

FELDENKRAIS AUSTRALIA

Journal of the Australian Feldenkrais Guild Inc.

2020



**HANDS-FREE
FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION
SOMATIC VS ACADEMIC LEARNING
PHILOSOPHY & FELDENKRAIS
LEARNING THROUGH LIFE**



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

By Shona Lee

Learning the art of being a Feldenkrais practitioner is a transformative experience; for all aspects of your life. And the learning only continues to grow, as our ethos is a learning process. It's fitting that this Learning themed edition of the Journal, as well as defining and elaborating on the fundamentals for learning from well-seasoned practitioners, also features insightful reflections direct from those currently in a practitioner training program.... their level of self-awareness says much for what we cultivate through this practice and suggests the future for Feldenkrais is bright!

Somatic education delivered online? 'Hands-free' functional integration via Zoom? This year has been a steep learning curve for all and the contents of this publication gives you a window into how everyone's been rising to adapt to the challenge. To learn best in new territory, kindness towards yourself and others is key. I feel the more interdisciplinary collaborations

we can foster, such as the research project on the intersection of Feldenkrais and philosophy, the better. With learning as a continuum, each day's experience builds towards whatever you're aspiring for/ developing. If you can keep the aim in sight despite the daily demands and distractions, new insights might emerge from unexpected places (or pandemics!) that inform the way your heartfelt ideas eventually get realised.

And the beauty of compiling these reflections on learning into a publication such as this, means the insights arrived at by an individual, might inform our own learning / process.

"The mind, once stretched by an original idea, can never return to it's original dimensions"
Ralph Waldo Emerson

THE EDITOR

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ABOUT FELDENKRAIS AUSTRALIA

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The theme for our 2021 issue is 'On the Ground' – contributions are invited.

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Cover: features Leon Mastenbroek

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FEATURE : LEARNING



DEFINING LEARNING?

By Lesley McLennan

Lesley McLennan (Melbourne 1, 1991) has had a diverse background through teaching, performance, arts administration,

philanthropy and of course the Feldenkrais Method. The unifying themes of movement and accessibility have linked each stage in her professional career, including this very new phase as a published author.

How many times have we been asked “What is Feldenkrais?” —an obvious and necessary question sparked by the very unusual word. Most students and practitioners have spent a great deal of stumbling time over our explanations of the Method. But more likely to cause problems in any conversation are words—so simple and commonplace—that we have never considered their meaning fully. Listening recently to a workshop presented by Moshe Feldenkrais (MF) in 1981, I was struck by two statements. The first:

“I have tried through my teaching to weed out all the things that I don’t know what they really mean.”

Coming from a man with five languages, and an enormous extended technical vocabulary, this is a very

pertinent statement. So, he distils his teaching to things for which he rigorously understands their meaning, and to do this, he must be constantly quizzing himself about his own knowledge.

The statement is the prequel to an entertaining monologue defining posture. I’m sure we’ve all heard/read renditions of this discussion concluding that “a good posture is one which enables a person to move without preliminary re-arrangement”. You can hear from his discussions on the subject, that finding the definition was an active pursuit that had nothing to do with dictionaries, nor loose social agreement on meaning, but was experientially based. Then comes the second statement that gave me pause:

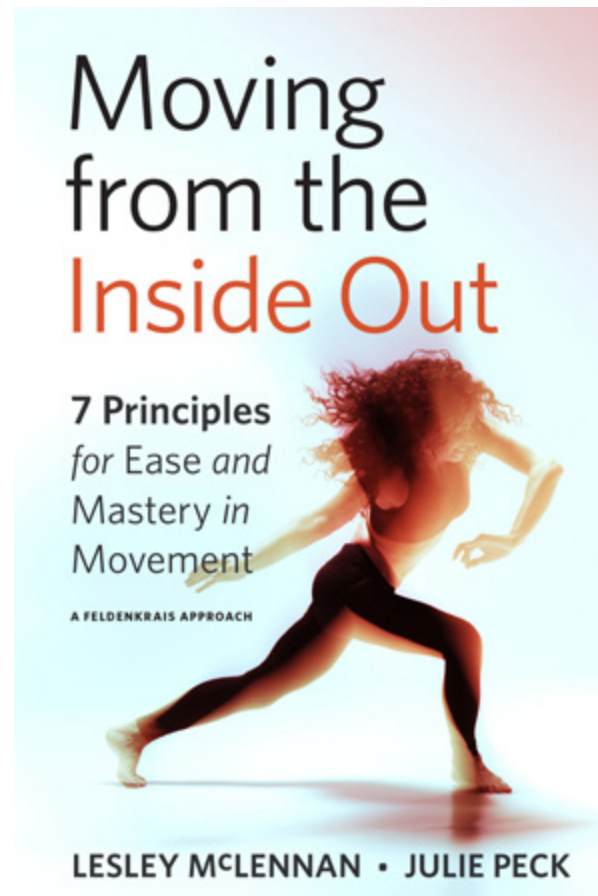
“Posture is corrected by the definition of the thing.” What a wonderful symmetry there is here, that in spending time to actively clarify and define the concept, he has also found novel solutions.

Unlike MF, the first time I heard the question, “what is good posture?” It never occurred to me, that I should question the word “posture” – this was such a common word that had been in my vocabulary too long to

remember its source. I thought the pertinent word was 'good'. A similar issue happened for me when I began writing the book, *Moving from the Inside Out*, with Julie Peck. She had constantly iterated that "*learning and movement are entwined as inextricably as the two strands of DNA in a double helix*". When I stopped long enough to write about the wonderful concepts Julie was putting together, I found gaping holes in my definitions of core words like 'learning'. I had been a secondary school teacher, been in many classrooms and workshops over the years, taught, lectured, and directed, and in all that time had never really questioned my definition of 'learning'.

If you would care to **take a moment before reading on, and do a quick exercise**, then I would recommend you **try this in writing** – how would you define/explain, **learning, attention, and awareness**? Three simple words, so commonplace we have probably never defined them—even to ourselves.

The benefit of writing is the amount we must slow our thoughts, and see on paper what we have jumped over in our mind. Like *slowing our movement, and finally noticing the jumps and glitches*, writing can clarify our gaps. For the first chapter of our book, I came to my solutions of Learning, Attention, Awareness.



Moving from the Inside Out
by Lesley McLennan Julie Peck

If you have just done that little writing exercise, then you will now have something with which to compare or challenge mine.

Learning is a process that leads to change — the mechanism of adapting. In the space of one century we have moved from thinking of learning as the province of mammals, to understanding that single-cell organisms, plants and even machinery can be said to learn. We now know our nervous systems are massive ongoing learning networks, but they can learn many things that hinder rather than help, and it is only with the aid of attention and awareness that we can unravel the differences.

Most human learning takes place under the spotlight of **attention** — that moment when we bring our sensors (either internal and/or external) to focus on a point of interest. Unlike learning, attention is hierarchical — the greater the stimulus, the more attention it receives. At its simplest, attention is noticing. When cultivated, attention is the beginning point of any investigation into the world inside and outside ourselves. It takes significant learning on our parts to shift attention deliberately, to block, expand or focus attention. One mark of a maturing system is the ability to control attention in this way.

Awareness is the state in which we can expand attention to include greater amounts of internal and external information and make choices. For example, in an aware state we can be conscious of the chaotic noises outside the window, notice a rising feeling of irritation, and choose to let the irritation build or expand attention further to notice what thoughts are fuelling the irritation. Awareness helps us expand knowledge of ourselves, our reactions, their meaning, and consequences. It is possible to live a conscious life with only very rare sparks of awareness. It is not possible to achieve our greatest potential without awareness because it is at the heart of self-creation.

Awareness evolves after a long apprenticeship in controlling attention.

In the days to come you might find some words you use commonly in your teaching. Consider if you have a real 'working' definition of their meanings. Could you 'freshen' up those definitions, and thereby give yourself new solutions? Then share your gems with us all!

1 *Moving from the Inside Out*, 2020, by Julie Peck and myself, has just been published by North Atlantic Books and relaunched in electronic and paperback formats.

2 Daniel Siegel, an esteemed pioneer in the field of mental health, refers to awareness as the 'scalpel' that resculpts neural pathways, in his seminal work *Mind Sight* (2009, p. 133).





ACADEMIC VS SOMATIC LEARNING

By Dr Christopher Allan

Dr Christopher Allan (SEAUS3) is a singer, voice teacher, choral conductor and music educator.

He has always been interested in helping people to achieve their goals. The move into somatic learning is proving to be an exciting addition to his life and a continuation of life-long learning.

I've done a lot of academic learning....Willingly stepped onto the treadmill of traditional tertiary education. In the 1970s I graduated with a 4 year long Graduate Diploma of Music Education (trained as a Music and English teacher for high school students) and then converted that, some years later, to a Bachelor of Music Education - 5 years of Conservatorium/ Uni training. Fast forward some years later and I was employed by the University of Newcastle (NSW) Conservatorium of Music as a voice teacher in the mid 90's, initially to teach singing in a one-on-one situation to both university and community students.

When I began to work at the 'Con' I was encouraged to up-skill so that I might be able to apply for a full time

position in the Uni's Music Faculty. So I undertook a Master of Music degree. This was meant to be 2 years, but I took 3 to finish and then applied for, and was made full time staff at the Uni in 2000.

I was a Level B Lecturer and, in order to get a promotion, I needed to do further study... So around 2003 I began the long process of being a PhD candidate. Because I had management experience in business and managed a professional theatre company for 5 years, I was quickly promoted into management positions within my school at the Uni. This was great, but meant that the PhD was a little sidelined as the toll of other work took over. I also sang professionally (with Opera Australia, the Song Company and many times as a solo performer), was a fully qualified Gemmologist (one who studies gem stones) and have a Diploma in Jewellery Design from the Gemmological Institute of America. However, I successfully completed the PhD in 2011. When I completed the PhD, I was a little bored! So did a 3 month course on developing websites using the software program Dreamweaver at the local TAFE.

