FELDENKRAIS AUSTRALIA

Journal of the Australian Feldenkrais Guild Inc. 2022

IMAGE IN ACTION

CASE STUDY IN RESILIENCE
SELF-IMAGE & POTENTIAL
STRUCTURAL EQUALITY
POSTURE: A CONUNDRUM
SPACE IN ACTION

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Written by Shona Lee

"We act in accordance with our self-image" - the opening statement of Moshe Feldenkrais in Body and Mature Behavior (1949).

Self-image is such a central concept to how we work in the Feldenkrais Method. Deliberately curating an image of ease, wholeness and emerging possibilities rather than one of inadequacies, limitations and struggle is a hallmark of the Method; the potent, precious, game-changing, paradigm-shifting value that we offer.

Refining the accuracy of our internal representation of self enables spontaneous re-organisation; a change in coordination to take place. Sometimes, when I'm lying in bed, doing an extended scan of sensations, tracking relationships and imagining how I might use my hands to support areas of over-activation in my neuromuscular system (in other words, giving myself an imaginary Functional Integration session!), the imagery is enough for my nervous system to recalibrate and my muscles to unwind. It's a surprisingly powerful response to the simple action of tuning in to the details within the overall image.

"We cannot see our reflection in running water. It is only in still water that we can see." Taoist proverb.

This issue of the AFG Feldenkrais Journal explores the theme of 'Image in Action'. Within its pages we look at the social and moral history of posture; society's stereotypes, and what it's like to be at odds with the image the world sees of you and how you see yourself; how to work with the internal images of space; and the importance of diversity, accessibility and inclusion in how we run our practices and organisations within the Feldenkrais community. We look at how your self-image determines the expression of your potential, and a case study on the profound effect of changing someone's self-image to be resilient, robust and capable. May the reading further clarify and enrich your image of Image!

This year I am delighted to welcome Michael Hobbs from SEAUS 4 on board as co-editor. His attention to detail in combing copy for grammatical flow, and consideration of accessibility choices in the digital formatting brings a more colourful, image-adorned publication to life. I am super grateful to have his assistance and input.

The editors: Shona Lee (SEAUS 1, 2018) is based in Sydney. She finds humans and how we function continually fascinating in discovering new aspects of understanding and insights.
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AUSTRALIAN FELDENKRAIS GUILD

ABOUT FELDENKRAIS AUSTRALIA

Feldenkrais Australia is the journal of the Australian Feldenkrais Guild Inc. and is intended for Feldenkrais Method® practitioners and trainee practitioners. The Feldenkrais Australia journal is made available to members and the public via the internet. The journal is published once a year.

Next issue is planned for 2023 on the theme of Timing, Orientation and Manipulation.

Contributions are invited.

Please address all correspondence to the editor.
Email: nationalnewsletter@feldenkrais.org.au

Cover photo:
"Canoeing on a quiet lake in Canada, we float over shallow water and out leap my daughters! The exuberance is infectious. We all jump in." - Kerrie Hart.

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REDISCOVERING RESILIENCE: A CASE STUDY *By Kerrie Hart*

Kerrie Hart has a passion for inspiring others, loving those "aha" moments when people sense differences and become curious. She graduated as a physiotherapist in 1992, and as a Feldenkrais practitioner in 2001, (Seattle/Sun Valley with educational director, Jeff Haller). She practiced the Feldenkrais Method first in Canada, and now in Byron Bay, NSW.

Rediscovering resilience

Spinning up backwards from my Feldenkrais table, from lying on her stomach to standing in one fluid movement, Sophia grinned, bright-eyed. I brought her attention to how freely she moved, and she quickly popped back into lying to do it again. Not satisfied with how she landed on her feet (slightly unsteadily), she repeated this movement three more times until she sensed how to do it easily.

"Before I would have done it like this," she said, proceeding to lie down again. She held her breath and, hesitantly, used her arms to push herself up in a number of separate movements to bring herself back up to standing. Sophia was making distinctions as to how she was moving that day as compared to a few months before, and demonstrating the confidence and coordination she had rediscovered.

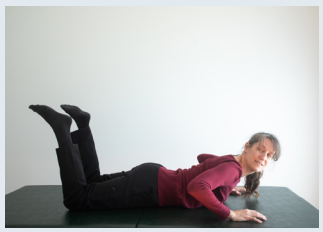
Sophia's self-image in action had changed. Her perception of herself had improved, which is to say that her patterns of brain activity had changed. Through a process of consciously perceiving movement and sensation, she was able to recover the quality of movement she had known at an earlier time in her life; possibly even expanding beyond what she could perceive before.

Over the course of eight sessions, I had listened to Sophia, observed how she was moving and how this related to the thoughts and feelings she expressed, and created movement "lessons" together with her, in a continually adaptive process. I will now share with you some of my observations, thoughts and strategies in facilitating this learning process.

A case study in self-image post spinal fractures

12-year-old Sophia (not her real name) arrived for her first appointment appearing like it was difficult to hold herself up. Initially leaning against the wall, then dropping into the chair with a bump, rounding her spine, rolling her pelvis back, and holding her knees together, she expressed feeling tired, with pain in her mid and lower back, and at the base of her neck. She shared that walking, an easy jog, or sitting for long periods brought on her pain or made it worse.

When booking her appointment, Sophia's mum and I had a comprehensive conversation on the phone. This enabled me to find out about various injuries and pains that Sophia had experienced, without Sophia hearing, avoiding the potential to negatively impact



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Sophia's self-image by being reminded of these experiences and her mum's concerns. Her mother expressed her aim in bringing Sophia to see me was to ease her pain and help her learn "how to move" again. Sophia had slipped and landed on her back when running on muddy ground two and a half months before this call, sustaining stable fractures of the T3 and T4 vertebrae, and had been experiencing pain ever since.

The previous few years had included a number of changes and events for Sophia, all of which could have influenced her self-image. She had moved countries, grown tall for her age, and fractured her right distal radius twice (while playing on the monkey bars, and a year and a half earlier falling off a skateboard). That wasn't all though: another hospital visit due to a knee injury, followed by three weeks on crutches; and heel pain, podiatry appointments, and six months using orthotics. Sophia had stopped using the orthotics once her heel pain had eased, as she told her mum that she thought that the added height of the orthotics could explain why she rolled her ankle a few times, which frightened her. How any or all of these experiences affected Sophia would be unique in flavour based on everything she had learned and experienced in her life, including what she'd learnt from her society, culture and family.

Sophia and I talked about how she'd enjoyed horse riding and sport at school previous to her spinal fractures, and she lit up when she told me about her neighbour's dog, who visited her on a daily basis. Describing herself as "chatty", the capacity for making insightful conversation was highly developed in Sophia, and I frequently needed to be creative in our sessions, coming up with ways to invite her to shift her attention and curiosity to her sensations and movement.

I observed Sophia reaching to pick up her school bag. She started with her head moving forwards, flexing her thoracic and lumbar spine as she reached down and forwards, with very little knee and hip flexion. She described tension and an ache in her lower back with this movement. In sitting, and on her hands and knees, she also opted for a pattern of lumbar and thoracic flexion. In standing, Sophia was hesitant to reach her hands down to the floor in front of her. She expressed that she was scared that her spine might "snap", explaining that she was told by a doctor to keep her spine straight.

What was highly likely intended as temporary advice to lessen her acute pain, Sophia had continued to internalise.

Session 1: Connecting pelvic and spinal movements

Lying on her back, with rollers behind her knees and achilles, I began by giving proprioceptive feedback via small, gentle foot and ankle movements, which connected up into her hips, pelvis and spine. Starting with touching areas that weren't currently painful, and in a manner that didn't evoke a protective response, Sophia's breathing deepened, and the holding patterns in her hips and spinal muscles lessened. I introduced subtle lengthening of her spine, holding her head, bringing her pelvis along with this gentle pull. Lifting her head higher, and then each shoulder at varying angles forwards, I brought attention to small shifts in contact behind her upper back, to the right and left. All of this was done with no pain evoked, going slowly and with sensitivity.

Taking the rollers out and placing the soles of Sophia's feet on the table, knees flexed and pointing towards the ceiling, I verbally guided Sophia in anterior and posterior pelvic tilt movements, with attention to the connection through her entire spine up to her head. This gentle rocking forwards and backwards of the pelvis, with a mirroring movement of her head through the pull and push transmitted through the spine, was done with more and more simplicity as she explored the variations.

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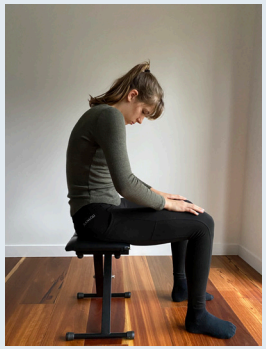
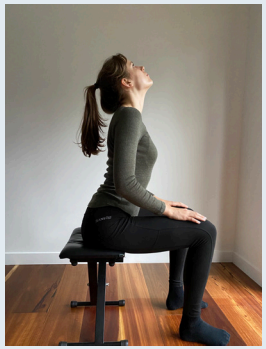
Sitting up on the edge of the table, feet on the floor, this gentle exploration between pelvic and spinal movements was continued. In this new orientation, lowering her head to look downwards was combined with a posterior pelvic tilt, and lumbar and thoracic flexion; and followed by looking up, extending her spine and tilting her pelvis anteriorly. Making these movement patterns smaller and smaller, smoother and smoother, Sophia discovered how she could sit with the least amount of muscular work. I encouraged Sophia to play with these movements at home and feel for this readiness to move while sitting at school.





