

Educating the Movement Body

• Nancy Blanning

Steve Spitalny's article on the twelve senses, as indicated by Rudolf Steiner, describes the individual senses and their importance for human development. Our work in early childhood particularly focuses upon supporting the senses of touch (tactile), life, self-movement (proprioceptive), and balance (vestibular). While sometimes also called the "lower senses," they are in no way inferior to or less important than the better-known senses of smell, taste, sight, and hearing. To the contrary, they are literally the foundation upon which other sensory—not to mention academic and emotional—development depends.

The completeness and maturity of each of these sensory systems heralds how fully other skills related to these domains may unfold. For example, the sense of self-movement/proprioception gives the child her first "map" through the experience of body geography. Which are my shoulders, my elbows, my hands? What is their order in my body? Do I know them so well that I do not need to see where hands and arms are to put on my jacket? Can I sense how hard to pull to zip it up?

While self-movement gives us a geography of the body in relation to itself, balance gives us our orientation to the earth. It helps us sense the spatial orientation of other beings and objects around us. Through this sense we learn right and left, up and down, forward and back. These three planes of space are expressed in the architecture of the semi-circular canals of the inner ear, the physical sensory organs for balance. The development of this sense lets us begin to discern right and left directionality, ordering and sequence. If we think about this for a moment, we can see that many other skills will depend upon a firm foundation of directionality and sequenced order—writing, reading, numeral recognition, proper sequence of numbers in math problems, to name a few. In *Man as a Being of Sense and Perception*, Rudolf Steiner states that our relationship to mathematics literally grows out of the senses of self-movement and balance.

Henning Kohler takes further indications given by Rudolf Steiner to speak about how good sensory

development affects emotional health. His book, *Working with Anxious, Nervous, and Depressed Children*, describes how healthy touch is the foundation for developing trust and a sense of security in life. If the life sense is well supported by the caring adults around the child, the basis for flexibility and tolerance is laid. Out of healthy self-movement grows the soul capacities of empathy and compassion. And healthy, dependable balance is the physical correlate of what may become emotional equilibrium, the ability to balance and regulate our feelings so we are not swept away by them.

These all grow and strengthen through movement, particularly the free, unencumbered, richly diverse movements of early childhood. Our passive, intellectual, anxiety-and-fear-laden life style, however, badly restricts children's opportunity to move and explore in ways that develop sensory health. Teachers consistently report that children in our classes show problems with "sensory integration," clumsiness, timidity toward movement, or have a need to be in constant motion. Children have not been able to experience what they need to educate the movement body. So it is now an urgent requirement to help the children make up for what has been thwarted or missed developmentally. All the movement possibilities we invite the children toward are "medicine" for these ills. When we consciously provide enriched chances to experience balance and self-movement in imaginative ways, it is also enormously fun.

The following movement journey based on a folk tale from India, "A Drum," emphasizes movements to stimulate self-movement and balance. Jumping with the lower limbs, clapping with hands, galloping and coordinating upper and lower body all educate the self-movement system. Circling with the song, rolling, and somersaulting stimulate and activate balance. Whenever we bring these into our movement imaginations, we are giving the children a potentized dose of developmental support. We are having the joy of movement in the moment and encouraging strong and healthy capacities for the future as well.

A DRUM

A Movement Journey / Circle
Adapted from "A Drum: A Folk Tale from India"

Setup: Needed are **4-6 pieces of wood** (such as wooden dowels) or cloths to represent the wood, placed on the floor as path for the children to jump through. This is set up before the journey begins and the children are guided to it by the teacher. If one wishes to do somersaults for the rolling pot, a **gym mat or soft, padded surface** to roll upon should be already set up as well.

Drum Refrain:

G A G E G A G

How I wish I had a drum.

D D G G E D E

On it I would thrum, thrum, thrum.

G A G E G A G

Thrum, thrum, thrum throughout the land.

D D G G E D E

I would be a one man band.

Hands joined, circling round

Pause in circling—on thrums, clap thighs

Clap thighs, then circle again through end of refrain

Standing in place:

A boy and mother lived alone.
They had not much to call their own.
The mother washed and swept each day
To earn their bread. She could not play.

Arms extended out to show empty hands
Scrubbing up and down on "washed"; sweeping
gesture across midline of body
Sadly shaking head

The little boy wished for a drum.
With it he would have such fun.

Face alight with the thought

Repeat Drum Refrain as above

Children are guided toward the set-up "wood pieces" path during the course of the song

No drum,
But mother found some wood.

Shake head
Extend forearms, elbows bent, hands cupped
upward, as though holding wood
Nodding head in affirmation
Lead children to jump through the path.
Repeat these lines until everyone is through.

"Here, child. With this you shall do good."
The wood he set upon the way.
To jump and leap was fun to play.

But then he saw a woman sad.
Building a fire was going bad.
"Dear, mother friend, please stack this wood.

Standing, interested look forward, as
though beholding the woman
Cross forearms, alternating one on top of the other,
like stacking wood for a fire.
Arms weave upward starting mid-torso (like an
upward-rising eurythmy "S") to suggest rising flames
Hands forward in offering gesture

The flames will rise up like they should."

"Thank you, child. Please have some bread.
With this cooking fire, we'll all be fed."

Repeat Drum Refrain as above, circling round and stopping in place for next lines.

