

NIGEL'S STORY: A MOTHER'S DIARY



Kay Distel

“... the skin is only a piece of differentiated ear,
not the other way around!”

–Alfred Tomatis

Explanation: the sound stimuli to the body come through the joints, the muscles. In other words, the body's posture is all tied to the ear's vestibular labyrinth. Tomatis believed that up to 60 per cent of this cortical charge came this way, and another 30 per cent came through the charge of the sounds themselves processed by the cochlear. Therefore he contended that the ear accounts for 90-95 per cent of the body's total energy charge.

–Tim Wilson, *About the Tomatis Method*

Kay Distel

Kay has practiced as a Tomatis® consultant for 15 years and finds the work continually exciting and challenging because of the diverse clients she can help. Coming from a background of body therapy, counseling and an attitude of inclusivity, she offers her clients practical awareness of auditory processing and the connection to health and learning. Outreach work with the elderly stimulated her interest to take Tomatis® ideas and experience into formal research. She is now completing a PhD, which uses her vast knowledge and specialized training in the context of facilitating adults in higher education with diverse learning needs. She runs a Tomatis® consultancy and practice in Brisbane, Australia.

You can find out more about Kay's practice at:

www.soundeducation.com.au

CHAPTER 2

Nigel's story: a mother's diary

Nigel and his mother came to our center because he was struggling to settle into his preschool environment and had difficulty coping with his new baby brother. Nigel, aged five, appeared advanced in his use of language. He was an articulate, bright child, but he was unable to control his noisy, apparently hyperactive behavior.

The family was suffering. His mother was a trained nurse with excellent observation skills but felt like she was at her wits' end. She was becoming anxious and depressed, and feeling helpless as she found it increasingly difficult to control Nigel's dangerous activities—he was particularly prone to running without looking out for potential hazards. I admired Nigel's mother's resilience and her refusal to give up on her child. Nigel's father had been diagnosed with dyslexia during his early childhood and came from a family of medical practitioners, though he had pursued a career in banking. In the initial stages of our relationship, he appeared distant and frustrated at his son's seemingly uncontrolled behavior.

The first interview was very difficult. Nigel was unable to complete a listening test, his drawings were haphazard and much of the interview was spent containing him in the room while the therapist talked to his

mother. There was a general consensus that Nigel would benefit from a Tomatis® program and that the main goal of this program would be to prepare Nigel for school, enabling him to control his behavior within his environment so that he would be able to listen well enough to learn in a classroom situation.

Intervention

Mother and child completed the intervention together in order to strengthen their bond. Nigel's mother's diary reflects the experiences of herself, her son and her family over a ten-day program, which consisted of two hours of listening each day.

Day One

I was amazed at how centered I felt. At the completion of the two hours I felt like I had spent some time at the beach. The anxious feeling, which has become a daily issue, was reduced. The afternoon chaos didn't grab me as it usually does. Feeling very tired, but not exhausted as usual.

N. was very affectionate in the afternoon. Was initiating cuddles. Was easygoing with requests, such as, "Dinnertime now. Bath now." Became boisterous and argumentative after bath time. He put his whole head under the water. Unusual. At bedtime he was talking about his brother in an affectionate way: "I love Larry." Not usual. He wanted to cuddle me. Kissed me and looked me in the eyes when doing so. This is not usual. I felt overwhelmed with emotion. It was special to have N. initiate closeness. N. also seemed to be more aware of his surroundings or he was verbalizing it more: saying things like, "There are bugs on the pineapple," "L. needs a nappy changed."

Day Two

Feeling very exhausted, but calm. I am more organized. Dinner with the boys wasn't a stress for me. Everything just clicked. N. fell asleep after—a deep

sleep. Woke up full of beans. A little hyperactive and was tormenting L. I did my usual: “We are gentle to each other. I won’t put up with not being gentle.” N. looked at me in the eye, wept and cuddled for five minutes. He wouldn’t let go. Very affectionate at bedtime. During therapy he was able to color in between squares and cut in a straight line. He held his crayon in the correct way. Not seen before.

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Day Three

Overwhelming tiredness, however calm. Sat in back garden and could not believe how alive the plants seemed. Went for a family walk and felt so peaceful and alert, while still being calm. The knot in my stomach just wasn’t there. I cried because of an overwhelming joy. Life seems so beautiful.