Session one:
Image left: pelvis tilts as chin alternates pushing away and towards sternum.
Image bottom left: spinal flexion in sitting, posterior pelvic tilt.
Image bottom right: spinal extension in sitting, anterior pelvic tilt.

Session 2: Moving between sitting and lying; flexion

A week passed, and when I next saw Sophia she shared that her mid back had been aching, especially after sitting doing tests at school during the week. I set up a thick blanket on the floor and observed her move from sitting to lying on her back. Her spontaneous pattern of choice for this was to lean to the right and use her right hand then elbow for support. As she lowered herself into lying, she held her breath and moved with marked tension, restricting her spinal and rib motion. Moving back up into sitting while placing the soles of her feet together, Sophia lifted her right foot (holding it with both hands), while gently lowering her head at the same time, again making distinctions about how her pelvis connected to movements of her spine and head.

Following on from this, she shifted her weight in sitting, holding her right foot off the ground and moving it to the right and left, with hands-on feedback from me to give her feedback regarding how she included her ribs in this movement. Lying on her back holding her right foot, I invited Sophia to raise her foot and head a number of times, guiding her to sense how she could find support in different places of her back, higher and lower, towards left and right, depending on the timing of lifting her head and foot and how she involved her pelvis and ribs, eyes and breath.

From a sitting position, with her left hip internally rotated to place her left foot to the left, and her right hip externally rotated, lowering her head down towards her right knee, she gradually and progressively moved towards lying on her back in a spinal flexion pattern. The learning included reversibility and continuous pelvic movement in this sequence of motion.

Sophia became more and more playful as she moved between sitting and lying and back to sitting in this way. Pausing in sitting as she had at the beginning, with the soles of her feet together, raising her right foot, distinctions were sensed in how simply and easily she could now lift her right foot. Sophia then experienced these movements holding her left foot and moved with her left side in the same manner.

Session two:
Images below: rolling from lying to sitting and back down again while holding foot

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At the end, she let go of holding either foot and had fun moving from sitting, lowering down to one side, rolling via her back to the other side and sitting up again; side to side. Her movement had become more efficient - with no need to use her arms to help lower herself, nor to sit up again.

Session 3: Spinal extensor activation; eyes leading movement

Two weeks later, Sophia returned. She said that she was doing the rolling pattern from the last session, and that when she tried running about at school, felt pain in her back and the front of both of her knees. In walking, she landed heavily and audibly on her feet, with pronation on both sides, and her sternum depressed. In a semi-squat movement, she first moved her knees forwards, shifting weight more to her forefeet, relying on knee flexion far more than hip flexion, and bringing her knees inwards.

Lying on her stomach, I gave her sensory feedback about different levels of her spine and ribs during small rotational movements passively initiated from pelvic rotation to the left and right. This feedback through touch helped improve Sophia's perception of these vertebrae and ribs, with the potential to then include them more clearly when actively moving herself.

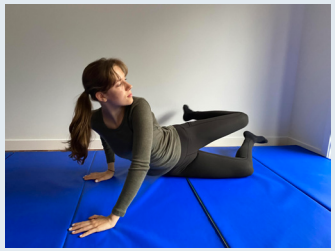
Bending her knees, I held both legs in approximately 90 degrees knee flexion and again rotated her pelvis passively, but this time, by moving her lower legs to the left, lifting the right thigh to extend the right hip, exploring weight transfer feedback and spinal rotation-extension. I did the same movement in the opposite direction.

To heighten perception of scapular movements, I guided each scapula in circular movements over her ribs, then continued this while moving her ribs, firstly on the same side, then on the opposite side, in various patterns that gave her a sense of both the back of her ribs through my touch and the front of her ribs through the changing contact with the table.

Bringing what she had sensed while being moved passively into active movement on a blanket on the floor, she played with transitions from prone to side-sitting on each side, starting with her elbows bent, palms on the floor, head lifted to look at the wall rather than the floor, and legs hip width apart. The first step was looking over one shoulder with hands-on feedback so she could more clearly sense her scapula moving down and back. Then with her knees bent, lifting the thigh on the same side to extend her hip, she followed that foot with her eyes, moving towards sitting up through an extending, spiralling pattern of movement.

We played with this movement to each side, slowly at first, and then quicker, and Sophia gradually began to move more freely in each direction, the movements becoming one smooth, continuous movement. Leading with her eyes as she moved, she learned to look at the wall rather than the floor, to engage more effectively the lift her thoracic extensors could provide, such that her hands, whilst there for support, were not being relied on heavily to 'catch' her weight.

Session three:
Images left-right below: leading movement with the head and eyes, to move from prone to side-sitting via extension, spiralling patterns.

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After this Sophia stood taller, and I gave her gentle feedback from the top of her head pressing down to help her to sense the direct and efficient support her skeletal alignment was providing. This long spinal alignment was also integrated into a semi squat movement, with attention to options for hip movements for maximising efficiency.

I talked to Sophia's mum about the possibility of starting Aikido at some point, explaining that the rolling and falling patterns that Sophia would experience could continue to build her confidence in movement, especially in the capacity to fall "well", reducing the risk of injury by learning to distribute the forces over many areas of her body. She spoke with Sophia, who was keen to give it a try, and I recommended a woman I know who teaches small classes in her home studio. Having experienced her teaching style, I trusted that she could pace the learning process to meet Sophia's needs.

Session 4: Side flexion for adaptability

A month passed, during which time Sophia went overseas to visit family. When she arrived for her next appointment, she said she had been experiencing mid to low back pain for a few days. She was holding unnecessary muscle tension. This was evident in supine when lifting her head, and when side flexing and rotating her thoracic spine.

Holding unnecessary muscular tension can contribute to being less adaptable. Tension around joints that we rely on for our balance reactions can make it more difficult to regain balance when moving, placing us at greater risk of falls. This reduction in adaptability can contribute to feeling less secure or safe in moving, and, in turn, the less safe we feel, the more tension we tend to hold… The Feldenkrais Method and Aikido can both include training in falling and rolling, and through exploration with attention to sensations, these patterns can become spontaneously available.

In this session we explored a theme of side flexion of the torso through both passive and active movements. Sophia hooked her index finger around her big toe while lying on her back and curiously explored turning her leg inwards and outwards, with pelvic lateral tilts, and rib movements to shorten then lengthen her side, sometimes lifting her head and moving it to each side, sometimes leaving her head resting. Continuing this with the other leg, and then holding both feet and moving both legs at the same time, she played with moving her pelvis and ribs more and more freely. When Sophia stood up at the end of the session she commented that she felt lighter and freer, and that her pain had gone.

Session four:
Image left: alternating side flexion left and right, with internal and external rotation of hips.

Session 5: Rolling in flexion; hamstring lengthening, reversibility

Sophia let me know she would soon start Aikido, so my intention for this session was to see what we could explore that might serve her in the class; building her movement repertoire and confidence. Moving to sit on the blanket on the floor, she dropped her weight forward onto her knees. I asked her how else she might move to the floor, and this time she dropped her weight onto her buttocks and hands. In both movements there was a point in the process where her movements weren't reversible, and this type of falling without fluid transitions of weight transfer can be jarring and unpleasant.

I thought it might be useful to play with some movements in a four-point support position (on hands and feet), but when asked to place her hands on the floor, Sophia hesitantly started walking her hands down

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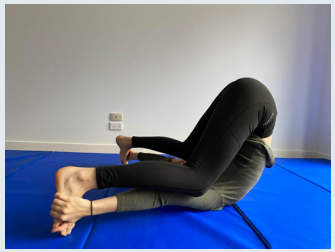
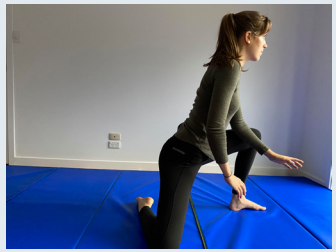
the front of her legs. Rather than continue with this idea, I asked her to place her hands on a stool instead, thinking that I would bring the "floor" up to her hands first. She rounded her spine, head hanging down, saying her wrists felt uncomfortable. I switched to using a chair which was higher, and she wrapped her fingers over the edge of the chair to find a more comfortable wrist position. From this position I began to invite the image of a 'long tail' (like her neighbour's dog has) and started to bring attention to spinal flexion and extension patterns while tucking under and then lifting her imaginary tail. In this orientation, these spinal and associated pelvic movements were very challenging, so I shifted the positioning to hands and knees, starting with some tail "wagging" movements first. Thinking of dogs wagging tails had the desired effect of a more playful process, engaging curiosity for a better learning atmosphere. Shifting to lifting and lowering her "tail" and her head together then became more possible.

Moving to lying on her back, we played with hamstring lengthening movements - holding raising one foot at a time, together with her head in various arrangements with weight transfer to right and left. A progression to rolling up and down along either side of her spine, from lying to sitting and back to lying was added, slowly and then more quickly. Letting go of her feet she then played with the transition up into a half kneeling (think 'marriage proposal') position and back to lying with her feet swinging overhead, pelvis lifted, switching her leg positions so as to rise up to the opposite half kneeling position. Sophia could now lower herself from standing to a half kneel, tuck a leg under and roll onto her back, and then return to standing in a fluid manner. She had discovered a new choice for moving to the ground.





