



Episode 04: Sensory Discrimination for Skilfulness

Hosts: Tracy Stackhouse · Cory Dundon · Michelle Maunder

LISTENER NAME

DATE LISTENED

TOTAL LISTENING + REFLECTION TIME (MINS)

CPD HOURS CLAIMED



Episode Summary

Sensory discrimination is the detail: not just that you were touched, but exactly what, where and how much. This episode is about why the brain needs that detail at all, and the answer is skilfulness. From finding the right coin in your pocket to fretting a guitar chord, we trace how discrimination feeds perception, perception couples with action, and that whole dance is what lets a child become skilful. Sensory discrimination has been the backbeat to our first three episodes, so this time we put it front and centre. From there we get into the part that is hard to pull together from the literature: how sensory discrimination feeds perception, how perception couples with action through affordances, and how a child can only do with an object what their body can already embody. We talk about the error-detection loop that drives neuroplasticity, where skill breaks down for kids with sensory integrative difficulties, and why a child working hard just to stay upright against gravity may treat detail as irrelevant. It sets up the link to sensory modulation and safety, which is where we are headed next.



Resources & Mentions

- Principles of Neural Science (Kandel and colleagues), the detailed neuroscience reference Tracy mentions.
- Sensory Integration: Theory and Practice, for a broader overview.
- Jean Ayres, Sensory Integration and the Child, the accessible parent-facing book.
- The Sensory Integration and Praxis Tests (SIPT) and the Evaluation in Ayres Sensory Integration (EASI).
- Check out DFX's Learning Journeys to build your clinical reasoning skills: <https://dfxlearningjourneys.thinkific.com/>



Reflection Prompts

Take a few quiet minutes to consider each prompt and write freely. Add or remove a prompt block to suit the episode.

- 1** Discrimination is the precise detail the nervous system processes, but the real OT question is detail for the purpose of what. How does framing discrimination around skilfulness change how you assess it?

- 2** So much daily living skill rests quietly on haptic processing, touch and vision together, without us thinking about it. Where might a child's everyday struggle actually trace back to discrimination rather than effort or attention?

- 3** We make the case that discrimination is the foundation of praxis. For a child whose skills break down, how could you test whether the detail underneath, the perception feeding the action, is actually coming through?

- 4** A child can only do with an object what their body can already embody. Where might you be expecting a skill the child cannot yet embody, and how would building the underlying capacity change your plan?

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We note that a child working hard just to stay upright against gravity may treat sensory detail as irrelevant. For a child like that, how might modulation and safety need to come before discrimination can do its work?