You could probably say that I'm a learning tragic/junkie/insert your own word here....

I am now undertaking the Feldenkrais Practitioner training. As you can see, from above, I'm used to the idea of learn, learn, learn, learn some more, achieve and eventually graduate. There's been plenty of research, plenty of writing, plenty of sleepless nights and deadlines (achieved or missed!). Therefore, to come to my first training, lie on the floor for hours, examine myself and attempt NOT to achieve was both a revelation and a shock. To be asked to find, not in a book, but within myself, my awareness, my experience, a way forward was an enormous challenge. To be told that it 'didn't matter' if I was to master a movement, or that it was quite ok if I sat something out during a training day was anathema to my experience.

It may come as a shock to you, but it had only dawned on me a year or so before beginning the training (February 2019), that I was 'competitive'. I had just seen myself as a learner and achiever (and successful in my area), but there was an emerging realisation that

I had to watch a tendency to 'take over' especially in a musical sense, because I knew a 'better way' of doing something.

Competitive? Pain in the neck? Could the competitiveness have come from a continual striving toward a goal? Or 30 years performing in public and needing to hit the mark each and every time? Bears more reflection on my behalf I think....

Now, a year and a half into the Feldenkrais training, still struggling with some of those concepts, but I'm thoroughly enjoying the journey. In the last 5 years I held the positions of Program Convenor (of two degree programs - everything from staffing every course in the programs to quality assurance) and Deputy Head of School, Teaching and Learning at the University of Newcastle (essentially overseeing the quality of the courses the whole school provided). That experience cemented me to the idea of 'outward' learning - preparing courses, tracking assessments, conforming to a particular set of parameters drawn both from the School of Music and also the University etc. The kind of learning I am doing now, although there is an outward component, is essentially an inward learning.

The idea of looking inward is not new to me, but what is more 'new' is the concept of this style of learning itself. In an article by Thomas Hanna (which we were given to read last year) he gives this idea: .. *"[the Feldenkrais Method] ..allows us to experience our motor function and therefore find and experience a new way of doing something. In other words we learn."* This concept of learning in an experiential way again is not new to me - but the concept that learning can be an awareness led experience of my movement, my attitude toward movement and the recognition of new opportunities of movement is something that quite blows my mind.

We speak often in training of being 'perturbed'. I realise that I have fought that concept for some time and am only now realising that my need NOT to be perturbed is born out of a sense of 'safety'. I could be slightly uncharitable and say that it's not safety at all but the construct of my life that I have built. Based on the types of learning and general life I have lived, I have, as does everyone I'm sure, built my idea of who I am and how I function. Challenging that, as the Feldenkrais Method does, is profound. Shaking up your ideas of 'right and wrong', 'good and bad' and even

'up and down' is tricky stuff to navigate. Shaking up the very way that you are used to thinking about, and negotiating learning is very challenging indeed. It's not easy to leave behind what you have built up, but the promise of new opportunities and horizons suggests that it's a very worthwhile journey.

How that journey pans out over the remaining time of my training, and in the years beyond, remains to be seen. Suffice to say, I am more than intrigued by the process and wonder what will be revealed. I've always championed the notion of being a life-long learner, it's good to see that I'm living that life. ■



SKELETONS ALIVE - DECEMBER 2019 WITH STEPHANIE SPINK AND CHRIS LAMBERT

By Kylie Cook

Kylie Cook (SEAUS3) an environmental activist with a love of good organic food, used to run an Organic Wholefoods Business. But its 3.30 am starts weren't exactly a 'sustainable' lifestyle! So she did a year of yoga teacher training whilst selling her business and is now two years into the Feldenkrais Practitioner Training and incredibly thankful and happy to have the resources and opportunity to delve deeply into the method.

I am currently in the SEAUS3 Feldenkrais Practitioner training. When I heard the Skeleton Stringing workshop announced I booked in right away, as I had seen a short video of the strung skeleton on Facebook and was amazed at how this visual medium enhanced my understanding of the movement of my own skeleton. I knew the course would provide me with a unique experience of anatomy that I would otherwise not have access to. Given that I feel unlikely to learn all the names of connecting bones / ligaments / muscles, I thought this would be a perfect opportunity to gain a clearer understanding of all the bones that make a skeleton.

I am quite lackadaisical so only the day before I opened the email to find out what I need to take, giving me just enough time to print off the manual and gather the seemingly endless amount of tools and equipment I needed to bring with me to the course. The next morning I rocked up to Box Hill Town Hall with a couple of buckets full of tools and equipment and lugged the third hand skeleton that I had found for a much cheaper price on Marketplace into the 'downstairs dungeon', where there were another 20 skeletons waiting to be strung and a room full of Felde folk. *One of the things I love about Feldenkrais is the warm regard there is in a room, so although I knew a few faces, everyone else has this really authentic way of*



making welcome everyone and being quite open to every person, so I felt part of an extended family on entry.

Stephanie and Chris enquired if any of us had experience using a drill and approximately a quarter of the class hadn't. This blew my mind - imagine signing up to string a skeleton, to use a drill on odd shaped round bones as your first drilling experience?! I was wondering how these two facilitators were going to handle the extreme variance in skill.... I was thinking, *this is super impressive on not just the people who attended but also the teaching staff to hold this spectrum of skill.* I sometimes think that one of the truly incredible things Feldenkrais provides is this **ability to have a confidence in your own ability**, with knowledge that we will be taught by Feldenkrais practitioners who are able to **support learning in a manner which fosters a safe and encouraging environment to flourish.**

SKELETONS ALIVE - DECEMBER 2019 WITH STEPHANIE SPINK AND CHRIS LAMBERT *By Kylie Cook*



After a spoken orientation and setting up of our workspaces (where some of us realised that sharing equipment was not going to work timewise) there was an opportunity to use the drill on wood and bone to familiarise ourselves with the materials. The next morning saw me hit up Bunnings for a rechargeable drill and a workbench. First up on day two was assembling the skeletons out of their box / wrapping for those who'd purchased them new.

Then we began by opening the skull and drilling into the base of the skull to allow the head to move up/down and side to side on the neck. It did feel kind of weird to *pierce the 'bone that makes the head'* even though the skeleton is plasticIt isn't particularly smooth inside the skull so there was a bit of consternation to begin, trying to line up entry and exit holes without a clear visual. Fortunately by the fourth hole, a 'settling in to my drilling' occurred and I found a drilling pressure and rhythm that was less hesitant and

more efficient. My skill, was anchoring bones really well for secure drilling; I was definitely challenged by finding a line on the opposite side of a bone where the route on the outside of the bone is contoured (which is pretty much every bone in our body).

I already had basic drill skills and had missed out on the perfectionist gene, so despite a few nerves I was feeling ok. What I did notice arising in myself as the course progressed, was the unconscious irascibility of my extremely violent, volatile father still living in my being (he was particularly scary with tools in his hand). As I drilled and marked and measured, there was a real jerkiness to my movements, I noticed my brain shutting down and I struggled to take in the next sequence of information. Remember that third hand skeleton? It was an anomaly so most of the guidance for the vast majority of people who'd purchased a skeleton with the course needed altering to fit the assembly of my

own skeleton. Who knew there was so much variance in the construction of skeletons....

So I watched myself undertaking each task like an ATM and did my best to keep my breathing smooth and steady and my movements slow and subtle - I rested lots.

We drilled our way down the body, into the neck, the scapula, (for free floating shoulder blades) the shoulders, the elbow and wrist; the hips, the knee, the ankle. Each joint providing unique bones to grapple softly with. From how to secure the clamps, to how to make the bones sit well together; to what order does the elastic need to travel through all these holes I've just made in joining together to make a functional connection? The changing density of plastics required slightly different drilling techniques, some plastic was soft and spongy, some hard and brittle.

We learnt so much - like a sharp drill bit is really important!

Asking for help and working in pairs can be really efficient....

Blu-tack is our friend. Skewers and pipe cleaners are essential hardware.

And charging the battery on the drill *each day* is very useful!

SKELETONS ALIVE - DECEMBER 2019 WITH STEPHANIE SPINK AND CHRIS LAMBERT *By Kylie Cook*



We also learnt how incredible our skeletons are. Being able to hold and feel the shape of most of the bones, the big ones in particular, was an opportunity to really experience the shape and structure of each bone - how well they 'but against' each other; the twists, bumps and grooves. It made my own bones feel so much more present as a thing inside me; the shape of them how they move with each other - how and where they sit inside of me and how the muscles and ligaments attach.

After stringing the skeletons, we had a play, laying all the 20 odd skeletons on the floor on mats and moving them in a short ATM sequence; watching the unfurling of the movement through the skeleton. Just like humans each one moved differently, as no two drillings were exactly alike, so here was this subtle variation in each skeleton... It was simply beautiful to watch the



culmination of all this activity unfold in this soft dance on the floor. We should have made a video!

As with every Feldenkrais event I have been to there is a level of maturity, curiosity, openness and camaraderie; opportunity to make significant connections with people from near and far. *Hello to my new friends in Singapore and Japan!* We shared tools, stories and food. I was even lent a pair of glasses when I misplaced mine (thanks Nina!)

Now it wouldn't be a Feldenkrais training if we didn't have to move rooms....! Midway through we traipsed all 20 skeletons up the lift along the passage ways along with all the tables and tools. It was a serious logistical undertaking that Jenni Evans and team organised with good humour and grace. I didn't quite finish my stringing during the workshop so was to

have a catch up at Jenni's place which I missed due to illness. However I feel very confident in my ability to read the directions and do the last couple of holes by myself, so a resounding accomplishment from a 5 day undertaking. *(Side note: in the time it took most people to complete one side of their skeleton, Jenni had practically finished two skeletons!!)*

Having the opportunity to watch the facilitators do their thing was pretty amazing. The way the tasks were broken down, modified and adjusted for a diverse group of people probably remains the highlight of the course. The depth of their knowledge and their ability to apply it so thoughtfully, constructively and with great clarity was like a master class in Feldenkrais. They fielded several hundred questions and demonstrated, many times over and over the same action, made adjustments for the few odd bod skeletons and did it with deftness and grace. I feel so fortunate to have had this opportunity, so if you are interested when the next one comes along.....whether you choose to string a skeleton or assist someone else, I'd say go for it!