Session five:
Images above:rolling in flexion with reversibility and coming up to half kneeling

Session 6: Forward rolling

A week later, Sophia had attended her first Aikido class and, smiling, said it went well. She was happy that the movements we had done last session were some of the ones she did in class. In this session we continued to explore rolling patterns, this time in a forward roll, a judo rolling pattern where she looked under one armpit, and rolled over her scapula.

Session six:
Image right: exploring forward rolling patterns

With Sophia lying on her back, I lifted her head at various angles, and guided her attention to how her ribs were moving, as well as the sensory feedback from her changing contact with the floor. She then found more efficient rolling patterns.

Session 7: Perceiving her feet in action; flowing between spinal flexion and extension

Another week went by and Sophia was enjoying the Aikido classes. She had started to learn an Aikido pattern for a forward roll from kneeling. She said she often forgot to tuck her foot (into plantar flexion) during falls. She was animated and energetic in this session- such a contrast from her first session. She was curious about sit ups, push ups and planks, as they had been doing these in PE at school, and just how many sit ups she might need to do to "get abs"! So I started the session with Sophia lifting her head with the fingers of her hands interlaced behind her skull (habitual then non-habitual interlacing).

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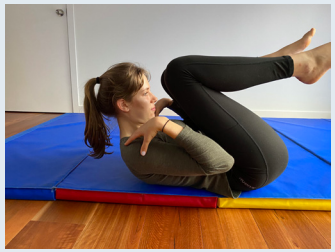
Moving on to head lifted, knees over her torso, she moved her knee and elbow towards each other on one side then the other, shifting weight to right and left without "falling" onto her side. Next, taking her hands away from behind her head and bringing them near her face, she played with flexion lying on her back transitioning to an extended position on her stomach, rolling across the room and back: flexion, extension, flexion, extension, with her head off the floor, eyes oriented to the "horizon". With this awareness of where her gaze was directed, she then explored reversibility in moving backwards from sitting holding behind one thigh then the other with her hands.

In sitting, Sophia then moved each ankle into plantar flexion with her hands, rotating her tibia to bring the top surface of each foot to the floor. Plantar flexion was then brought to her attention as she tucked each lower leg on the way to rising to a half kneel after rolling up from her back.

Session seven:
Images below: moving between spinal flexion and extension



Finally moving from standing to lying on her back, she tucked her foot into plantar flexion. The aim here was to help her include her foot and ankle more clearly in her brain mapping of the movements she did in Aikido, to expand her perception to include more of herself in her movements.

Session 8: Integrated movement patterns

Arriving for her last session, Sophia announced that she was "fully healed": that she had no pain, was enjoying Aikido, and thought that she had made the school relay team! On her hands and knees, moving into a spinal extension pattern, she included very little movement of her pelvis, and had a bias towards extending her lower back more on the right than the left. She played with looking in various directions during spinal flexion and extension movements in this position, then moved to lying on her stomach, moving her head and knee towards each other on one side, then the other. Imagining a rod and then a string connecting her head and knee, she moved them up and down, keeping the distance between them unchanged, making sensory distinctions about the differences between these two ways of moving.

Lying on her back lifting and lowering her pelvis and each vertebra sequentially, going up and down became wavelike and simple as she tuned in to sensory feedback. Coming back to hands and knees, Sophia moved into spinal extension symmetrically, including her pelvis freely and spontaneously, with no cueing from me. Lying on her stomach, legs together, knees bent, her hands under her cheek, head turned, I moved Sophia's legs to turn her pelvis towards one side and then the other. I gave her feedback about how her ribs responded, and how her elbows were pushed and pulled by the movement below.

At the end of the session, Sophia spinned up backwards, from lying on her stomach to standing, in one fluid movement from my Feldenkrais table. Sophia grinned, bright-eyed. Sophia was no longer moving in a protective manner, with an expectation of evoking pain, stiffening herself to avoid pain or injury, fearful of what might happen.

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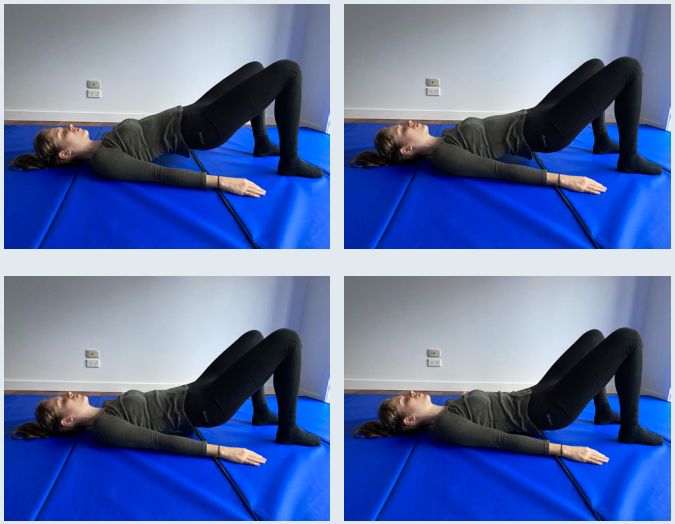

Session eight:
Images above: lifting and lowering pelvis and spine sequentially

Observations regarding self-image

When Sophia first started her sessions, her movement repertoire was limited. It was perfectly natural that her nervous system had produced protective responses immediately after injury: she had muscular holding patterns and messages from her brain about pain. Her tone of voice and demeanour when she told me how she fractured her wrists and her spine, her expressed fear of "snapping" her spine, together with her cautious patterns of moving all suggested that her self-image included thoughts and feelings associated with fear of injury during movement. One of my main aims during these sessions was to help her feel more resilient.

There had been so many changes for Sophia in recent years, and these changes also had the potential to shape how she was feeling about herself - her thoughts, movements and sensory perceptions. Growing tall in a relatively short period takes some adapting to. Associated changes in flexibility and proprioception can make for changes in coordination, and sometimes people relate to a taller child differently, e.g. expectations of more maturity with greater height. Some tall children feel uncomfortable with being more conspicuous.

Moving countries, making new friends, attending a new school, seeing a paediatrician who planned to monitor her thyroid levels, the list went on. These were all possible reasons for changes in Sophia's unique self-image, both before and after her injuries. Thankfully, the Feldenkrais Method also provides the opportunity for changes in self-image.

Feldenkrais Method strategies to facilitate learning/changes in self image:

From the beginning, I spoke in positive terms, to help Sophia trust in her capacity for healing, adaptability and resilience. I used phrases like, "the fractures have healed"; "moving slowly and gently can help your brain turn off muscle holding and ease pain"; and "learning to roll freely can help you fall comfortably". In the first session I began with Sophia in a well-supported, comfortable position in lying, giving her nervous system the opportunity to let go of unnecessary muscular work, helping her feel safe and cared for, and building rapport. Introducing gentle passive movement of non-painful areas first, she could relax and become curious about her sensations.

With attention to the touch of my hands, weight transfer and internal proprioceptive feedback, she could start to sense the direction parts of her were moving and the speed and quality of movements; how movement in one area was connected to movement in other areas. With these sensory distinctions fresh in her mind, active movements were explored. She could start to consciously include more of herself in movement.

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Hands-on sensory feedback was given in many different ways, including:

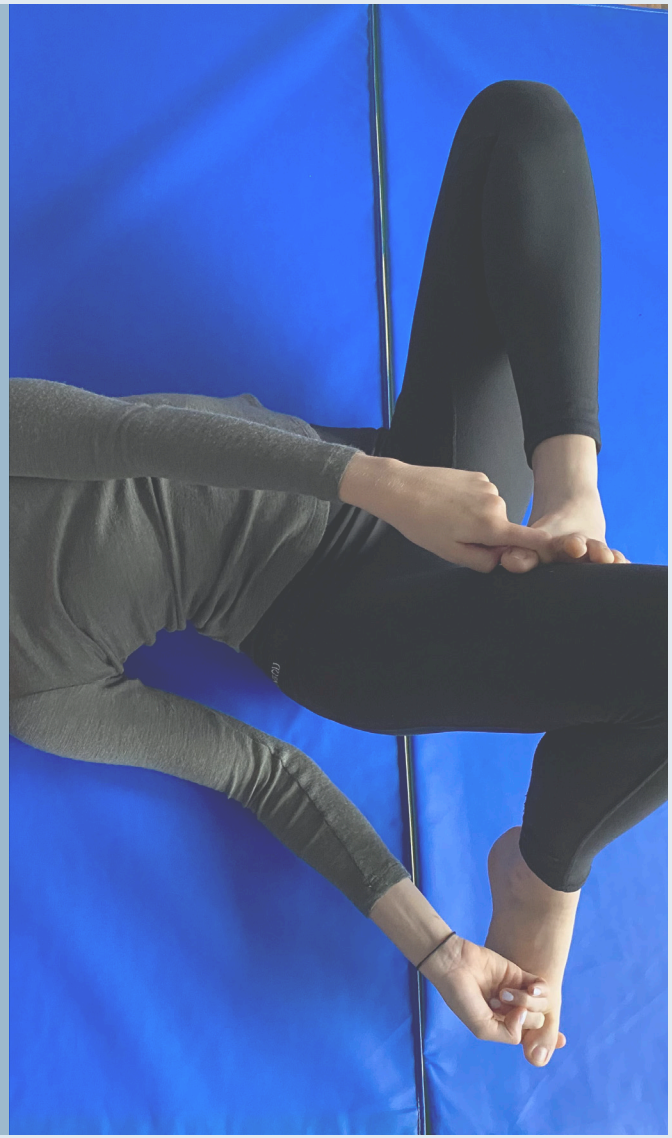
- Gentle compression and traction (push and pull) to give proprioceptive feedback about skeletal support/dynamic alignment, and sensations of shortening/lengthening, e.g. of the spine.
- Supporting the work of muscles manually to enable the nervous system to inhibit/let go muscular holding.
- Tracking movement of different parts with my hands while Sophia moved herself, e.g. movement of her ribs.

