, it is important to be clear that sensory integration and sensory stimulation are not the same thing. All the stimulation in the world is of little use if the child (or adult) cannot integrate the experience to make sense of himself and the world. It is quite literally comparable to repeatedly feeding someone with a digestive disorder. You can feed him all you want; he becomes overwhelmed and sick because he cannot make use of what is coming in. Putting in too much food, or food in poor combinations, can actually damage the digestive processes. The same is true of the senses.

Even for those with healthy sensory digestion, much of what is currently passing for sensory food is not: busy mobiles; toys that light up, flicker and spin and squeak; furry toys; and lots of "music" or whatever one would call the sound that comes from a plastic piano! Input, or sensory meals, that are overwhelming or not of a quality that connects the child to the natural world, trigger his internal alarm system and he cannot open to or integrate it.

Because the ground of all depends on the nourishment and integration of the base senses, in the Enki approach our primary attention goes to this – helping the child build the capacity to integrate what is coming in and make sense of it. The central development of these senses and the pathways for their integration happens between conception and eight years old. But, throughout life we are continually in the process of integrating these senses so that we can process what comes in and use it for our growth and wellbeing. Although the process is slower, children into their teens can still significantly improve their integration and thus their learning just through work with the base senses. And even a seventy year old needs food for all the senses, and support to integrate them, just as the young child does. As always, age shifts the balances, but not the essential tasks.

As functioning adults, we have all found ways to nourish and integrate these senses or we could not function; these strategies may be more and less effective, but they have put the bulk of any struggles we may have into an unconscious realm. Therefore, it will be easiest to understand sensory integration by looking at its opposite: sensory integration dysfunction.

⁸⁶ *Sensory Integration and the Child*, by Jean Ayres, PhD, Western Psychological Services 1979