My surroundings, children, just gorgeous! Even P. seems lovely. What have I been missing? I will look forward. It is too disturbing to reflect on the awful quality of life that has become normal. I have an enormous appreciation for my life.

N. ate his lunch voraciously, asking for more food. He was happy and engaging with all family members. More cuddles and kisses. Just amazingly wonderful. The beautiful N. I hope he stays with us!

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I worked in the afternoon. Very calm and able to pick up errors that no one had noticed for five days. I was on fire. People I didn’t know that well at work commented that I looked like I had done something different to myself. New haircut? More sleep? I didn’t feel like I was acting any differently, maybe I was. I felt 25 again, before kids. Apparently N. ate a very big meal. Continued to be happy, engaging and cooperative. Is this what other families experience most of the time? I would love to see more of it. I hope these

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changes can be maintained.

Day Four

N. was obviously enjoying the music. Interactive with his environment. Relatively calm in the afternoon. Visited grandparents. They received kisses and cuddles. He was a delight for all.

Day Five

N. was interested in piecing a puzzle together. With a quiet, methodical approach, he happily did several puzzles. Very happy boy in the afternoon after a long nap. Both children were delightful. L. was very peaceful and happy and this obviously spilled over. P. commented on how happy everyone seemed!

Day Six

N. did another puzzle. Not very interested in drawing. Did some cutting well and pasting. N. tense in the afternoon. Slight change in routine. Both parents present. Didn't nap, visited P.'s mother. Still affectionate in the evening. Tempo of the household not as calm. I needed to work on being calm despite opposition.

Day Seven

N. restless and angry with me during therapy. I was obviously tense myself. Unable to center myself. Concerned about behavior of partner. N. calms down when interacting with Kay. Then both N. and I have a cry and a cuddle. A release of built-up tension from last day and evening. N. was an angel in the afternoon. Very interactive and caring with his cousins and grandparents. Became unsettled when father arrived home. Father very tense. I kept my cool and somehow kept N. together. A peaceful goodnight. I was able to calmly

interact with P. over dinner and a glass of wine. I used “I” language to express my disappointment in last day’s events. P. responded in a non-aggressive manner, but put the blame on just being tired. A relief that his aggression didn’t continue. A peaceful evening. Could have gone the other way if I had responded to his stress and initial presence with the family. I am proud of myself for being so centered and peaceful. Thank you, Dr. Tomatis, Mozart, Gregorian chant and, of course, Kay.

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Day Eight

N. happy in therapy. Built a cubby with Kay. Singing and dancing to children’s songs. Able to balance on wood without any apprehension. Had a deep afternoon sleep. Not as affectionate in the evening as previous days. Played with enthusiasm in the backyard. Jumped off the table, kicking the ball, full of life. Ate well at lunch and dinner. I had been calm this afternoon. I have decided I won’t live a life built on fear, but love. My children’s wellbeing is paramount. I will not allow any human being to use them for their own selfish aims. What we/they deserve is peace not chaos. They deserve honesty and integrity from the adults in their home.

Day Nine

N. continued to happily play in the cubby house today. Very calm during children’s music. Did a picture without too much prompting. Struggling with pencil and paper. However big change compared to the beginning of his trying to hold his pencil the correct way. Amazing!

N. was aggressive with L. in the evening. I am still not too sure how to approach this situation. When N. was told he was having a bath he went a little crazy. I verbally commented that his behavior was too crazy. He turned to me

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and apologized, cried and gave me a cuddle. I don't know if it is because he was aware of himself or because I insulted him. I'm not sure. N. was calm and relaxed thereafter.

Affectionate with plenty of eye contact. Listening to both parents. N. commented that he could hear clicking noises. I am not sure what that meant. All-and-all his behavior has changed remarkably compared to two weeks ago; he is the angel he once was.

P. is in a good mood tonight. The weekend is here for him. He commented about the changes in both of us. The most obvious were that we are calmer and more centered. I can't believe how happy I am, full of hope for a brighter, bigger future. The persistent nagging, negative erosion has no place with me and my abode. Not anymore, life begins at 35 not 40!