Verbally guided movements included:

- Novel movements and references to images she enjoyed, like dogs, to engage curiosity.
- Attention to how movements were initiated, e.g. leading movement with her eyes, or starting with her pelvis.
- Varying orientations, e.g eyes on the horizon, or looking up and down, depending on what patterns we were exploring. Our muscular activation patterns are different in varying orientations.
- Differing movement timing, slowly at first, so as to lessen protective responses and to make more sensory distinctions, and improve movement quality, e.g. noticing if her breath was held. Later, moving quickly was a part of bringing in more playfulness, which facilitates learning, improves confidence in moving at speed, and provides repetition to enhance automaticity and efficiency. By speeding up and making the movements fun, there was more likelihood of Sophia doing more of the movements at home.
- Use of constraints, e.g. holding her foot with her hand and providing resistance to extending her knee, activating her quadriceps, with reciprocal inhibition of her hamstrings for more effective hamstring lengthening.
- Balance and reversibility training.
- Rests to integrate learning and sense changes, and for learning self-regulation.

The lessons we explored helped Sophia to trust that she could move safely at speed, in a challenging direction (moving backwards), while believing that even if she was slightly off balance on landing in standing, that she was safe and wouldn't hurt herself. Her perception of herself in action had improved and she was ready to continue learning in other settings!

Thank you to Brianna for demonstrating the movements explored throughout this series.



WHAT YOUR TOES REVEAL ABOUT YOUR POTENTIAL *By Lesley McLennan*

Lesley McLennan (Melbourne 1, 1991) is a Feldenkrais practitioner, sculptor, world traveller, philanthropist and writer. Over the years she has performed in theatre, worked in arts administration, and taught in too many classrooms to count. Each stage of her professional career has been linked with the unifying themes of movement and accessibility.

A formula for understanding your potential

We'll get to the toes soon, but first—how much potential do you really have, and what has your self-image got to do with it? Buckminster Fuller, the Leonardo da Vinci of the 20th century, claimed, "Everyone is born a genius."

It sounds like hyperbolic rubbish to most of us, doesn't it? Even though many extraordinary achievers share the same view—that we are all innately capable of great things. So why don't we discover in ourselves the genius that others say is our birthright? The most powerful obstacle has been under-construction for a very, very long time. It's your self-image.

The Potential Formula

The formula is so simple we totally miss how important it is: Your potential is greater than your self-image.

It's your self-image that governs your actions, therefore your actions are less than your potential. So, to reach your potential, you need to start with self-image, how it's comprised, and what parts are mutable.

The self-image is a multi-dimensional representation of yourself. It encompasses maps of all your body parts, and it holds the rules of being you. Beneath consciousness, your self-image contains the oldest lessons you have ever learnt about being yourself. Every experience, every action and reaction is filtered through your self-image.

Any identity statement you can make about yourself comes from your self-image— "I'm a friendly person, I can't do maths, I'm a Catholic, I don't wear tight jeans, I'm good at running". "I" statements feel so innate, so real, that it is challenging to start unpicking them to discover the potential they may have obscured.

You can start the process anywhere—including at your toes. But first, some thoughts about the structure of the self-image will help.

your POTENTIAL > your SELF IMAGE

your SELF IMAGE governs **your ACTIONS**
therefore

your ACTIONS < your POTENTIAL

Three tiers of self-image

The foundation of self-image is your heritage. DNA and embryonic development provide the basic form and capabilities of your biological systems (nervous, musculoskeletal, alimentary etc). At birth we have genetically defined hair colour, eye shape, skin tone, blood type, physiological predispositions and mutations. All these form a largely immutable base to your self-image.

The second tier is education. These are absorbed from the individuals and groups surrounding you from birth onwards. Everything that is assimilated from parents, teachers, society, and cultures, without question. Language, deportment, rules of conduct and most beliefs fall into the category of self-image acquired by

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education from others. Some of these elements are so tough to adjust that it can feel life-threatening to try.

Third is your own direction: self-education. Your self-image constantly adapts to the pull and push of your personal interests and what holds your attention. Reactions to your environment and the events of time all shape you and your image of yourself.

Defining three tiers is pragmatic but way too neat. The continual interweaving between layers makes distinctions less crisp. For example, gender (heritage) and culture (education) influence the early choices available in self-education. Similarly, our personal pursuits can modify old familial codes, including our interpretation of biological facts such as skin colour. To reach potential, it's obvious that self-direction is necessary, but so too is constantly questioning the impact on our motivations of behavioural rules and habits absorbed from others.

A mark of an expanding self-image is the ability to do more. As the formula says, our self-image governs our actions. The ability to do more includes thinking, feeling, sensing as well as physical actions. When we can do more, we are coming ever closer to our potential.
Here's where your toes can help.

Your tale-telling toes

Which of the toes on your right foot can you move independently? There will be moments as your nervous systems tries to match the sensory information from your toes to your neurological maps to answer this unusual question.

If you are bare-footed, how could you investigate this idea? Can you pick up your third toe and cross it over your second toe, just like you would when crossing your fingers for good luck?

3 tiers of self-image

3 Self-education
Personal interests, individual reactions to environment and events.
Constantly updating

2 Education
Everything we assimilate from others e.g language, deportment, rules of conduct, major beliefs, cultural values etc.
Tough to change

1 Heritage
Biological systems, their form and capacity at birth.
Immutable

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If you just said to yourself, "Don't be ridiculous, no-one can do that!" Then bingo: you have just come up against your self-image. We have capabilities with our feet that most of us have never used, and never even conceived possible—it was never in our image of ourselves. If you had been born with no arms, you would most certainly have learnt to use your toes this way. There are people who can drink coffee, write notes, and even change diapers using only their feet. Practice with time and knowledge makes the inconceivable possible.

Of course, if you were sitting on a train, reading that paragraph, there is another angle. Though you easily could, most people would not remove their shoes to investigate this question. Our self-image dictates our cultural conformity. It is perfectly logical not to want to look 'mad' in a public place by liberating a foot and wriggling your toes. But did you perceive the choice?

The experiment is not about right or wrong rules, good or bad actions. It is about light-heartedly noticing how your self-image governs what you can or can't, will or won't do. The quickest way to test your self-image is to find an identity statement and investigate it, not in your head, but with an action.

To access your greatest potential, you must understand the relationship between your self-image and your actions. Just string that experiment with the toes out a bit further. In our lives we have interlaced our fingers for many reasons, maybe to pray, maybe to contain agitation, maybe to get better leverage for pulling an object. Have you ever interlaced your toes? You have as many joints in your feet as you have in your hands. If you can't independently interlace your toes, can you use your fingers to interlace your toes? And why would you?

This interlacing exploration is great for expanding your neurological map of your toes and feet and how those joints can move. This type of novel action gets right down into Tier 1 of our self-image, expanding the maps of the body parts we were born with.
But wait, there's more. For instance, how did you approach this activity - as if it was a competition, or with playful curiosity? Did you go hard, disregarding how your back, hips and toes felt? Or did you find the easiest seated position, to bring your feet close and lengthen your toes so there was more possibility for movement?

The activity itself is less important than what it tells you about your priorities, your regard for yourself, your limitations and your scope to think, feel, sense and move outside your habitual limits.

Self-image is not just a problem of mind

William James, pioneering psychologist of the 1800s commented, "The human individual lives usually far within his limits; he possesses powers of various sorts which he habitually fails to use."

Since James, many have approached the limitations of self-image as a problem of mind and individuals. Moshé Feldenkrais, a polymath of the 1900s, proposed a completely different approach.

Since self-image was a process of learning from birth, then limitations in the self-image would arise from restricting that learning process. He proposed using novel movements to engage not just the mind, but the senses and feelings, to re-awaken curiosity that had been curtailed in our long years of learning from

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others. His book Awareness through Movement (1972) is a treatise on using movement to help individuals recognise and surpass their self-imposed limitations. Feldenkrais practitioners around the world are continuing that work.

Know thyself

Actions are the deepest way of knowing yourself. We are more easily fooled by our thinking than our actions. The next time you make a statement about yourself, take a moment to wonder where it came from, what could the unintended limitations be, and how you could test out the edges of this in your actions. Along this path might lie more potential than you ever dreamt.

This article belongs to a series, aimed at people who have little or no acquaintance with Feldenkrais Method. I am developing these hoping they will also be of use to our Feldenkrais practitioner community - to cut, paste, borrow from, use in newsletters or whatever. This article was inspired by the first couple of chapters in Awareness Through Movement by Moshé Feldenkrais and was my attempt to lay out some breadcrumbs for people to follow. It was published online on Medium.com. This and other articles can be accessed and shared by searching Medium for either @potentself or my full name.

