Movement as Muse

During the Feldenkrais Method® lessons called Awareness Through Movement®, we literally practice the skills most called into play in the creative process. How exactly does ATM prime the creative pump? It’s a slippery process—it's as if we just fall into a creative mode without effort, and sometimes, even without intention.

I have become increasingly aware of the relationship between my own artistic development and ATM, yet I was unprepared for the work to have the similar affect on my students. Over the years I have heard countless stories from my students finally getting back to writing, or finishing the quilt they started, or getting new ideas for a program at work. The obstacles that were once in the way moved aside to let their creative force take hold. I enjoyed hearing these stories but was curious as to how the connection between ATM and creativity worked. I suspected that a unique partnership between awareness and expression can "create" a dependable and enjoyable means to tap our own creative source.

Emelio, a Ph.D. candidate, began to receive visual images (his words) after ATM lessons. It was as if his drawings drew themselves. With no training in the visual arts, he rendered these images and shared them with me with complete confidence in his own process. His expressive nature seemed to show itself after ATM. In ATM, we practice being a beginner with each lesson. We get comfortable with the raw, unfinished experience of movement. Perhaps this quiets the critic in all of us.

Patrice, an accomplished playwright, was experiencing a slowing down in her writing process. She noticed that there was a connection between ATM and increased flow in her writing. It was as if all the detailed attention to movement was literally moving the words through her and onto the page.

In ATM we find some unusual solutions to the idea of limitations. During an ATM we might purposely restrict movement in one area so that we literally have to move somewhere else. We call these “constraints.” Using these constraints, we open up possibilities in movement that we were previously unaware of. Ellen, a visual artist venturing into spoken word performance, describes ATM as, “An exotic new taste to my consciousness, suitably strange and deliciously unknown.”

In ATM we often switch gears as we experiment with the same movement in many different positions—giving us a new opportunity with each shift. Laura, education director at a children’s museum, noticed a renewed vitality to her thinking when she returned to the business of curating and planning after ATM. She found herself considering a broader range of ideas.

In ATM we enter the planet of the non-habitual as we visit novel movement patterns. As art therapist Shaun states, The creative process is an ecology that depends upon the full spectrum of our resources.

The Feldenkrais Method provides an accessible means to tap our creative resources. Dr. Feldenkrais created this Method to encompass improvement of all human activity. The spirit of his work dwells in a return to wholeness that includes creative expression. The wealth of our interior takes form in our dances, drawings, music, and words. Through practices of awareness, we tune the muscle of our attention, quiet the critic, and summon our innermost muse.

—Nancy Galeota-Wozny, GCFP, is a dancer and has presented her work at Rice University, The Jung Center, MD Anderson, Baylor College of Medicine and throughout Houston’s schools. More info at: <www.wozny.org/mopohome.html>
Support for Creative Expression: The *Feldenkrais Method* with Actors

When working with actors, I have combined elements of the *Feldenkrais Method* with text and movement work. Various concepts from *Awareness through Movement* lessons contain useful and effective applications to the stage. Body awareness gained from the *Feldenkrais Method* strengthens the performer's sense of self and increases performance readiness. Awareness can be heightened through the concept of support, and this support can subsequently enhance creative expression.

For example, in an ATM you lie down and scan the contact your body makes with the floor. Gravity sets in, the muscles let go, shoulder blades, elbows, pelvis, calves and heels begin to sink. Throughout the simple movement sequences explored in each lesson are pauses which allow you to feel how these points of contact become clearer and softer. You feel supported. Like stilts over water, the contact points support your “house.”

How can you creatively transfer the support of the floor to support while performing? When you stand after an ATM you might feel, for example, a sense of grounding as you experience your weight going downwards into the floor. This stability is an excellent base for a performer. When I encourage actors to use their imagination, they can feel that support behind them. The contact points now press against the air, the empty space. The space becomes tangible as they can feel it press back.

The *Feldenkrais Method* offers the possibility to act with the entire self, to feel supported by all dimensions of the body simultaneously—to act with the full body, front, back, sides, up, down and all around. Exploring ATMs which allow the use of the entire self in every action, performers increase their stage presence and expand their ability to make creative choices.

—Bob Feldman, a graduate of Malmoe II, lives in Singapore and teaches the *Feldenkrais Method, movement, mime, and acting in the performing arts departments at various colleges there; provides training in stress management, presentation skills and communication through “The Aware Body” program; and sees individual clients for the Feldenkrais Method at a health clinic. Reach him at: email: <bobfeldman@pacific.net.sg>

“Fear is the enemy of creativity.”


“I believe that my creative mind is my greatest weapon.”

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“Development stresses the harmonious coordination between structure, function, and achievement.”

—Moshe Feldenkrais—
I was most fortunate as a child to express myself creatively. As a toddler, my father, a painting contractor, often took me along on his jobs. Sometimes, he’d let me draw on his customers’ walls before applying paint or wallpaper. Having the permission to express myself freely was a strong foundation in my artistic development, one that I later discovered could easily give way under pressure.

When I entered a school system where teachers had no particular interest in encouraging any originality, I began feeling shy, defeated, and afraid to take risks. This took a toll on my inner artistic life. By the time I reached my teens, I found myself plummeting into a creative void.