Day Ten: the last day of first intensive—a summary

- *In the beginning he was not keen to initiate affection, but is now very spontaneous.*
- *He now looks at you in the eye when giving and receiving cuddles.*
- *N. now apologizes for aggressive behavior and is now responding to simple requests, very different when compared to the level of chaos of before: for example, if I say, "It is time to go now. Please put your shoes on!" I walk away and his shoes are on.*
- *He is now sleeping soundly, with no night waking.*
- *N. is now eating all food on his plate: "More please!"*
- *N. is now interested in packing away toys—was on the way to doing it before but wasn't quite there.*
- *He can hold his pencil well, when focused and the opportunity is available.*
- *Is now holding scissors with more ease and cutting straighter.*
- *N. is not tripping over as much now and is more confident running and*

jumping.

- *He has more energy.*
- *N. is full of smiles, laughter, peace. Simply wonderful!*

ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING

N. is:

- *trying more foods and asking for more food*
- *eating lettuce on sandwiches and not craving dairy as much*
- *not requiring a drink as much*
- *going to sleep quickly after reading books*
- *less sensitive when being towel-dried*
- *tolerating gentle massage, even enjoys it: “Can I have a massage?”*
- *keen to try and dress himself*
- *trying to work out left and right with shoes*
- *paying attention to buttons more, with less frustration*
- *brushing his teeth without distress*
- *independently washing his hands*
- *flushing the toilet*
- *happy to brush hair*
- *tolerating putting blackout on better*
- *willing to wear a hat and warm clothes*
- *still not happy to have hair washed—remains extremely distressed*
- *still needing a nappy at night*
- *attempting artwork—drawing, finger painting, playing with clay*
- *more interested on some days than others*

- *better when there has been no television*
- *following me to my workstation*
- *really good with scissors*
- *giving more cuddles to Nana and Poppy*
- *able to stay relatively calm.*

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS—AT THE PRESCHOOL

- *N.'s teacher no longer needs to use little reminders like, "We wait our turn," or "We don't hit each other."*
- *He isn't screaming or throwing his arms when frustrated.*
- *N. is showing more signs of being able to calm down quicker, and has shown interest in socializing with more than one person. Teacher is happy!*
- *He is attempting to draw and paint without frustration and/or refusing to try.*
- *N. is proud of his artwork.*
- *He is less disruptive at group time and more considerate of others' needs.*
- *He will carry his own bag without a fuss.*
- *N. now separates with ease, with no crying, instead running to the door: "Okay, Mum see you!"*
- *He has some favorite toys.*
- *He isn't mowing down towers anymore, but is building them with some amazing designs. They have been saved for me to see.*
- *N. is demonstrating more creative thinking. Some activities are built around his ideas.*
- *He now sits still while books are being read.*

The staff are extremely happy at the end of the day. Continual thumbs-up and smiles from all of us. Preschool teacher received lots of hugs. There is a great

rapport happening. I have mentioned I am doing Tomatis® therapy. The staff are amazed generally at the changes in N. I am maintaining an open dialogue with staff. They really care! Fabulous!

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS—AT THE MOVEMENT CLASS

- *N. is excited to go: “Is it today? Come on, let’s go!”*
- *He is generally more aware of other members in the group.*
- *N. now less disruptive, occasionally will have an outburst and circle the room a few times and then settles. The teacher accepts this and calls it N.’s “vestibular exercises.”*
- *He is keen to try more of the equipment and is coping with the challenges.*
- *N. is less frustrated when unable to master something.*
- *He is showing better balance and appears more coordinated.*
- *N. now attempts to cross the midline.*
- *He is able to listen to instructions and follow through without prompting.*
- *N. is laughing and enjoying himself more, is saying hello to the other children, and is friendlier.*

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Conclusion

The Tomatis® Method is a whole-listening approach. It influences receptive and expressive listening, motor functioning, the balance between the right and left brain, and the emotional difficulties that translate to fight/flight/freeze behaviors. If we can activate and strengthen the pathways to the left brain, the dynamic integration of the

two hemispheres causes changes in the entire neural network.

The diary and eloquent feedback from Nigel's mother reflects many elements and the effect of the listening process. Nigel no longer needed prompting in the movement class, also indicating signs of improved motor functioning. To cross over from the left side of the body to the right, and vice versa (the midline crossing) is an important milestone on an educational level as it relates to the function of both reading and writing.

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The diary reflects daily examples of emotional changes. Nigel became less reactive, more reflective and he developed the possibility of being both centered and more grounded. This meant that he was more physically aware of himself and others in his surrounding area and was able to process environmental stimuli in a safe way. Nigel is now nine years old and while still "not perfect" he has settled in school and is learning well.