REACTION REDUX *by Jodi Freedman*

Jodi Freedman graduated from Russell and Linda Dellmans' Feldenkrais training in Sonoma, California in 2007. They have been teaching middle school English and History for three decades. They teach and take Feldenkrais lessons as a means to further their sense of self and to help others.

Reaction redux

If I had to trace it back to when I consciously started to think about my self-image in action, it would be when I was six years old. For a number of weeks in 1971, a song by the Dramatics was part of the Top 40 line up. It was called, "Whatcha See is Whatcha Get":

Some people are made of plastic
And some people are made of wood.
Some people have hearts of stone
And some people are no good.
But baby, I'm for real
I'm as real as real can get.
If what you want is real loving
Then what you see is what you get.
What you see (what you see)
Is what you get (is what you get).

At the time, I was not aware that this very catchy tune was about dating and romantic love. My six year old self was pretty much constantly singing that refrain, "What you see is what you get" and I cobbled together the idea that what people saw, is how they thought of you. So even though I thought of myself as a boy, apparently, that is not what people saw. They saw a six year old girl.

I had always had the gift (or, at least, I see it now as a gift) of being an out of the box thinker and seer. And although my physical body lagged in terms of traditional development, I was speaking in full sentences at nine months old. I was busy, as most children are, forming my self-image. And since I didn't move easily and didn't learn to read 'til about 9 years old, most of my learning about the world was through listening to music, singing, and talking anyone's ear off who would let me.

Feldenkrais, in Body and Mature Behaviour (1949), speaks a lot about identity and self-image. It's the core of much of his work. Early on in the book he breaks identity down into reflex behaviour, which he defines as a biological inheritance. He remarks that, "such inheritance is genetic… we can do little to alter it…" He goes onto place the rest of identity into the category of acquired behaviour. Feldenkrais says acquired behaviour is, "the result of genetic activity with its environment" and that, "assuming that if the environment can be altered, acquired behaviour could also be changed."

Over time, it became quite clear to me that what people saw was not who I thought I was. My biological inheritance was holding me back. I had a lot of difficulty as my body began to develop into that of a young girl and went through a lot of work to try to hide this body from others and from myself. There were very non-flexible categories of gender in my young world, and I vacillated between being in denial of my gender identity as a girl and actively pushing back against it. I hated dresses and dolls and pretty much rejected anything I saw as "girly". Looking back now, part of my coping strategy was to limit my movements and to not see my own body.

Fast forward to my late 20's, when I started to feel a lot of pain in my body. I signed up for a Feldenkrais class at a community college that was advertised for senior citizens and purported to include slow and gentle movements. I left that class feeling light as a feather - something that had not been true for me until that moment. I believe Feldenkrais would say that this experience was an example of what he called acquired behaviour at its highest good. I surmised that if I felt this good in my body once, I had the potential to feel that way again.

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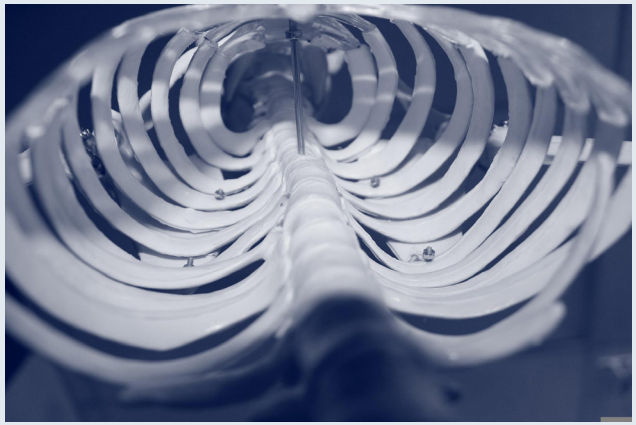
I don't think I missed one of those senior only Feldenkrais classes for the next three years. I was finding a way, not BACK to my body, because I never really inhabited it, but TO my body through the Feldenkrais ATM work. I began to see that my body could move in a way that was true to who I was, and that I could move freely and easily. I honestly thought that this would never happen to me and I would just be a gender outlaw, not worthy of real connections, and certainly not able to free myself of the gender box I was placed in. But the longer I was involved in the work, the more hope I had that maybe things could be different and maybe my life could be easier. So I signed up for a Feldenkrais training program.

Ruthy Alon, in her book Mindful Spontaneity (1996), asks, "Did you stop taking pride in your body because of frustrating criticism …?" Later, she asks, "What is it about your body that disturbs you- its shape as perceived by others, or the way your body feels to you, which only you know?" She says that, "In accepting criticism as well as admiration, you gave away to others the power of judging yourself…. growing remote from your own inner voice."

I had this idea that if I could just accept the body I was given, I could open to see all the ways in which it could move. One of the many ideas that I was drawn to in this work is the fact that these movements were THE SAME for men and women, so I felt free from gender judgment of myself and of others. The work that seemed the most potent at the time were the lessons around the rib cage. We had a guest teacher from Australia, I wish I could remember her name, who had us trace the inside of our rib cage, which she referred to as a rib basket. That one word change, from cage to basket, opened so much for me. She also worked with me on my shoulders, which had been habitually slouched forward to help conceal my chest from myself and the world.

By the end of the training, I moved so differently and I felt so much better about my self-image. However, even though I had the ability to move more freely, I still didn't feel comfortable in my own body. Even though I could finally feel the ribs under my breasts, I still had breasts and they were not a part of my self-image. I got breast reduction surgery and that made a huge difference for a while. I felt lighter and freer for sure, but even after that and with over a decade of deeply diving into the Feldenkrais work, I was still not living up to the "Whatcha see is Whatcha Get" motto I had internalized when I was six.

In Lesley McLennan's piece, also included in this journal about the method and self-image, she writes that a person's self-image contains, "the oldest lessons you have ever learnt about being yourself" and that, "every experience, action and reaction is filtered through your self-image." She goes on to say that any, "identity statement you can make about yourself comes from your self-image."



McLennan sees self-image as having three tiers: heritage (DNA, eye color, skin tone etc), education that we have assimilated from all those who have been in our lives and "self-education." She brings these tiers together in her idea that in order to reach your potential, you have to begin with self-image and "your self-image governs your actions therefore your actions < your potential."

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I see it somewhat differently. To me, that first tier includes gender, and gender is mutable. For some transgendered folks, they feel like they were born in the wrong body and that they are not changing their identity but are just getting their body to match who they have always perceived themselves to be. I cannot speak for all transgendered people, only for myself: I first had to know that there was the possibility that I could be myself. As I learned about my body, my identity became clearer and clearer. This is what the Feldenkrais work gave me, an identity of possibility and potential.

McLennan ends her article by saying, "When you make a statement about yourself, take a moment to wonder where it came from, what could the unintended limitations be, and how you could test out the edges of this in your actions." This has been my journey. Feldenkrais, along with my very supportive partner, have been my constant companions in developing the self-image I always wanted to have and becoming the person I always wanted to be.

STRUCTURAL EQUALITY AND FELDENKRAIS

By Shona Lee, Tobias Link and Kate Sagovsky

Shona Lee (SEAUS 1, 2018) thinks variety is the spice of life. It's the diversity of people that she gets to come in contact with (and learn from) through her work as a Feldenkrais practitioner and remedial massage therapist that she finds most fulfilling.

Tobias Link (Lüdenscheid 1, 2020) is a professional musician and somatic body work artist who loves the unknown and its usage. Creativity, Improvisation and the joy of human connection is what thrills him. www.instagram.com/tobiaslink29.

Kate Sagovsky (London 3, 2020) is an artist specialising in somatics and live performance. Her work facilitates people to connect better to themselves, others, and the world. She is director of live performance company MOVING DUST (www.movingdust.com) and STUDIO SOMA (www.studio-soma.space).

The IFF Young Practitioners Group

The IFF Young Practitioners Group was formed in November 2021. This group meets online and is made up of almost 30 Feldenkrais practitioners and trainees from across twelve different countries and four continents. The diversity of this group is exciting and invigorating: as an inter-cultural group, who are all under 40 years of age, we are passionate about helping to build and develop the future life of our global Feldenkrais community.

When we first gathered, we spoke about our experiences of the Feldenkrais Method. We quickly realised that a shared concern of the group is our impression that the vast majority of people involved in Feldenkrais are from an older, white, and relatively affluent demographic. We became curious: Where does this bias stem from and what factors perpetuate this as 'the norm'? Does the current make-up of the Feldenkrais community worldwide make it difficult for other types of people to access the Feldenkrais Method, or even prevent new people from engaging at all? Who are we inadvertently excluding?

Perhaps most importantly of all: What does it mean for the future of the Feldenkrais Method – both its survival, and the beliefs and values it embodies – if this does not change?

The Feldenkrais Method and equality

The development of the Method could be viewed as Feldenkrais' reaction to several key experiences of discrimination. During his lifetime, Moshé himself experienced oppression: violence and incipient pogroms against the Jewish population in his home country, his flight as a 15-year-old without his family to what was then Palestine, his time as a migrant in France, and his flight again from the Germans to the UK. These experiences must have contributed to his development of a method which so strongly encourages the development of an embodied understanding of self-worth and self-determination.