Remember my irascible father? He got way quieter. My hands became steady and my eye more true.

Photos by Helen Lane. ■



LEARNING IN LOCKDOWN

By Melissa Maxwell

Melissa Maxwell (SEAUS3) is on the Feldenkrais path enjoying the immersion of the SEAUS3 FPTP.

A Mum and a Wife at heart who is practising the juggle with laughter and aspiring elegance.

Segment 5 was held in May 2020, completed online over a dual stream option of intensive or distributed. I chose to do the distributed learning option which went over 4 weeks, the intensive stream went over 2 weeks.

I'm a Mum. My little man is 3.5 years old. Usually my Mum would mind him whilst I study and have some adult time to immerse myself in all the play and conversations which accompany a Feldenkrais segment. This one would be different. We were in lockdown. We had permission to leave our homes for 4 reasons and to immerse yourself in a Feldenkrais segment was not one of them. The joy of the juggle began.

As cities across Australia and the world practiced social distancing and lock-ins, we embarked on our 5th segment of training in the safety of our homes.

The theme for our ATM practices and learning was breathing which was most fitting given the current crisis. Our world has changed. A bit like all things I guess, in that you don't realise what you have until it's gone. A new way of being for everyone. The ultimate slow down. Some people have loved the time inside with their families and the time to nurture themselves and recuperate, reacquainting with themselves and each other. Others have really struggled and can't wait to be out and busy in the world again.

As the two streams learned side by side, I was grateful to have chosen the distributed stream as the learning content seemed so much more than if we were attending the hall. The reality of it is however that the amount we had to absorb would have felt very different if it involved passive listening and absorbing as opposed to active reading and doing. I felt stretched; also invigorated. I was loving the challenges this was presenting in my learning, a true Feldenkrais constraint, exposure to a different level of awareness. It was difficult to balance 'Mumming' and learning but we managed. The normal challenges I would face in attending the segments were not present and we managed quite fine in the warmth of being home with the distractions of toys and Paw Patrol...

Each morning would begin with a Zoom meeting with all of the students and this took some getting used to. Slowly but surely the fantastic conversations that ensue within the Feldenkrais environment blossomed into giving everyone food for thought as they proceeded through their respective days. Some people set up diarised study groups to keep the structure of the learning consistent and on track, others had discussions at all hours of the days and nights individually or in small groups. It was fascinating to talk with people as we discussed our strengths and struggles as we navigated a very different way of being in a different way of learning. For some the time behind a screen was too much, for others the exposure to so many strong voices all at once was too much, but I do believe I can speak for most when we chose to treat this very different learning experience with the same headspace and exploration that comes with being in an ATM; what we learned about ourselves and those around us was uncapped. The opportunity this learning style provided to bring our Feldenkrais learnings from Box Hill into our own homes was a profound experience.

For me when I attend the Box Hill Town Hall for my learning it feels like respite, recuperation and recovery. For many they come from interstate and can

completely immerse themselves in their learnings and totally become absorbed with what their bodies teach them about all things past, present and possible. This learning involved being at home. Some people were working as well as learning, others were caring as well as learning, so that immersion, escape and becoming had to find space amongst life and all of its happenings in a very shut down world.... As we navigated our way through learning how to promote engagement in ATM Practice, and then explored the dynamics of ATM as a self-educative practice our minds began to open as our bodies began to let go. Being in your own environment, whilst being incredibly distracting at times, also presented a different constraint in **that there was no clear line between where the practice began and the learning finished. Each task became new, each everyday activity became an exploration**, all the while thinking and being and breathing in a world that was struggling to inhale. It truly was a learning of contrasts.

I think every student located the “Read Aloud” capability on our computers as the absorption required to grasp the enormous amounts of reading was an absolute necessity. It is strange to think that during a segment we would passively intake so much information but in comparison and retrospectively looking at other segments we definitely do.

We focused on organising ATM lessons around function and began to develop our practices as ATM teachers. As our exploration and learning was led into preparing to teach a lesson, the environment of home in the normal-not-normal world, not in Box Hill, rocked us. Our desire to find perfection first off delayed some - they wanted to present their best first-time around. It was with much reminding by our wise teachers that, had we been in Box Hill, your first time effort would have been ‘best enough’. We were introduced to the ‘use of self’ and language which I am convinced will be a practice I will learn and indulge in for all of my days.

The difference in learning online as opposed to in person, on site, was vast for me. As each segment starts I love to look around the room at all of the faces I have come to know and adore through my learning, and see how their lives have changed in the respective months between segments. Quite often their lives have not changed too much (or sometimes they have a lot) but they as individuals continue to grow and evolve whilst the stability of their environment bends and folds around them. I love to look and note how everyone moves and how they carry themselves, as I know that at the end of the 2 or sometimes 3 weeks the differences will be profound. By the end of the segment

I see bright faces, reinvigorated minds, I see bodies standing tall without effort – equipoise is present everywhere. It is so beautiful.

In the online capacity I feel my knowledge has anchored and my understanding of the method continues to grow as I nurture it. As we go into our next segment of Learning, for me in Melbourne it will be in Lockdown again. I sincerely look forward to a place in time when we can all come together to be present again, where I get to see my friends and how they glow after another exceptional opportunity to learn.

And the hugs, Feldenkrais hugs are the best! ■



ONLINE LEARNING

By Kylie Cook

Kylie Cook (SEAUS3) an environmental activist with a love of good organic food, used to run an Organic Wholefoods Business.

But its 3.30 am starts weren't exactly a 'sustainable' lifestyle! So she did a year of yoga teacher training whilst selling her business and is now two years into the Feldenkrais Practitioner Training and incredibly thankful and happy to have the resources and opportunity to delve deeply into the method.

The Novel Coronavirus was the impetus for novel learning in the SEAUS3 Feldenkrais Training.

Zoran and Jenni did a whole lot of unseen work to take what is a primarily experiential undertaking and breathing life into Module 5 being a combination of distance education and online learning.

We were fortunate to have all had experience with Zoom as we had study buddies from the beginning and were used to monthly gatherings in small numbers to continue our learning between modules. There was definitely a sense of nervousness prior to our start date as to how much online time we could handle as many

of us were already spending more time online due to our changed work environments. This coupled with some people having young children at home, people working at home - having to share spaces and tech, challenges with finances for some, not able to stop work for others; there were a lot of unfamiliar issues to contend with coupled with the sadness of not meeting up with folks we have a firm friendships with and great uncertainty in how it could flow well. *Especially as we were hoping to have a more tactile immersion and exploration of Functional Integration...*

A few days before our start date a whole heap of information came into our email and arrived on the Knowledgebase (the online portal where all our curricula is housed). It didn't make easy sense to me, so I didn't worry and assumed I would find out as I went along. Looking at the timetable it was obvious it was more distance than online learning and we had very little contact with each other as a group, aside from our group of three. So I set up a daily time slot for folks to gather and chat about all things Feldenkrais study. I found this really useful - everyday there was between 1 and 9 other people dropping in to either

do the daily ATM or discuss the various assignments. It felt like a hangout room and kept the feelings of interconnectedness flowing.

We were given a lot of reading and a lot of assignments to complete. I found it useful to print the pages and use them for notes rather than more screen time. I really enjoyed the assignments and having to learn to use Google docs. Well that is a lie..... I enjoyed being able to use it by the end of a three hour marathon of wrapping my head around file sharing!! Sometimes it was like an ATM - I wound up sharing stuff without actually knowing how - suddenly I found myself sitting up and the path was obfuscated by the thousands of wrong attempts I made.

We got to teach an ATM lesson on Zoom and listen and re-watch ourselves and critique our voice and strategies. It was really interesting and immersive in a different and informative way. We didn't miss out on our FI - we each had a virtual one! I was so impressed with the visual acuity of my practitioner; I felt realised was so much learning I had yet to acquire. It also showcased how we can have an online presence with our emerging work in the field.

So it felt quite cutting edge and like we were having real time learning on how to have an online business too; something I am not sure would be touched on in the regular training format. I loved the online learning platform so much I repeated the whole experience with three of my peers who were unable to attend in real time and guided them through some of the pitfalls we had already worked through. I learnt so much more the second time around about the structure of the course, as I was not so focused on tasks the course format seemed much more elegant and smooth on repetition.

Of course we had another outbreak in Melbourne and our curve is definitely not flat as I type this on the day of the Journal contribution deadline. With more than 700 cases of COVID-19 recorded, no one wants to come to Melbourne. We have had long distance Larry Goldfarb from Santa Cruz California, for the past two weeks. Once again we are in each other's homes and meeting the odd family member and their pets. The format this time is all on Zoom with a few breaks and an ATM lesson at least daily. I am struggling this time. As I am working, I have one day of 9 hours Zoom time and it is a LOT. However I am grateful that we can be home, as there has been a huge mental health breakdown of a family member and I would have chosen to remain home if we were in Box Hill.

Because we are online I haven't had to miss out; I have been able to pace myself more easily and keep an eye on my family member. I have been finding a path of presence - to myself, my family and my learning. Although I have been mentally fatigued and struggled, it has also been a luxury to have had the care and support of my peers and to even have my laptop by my bed and fall asleep to Larry talking on occasion. Maybe it is going in subliminally; Larry said it is a possibility.

