
FOCUS: Sensory Development

Sensory Processing: Having the Courage to Accept

~ Louise deForest

Recently a student asked me if I thought there were any “normal,” i.e. healthy, children anymore in the world. I answered that I always strive to see every child as healthy but now there is no more normal.

Parents and early childhood educators have seen changes in the children over the last decades and it is obvious that incarnation is increasingly difficult for these new souls “wishing to form their lives in these difficult times,” as Herbert Hahn says. And yet something draws them here and they pour themselves into earthly life, filled with trust that we will meet them with open hearts and support them as best we can. Incarnation is a voluntary journey of the unborn to the earth, of the individual dimensions of destiny of human souls, each of which arrives on earth and is born into a meaningful life. The special relationship that the child has with his or her surroundings, the devotion and trust and their imitative capacities—becoming one with everything—their ability to absorb the essence of the other—their gestures, habits and moral disposition—all come from what took place in life before conception in the spiritual world.

In this age of defining and categorizing and diagnosing, these souls are often met with a world that wants to fix them—to name and define their difficulties and then to make them “normal.” It’s a measure of how dysfunctional our world is that we want to make children fit into what is obviously not working. Instead, we must remember always the human individuality and its meaningful and particular journey to earth. Each one of us brings our specific pre-birth experiences and missions into the present life. As Steiner said, “Life will only be understood if we see it in its entirety, not if we consider only the short segment of time between birth and death, for that particular segment depends intrinsically on spiritual occurrences before birth. In our entire essence we depend on what happened in the spiritual world before we were born” (GA 140).

I recently read an interesting interview with the psychologist James Hillman in *The Sun* discussing

what he perceives as weaknesses in today’s mainstream psychology. In this interview, Hillman urges us to look at the myths we are enmeshed in presently and try to perceive what we call “reality,” or “science,” or “fact” in a different way. “Let’s say that what matters is that you have an acorn in you, you are a certain person, and that person begins to appear early in your life, but it is there all the way through your life. Winston Churchill, for example, when he was a schoolboy, had a lot of trouble with language and didn’t speak well. He was put in what we would call the remedial reading class. He had problems about writing, speaking and spelling. Of course he did! This little boy was a Nobel Prize winner in literature and had to save the Western world through his speech. Of course he had a speech defect; of course he couldn’t speak easily when he was eleven or fourteen—it was too much to carry!” Who (and how) we are now is an intrinsic element in who we are becoming! The soul knows who we are from the very beginning.

Of course we must offer support when it is needed, always with the understanding that the child will take up this support if it is in his or her best interest to do so. But I believe that the best support we can offer the children of today is our trust and confidence in them. In my lectures and classes I often speak about a child in one my classes who was one of my many teachers. He was a child who had severe sensory processing disorder; he could not trust the information coming to him from his senses and the fear and anxiety of not being able to orient himself in the world caused him to be aggressive and disruptive. One day he was listening to his classmates speak about their relationship to me: “Mrs. deForest loves me,” said one. “Mrs. deForest loves me,” said another. Finally he stepped forward—probably he swaggered forward, knowing him—and said, “Yes, Mrs. deForest loves you all, but she adores me.” Can we surround these challenged (and challenging) children with our heartfelt warmth? Often we spend a lot of time worrying about certain children in our classes and

we pray nightly that we will be guided in helping them; may I suggest that we orient ourselves instead to thinking of these mysterious children with wonder and joy. Let them occupy your thoughts, but in such a way that they get the message—my teacher adores me! When they live into our thoughts, as all children do, let them find there reverence for the mysterious workings of the spiritual world and utter and total confidence in the rightfulness of being of the child in front of us. Our confidence in the child and in the wisdom inherent in each biography will give the child strength and hope and will provide her with a healthy self to grow into in the future.

One of the major tasks of our times is to overcome fear and one of our biggest fears is that of the unknown. These “different” children are from the future, I think, and one of their generational karmic tasks is to help humanity change its consciousness. Because of who they are and their efforts to incarnate, they invite us into collaboration with others; because of their social awkwardness, they invite us to move towards selfless patience; because of the way they have chosen to incarnate, they invite us into a willingness to not-know. I once worked with an Alzheimer’s patient named Miss Emmy. She was very disoriented and often frustrated and confused. After a particularly frustrating day she turned to me and said, “You

don’t have to know where you are to be there.” This is the reality today for those of us working with young children. We are all “there” and sometimes it makes us afraid. But these children are also inviting us into the future; to step forward with courage to NOT know and willingness to accompany them, not filled with judgments from our clumsy intellects, but rather profound respect and joyful wonder. It is then that we, as educators, can take up both the Raphaelic and Michaelic gestures—Raphael gently laying hands on the shoulder of the child and saying, “I know your pain,” and Michael, standing beside the child, sword raised, saying, “You can do it!” ♦

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Resources:

- Hillman, James and Michael Ventura, “We’ve Had a Hundred Years of Psychology—and the World’s Getting Worse.” *The Sun Magazine*, issue 487 (July 2016).
- Steiner, Rudolf, *Life between Death and Rebirth*, René M. Querido, trans. (Great Barrington: Steiner Books, 1975).