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What we now refer to as concepts of diversity, access, inclusion, and equality can be seen as deeply embedded in the foundational ideas and principles of the method. What is remarkable about the work of Feldenkrais is that it is designed to be suitable for all people, regardless of identity characteristics or physical preconditions. As practitioners, we learn to perceive and welcome the whole person, without judgment. We recognize the potential of each unique individual and meet the person as they are (including the personal, inter-generational, and cultural histories as well as traumas that are embodied within them). We learn to meet the aspects of each person that are shared in common, and can help to unite us, as well as those which differ. We allow them agency over their own learning.

How can we open the door to more people? We invite many different options to be explored when teaching. In the same way, we ourselves need to explore how we can adapt our teaching to different contexts, allowing us to reach out to people with diverse needs and include them in our practice.

Feldenkrais can provide a way to explore one's own history and learn skills for coping with future challenges. This process requires a protected space that makes it possible to enter a mode of self-awareness, play, and learning; a space away from the demands of everyday life and free from the prevailing oppressions in society. Creating trauma-informed spaces of active inclusion is vital.

As practitioners, we need to be aware that not everyone automatically feels safe enough for introspection and physical awareness. Many people have trauma that makes this extremely difficult, and some groups of people experience significantly higher levels of trauma than others (eg. those living under the oppression of structural racism). We must be informed enough that we can confidently hold a safe-space for people who carry embodied trauma within them. Learning environments can also feel very different for different people. Some people may feel greater barriers to inclusion from the moment they walk in the door. People of colour (POC) may walk into a Feldenkrais lesson and wonder, "This is a white space, am I welcome here?"; people who have not experienced much formal education may wonder, "This is a classroom, am I welcome here?"; or young people may ask, "Everyone else here seems older than me, maybe this isn't meant for me?"; and so on. As practitioners, we must seek to construct spaces of active inclusion, through the way we organise our learning spaces, facilitate connection and community with and between students, structure our lessons, and speak about what it is we're doing.

The body politic

Self-image and self-organisation are interrelated and interdependent with the complex layers of the social systems and structures that surround us. We have all grown up and been socialized inside of an unequal society, which values some people more than others according to overlapping elements of identity and background (including gender, physical ability, race, religion, nationality, sexuality, and others). We all unconsciously internalise the implicit rules of a hierarchical and unequal culture that socialises us to believe only certain people have the right to behave in certain ways.

In the Feldenkrais Method we tend to focus on ourselves, exploring our own movement with the guidance (through speech and/or touch) of a trained practitioner. It feels like a quiet, reflective, internalised practice, and is often characterised as such.

STRUCTURAL EQUALITY AND FELDENKRAIS *By Shona Lee, Tobias Link and Kate Sagovsky*

Yet, the body is a central site of oppression. So the seemingly simple, private process of regaining autonomy over one's embodied self-expression becomes a radical act. It rejects the way in which social inequality is expressed through our physical selves, and allows us to find new ways of being in the world.

Not only this, but in a world that often does not truly value the individual (and actively devalues some people more than others) self-care can become a radical act. Practising the Feldenkrais Method can potentially provide each individual with a space which is free from the dominant oppressions in society, and in doing so personal experience becomes political.

Organisations, including our own, inevitably reflect the structural inequality of society at large. The global Feldenkrais community is made up of organisational structures which operate at local, national, and international levels. If we are to facilitate greater equality within our community, we must accept the challenge of interrogating the make-up and function of these organisations. Only then can we consciously decide whether and how we want to use and develop the structures that already exist, or if we need to create new ones in order to work together towards urgent and vital change.

Where should we start?

There are many possible ways to begin shifting the status quo, through actions on a personal, local, national, and international level. The IFF Young Practitioners' Group is championing the development of an Access Fund. This international charity would work towards removing financial barriers to accessing the Feldenkrais Method by providing scholarship opportunities to trainees from a diverse range of backgrounds.

Many people find the costs of training to be beyond their means. This disproportionately affects people from particular backgrounds which are already under-represented in our community. Removing financial barriers and supporting student practitioners from a wider variety of backgrounds through the Access Fund, will begin decisively to shift the demographic of qualified Feldenkrais practitioners across the world. This, in turn, will increase the likelihood of Feldenkrais being taught in a much wider range of contexts and communities. By asking the worldwide Feldenkrais community to support the Access Fund, we are deliberately aiming to raise consciousness about the necessity and possibility for change in the face of current inequalities, whilst also suggesting one pathway for effective action.

One thing is clear: as members of the global Feldenkrais community we have a shared responsibility to make our work significantly more accessible. Without this progression, we are unlikely to continue to grow the reach of the Method, and will fail to cultivate a whole new generation of practitioners and students. More importantly, we will be ignoring the fundamental principles of the Method itself, which call on us actively to empower people - all people - regardless of who they are.

The IFF Young Practitioners Group are keen to create ways for more people from all backgrounds to experience, train in, and teach the work from which we have all benefited. We aim to promote and lead on actions which cultivate a radical and intersectional approach to access, diversity, equality, and inclusion in the Feldenkrais community at an international level. If you share these values and would like to hear more about our work, please do contact us at iffyouthgroup@feldenkrais-method.org.

PERSONALISING YOUR IMAGE OF THE AFG *by Sue Vonthien*

Sue Vonthien (SEAUS 1, 2018) had a career in education, including 10 years as the Teaching Principal in a small school in a rainforest west of Mackay. She retired for 4 months before beginning her Feldenkrais training, and currently runs 3 online ATM classes and 2 days of FI per week. Her passions are family, especially grandchildren, enjoying nature, a little djembe drumming, building her Feldenkrais practice and more lately the AFG!

What is your image of the AFG National Council?

Does that sound like a dry topic? From where I am sitting (although it's definitely not sitting around, we're very 'hands-on'), it is anything but dry….let me explain: when I graduated, just 4 years ago, I barely had a grasp of the Guild let alone the National Council. Who would have thought that I would find myself as President, working with a small but dedicated group of practitioners to make decisions on how best to support our Feldenkrais community and help the general public discover this amazing method? Yet here I am!

I'd love to introduce you to the dedicated group of volunteers who form the National Council.

According to our Constitution, we can have 12 in the team, and in 2022, we have had 7 volunteers:

Jini Lim, the Membership Champion, Nicole Harstead, National Library Champion and Liz Senn, our Student Representative, who is also responsible for Professional Organisation (including being our Continuing Ed Champion), represent Victoria and Tasmania. Carol Clayton-Vincent, the Treasurer, Lyn Kennedy, our IFF and Constitution Champion and Sue Scott (IFF Treasurer) represent NSW and ACT. Representing QLD and northern NSW is myself, also the President of the Guild. I also want to acknowledge Alison Smith, who was Secretary, but travelled overseas mid-year.

We are backed by our super Support Crew: Leith Kinross as Secretariat, Simon Slieker as Website Development and Support, and Danni Howell as Bookkeeper. We also have our numerous incredible volunteers at the Divisional level, beavering away to create support for members locally.

ALL members of the Guild are invited to come forward with ideas, and/or volunteer to make them happen. Shona Lee produces our Guild Newsletter, edits the AFG Journal, and comes up with projects such as peer-to-peer mentoring, which many of us have enjoyed. And we are currently enjoying the experience of "Chat with an Assistant Trainer", thanks to Julie Peck's idea and work, supported by Liz Senn.

As members, what ideas do you have brewing that we could spark into being together?

It starts from an image. Our National Council is here to help make it happen. If you would like to be more involved, please get in touch. We welcome all enthusiasm for taking the Feldenkrais Method forward.

SPACE IN ACTION *By Michael Hobbs*

Michael Hobbs is a health coach, chiropractor, writer and performance artist currently living in Lisbon, Portugal. He consults individuals and companies online, and is completing his Feldenkrais practitioner training. He's fascinated by the intersection of movement and words.

Feldenkrais and space

My experience with Feldenkrais often feels like an exploration of space. Frequently, I come away from an ATM class or FI with a sense of uncovering internal space where I had not sensed it previously. The miniscule comes to feel like its own universe, such that the space between two ribs, for example, initially imperceptible, becomes a whole area of space to move from, towards and in relation with. There is also a shift in how I sense external space: after a lesson, I am more aware of how I relate with and move through the space exterior to my skin.

Increasingly, I have been asking myself during FI and ATM lessons how I can intentionally begin to sense more space.

What is it to work with the image of 'space' in a lesson? What is it to embody spaciousness in action, on the floor and through life?

Space is not nothing

Space is not nothing, though the words are often used interchangeably. Nothing is an abstraction; there is no such thing as nothing in an embodied sense, as to wrap consciousness around it is to make nothing into something. Saying, thinking and doing nothing are contradictory statements. As Parmenides wrote, "It is necessary to say and think what is; for being is and nothing is not." To say and think at all is to do.

Scientifically, pure nothingness has not been shown to exist; how could it be? Even cosmic voids still contain matter, so that what they come to represent is not nothing, but vast space, an approximation towards nothing that nevertheless still comprises energy.

The same can be said for the human body, which is said to constitute >99.9% empty space. Mostly, these spaces are clouds of electrons. This 'empty space' is structured by relationships between moving parts. Space is relational: it's determined by wave-like behaviour, not just particle-like behaviour.

It might be that humans lack an element of consciousness that would, perhaps, be necessary for understanding the complexity of true nothingness in our universe. Existentialists such as Sartre and Lacan have argued that nothingness is that which exists outside consciousness, and, in this way, consciousness is born from nothing, however this is a philosophical ideology. While it might be interesting to conceptualise about abstractions of nothing, it may not also be the most practical inquiry if it is not also considered phenomenologically. Perhaps, instead, it would be more useful to finely attune to the subtler sensations of space: what's here and not here, as it is communicated to us through experiencing.