We are so fortunate to have so much technology and be so adaptable. It really is a privilege and I am not sure training could have continued if we weren't able to utilise the tech; it certainly wouldn't be as easy. Jenni is running marathons every day, being the Zoom Host, sorting numerous problems and glitches, giving FIs and running her business as well (and probably preparing for Module 7 to also go online because border closures are likely to still be enforced).

As the COVID numbers crept up early in Module 6 training I had a day of real sadness at having to continue in the online format, despite the benefits for myself and others (some people are saving a small fortune in travel and accommodation costs). Online learning is flexible, creative and has loads of practical attributes but it isn't as nuanced and warm; it is more

work to make the connections between people as rich. Then the mental health emergency took all my perspective and placed what is important front and centre. I am ready and eager to see how Module 7 is going to unfold, most likely online and how I can make the connections richer, warmer, more tangible both in the intervening time and during the module. ■



HANDS-FREE FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION - NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION

By Jenni Evans

Jenni Evans (Melbourne 2, 2001) has been running online classes for over 3 years and more recently offering individual consultations. She is currently the Program Director of the Feldenkrais Institute of Australia and passionate about the way Feldenkrais embodies innovation for improvement.

During the COVID-19 shut in, we have all had to adapt and learn new skills. Students enrolled in the current South Eastern Australia Feldenkrais Professional Training Program were expecting to be able to come together in both Melbourne and Sydney to continue their learning. They would normally have worked together as a large group, participating in Awareness Through Movement® lessons, and in small groups, practicing the component skills of teaching to others. They would also have expected to receive individual Functional Integration® lessons as part of their preparation to become Feldenkrais Practitioners. The challenges of adapting the curriculum could be met with technology, but Functional Integration lessons traditionally require touch, in a shared space.

What is Functional Integration?

Firstly, how do we think of Functional Integration. Can it involve talking? Yes of course.

Must it involve touch? Yes of course – but does it have to be the Practitioner that does the touching?

And what about movement – who should be doing that?

Both Functional Integration (FI) and Awareness through Movement (ATM) are essentially conversations between a Practitioner (eg. she) and one or more people with a particular concern or interest. The purpose is to create conditions in which the client becomes aware of unhelpful movement patterns, contrasts between different parts/ movements and discovers more efficient options. Often, we think of ATM as the talking work and FI as the touching work, but this is an oversimplification. A more useful distinction might be that ATM is usually a prepared sequence of movements and explorations that the practitioner has chosen to address a perceived need or interest shared by the participants, whereas FI is a

unique, spontaneous, interactive exploration, adapting to the response of the client. Both can include talking and touch. In ATM, there is also the clear intention of building independent skills in self-awareness and self-direction. Working hands free, can remind us to encourage these skills in FI as well.

In an FI lesson, we begin with a verbal conversation. The practitioner (eg. she) listens for clues about how the person (eg. he) typically organises himself, she uses exploratory questions to bring to awareness, for both of them, the patterns and habits that may be present. At the same time, the practitioner is watching for movement clues. What can the person not stop doing? Which parts always /never join in a movement? When do these patterns appear? What happens to breathing, balance, coordination or emotional state when they do? Together we unpack the puzzle. It doesn't matter whether it's a concern about pain or limitation, or a desire to improve performance in some physical or mental skill - we want to share the understanding of how the person enacts themselves.

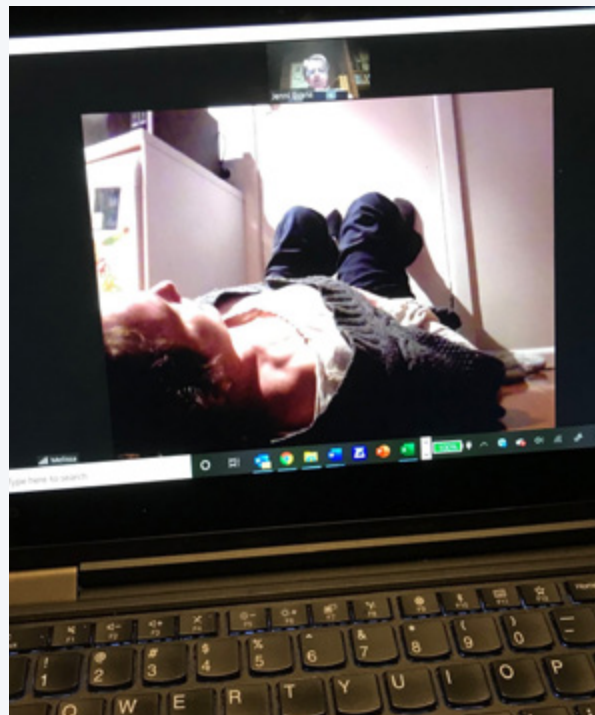
The practitioner might ask the person to demonstrate a movement or create some sort of reference to check back with later. She may also be subtly recreating the movement patterns in herself to get a feel for the client's organisation. She does this information

gathering, not to diagnose or prescribe, but to increase awareness and enhance self-image in the client. Together they clarify the desired outcome; learning has already been taking place. Sometimes this exploration will be sufficiently engaging to fill the whole lesson. Technology allows us to do all this quite effectively, whether we're in the same room or far across the world.

If they were together and the practitioner was acting from a therapeutic model, she might now think to herself, 'I see what the difficulty is', and then use her hands to explore, nudge and invite the client's nervous system and musculature to let go of habitual holding and come to more neutral organisation. The client would get up feeling better and go happily on his way until the pattern reoccurs, and he needs help again. But the Feldenkrais Method® is an educative approach, so the role of the practitioner is to help the client discover how he creates both the difficulty and the improvement.

Once the Practitioner has formed some ideas about where more information could be valuable to the person, to generate new or improved movement options, she formulates questions about what movement is available, easy or accessible. Traditionally she would invite the person to lie on the Feldenkrais

table, as she begins to explore with touch, her hands becoming the primary mode for asking the exploratory questions. Technology does not yet allow this when we are apart. In a hands-free context, it will be even more important for the practitioner to form a clear hypothesis about what might be happening in the client's system. She will then be able to begin the challenge of finding innovative ways of testing her assumptions and allowing the client to discover them for himself.



So now for the virtual touching

Moshe Feldenkrais is often quoted as saying "We act in accordance with our self-image." This is one of the essential ideas in our work. The way we sense ourselves or think about ourselves informs what is possible in the way we move. For example, if you think of your feet as blocks of wood, how would you walk? Compare this with thinking about having hands on the ends of your legs. How do you walk now?

Touch is used as a means of making the distinctions, vital for the formation and clarification of our self-image. The primary role of the practitioner in any Feldenkrais lesson is to help clarify that sense of self and discover movement options. Since you were born, you have been generating and building your sense of self. Initially this would have been through random movements bringing you into contact with surfaces, other parts of yourself and the people who cared for you. Gradually, as the repetition of movement and the responses you received formed recognisable patterns, you would have become more purposeful and intentional in your touch. These skills can be harnessed when working remotely. The practitioner can suggest various movements or placement of limbs to bring awareness to different parts of yourself. To gather information from the above exercise with your feet,

your feet needed to touch the ground or some other solid surface such as a wall. (It wouldn't work in space).

Finding the ground

Humans have evolved to live in the field of gravity, in contact with the ground. We know that it is vital to our nervous system to be able to sense a clear pathway of support. This allows our muscles to reduce excess muscular work, to find their optimal functioning. The tension and holding patterns we accumulate over our lives have the effect of reducing that sense of support; so our brains keep muscles engaged, in an effort to keep us stable. Much of the role of the practitioner is to help the client sense where he might be holding or engaging in unnecessary work.

Traditionally we invite people to lie down to maximise the surface of support. In the virtual context, we can ask the client to notice where there are gaps or where he feels areas of higher tension. Sometimes awareness is enough to prompt a change and at other times we will need to find ways to bring the ground to the person, so he can feel its support. This can be done with towels and pillows or by asking the person to use his own hands – eg. making a fist under his low back until it begins to soften and can gently be lowered to the ground. Involving the client in this way, can help

build the independent skills that allow him to continue his self-care once the session is over.

3 Types of Touch

There are 3 types of touch we can use in the hands-free context. Contact with the ground or other surface, the touch of the client's hands and imaginary touch. Moshe Feldenkrais calls this '*making mental contact with parts of yourself.*'

To explore the effect of contact with the ground, try the following: Lie on your back and notice which parts of your ribs rest on the floor. Is the pattern symmetrical? Is the pressure even from the ribs near your shoulders, to the ribs near your waist? Can you feel any ribs that press harder into the ground than others? Now check how your pelvis is resting. Do both sides contact the ground equally? If you noticed a difference in pressure on one side of the ribs, is it the same side of your pelvis that presses more? Now take your attention inside. As you breathe, let your breath touch each rib as it passes. How clearly can you feel the floor as your breath lands on the inside of each rib? Go back to the external sensing and notice any changes in how you feel the contact between your back and floor now.

The client can also be invited to bring awareness to various parts or to gather information by using his own

hands. For example: As you lie on the floor sensing how you are breathing, rest your hands on your chest, so that your fingers spread over as many ribs as possible. Notice how many ribs move independently as your breath passes, and how many move in pairs or groups. Does this change as you sense them?

Imagery can also be used to create a sense of touch. For example, sit with your forearm resting on your thigh, so that your hand has the palm facing down. Imagine that there is a thin column of warm air pushing into the centre of the palm of your hand. Let the air lift your hand as far as feels easy. Notice how far along your arm you feel the echo of that movement. What happens if you place an imaginary sandbag on your forearm? How does that change the sensations?

Movement

Movement is an important tool in increasing awareness. Traditionally in FI, it is the practitioner that supplies the movement, so that the client experiences a quality of ease or does not need to engage a habit. Fortunately, there is a constant source of movement available in the client – his breathing.

Imagine my finger placing a coloured dot on the corner of your shoulder. As you breathe, does the dot move? If so, in which direction? Can you use your breath to

move the dot on your shoulder in any other directions? Which ones are available and which are not (at the moment)? If you check the opposite shoulder and then come back to the first one, has something changed?