A child was crying, could not be calmed.
“He is so hungry,” his mother sobbed.
“Here, have this bread.” The child ate.
To the boy she gave a pot to take.
He rolled the pot along the road.

Spoken while standing
Appropriate gesture of concern
Hands extend offering /Hand to mouth in eating gesture
Arms circled, as though holding pot
Either everyone does log rolls along length of room
or each child does a somersault on a gym mat
already set up
Repeat until rolling is completed

“Ga-lip, ga-lop,” it sang and told.

Repeat Drum Refrain, stopping at end for next section.

An angry washer man by the river stood.
His washing pot was broken. This was no good!
“Please, have this pot,” the boy did say.
“Thank you,” said the man.
“Take this coat now on your way.”

Hands on hips, unhappy stance
Stomp foot on “good”
Hands extended in giving gesture
Make slight bow forward
Extending gesture again

Repeat Drum Refrain, stopping to speak the next section:

The boy saw a man, shivering, cold and blue.
Some robbers took his coat and his shirt away, too.
“Sir, take this coat. Of it you have need.”
“Thank you, good child. Take my horse as your steed.”
Now off the boy galloped on his way.
To race like the wind was jolly good play!
Whoa!

Standing, shivering, rubbing arms as though to keep warm
Offering gesture
Right arm extended out, as though handing over reins.
Galloping vigorously

Sudden stop
(Repeat this pattern two or three times, varying tempo)

But then he wished he had a drum.

Spoken quietly, wistfully

Repeat Drum Refrain, stopping to speak the next section:

Then beneath a tree with faces long
A wedding party sang a mournful song.
“Our groom needs a horse that he can ride.
To arrive on foot we cannot abide.”
“A horse is here! Please ride away.
From your happy wedding you shall not stay.”
The groom galloped off.
The people jumped “Hurray!”
The boy saw their happiness.
He’d now go further on his way.

Hands denote a long face
Standing in place, gentle galloping movement
Extending hand, offering “reins”
Everyone gallops around the circle, but more gently than above. Stop and jump on “hurray.” Repeat 2-3X.
Spoken standing in place
Begin to walk along in circle

(Spoken slowly and almost reverently):
But in the boy’s hands was placed a drum.
“You have saved our joyous day.
Now thrum, thrum, thrum.”

As though handing the boy the drum
Clap thighs

Repeat Drum Refrain. Come to sitting position at end.

The boy and drum now need to sleep.
With them we'll rest. God watch will keep.

Lie down

(Signal end of rest as is customary for your group or begin a gentle singing of the Refrain to let children know they can sit up with you.)

Additional notes:

Depending on the age of the group, the "thrum" clapping can be done in many different ways. If there are older children, it will be very satisfying to vary and surprisingly change how the clapping is done. For example:

- Simple unison of both hands clapping thighs
- Alternate clapping of hands on thighs, first right, left, right
- Simple clapping of hands together
- Clapping of shoulders, arms crossing over chest
- Clapping on knees with any of the variations above
- Clapping on knees, right-on-right, left-on-left, then cross to opposite knee, back to same sided clapping.
- Alternate clapping of shoulders across chest
- Jumping in place, one jump on each "thrum"
- Stomping feet alternately on each "thrum"
- And so on

The aim of this imagination is to emphasize rhythmic movement of hands and feet while also stimulating vestibular and proprioceptive systems and full body movement by galloping.

The story "A Drum" was first heard from the early childhood faculty at the Rudolf Steiner School in New York City. Sincere thanks to them for adding this to our multicultural story repertoire. The adaptation by Nancy Blanning is drawn from several versions. Without hesitation, the boy gives away what he sees others need. Yet he has no expectation of receiving anything in return. Therein lies the simple beauty of the story.

A Drum: A Folk Tale from India

A widowed mother and her son lived together in poverty. She had to work hard each day just to earn enough for their food. One day as she prepared to go to the market place, she asked if there were anything she could get for him. The boy earnestly wished for a drum, but there was no money for toys. As she came sadly home, she saw some wood by the road and brought that instead to her son to play with.

The boy was playing with the wood and noticed an old woman whose cooking fire would not burn. He offered to her the wood, which quickly caught fire. In return, she gave to him a piece of bread.

The child walked along the road and soon saw a woman whose child was crying. "He cries because he is so hungry," said the woman. The boy gave to the child his piece of bread to eat, and soon the hunger was satisfied. In thanks, the woman gave the boy a large pot.

When he reached the river, the boy saw a washerman and his wife arguing. The man yelled that his wife had broken their

washing pot. Without hesitation the boy gave to the man his pot. The man handed the boy a coat to take along on his way.

Next the boy came to a man shivering with cold. Robbers had taken everything from him, even his clothes. The man was soon warmed in the coat the boy gave to him. "Take this horse," said the man in gratitude.

The boy galloped away on the horse and soon came to a wedding party. All sat under a tree looking sad. The boy asked about their trouble. A horse the groom was to ride upon had not arrived. The party could not proceed to the wedding with the groom on foot; he must arrive on horseback at his wedding. The boy smiled and gave his horse away to the groom. The wedding party now made their way joyfully.

As the boy turned to continue on his way, one of the party came to him. In his hands he held a drum. "Please," said the man. "Take this drum. You have saved our wedding day."

With joy the boy began to "thrum, thrum, thrum" on his precious treasure.