Doing nothing

'Doing nothing', then, speaks more to a desire than it does an action. It's a horizon. An unattainable intention that we orient towards. That, in itself, might be a powerful thing: perhaps holding onto nothingness as a desire encourages people to keep coming back to a practice. After all, we want what we don't have.

In practical terms, I interpret 'doing nothing' to mean one of a number of somethings. When someone tells me that they're 'doing nothing today', I don't take them literally. Doing something is doing something, even if the thing that they say they're doing is noth-

SPACE IN ACTION *By Michael Hobbs*

ing. Instead, I fill in the gaps: I might imagine them spending the day on the lounge, or in bed, or reading a book, or at home in the garden, depending on who, where, when, why and how they've communicated it to me. 'Doing nothing' might come to mean 'resting', 'relaxing', 'not working', 'not talking', or a multitude of other possibilities (the possibility of experiencing a negation, such as 'not talking', is discussed later).

Simply being

'Simply be' is another confusing command. What is it 'to be'? The more I think about it, the more complex the statement becomes. This is, of course, the genius of the statement: 'What is it to be' is an unsolvable question, and at a certain point, requires a surrendering of thinking. This calls for trust in other ways of thinking and knowing, grounded outside rationalisation (in embodiment instead, for example). Yet to surrender is still a verb; it denotes action. The end result isn't a movement towards nothingness, but towards a particular state of being.

This state has many personalities, for example wu in Taoism, or sunyata in Buddhism. These states have been better described elsewhere, by scholars specialising in these topics. For the purposes of this essay, I will discuss briefly sunyata.

The Buddhist concept of sunyata could mean "emptiness", "void", "open", "without", "nothing", "non-existent" or something else, depending on who is speaking, to whom, and in what context. This is important to note, because Buddhism is not primarily interested in elaborating conceptual discussion, like Western philosophy has come to be, but inherently presupposes practice in its discourse, so that its terminology often evades concrete definitions. Instead, meaning is acknowledged to be highly contextual (as, it might be argued, is true for all language). The Kyoto School does offer writing about nothingness in Buddhism, but it is important to consider the context that this school was developed in, which was dramatically influenced by Western thinkers, and attempted to apply Western philosophy principles to Eastern philosophies.

Given the multiple meanings of sunyata it is difficult to provide a definitive phenomenology of experience. This might even be the point: sunyata is about constant adaptation, moment to moment, and about trusting one's own experience. In a broad sense, it

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is not concerned with the negation of existence, but rather with returning to an undifferentiated state from which everything can arise (this idea is reflected similarly in most creationist myths from around the world, which are about form from formlessness- often a dark, chaotic water- as opposed to the contemporary creatio ex nihilo idea in Judeo-Christian-Islamic religions, that posits something was made from nothing). There is also the sense that it is described, at least in part, by absence: a combinative absence of form, of sensation, of perception, of mental formations and/or of consciousness. This raises questions about whether we can 'sense' absence as a primary experience.

Sensing absence

In consultation, when I revisit a prior movement with a client, they often express to me excitedly that now they 'are feeling nothing'. They are referring to noticing an absence of pain. If I probe further, it's not that they've stopped sensing altogether. They could describe the movement as 'effortless', 'fluid' or 'comfortable' (reorienting experiencing towards positive sensations is one of the tenets of Feldenkrais that I find particularly helpful, and that clients often have no models for). Yet could the experience of absence also be a primary sensation? Or is it a cognitive interpretation when our self-image does not correlate with what we are sensing as present?

Experientially, absence has a certain quality. I think about noticing that my laptop is missing from my desk, or hearing silence. A lot of emotions are modeled this way, too: loss, grief and desire, for example. Does this mean that there are qualities of absence that can be noticed? As A. Farennikova argues, it depends how perception is defined (Farennikova, 2013). Taking perception to be purely sensory, it might be argued that it is only possible to detect what is there, and hence the phenomenology of absence is dependent upon a mismatch between a projected expectation and the reality of experience.

However, if we take perception to be sensorimotor (that is, our afferent sensory pathways and efferent motor pathways are so interdependent that there is a degree of inseparability between them), then the perception of absence might not only be possible, but might be an important quality of phenomenology. In other words, noticing that my laptop is missing from my desk triggers a particular motor response, which, in turn, informs my perceiving. It might be that it is the quality of this dialogue between afferent and efferent pathways that allows me to sense absence as a primary experience.

Could sensing the absence of pain, then, also be its own phenomenological experience, that includes perceiving alternative, positive stimuli, while at the same time perceiving an absence as its own primary experience?

Could this be extrapolated to say that in perceiving space I am also perceiving an absence of more solid form? This may have implications for how we explore space. For example, when working on the self-image of space within two joints, perhaps it's also important to work on the self-image of the articulating bony parts. Much has been written already about working with solid parts, so this will not be made the focus of this particular essay, or the ATMs that are offered at the end of this essay, which are interested with making

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primary the space in-between.

Sensing space within the body

What are the qualities that space has within the body? What is it to notice the space within a joint, between its two bony articulations? What are the qualities that I want it to have? What could it be like to have more space between my articulations; in my hip joints, for example? More generally speaking, what could it be like to have more internal space in which to move? What about my relationship with the external space?

There are a few potential lessons to be learnt when sensing space within the body:

- It encourages a refinement of sensitivity, as what was once experienced as 'nothing' comes to be sensed as having tangible elements
- It encourages possibility and choice.
- It encourages thinking about relationality, connection and interdependence
- It encourages expansive thinking and creativity (when I think about an 'abundance mindset', for example, I note a similar somatic experience as when I move with a self-image of space)
- It might help with mobility training, joint position sense and motor control

Two examples of ATM lessons focusing on internal space:

The lessons below are presented as suggestions, not instructions. There are many other questions that could be asked and explored, that might feel more pertinent for you to explore. That is also important to notice. You are invited to make your own decisions.

ATM #1: Sensing regional-specific space within the body

- Lie on your back on the floor and complete a body scan
- Begin to notice the spaces in your body. This could be external spaces, for example between the back of your neck or lumbar spine and the floor, or the spaces between your fingers and toes. It could also include internal spaces, for example in your nostrils, your mouth, between each rib, or the space within your pelvis.
- Begin to notice the space in each joint. For example, notice the space in your ankles, your hip joints, the joints of your lumbar spine, your TMJS. You could do this for each joint.
- Choose a joint to work with. What is the image of the space that exists between the two bony articulations for this joint? Does the space have particular qualities? This could be sensory, perceptual, emotional or relational qualities, amongst others.
- Do you notice the absence of any particular qualities? What isn't there?
- What is the effect of your breathing on the joint?
- Begin to move one of the bones that articulates at that joint. Then move the other bone at the other articulation. Notice the experience of this. Are they different or the same? How?
- Can you make the space smaller, bringing the bones together?
- Can you make the space larger, bringing the bones apart?
- Begin to explore movements while paying attention to this space. You could explore lying on your back, on your stomach or on your side. What do you notice?
- Continue to pay attention to this joint space. Begin to walk. What do you notice?

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ATM #2: Moving with a generalised image of 'space'

- Complete a body scan
- Focus your attention on an image of 'space'. That may bring forth a multitude of images within you: a galaxy, a sky, an empty room, the ocean, a large meadow, are some examples.
- Continue to pay attention to this image. What do you notice?
- What are the qualities within your body that you experience as you focus on this image?
- What are the qualities that are there, and what are the qualities that aren't there, or are absent?
- Begin to move, continuing to pay attention to this image. What qualities do you notice as you move? How does this image impact your movement and experience of yourself?

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WHY WE DON'T NEED GOOD POSTURE: AN ETHICAL CONUNDRUM *by Margaret Kaye*

Margaret Kaye has run an active practice since graduation from the Melbourne Feldenkrais Professional Training Program in 1991; so for some time now! She is a certified Feldenkrais® Practitioner, mentor, and Assistant Trainer.

As well as individual sessions and group Awareness Through Movement classes, both online and in-person, Margaret specialises in working with performers, such as actors, musicians and athletes; including in tertiary educational institutions such as the Australian Institute of Music (AIM), both with actors in Dramatic Arts and musicians in the Body Awareness for Musicians class in Classic Performance; and the National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA).

What IS posture?

Some of us hear, or think, the word, and do something other than what we are already doing. As we bring our attention to our behaviour, we feel judged, or judge ourselves, and do something to correct it. But why? Ethical traditions seek to define normative rules concerning posture, indicating some gestures as good, and others as bad in light of universal values, which, depending on the era, may be human reason, or the gaze of God. No community denies that the body's systems of physical comportments have meaning, but does this allow the legitimisation of values being imposed upon posture?

Cultural significance means that we read human posture or comportment and seek signs to tell us the status of the person in society. We judge their status according to values placed on certain positionings of the body. Unlike gesture in general, which describes an action or actions that are transitional, of movement from one moment in time to another, posture is generally known as static, although often portrayed in walking. It is the antecedent of most motion. Each posture is a pose or a voguing.

While posture is associated with good health, this is a modern phenomena. As noted by Sander Gilman, in The History of Posture, posture separates 'primitive' from 'advanced' peoples and the 'ill' from the 'healthy'. Indeed, an entire medical sub-specialty developed in which gymnastics defined and recuperated the body. But all of these claims were also part of a Western attempt to use posture (and the means of altering it) as the litmus test for the healthy modern body of the perfect citizen.

