

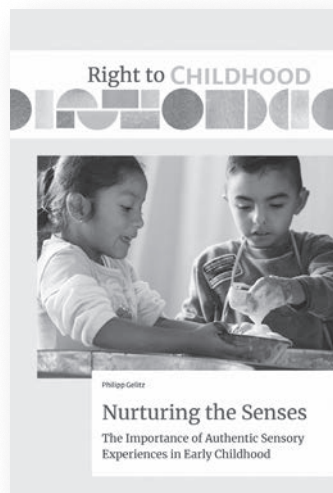
Publication News

Nurturing the Senses: The Importance of Authentic Sensory Experiences in Early Childhood

Philipp Gelitz, translated by Margot Saar

(WECAN, 2024)

Reviewed by Laura Mason



In this little 34-page booklet, author Philipp Gelitz helps us recognize the importance of providing thoughtful environments in which young children can take hold of their physical bodies. Presented in present-day language, referencing modern research, and with beautiful photos that

depict the experiences of children in various stages of development, it's a publication that every caregiver and early childhood educator should have.

The book opens with an imagination that places us in the comfortable and protected world of the human before birth, followed by a description of the post-birth conditions of gravity, light, color, sound, hunger, thirst, and discomfort, among a variety of other sensory experiences. We immediately understand the significance of creating a sensory environment that supports children from infancy, both protecting them from overstimulation and providing them with opportunities to exercise their senses and learn about the world and themselves.

As Waldorf educators, we are not alone in our understanding that immersive sensory experiences are foundational to children's cognitive development, and the author references several studies that demonstrate that. A modern understanding of perceptual systems,

and a description of Steiner's twelve senses along with ideas for supporting the integration of each are also included. If you've been looking for a description of the twelve senses that is easily understandable and accessible to those new to Waldorf education, this is a great resource!

The author also introduces the idea of sensory congruence and the importance of children having experiences that do not isolate one sense from another but involve a variety of senses together so they can make meaning of the world. As we know, what a child learns through real-world experiences that involve movement, balance, sight, hearing, smell, touch, warmth, and more, is very different from what they might learn by looking at a photograph, which is primarily a two-dimensional visual experience. The author then touches briefly (and digestibly) on how the lack of congruent sensory experiences when using screens leads to incomplete impressions and the potential weakening of senses left unstimulated.

I was struck by the final few sections, in which different views of the human being are described. The author describes the modern concept of embodiment (which aligns with the way Waldorf education views human development) so concisely that it bears repeating: "a person's mental and spiritual potential depend on the extent to which they can take hold of their bodily structures." Our primary work as caregivers and early childhood educators is to help the children make a comfortable home in their bodies. This little book can help us be inspired to do so! I encourage educators to read it and consider sharing it with their school communities. It could also make a lovely study text for parent/caregiver groups. ♦