



Sensing

Question

What am I discovering in my breathing?

Context

ecl utilises the senses as a rich sources of knowing and learning. For years educators and parents of young children have seen how natural the senses are in early years learning. In Piaget's terms they are in the Sensorimotor **and** Preoperational stages of development. In later stages the emphasis is on thinking capacities as the primary way of knowing. It is a natural development but often our senses get overlooked – almost completely – to our detriment.

Knowing through the senses is based on what we see, hear, taste, smell and touch and also what we 'sense' internally. Our route into using sensing more fully is through an awareness of the body, with an orientation to the breath, feeling tones and physical sensations. Awareness requires only that we try to pay attention to things and other phenomema, seeing and feeling them as they are, noticing what is and allowing space for information to reveal itself with as little interpretation as possible.

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to raise your awareness of sensation in your body. The focus is on the passage of breath through your nostrils – nothing more, nothing less.

On the surface, this exercise is simple: you sit and you observe your breath over a short period of time. But it is important to actually feel your breathing. Is your mind concentrating only on sensation as it passes through? Are you noticing the detail of a change in temperature between the in-breath and the out-breath? Can you feel the reverberation of the breath in the different parts of the body – nose, throat, lungs, diaphragm and abdomen?

You will need

A quiet space with no interruptions for about 12 –16 minutes.

A chair on which you can sit with your back fairly upright.; or the floor – which ever you are most comfortable with.

Notice

In particular look out for how difficult it can be to stay focused and how your thinking interrupts concentration, taking you back into memories or forwards into an imagined future. Are you able to observe your sensation for long? There is no need to judge, just observe.

What to do

- Sit comfortably and shake your body loose. Then straighten your back and place your hands loosely in your lap or palms down on your knees. Close your eyes.
- Take a deep breath and then sigh on the out-breath. Do this twice. Observe the sensations along your respiratory track – nostrils, windpipe, lungs.
- Now turn your attention to the sensation of breath in your nostrils. Feel the air passing through from the rim of your nose to your sinuses. Feel the difference between the in-breath and the out-breath. Just observe. It might be cooler on the in-breath; warmer on the out-breath. Just observe.
- When a thought comes to your mind – acknowledge it and refocus on the breath.
- Do this focusing on the breath for five minutes or so just gently reminding yourself to let go of thoughts when you realise they are there.
- Now follow the sensation of your breath as it travels down and into your lungs. Feel it in your windpipe and actually filling your lungs. Cool, fresh air entering; warm, used air leaving. When there is a pause between breaths just observe the body sensations in the gap; enjoy the space.
- Feel the rise and fall of your chest. Just observe; don't try to alter or control your breathing – let it be spontaneous. Just observe it as it is. And when a thought comes into your mind let it go. Practise this for about three minutes.
- If it is difficult to stay focused, as well as observing sensation of the breath, count on each out-breath up to ten. This helps to anchor the mind. When you lose the count of the breath, acknowledge the thought that has entered your mind and return to breathing – but without disappointment or annoyance. If you manage to get to ten start the sequence again.
- Finally, take in the sensation of breath as it travels from the tip of the nostrils to the lungs, feeling the rise and fall of the chest and abdomen. Emerge slowly from this state. Sit quietly with your eyes open for a minute. Notice if you feel different from when you started.

Building on the experience

Over the coming week try to find at least two 12 – 15 minute slots in your day to quietly observe your breath. As well as strengthening your sensitivity to sensation, you'll find your powers of concentration begin to improve.

Write down in your journal what you find easy and what you find difficult about this exercise. Are there times when it is easier to concentrate than others? What gets in the way of your motivation to practise?