Differentiation

Another of the key strategies we use is creating a sense of contrast or difference, to allow us to notice things that otherwise would be 'invisible'. The client can be asked to sense difference between one side of the body and another, different parts of his body, different sequences or initiations of movements. What he is consciously able to consciously notice or report, is less important in bringing about change, than *providing this input* to his nervous system so that it can reorganise to optimise ease. We are all equipped with this innate intelligence in which, with awareness, our brains can do the changing for us.

Integration

Often the practitioner will finish a lesson by finding a way to clarify the connection through the client's system or creating a sense of relationships, as if the person was standing in the field of gravity. This is done while he is differently organised, before he gets up off the table. If the client is lying on the floor near a

wall, he can be invited to place both feet on the wall and then gently press one foot into the wall, then the other, to sense and compare the sensations as the force transmits through him. If the client is seated, gently 'pouring' his weight into one foot as if preparing to stand, and then comparing with the other, will give a sense of connection. Of course, standing and walking will also have an integrative effect.

The Practitioner can ask for commentary on the experience but will also be able to notice quite subtle shifts in breathing, contact with the ground, or flow of movement through the body, which will help to prompt the next question or exploration. Traditionally the practitioner uses touch to clarify connections and relationships between various parts of a movement pattern, but when using verbal questions of the client, she will have a clearer idea of what the client has actually noticed, and the discoveries he has been able to make himself. These are the ones that have the greatest power to be transformative.

In the traditional context, it can be easy for the practitioner to fall into the role of fixing the clients problem or telling them what they should do. In the hands-free setting, it is essential to engage the client

in the journey of exploration and discovery. Ideally in Functional Integration, two people work collaboratively with the roles of the guide and the explorer being shared, so that both discover more about what is possible for this client at this time, in this context. They share the development of plan to continue the exploration as the person goes back to his individual journey. Of course, there are cases where the client is not able to do this for himself. For example, children with Cerebral Palsy or people who have experienced a stroke or brain injury may simply not be able to generate consistent, repeatable movements themselves and will need external support to begin to build functional movement patterns.

We certainly look forward to being able to work with our hands again!

The Feldenkrais Method is a learning modality - everything is an opportunity for discovery and creativity.

Jenni Evans
MAFG, CFP and Assistant Trainer
June 2020

HANDS-FREE FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION - NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION *By Jenni Evans*

And if you're wondering what a virtual FI is like on the receiving end....

"That was an amazing FI, with a pretty stunning result. Brought about by thinking...You asked the questions, I answered with my movements and my reporting of what I was feeling and what I thought I was doing. I couldn't be sure if what I was doing was what I said I was doing, ie. moving my shoulders in specific directions by how and where I breathed, but I simply decided to believe it was true. And that you believed me each time made it more definitely true, ie, I was more confident in the premise that what I was reporting was true, and could therefore build on it. Your role then was to keep the foundation of the premise there once we had established it, so that I could continue to build on it. That Buddhist line "we are what we think. All that we are arises in our thoughts. With our thoughts we create the world..." comes to mind.

And this was a combination of two minds coming together my sensory motor system informing the process; not to mention perception, discrimination, interpretation, languaging. A whole collection of neurones firing. I can't speak for how your nervous system contributed but I couldn't have done that on my own. And out of all that a very concrete change in function of my skeleton.

I'm really excited about this new direction. I think it has so much potential, and far from being annoyed by COVID, I'm grateful it's led to this - I have a feeling we are just beginning to tap the greater potential of our nervous system and what Moshe was able to experience."

Caroline Yabsley ■

LOOK OUT FOR A NEW BOOK

"Learning through the nervous system: The Feldenkrais Method", edited by Chris Kresge and Staffan Elgelid that is due to be published by Handspring Publishing in the United States later this year.

There are over 20 chapters, written by authors from all over the world. It explores the wide variety of applications of the Feldenkrais Method and some theoretical frameworks to support understanding of the Method. It should be a wonderful introduction to the Method for the general public, as well as a useful book for students and practitioners. ■



PHIL&FELDY

By Eva Culek

Eva Culek (Sydney 4, 2003) is based in Canberra and has been in private practice since 1999, assisting people with

physical, psychological and psychiatric issues and with performance enhancement. She has presented the Feldenkrais Method to interest groups since 2003 and co-facilitated with a variety of presenters.

A tale about a research project, slow learning, and how life gets in the way.

“The achievement of immediate objectives has a negative aspect” M.Feldenkrais

The above quote from Awareness Through Movement had always intrigued me. I experienced what Feldenkrais meant during a collaborative research project that attempted to hybridize philosophy and Feldenkrais. While the immediate objective of hybridization did not eventuate fully, along the way my collaborator and I gained numerous unexpected insights and benefits. We shared each other's way of perceiving and understanding. And while I learned to experiment with my way of practicing FM, and to scrutinize text and concepts with more depth and

precision, my collaborator undertook a parallel process with movement and bodily sensation. This tale recounts that journey.

Graduating in 2003 from the last of Dr Frank Wildman's Australian trainings, I attended many continuing education events over the years. A symposium organized by the Queensland Division of the Australian Feldenkrais Guild got me to Brisbane in 2011. The theme was The Elusive Obvious. Generously, the QLD division decided to fund projects, with profits from the symposium. For reasons I can't recall, it was called the Thong project. I proposed and was awarded funding for a research collaboration with a philosopher. Philosophy and Feldenkrais we called it. It was May 2012.

The idea was to see what happens when you bring the tools of European philosophy together with the tools of the Feldenkrais method. Our aim was to formulate new ways of expressing and reflecting on the somatic experiences in ATM and FI, and to investigate whether this was beneficial. New ways of understanding the bodily habits that open up philosophical thought and dialogue were also in our scope. We planned to take 18 months to allow plenty of time for reflection.

Now you might be wondering just what are the tools of western philosophy? As I was to discover - and am



Undine Sellbach

still discovering - they are processes of thinking and dialogue that interrogate, investigate and explore text and ideas to reveal habits of thinking and imagining. Philosophy may seem to be a disembodied set of concepts, but its ideas are always sensed and felt. Cultural assumptions, confirmation biases, personal preferences, and other intellectual traits can all be examined. Questioning systems of enquiry is also part of the ambit of European philosophy. Heady, but ultimately practical, stuff.

Dr Undine Sellbach was the philosopher. She lived in Hobart and lectured at the University of Tasmania. I'd done some guest teaching in Undine's undergraduate Philosophy and the Body course in 2011. Teaching ATM twice to persons with such open regard to the experience, thanks to full endorsement by Undine, had been fun. Reifying concepts for the weekly tutorials

was more of a challenge. I recorded short ATM style explorations for her to do with the students. Undine found having some Feldenkrais tools to animate philosophical concepts enjoyable and productive. It was received positively by the students. Unexpectedly, there was a noticeable outcome: the essays were more interesting and had deeper analysis of the material. Coincidence? Undine thought not. She had taught the course on successive years and so had a point of comparison. With Undine intrigued, we began to wonder how we could work together on something of more substance.

I should say a word or two about Undine here. Academic philosopher she may be, but performing in a performance company that she ran, and elsewhere, was a longstanding passion and practice. With a background in 20th century European Philosophy, and a research focus on embodied imagination, her research draws on philosophical and aesthetics techniques to re-imagine the relationships between humans, animals, instincts and the environment. She has published in the areas of animal studies, aesthetics, theories of embodiment and architecture and co-authored a philosophical performance work "A Whirlwind of Insects". All up, a smart, creative and fun human.

As for me, I had gone from working as a remedial massage therapist and teaching in the department

of applied science in an institute of technology, to practicing Feldenkrais and continuing my own personal growth with somatic and psychotherapy techniques. I found Feldenkrais a big enough container to put all my structural techniques and skills, enjoyed clinical practice, and loved working functionally and with process.

Despite Margaret Mayo's sage advice I didn't do much ATM teaching, other than on commission, mainly because I didn't want to work at night and the organising was a drag. So I'd been ticking along in practice for the best part of a decade and I needed something interesting to happen. Cut to the first research meeting.

The funding provided a travel allowance for face to face meetings. In February 2013 I went to Hobart to spend 4 days exposing Undine to the activities and thinking style that are part of the Feldenkrais method. Those 4 days were a steep learning curve for me. I was acutely uncomfortable with having an open agenda (what is the functional improvement I'm here to address?), experienced a mix of emotions, felt out of my depth and a bit lost.

The intensity and intimacy of being immersed in each other's mental frameworks was a new experience for me. Undine, however, was in her comfort zone. Finally

something interesting was happening to me beyond the world of clinical practice. I was developing a research collaboration. We got glimpses of how a philosophy and Feldenkrais hybrid might offer new modes of discussion and benefit a student's ability to anchor in and articulate their experiences, and increase their discrimination and insight. These tantalising glimpses kept up our enthusiasm to continue the research.

Famous for happening when you make other plans, life had been at it, and Undine's first child was born in March 2013. Busy with baby, teaching and the writing of a book, our next face to face meeting was pushed back to April 2014.

This next exchange introduced me to the language games of Ludwig Wittgenstein. I'd been made aware of the connection between the methodologies of that philosopher and Feldenkrais by Carl Ginsburg's 1994 article 'Feldenkrais and Wittgenstein'. Ginsburg made clear both believed that language restricts thinking. Both were after a new way of thinking and had created ways to strip away confusions in language, and clarify questions rather than giving answers.

Here was an activity to bring to a test group. I wondered about taking practitioners through these language games and then have them talk about their ATM/FI experience. What would that open up? Would

I in practitioner mode acquire an enriched questioning process to encourage students to anchor more deeply into their experience? Would this be of benefit?