Gesture

Some positioning and gestures, which are inherent in postural patterns, are known to be universal, while others are culturally bound. Cicero, in Roman times, examined the difference between Atticism, a sober and austere style and Asianism, a flowery style, exuberant in gestures and words. Literature in the Middle Ages contrasted gestus, which was considered worthy of clerics, with gesticulatio which was considered excessive, effeminate, unrefined and embodying the sinner. Standing erect and remaining in centre without movement flourishes was considered more appropriate for Western men than being expressive. Clerics sought to reduce fluidity in their postural codes to reduce what was deemed as feminine in their actions, as women were sinners personified.

This included standing erect, in reach of the heavenly abode of God. Otherwise, they splayed prone on the ground in demonstration of subservience. Leaning to one side or gesticulating beyond a certain realm was a sign of consorting with the devil. Gone were the days of lying about eating dinner like the Romans. One had to sit upright.

The same principle exists today, whereby there are certain Western attributes associated with manliness

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and femininity. While there are cultural differences, the growth of globalisation means that posture and gait, expression and gesture are culturally and mechanically determined through our experiences of society.

If I sit on the ground in my Western world shopping centre, or squat while waiting for the bus, how am I perceived? Probably as unwell, or homeless.

Soul

One's posture can ostensibly reveal to others their inner state. Hence the discourse that seeks to influence people's posture: change of the carriage, comportment and bearing can be seen as a way of influencing the inner, the soul, to conform to moral values as well as external appearance.

Verticality versus Horizontality

While our relationship to rectitude and uprightness may have varied over time, the attitude of sovereignty and submission can be seen to be related to our distance from the earth or ability to erect ourselves in height in opposition to gravity.

Canetti's Crowds and Power (1960) describes a ritual dance: "…the Navajos of North Mexico…dance with a clumsy constraint, half-crouching and creeping…"

Like other indigenous peoples, the Navajos move in downward motion, and their postures are described as problematic. Their body parts do not point upwards but outwards. The postural configurations therefore do not presuppose submission to the gaze of God or upward ascension to God, but downwardness towards the horizontal plane, in connection to community and Earth.

This contrasts with Western tradition in which men seek to be superior and oppose nature. Their verticality symbolises a leaving of the Earth, and the philosophical belief in individuality. Symbolically, verticality in Western culture is characterised by elevation and ascension, which is opposition to falling. Horizontality or width is representational of stability (Magli, 1989).

Our fear of falling as described by Moshé Feldenkrais is an instinctive reaction that potentially stops us from moving as well as we might. The reaction of fear involves a violent contraction of the flexor muscles -especially the abdominals- and breath holding. It also resembles the pattern of anxiety (not unlike what happens when you go to the gym a lot).

Leaning

Peter the Chanter wrote in De Penitentia, in the twelfth century, attempting to technologise corporeal submission postures of clerics that, "The third mode of interceding with God is done standing, the supplicant being positioned with the whole body erect". Peter condemned leaning, characterising it as an insult to God. It was "depraved" and "damnable". Prostration

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shows falling, where the person in question is as horizontal as they can get. A man should practice, "throwing himself flat on the ground on his face" and "the supplicatory lying on the ground on his chest and his face kissing the ground fearing to raise his eyes to heaven…"

To this day, modes of subjection are demonstrated amongst the clerics of God as well as in civil society: people prostrate themselves before tyrants to avoid punishment, and kings to demonstrate humility and reverence.

Courtesy books, written for the aristocracy as they assumed the attributes of the church, mention the importance of walking with 'straight' dignity. The Covenances de table (table manners) condemn leaning on the elbows and slumping the upper body: "Listen. Don't lean on your elbow."

Thematically the idea is to keep within bounds, avoid gesticulating, and to avoid being like gesticulatio: avoid excess. Other than in situations such as in prayer and other contexts where humility should be expressed, I take this to mean keeping within a sphere not much wider than one's own tube-like shape. Lengthening or bending limbs to fill a space broader than this sphere would assume either an unearned power or defiance.

Contrapposto (counterpoise) is a term devised by artists to describe being off centre. This is thematically used in many artworks, such as David by Michelangelo. His shoulders and pelvis twist in opposite directions and he leans on one leg. According to Wikipedia, "Its appearance marks the first time in Western art that the human body is used to express a psychological disposition."

The term 'graceful' was introduced in the sixteenth century in discourse on posture. It implied imperfection and excellence as an inheritance of breeding, which would come without artifice or effort – thus no affectation that must indicate insincerity. Castiglione's 'The Book of the Courtier' demanded, "The child is not to sink his head between his shoulders, as this shows arrogance; rather he should hold himself upright effortlessly, as this shows grace. And he should not tilt his head to the side like a hypocrite except when necessary to express his meaning."

Today

Today, we do not have schooling on posture, except for a common understanding that we must 'stand (or sit) up straight'. Do we even know what this means? There is at once an unspoken naturalism of posture shared by a whole culture, yet a pedagogical tradition that sneaks into all cultural learning with little actual instruction (with the exception of coaching in modelling deportment, and army drills). The modern 'upstanding' citizen is practicing the comportment of historic devoutness and aristocratic propriety without knowing the explicit meaning, although there is an implicit enculturated understanding of the difference between symmetrical rectitude and the laxity of asymmetrical 'slouching.'

Alma Archer illustrates in 1937 in 'How to Walk' how to stand gracefully, demonstrating to women the 'RIGHT' way to stand: "How quickly the eye is attracted to a woman who stands beautifully." The normative illustrates moderation, containment, verticality, individuality, godliness, 'naturalism', and gracefulness. She is both asexualised and a good woman.

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This contrasts to the WRONG. The model points with her arms, knee and head to the horizon, expressing the exact opposite of what we know to be that of 'good girls.' They do not stand tall, but displace their centre by leaning. They cock their heads, with gestures that men usually make towards women in intimidatory situations. In doing so, they also express their stability and authority by spreading themselves horizontally. They are neither submissive nor do they show us humility. Their postures declare who they are and how they will behave. They are graceless – they are depraved and wicked. If their heads are tilted to one side, then are they submissive? If not, then what are they?

Young men who take up the 'cool dude' posture stand too with their legs spread, often off centre, their backs looped and folded, elbows spread, and hands in diverse places such as pockets or on hips.

How does this emerge from the correct way? They show their tribal bonding with non–conformists. They seek a slouchy kyphosis as they show their skateboarding talent; it's a form of rebellion, which is maybe just 'cool'. Standing tall may be uncool. But might they also be challenging class hierarchies?

The irony is that now men and women hold this kyphosis due to the environment in which they work. Our attachment to screens of all kinds fold us down, locking us into a devilish pose. It changes our health (the new smoking), but also enables us to be represented as submissive (slaves to the corporate world), while limiting our expressiveness of who we are.

Some demonstrate their strength by working out, at the gym or otherwise. This may be a form of showing females can be strong. It may be a form of showing masculinity. It often results in continually contracting their bodies to the extent they are folded and unable to shift themselves into any position with efficiency and or fluidity. How do we be free and move how we want to while holding place in our social environments?

Do we need good posture? According to whose values, and whose culture?

Moshé Feldenkrais noted something to the effect of, "posture is for posts". It's not clear if he was referring to the biomechanical attributes of 'good posture', or had a broader intention. His premise was that posture is a place that transitions depending on our intention. It is not a static position.

We have such immense capacity as humans, regardless of whether we have a body that fits the trope. We are adaptive. Our bodies- ourselves- have an immersive history that we carry consciously and unconsciously, that often befits our enculturated morals. Sometimes we are proud of this, and sometimes we squirm, without understanding why.

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If we can take the time to consider our potential, we may choose defiance, rebellion, femininity, different forms of masculinity, a non-binary approach, and cultural diversity. Are our non-linear actions, our fluid movements, our broader leg spreads, and our elbow widths related to our gender or sexuality, or are they just cultural containments?

Me

I choose all the above. "Good posture is the ability to move in any direction without preparation," according to Moshé Feldenkrais. He also coined the term 'acture' to counter the rigidity of posture. It combines the word 'posture' and 'action' to indicate positioning oneself in a place of readiness, availability of dynamic action, and inclusive of the concept of reversibility in order to counter the fear of falling.

I prefer to have a medically healthy alignment, to breathe and balance and have muscular efficiency. But those change depending on my activity. Posture is about how we embody ourselves, and use ourselves to be who we are. It is about accessing our potential, if we wish. But to do that one needs to know that it exists. That it can be without moral, cultural and social constraints; or, at least understanding what they

are, so we can then make decisions about how this is expressed in ourselves, and to others. I free myself from these limitations; that doesn't mean I am always rebellious. I understand when people are reading me, maybe judging me, and I am seen. I choose how to hold myself in the way I choose. I choose when and how.

Do you?

This essay was first written when Margaret was finishing her training as a Feldenkrais practitioner and was studying journalism (around the time of this photo of her, her friend and her dog!). Margaret's lecturer said the essay, which has since been updated, was significant enough that a book should be written about the history of posture. She never got around to that, however now it's been done by someone else: 'Stand Up Straight! A History of Posture', by Sander Gilman, 2018 is quoted in the article.

AUSTRALIAN FELDENKRAIS GUILD

NEXT ISSUE

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