As I reflect back, in spite of these trials and tribulations, this period of my life was a key incentive that would catapult me into a very exciting, satisfying discipline, the Feldenkrais Method. Adopting the work of Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais was the catalyst needed to gain back the self-confidence I held as a youth, painting spontaneously on blank walls. What were the factors in my Feldenkrais Method experience that would eventually lead me back to my creativity?

I believe that the Feldenkrais Method enhances ingenuity because it motivates us to orient more towards our process than our goals. We learn to make distinctions based on current feelings and sensations, rather than accessing interpretations accumulated from past interpretations. We don’t necessarily know where the process will go—which takes us into newer experiences and we feel more alive.

Creativity comes from within. It is not something we shop for, go to school for, and it certainly doesn’t land on the doorstep of only the lucky!

Furthermore, creativity doesn’t go away, we don’t lose it as if misplacing a set of keys. We can however, lose sight of it; clouds cover over it. For my own clarity, over a decade ago, I began exploring the parallels between art expression and the creative process as a metaphor to the comprehension of the Feldenkrais Method. I created workshops throughout the world where participants would shift back and forth from the Feldenkrais Method to painting, starting with tiny drawing on small pieces of paper, leading to broader strokes on life-sized canvasses.

As participants in the Feldenkrais Method, we learn to continually choose better options through movement. If we push, force, or ignore our own pace, we are leaving parts of ourselves behind. This can solicit various forms of frustration. If we listen, perceive, imagine, breathe, etc., we evoke a more global use of ourselves which elicits new patterns of action. The same holds true in painting, playing an instrument, gardening, or anything else we truly engage in.

My sense is that Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais never set out in the world with the intention of having people copy his work, for the path he chose was his own creative process. He often said, “Don’t DO me, DO you. Reinvent the work for yourselves, develop your own handwriting.”

I truly believe that Moshe’s wish was for all of mankind to utilize the Feldenkrais Method as a means to discover ones hopes and dreams...and become more functional in manifesting them.

—Angel Di Benedetto, GCP and Trainer began her studies with Moshe Feldenkrais in 1980. Her teaching focuses on developing creativity to enhance artistic expression, self confidence, personal awareness, and one’s quality of life. While maintaining a private practice, she devotes much of her time forming new Feldenkrais practitioners in numerous professional trainings in the USA, Europe, and Australia. Contact her at email: <AdiBen@aol.com>

Articles of Interest: In Print and Online


• Online, search for “Feldenkrais” at <www.WebMD.com> search area for 18 mentions of the Feldenkrais Method.
The How, the When, and the Where

Creativity is not limited to artists and performers, it can be developed by all of us in our everyday lives. How, when, and where do we get to explore this creativity? What do we mean when we talk about creativity? Are you a creative person? Do you know people who are creative?

What stands out when someone is being creative, is their ability to generate and see choices. When someone uses a Chinese parasol as a light fixture, we think, “Oh, how creative!” In the movie, “The Gods Must Be Crazy,” a Coke bottle was used in all kinds of creative ways, except for drinking Coca-Cola. We can see the ease of creativity in children, as adults our creativity does not come so easily.

If you are interested in being more creative, the Feldenkrais Method may be what you are looking for. It’s not that we are explicitly teaching creativity, but we are evoking a greater sense of choice in how we can sense, feel, think, and move. It is done in an environment that is safe and pleasurable, while eliciting your innate curiosity.

I first discovered this when I was teaching theater games in an acting and improvisation class at Princeton University. Interestingly, people tended to repeat the same sounds and movements in the exercises. It almost became predictable as to who would do what. At the time, I was just beginning my studies in the Feldenkrais Method and decided to try it out with these acting students. I began to observe something quite remarkable. Starting with a theater game, I would then teach the group an Awareness Through Movement lesson, then return to the same theater game. After doing the ATM, they chose completely novel sounds and movements. Different uses of themselves emerged spontaneously. It didn’t end there, throughout the semester, they continued to develop new ways of moving and interacting.

Another parallel between the Feldenkrais Method and the creative process is the opportunity to safely spend some time in the unknown. Most of our lives are constructed around knowing. When we are being creative, we don’t know what is going to happen next. In many Feldenkrais Method lessons, you don’t know where you are going to end up and you have the chance to observe yourself in this unusual context. The beauty of this is you can do this in a situation that doesn’t have the everyday pressures of producing an outcome.

A great deal of our ability to be creative is influenced by our self-image. Through the Feldenkrais Method our self-image expands. We color in more aspects of ourselves and discover that we are more creative than we ever imagined ourselves to be.

People from all occupations and backgrounds report having a greater sense of creativity, in both their work and play. Many find a positive influence from the Feldenkrais Method in their relationships, as well as their general outlook on life. In the process, they learn to move with greater fluidity and develop more awareness of themselves. Whether working on a computer, or performing on a stage, the Feldenkrais Method can provide the how, the when, and the where to awaken and realize the creative promise that exists in all of us.

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—Alan S. Questel, GFCP and Trainer, co-directs training programs in Marin County and Sonoma, California, Phoenix, Arizona, and Adelaide, Australia. Contact him at email: <ASQUESTEL@aol.com>

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