The power of naming new connections and framing experiences in verbal language is part of many people's process, and can be a key part of learning and habit transformation. During my training, Zoran Kovich affirmed the importance of examining 'how you put yourself together in a language way and how you put yourself together in a movement way'. Obviously learning another language and then experiencing the FM from the cognitive universe it delineates could also heighten awareness of habitual modes of thinking. But I was interested in working within the bounds of English.

My use of language was the most unexamined dimension of my self-image. Personal experience with how NLP, CBT and mindfulness could be spliced into my practice of Feldenkrais had all been interesting and at times productive. But in advanced trainings, I was encountering the same turns of phrase and, dare I say it, predictable Feldenkraisian culture (lie on your back, feel your contact with the floor, do you feel lighter etc.) . These are indubitably good questions to be asked. However, after a decade of practicing FM, I was reasonably familiar with my own habits of sensing, thinking, feeling and moving. I relished the opportunity

to investigate another approach to 'release myself from the shackles of routine functioning' which this research project promised.

But oy vey! Life got all irrepressibly life-y again and Undine left for greener pastures and a permanent academic job in Scotland. What to do?

We'd gotten through 2/3 of the proposed project and our conversations had turned to how to deliver a hybridised philosophy and Feldenkrais experience to a test group of practitioners to be then further refined. No conferences were upcoming, and online delivery did not appeal. A project update I wrote was published in the June 2014 journal of the AFG.

Incomplete, over time, and unaquitted, I entered another phase of the project: learning to accept unrealised potential, the frustrations of schedule collide, and - damn it - not taking ideas into action. I couldn't do it without Undine and that was that.

Even though the project seemingly fizzled out, there has been long term value for me. A boon to my creativity and an invisible part of gaining confidence, I had learned not to judge thought as inferior to action. I gained confidence because of the way that Undine guided me into some of the processes of 'doing

philosophy'. Slow reading, multiple readings, and slow comprehension has been profoundly important in my own life. These practices of critical thinking and reading, also called interrogations, have enabled me to hold ideas in my mind and focus on mental content in a new way. I am more able to discuss ideas in a relaxed way.

Undine took the material from the collaboration to enhance her teaching in class, as inspiration for a journal article, and into her performance philosophy practice. I had no idea these benefits would arise out of a seemingly unsuccessful project. By not achieving the immediate objectives, much learning still ensued.

It's nice to know that Feldenkrais can offer a novel angle on the teaching of and engagement with philosophy. And philosophy may yet offer a novel angle on the delivery and expression of the experiences opened up by the Feldenkrais method.

I wish to thank Patrick Hodder and Shona Lee for their support and encouragement in the writing of this article. Feedback and correspondence from practitioners with similar research experience welcome – email evaculek@gmail.com ■



A SENSE OF HEALTHY BEING

By Libby Murray

Libby Murray (SEAU3) is immersed in the Feldenkrais Professional Training program, intrigued in exploring the

Feldenkrais approach to learning and enjoys finding interconnections between the Method, her practice of classical ballet, Buddhist studies and background as a physiotherapist. Extending her lifelong interest in human movement, Libby is inquiring into human potential and emotional well-being and finds inspiration in the ebb and flow of the body and mind through creative spaces in photography, writing, contemporary dance and gardening.

During Segment 5 of the SEAus3 Feldenkrais Training Program, delivered online in May 2020, Educational Director and Trainer Zoran Kovich invited us as students into a learning experience rich in scope and potential for self-directed learning.

One of the primary learning objectives was to develop skills in appreciating and articulating Moshe Feldenkrais' ideas about self-education as expressed in his book 'Awareness Through Movement'. The task was to study how a series of Awareness Through Movement

(ATM) lessons can relate to one another around a functional theme, which in this case was breathing. It was an interesting and instructive process to:

1. Engage in a series of 12 breathing ATMs
2. Keep a journal in which I reflected upon my practice of ATM from a self-educative perspective
3. Be invited to select ONE self-educative dimension which I wished to cultivate and mature in my practice of ATM, with the aim of further developing that aspect in this process

I chose to investigate and cultivate the aspects of "self-love" in relation to myself without expectation or anticipation of what may ensue in the practice of doing the twelve breathing lessons. With an open mind and a little trepidation as to what I may unveil in the process, I embarked on traversing a path of self-discovery. Actually, that was a vast understatement! I had a natural reluctance borne of self-preservation in not wanting to separate the pieces of myself in the process of self-examination, and an inclination to adhere to one's self-delusional ability to see oneself as whole. A degree of self-discipline was required in the

introspection to come back loosely to visit the intention of illuminating how "self-love" was appearing to me.

During Segment 4 Trainer Susan Hillier delivered a Kata series during which moments of personal "impasse" were revealed, drawing me to choose an inquiry into "self-love". The interconnectedness of thought, emotion and action had appeared to me in how my own emotional history had affected the development of intention and participation in the Kata series. In 'The Risk of Serious Inquiry', Denis Leri puts forward the idea of "impasse" being a learning opportunity, a means to setting up an internal quest to discover meaning from how we 'see' ourselves. Accepting the challenge of rigorous inquiry, in self-examination to know oneself better, I set out to illuminate how each ATM affected me in my personal investigation of self-love...to experience a sense of kindness and generosity, a tolerance and respect for myself. Further to this, I trust that this self-love is interwoven in the fabric of what it means to be human, and integral to the compassionate and empathetic connections we make with humanity as a whole.

By befriending myself, there was the possibility of discovering meaningful self-knowledge and agency on a path that had already been revealed as a way to transcend my history. Finding clarity, creativity

through adversity, and a way to integrate my previous experience and knowledge to shape my potential as a human being.

To me, the opportunity and relevancy of investigating self-love in this task was to build capacity as a learner to take this forward into the practice and teaching of ATM, primarily starting with knowing myself better, and continuing my personal growth. I had a sense of polishing myself as a stone, showing up small crevices, finding tiny rough patches, seeing projections... seeking clarity and an ability to refine my own self-image in differentiating the information perceived from the outside world- tactile, kinaesthetic, auditory and visual, and from my inner world including memory, emotions, thoughts and imaginings.

As I began the lessons, there was a risk and fear of uncovering my own vulnerability. I had to ask myself how self-love was being expressed or was appearing to me during and after each lesson. As through a mirror or via a lens, the self-reflection that comes back may not be what we are expecting, not what has come before.....something new in thought, feeling or emotion may have been given space and opportunity to arise...

Abraham Maslow said "One can choose to go back toward safety or forward toward growth. Growth must

be chosen again and again; fear must be overcome again and again". I summoned the courage to continue.

There seemed to be a sense of gathering and folding to incorporate the parts of self-love that were present to me: whether they were clearly evident; had been splintered off; discarded as unwanted or not needed; or deemed unpalatable to revisit out of conscious or unconscious habit. I made a choice to experience emotions even if they were not fully understood at the time and find some emotional dignity in their acknowledgement. Some were familiar to me, and some were new... There was a challenge in moving in and out of this space, becoming aware of personal barriers to self-love interfering with my ability to flourish, thrive, and learn.

The notion of reversibility within the Feldenkrais Method was especially sustaining to me, enabling me to move elegantly and gracefully through some of my not so pleasant past experiences, find relevancy in my learnings from these and accept the new insights, learning to value my own reservoir of resilience.

So how do we continue to educate ourselves so as to understand Moshe Feldenkrais' idea of biological correctness as being able to move without preparation or hesitation? To play with the possibility that we are

not constrained or defined by our past and that we are free to act accordingly? The importance of self-education is foundational to the Feldenkrais Method, and I consider the functional relationship between one's own self-worth, self-belief and self-perception to be vital in the ability to survive, live and learn. Uncovering how I saw myself in relation to self-love, I hoped, would offer valuable learnings in the expansion of my own self-image.

I understood this task as having learning outcomes to better understand the self-educative nature of Awareness Through Movement lessons, focussing on the practice of ATM as a means of cultivating one's own capacities. In aspiring to deepen my understanding of self-love, I was investigating as Zoran Kovich delineated "the myriad psycho-physical benefits which ensue as a consequence of the human action-system being the subject matter through which we develop the means to authoritatively direct our own learning."

Zoran Kovich had previously introduced ideas of Socratic questioning and Gurdjieffian inquiry, referencing Denis LeRi pointing to Moshe Feldenkrais being "uncompromising and unrelenting in his efforts to separate himself from what is fraudulent in himself".

Understanding this depends on seeing ourselves as we are, in our capacity to “know thyself”.

“Learning is the gift of life”

Moshe Feldenkrais postulates that learning involves a continuity of process- the idea that education is not limited to what has been presented to us or what we have been exposed to in our history. In inquiring into what it means to mature as a healthy human being as in Moshe Feldenkrais’ article “On Health” and try to understand what he meant by self-learning as “continuing the essential differentiation of the nervous system”, I embarked on the process described above, choosing to cultivate a capacity for genuine self-love.

“A healthy person is the one who can live his unavowed dreams fully”

This self-prescribed inquiry into what self-love means to me offered an opportunity for both immense personal learnings and self-reflection illuminating my own self-image, and yielded insights into the art and craft of an ATM and in different ways to interpret the lesson. In doing the 12-part series, I increasingly attuned to appreciating the body of discovery my senses, heart and mind reveal to me during ATM lessons. The intersection

of introspection and interoception is indeed fertile ground.

As a budding Feldenkrais practitioner, I am now asking myself the question of how to convey the possibility and even likelihood that the lesson can be so much bigger than the lesson you teach... for both teacher and student.

What follows are unedited reflections I wrote in my journal immediately after doing the ninth ATM lesson in Zoran Kovich’s series entitled “Exploring Breathing Prone: Circling the head for a pliable thorax”. The lesson encompassed different perspectives for me: developmental; skeletal sense; somatosensory; cognitive response; and effect on emotional state.

Readers are welcome to do this lesson using the YouTube audio link below:

<https://youtu.be/zHrdVSsTb3I>

and are invited to do the lesson as I did, being mindful of cultivating and maturing the human capacity for genuine self-love.

Comments are welcome, email:
libby62murray@gmail.com

ATM Lesson 9: Exploring Breathing Prone: Circling the head for a pliable thorax

This ATM is one of the most integrating of all -- an amazing composition of all the aspects of ATM we have been studying and somatically experiencing in this segment. Thinking, feeling, sensing, doing...

As a baby:

I am a two-month-old baby on my tummy... exploring the world using my senses, aware first of my sense of smell close to the floor, I can taste the world. As I wake, my eyes begin to see myself.... Parts of my shoulder, my arm, my elbow. Can I reach my hand with only my mouth? I can try...

What is my construct of the world, what is my perception of this space?

I am deliciously fluid as my rubber skeleton can mould itself in any direction I intend. Drawn by my curiosity, I am exploring how far my neck will go, and then... surprise! My chest can move to support the neck--- it is like a continuous chain, but not clunky pieces..... just all following from the lead part.

Sometimes my mouth leads, or my chin leads, sometimes my forehead. And then all of a sudden, I hear something behind me, and it is the back of my head which is the driving part--- forwards and back.

I can see under my armpit! It's a new world out there.... I want to find out what else there is!!!

As a body of bones:

Clearly imagining and envisaging my skeleton.

Gradually I could feel my thoracic spine increasing tiny incremental movements all over the chest in every direction.

My thoracic outlet was very subtly brought into existence without any cognitive focus—the emphasis was on the intention of exploration, removing the thinking from more proximal parts.

How powerful the proximal parts of the body are, those tiny joints that move the bones we are largely unaware of in our daily static life. That the tiny costovertebral and sternocostal joints and the myriad of cartilaginous and fascial connections all around the first rib and the connections of the thoracic outlet can be awakened with such ease is quite stunning, considering they can become so stiff and restricted as we sit at our desks (or at Zoom!)

The coupling movements of the upper cervical area extending as the lower cervical area flexes as the chin leads;

and the upper cervical flexion with lower cervical flexion when the forehead leads – awareness of this in my sense of skeleton.

The directing eyes, hungry for cognition:

Just how much our eyes seek the horizon, and how important they are to our curiosity and motivation to explore the world. The eyes are creating our many

options of degrees of freedom.... To move, to explore, to sense, to feel, to take in information for our whole neural system to process.....

Practitioner Thinking:

This would be a great ATM for office workers- I would love to take those executives back to their developmental roots on the floor! Even sequence this one after the first sucking ATM in Segment 1. I really enjoyed the composition of this lesson and to deliver it I would make sure to emphasise the aspect of self-care as the movements in the cervical area can be so extreme and have such a powerful effect.

The sensing afterwards:

Ooooooh never has my breath come in and out with more efficiency... just effortless. Smooooooth.

A huge increase in space in the thoracic outlet and a relaxation in the shoulders, with the shoulder blades resting effortlessly in their spongy position on the chest wall.

Self-love:

That my heart and lungs have been gently massaged - I have an awareness of that generosity of space around these organs/viscera that can be created. I can do this for myself. This is only one of the ways in a single ATM, and the potential for this furthering of emotional maturity is enormous.....”

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LEARNING THROUGH LIFE

By Bronwyn Fewster

Bronwyn Fewster (Perth 1, 1999) has been a Feldenkrais Practitioner for 20 years. She

enjoys the encouragement, inspiration, guidance and mentoring this unique learning community brings to her life. She runs a private Feldenkrais practice including individual consults and group classes in Perth.

“Nothing is permanent about our behaviour patterns except our belief that they are so.” Moshe Feldenkrais

As we learn, we create who we are, moment by moment, throughout our entire lives.

Every moment of every day we are changing, whether we realise it or not, or even whether we want to change. This is because we are born with, and continue to have throughout our lives, the potential to continue to learn and therefore change who we are.

When I watch how my 11-month-old grand-daughter plays, it is obvious she is programmed to learn. Every day she is growing, changing and learning from her successes and failures. She is interested in, and



captivated by, everything. Initially, it was learning how to use her body that delighted her. Then she became more interested in interacting with her family, and people close to her. Now she has ventured further, and is continually on the lookout for anything in her surroundings that she can get hold of. She is constantly curious, touching and exploring everything in her path, looking intently at everything she comes in contact with, showing delight on hearing her favourite song, putting everything in her mouth. Shyness as well as little tantrums are now evident. I watch her little body growing, her movements and senses developing, her

feelings emerging and sometimes I swear I can see her brain making new connections with everything she does! She is learning, creating and becoming the unique person she is, moment by moment.

Just like when we were infants, everything that we do, think, sense and feel as adults, gives us an opportunity to improve, because we are programmed to learn no matter how old we are. As we grow older, the routines and habits we create assist us in our daily lives, but can also serve to limit our options, and stifle our creativeness. However, contrary to what we may have



been taught, our brain continuously has the capacity to learn.

“You don’t stop doing things because you are old; you get old because you stop doing things.” Amazingly, until relatively recently, scientific research was unable to find evidence to support this statement, however it is now gaining traction as we learn more about the brain’s capacity to recover from injury. There is now overwhelming evidence that our brain has the ability to heal and reorganise itself according to how we use it. This is referred to as ‘brain plasticity’, which is the concept that everything we do, think, sense, feel and move, changes our brain, from moment to moment. Our brain has the ability to learn from experience, and it grows ‘stronger’. It can rewire itself according to our actions, sensations, thoughts, emotions and feelings.

Brain plasticity can be described as ‘what fires together, wires together’. This means that whenever we do things differently to how we’ve done them previously, our brain has to make new connections, and new pathways are forged which allow us to make changes. In effect, we have ‘use it or lose it’ brains, meaning that our brain gets stronger and more functional when we use it.

It is well accepted that our bodies get stronger when we use them in specific ways, however until relatively recently, scientists didn’t believe this was also true of the brain, particularly after a certain age. Science used to support the philosophy that you can’t teach old dogs new tricks. We now know that given the right conditions, age doesn’t limit learning, and that ‘old dogs’ can in fact learn many new tricks, if they are motivated to do so in the right ways.

I would describe myself as a learner. I love learning, and I am open to, and looking for, learning opportunities throughout my life. From my experience with, and what I’ve learned from, the Feldenkrais Method thus far, I realise I have two main options to achieve this. I can leave what I learn, and who I want to be, up to chance, or I can actively take an interest in, coordinate, and take charge of, who I want to be by directing my learning intentionally. I intend to actively identify and provide myself with conditions that are conducive to learning. I have been given the ‘keys’ to

drive myself. I can get in and drive to where I want to go in my own unique way, or I can allow someone else to drive, maybe occasionally giving directions if I really don’t like where I’m being taken.

The Feldenkrais Method has been invaluable in helping me to identify some of the conditions for learning. In my experience, the three main conditions for learning are:

1. Having an open mind

While watching a movie recently, I heard the quote “Only a closed mind is certain”. One of the conditions required for learning is having an open mind. Just because I can’t do, don’t know, feel or sense something now, it doesn’t necessarily follow that I will never be able to. My current motto is to remember to add the magic word ‘yet’ when describing something I cannot do. For example, I can’t play the accordion..... yet. This implies possibility, not certainty. As a child, I was expected to be constantly learning new things and my life was organised in order to learn. As an adult, I need to remember that even though my school days are over, life is now my ‘school’, and every experience I have can be my teacher, if I have an open mind.

2. Taking risks

The actress Lupita Nyong’o said “It’s only when you risk failure that you discover things. When you play it



safe, you're not expressing the utmost of your human experience." This touched on another condition for learning; not being afraid to make mistakes, because failure teaches us what we don't yet know. Reflecting on how we fail, recognising what we don't know, and solving the problem, will result in growth because we have consciously learnt something about ourselves.

Learning is a continuous process. We can't expect to be perfect at something on the first attempt. If we do expect perfection, we might become discouraged or embarrassed, and there's a risk we will give up. I've observed my grand-daughter fail at something, and continue trying until she succeeds. Because she is still a baby, she has no expectations of how long that process should take. As adults, we can learn from this, and exercise patience, be kind to ourselves, have fun with it, and celebrate small steps in the right direction as we learn.

3. Building on what we already know

Another condition for learning is to build on what we already know, and what we can do, feel and sense. If we try to learn something too far removed from our current capabilities, we can feel incompetent and risk giving up. We need to build a 'scaffold' from where we are now to where we want to be. For example, when learning to walk a tightrope, it's best to start with the rope a few inches above the ground, and learn the skills, techniques and confidence required to attempt to walk across the Grand Canyon for instance.

Moshe Feldenkrais talked about making the impossible possible, the possible easy, and what's easy, elegant and aesthetically pleasing. If we start with what we can already do, and build from there with small, easy, incremental steps, gaining confidence and knowledge along the way, what seemed impossible can be made possible, easy and even elegant.

Watching my grand-daughter learning to move using trial and error, fuelled by curiosity, is fascinating. I have observed how one skill leads to another, and with time and variations in her attempts, to yet another. There is a kind of sequence, but also many paths to getting there. As an older learner, I remind myself that it is OK to muddle through and to add to what is already possible. We need to do any new activity

in a number of ways, reflecting on each outcome in order to make the necessary connections in the brain, so we can orchestrate what we want to achieve. We need to wait for our bodies to become strong, flexible and coordinated enough to carry out what we have learned, then to be able to sense when we are doing it well, and feel confident enough to repeat it with absolute joy and abandon.

As well as the conditions for learning outlined above, there are other important factors about learning. One of those is that age is no barrier to learning.

Moshe Feldenkrais taught that everything we learn requires "TOM", that is, the ability to combine Timing, Orientation and Manipulation in a way that allows us to learn to act. I often use the example of hitting a tennis ball to explain this. Firstly I need to ORIENT by deciding that I want to hit the ball, then turn to face in the direction the ball is coming from and decide in which direction I want to try and hit it. Then I need to swing the racket to hit the ball at just the right TIME to make contact and realise that it will take TIME to learn to do this effectively. Then I need the skills; the strength, mobility, balance and other sensory motor information to MANIPULATE the racket to hit the ball effectively.

To learn at any age, we need to identify the concept or skill we desire to learn and create the conditions needed to enjoy the process of learning. This includes creating the time to explore and apply learning principles, which can be achieved regardless of someone's age. In fact, as we get older the conditions needed for learning may actually improve. We have more time to dedicate to learning and the freedom to choose where to focus and develop that learning. We can pace our learning according to our individual needs and circumstances. There is less to prove and therefore less pressure to perform according to external measurement criteria. Learning can be purely for our own enjoyment and enrichment, and a way to contribute in our own unique way. Like my granddaughter, I am able to return to learning with a playful attitude, learning for the sheer joy of it. As an adult, the search for improvement and learning comes from an innate interest, and does not need to be forced on us due to work commitments or other outside factors. We can be free to learn about things we really care about taking as much time as we need to develop the skills required.

If age is no barrier, and we have a grasp on some of the key conditions that are conducive to learning, let's now explore the concept of directing learning intentionally.

Learn to be yourself

Each of us is unique. We are different from every other person on the planet, a fact that never ceases to amaze me. It makes sense that we need to navigate and create our own lives in a way that suits us. We need to learn to be ourselves, to find ways to uncover our potential, and to look for where we get in our own way by uncovering, exploring, refining and progressing our existing habits. We can learn from others but ultimately we have our own 'signature'. What works for me will be different from what works for everyone else.

We need to have clear intentions about what we want to achieve before we can make choices to help us to get there. Some of the paths leading to what we want will be more efficient or effective than others. Ultimately, we need to try options and choose what's best for us as individuals.

Pay attention to what is important to you

Choosing what you pay attention to is your own choice. We have a vast number of senses continually collecting sensory information internally and external to ourselves. Our experience and what we learn is determined by what we decide to focus our attention on. We can't pay attention to all of this sensory information all at once, so our choices direct which

information the brain has to work with in order to come out with the best solutions to get us to where we want to be at that moment.

A child's parents set the framework for their learning, and create the circumstances in which they can choose what they pay attention to. As adults, we have more autonomy, and we can decide what we pay attention to, and how we direct and move that attention. Our focus and intention help us to create who we are and what we need. This helps us to become the person we want to be. It's not something that can be done by anybody else, the responsibility is ours, according to our own choices and unique circumstances. This is different for every soul on the planet.

Don't give away your power

It is possible to give the power for our health and wellbeing over to others, thinking they know more about what is good for us than we do. It is impossible for others to experience anything exactly as we do. Therefore, the choice and power is actually ours, we must decide to do what makes the difference in our own lives. Other people's ideas and information can be helpful and guide us, if we listen with an open mind, but we have to choose to implement them for it to make an impact on us.



I find myself reminding my clients that it is their clever brain and body that has an inbuilt capacity to heal itself. My job as a Feldenkrais teacher is to help to provide some of the sensory-motor information that their habits don't supply, so that their brains have the fresh information it needs to organise and facilitate healing.

Decide what you learn

Do we learn the learning process in order to change? Not really. We can recognise that we are OK as we are in this moment, however also realise that everything that happens to us, changes us. We want to be the ones to direct those changes as much as possible. There are many options available to us in all that we do, but we tend to forget this. We need to be interested in learning how to explore different options so that we can choose what is comfortable and easy for us. When we have a

range of viable options and the ability to choose, we can exercise free choice.

One of Feldenkrais' definitions of learning was "To find many ways of doing what you can already do". Whenever we find new and easier ways to do things we feel a sense of delight, and this is something which motivates us to continue to learn throughout our lives.

Uncover your habits

Our habits are most often invisible to us, and other people usually recognise them more easily than we do. Habits are the pre-organised patterns of doing things, of organising ourselves to do the things that we do repetitively, that we've 'prepared earlier', that we have access to, and can do automatically, on auto pilot without thinking. They are very useful to us. We are often not aware of them because they are automatic. It is important to consciously review our habits periodically to check if they still serve us well. We need to check if they are still useful or if there may be a better way of achieving what we intend to do, something which is more efficient, or which could take the pressure off a part of us that has been overworked in using the old habit or pattern. Change is inevitable, hence our habits need to be updated in response to changes within us and outside of us.

The trouble is how do I access something that is invisible? This is one of the puzzles that the Feldenkrais Method addresses. Moshe Feldenkrais used the old Chinese saying, "I hear and forget, see and remember, I do and understand" to remind us that we learn best by experience. He was keen for people to have the experience of learning for themselves rather than observing other people's process of learning. He created many novel, interesting and challenging movement lessons, called Awareness Through Movement (ATM) lessons that facilitate self-exploration using movement as a means to learn. These lessons help us to uncover the habits we've created, which affect and limit the options we have at our disposal in how we respond, react and choose to be. If we are so inclined, we can learn to direct our lives by choice, and can use whatever life experiences we have to do this.

Billy Jean King, the tennis player, once said "In a tennis match I don't get the chance to play a single ball over again. Every ball that comes to me I have to make a decision about, and I have to accept and take responsibility for the consequences of every ball." Every one of those balls was her teacher, and informed the next decision she would make. Once we choose and make a decision, we move on from there according to our experience of the choice.

How do we learn?

Importantly, we need to orient towards learning and not shy away. With every situation, whether it be good, bad, interesting or boring, we can ask ourselves “What could I learn from this moment? What are the advantages of learning in this situation?”

We need to be interested, ask questions, look for connections between what we already know, do and understand, and what the present situation requires of us. There might be an easier, wiser way, rather than the knee-jerk reaction we can automatically use, and it might make life a whole lot easier for us, and people we love, or even people we may never even meet.

Some of the ingredients that contribute to our ability to learn are:

1. *Identifying our existing habits.* Pause, pay attention and notice what we already do, what our immediate action/reaction would be. Doing this helps us to start from where we are and build from there.
2. *Ask questions.* Questions drive learning. Is there another way? Do we have other options? Check if there are other ways available at this point of our learning journey. These might be more comfortable or easy, may provide a better solution or allow us to increase our understanding in some way.

3. *Explore and investigate any options,* by giving it a go, trying different options and noticing differences in our experience. Often our habits are so strong we don't even think to try something different even if we are uncomfortable or in pain. We just power on, doing what we automatically do, even if this results in doing more damage. We need to remind ourselves that our existing way is not the only way, and to try something different. To do this, we will need to slow down and do less, so that we can pay attention and appreciate the details of what we're doing.
4. *We look for variation and novelty as we repeat the action.* Begin to know something in many different ways. Our initial way is usually our favourite way or habit. By making slight adjustments in the starting position, or where we initiate and action, this changes the whole action and every part of us then needs to adjust. This results in changes and learning in every aspect of our being.

We can change our orientation, the timing, and find other ways to spark our curiosity and interest, and reignite a sense of playfulness and fun. We are investigating, so we don't expect things to work out better straight away, remembering failure is a indicator of what we don't yet know, and a signpost for change if we reflect and reappraise. Failure can lead to learning

something new. We need to be patient with ourselves. We need to reflect and appreciate the result, decide if what we have learnt worked better. Was what we intended for ourselves more clearly transformed into what we wanted to do? In doing all this we have been able to increase our repertoire and options, and given ourselves the ability to choose what is best for us. We can then apply it wherever we can to make our experience better.

The skills I continue to learn from the Feldenkrais Method can be applied to all learning and I get to practice them in a way that also benefits my movement. I have learnt to slow down as I am learning something, in order to pay attention to the detail that tells me how I am doing it, what else is possible, where I am and how to get back there if I want to. It's like driving a car versus walking. Driving gets you there fast, but the cost is that you don't notice the scenery as much. If you want the time to really notice the details along the way, you need to walk, go slower and pay attention.

Formal education can sometimes interfere with the process of discovering for ourselves. We are encouraged to do things the way we are taught, rather than discovering our own unique, special, maybe quirky, or novel, innovative, original, creative way of being in the world. Once we know the process

of learning, we can look for what we can learn from every situation, event and activity in our lives no matter how old we are.

Why and how is continuing to learn throughout our lives important for our wellbeing?

We are born with the potential to learn and have access to this throughout our life, so why would we stop using it? How could that possibly benefit us? Learning keeps us fresh, interesting and interested, and research has shown makes us happier. The happiest and most vital people I know are fundamentally interested and curious, continually asking questions, wanting to know what is going on, how things or other people work, when is the best time to do this or that, asking where and when will it happen. They are interested in others and the world around them. They are constantly learning.

In conclusion, it is important to remember that there is so much to learn in our lives. We will probably never learn to use all the functions on our computer or phone. Learning about how to use our bodies, which is much more complex and constantly changes according to what we do, is a lifelong undertaking. We will need to choose and prioritize where we focus our attention, to guide us to what functions we want to develop. This can be by preference, necessity or chance. As if that



is not enough, we need to learn to interact with each other, recognising that we are all different and unique within the vast world around us.

I believe it is better to take the reins ourselves, and choose what and how we learn, and then we can create ourselves more actively and knowingly and continually throughout life. Our legacy, and what we can share with each other while we are still on this earth, is only limited by what we have become acquainted with or experienced in our lives, and what we have learned. We can be an inspiration for each other by living our lives fully, intentionally, gratefully and being open to learning. In order to learn, we have to have questions, curiosity and an interest in our own life and life around us. How we facilitate, grow and nurture these things is our choice and our purpose, our calling, essentially our life's work.

My grand-daughter is on the road to lifelong learning and I am right there alongside her. ■

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NEXT ISSUE

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Desktop publishing by The Wizarts (wizarts.com.au)

FELDENKRAIS AUSTRALIA

Journal of the Australian Feldenkrais Guild Inc. 2020