Developing the Whole Child
—by Barbara Forbes, GCFP

Feldenkrais® practitioner Kathy Yates vividly remembers the first time she heard one of her young students with special needs talk. The child turned to her mother during her Feldenkrais lesson and asked: “Can I do this every day?” For children who have been through a variety of therapeutic interventions which they did not enjoy, The Feldenkrais Method® is a revelation – as it is for their parents.

Kathy explains: “The Feldenkrais Method is different. It is not stretching exercises, where they move isolated parts, stretching an arm or leg. Instead, the children begin to have the experience of being one connected whole. You get the feeling that they are sensing themselves in a way that they never have before. Children love it.”

One Little Step (www.onelittlestep.org), where Kathy is Program Director, was founded by the mother of a child with cerebral palsy. It is modeled after the Avalon Academy in California and is a full-time academic program where Feldenkrais lessons are an integral part of the school day. “The children come in smiling in anticipation,” Kathy reports. “One little boy usually clicks to respond with a ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ so we’ve been encouraging him to begin to use language. Now he arrives with a big, loud ‘HI!'”

“All the kids have made improvement in the 8 months we’ve been in existence. One little girl’s doctor discovered that her hip dysplasia improved, and she now sits up by herself in school.” As every parent knows, there’s nothing like seeing a child do something for the first time. For Kathy, to see a five year old sit independently for the first time, or move himself across the floor, is incredibly gratifying. “They have such energy and enthusiasm, and are so happy in the program! It’s exciting to see the profound effect this work can have on the quality of their lives.”

The Archway School in New Jersey incorporated One Little Step into their 2006 Summer School program, offering two private lessons a week, three group sessions, a Feldenkrais-based hydro-therapy session in the pool, as well as horse back riding. The work is available for children of all ages from the very young to older children and the district covers all the expenses. “We hope that this will pave the way for more Feldenkrais lessons in the schools.”

A number of Feldenkrais practitioners with experience as physical therapists now work in Early Intervention programs, and the Feldenkrais Method is being included in more programs for children with special needs. In some programs it is the only method. The Field Center for Children’s Integrated (continued on page 2)
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Development (www.thefieldcenter.org) is one such program. Founded by Sheryl Field with the mother of a child with special needs, it is a not-for-profit organization offering the Feldenkrais Method to families on a long-term basis.

The Field Center is doing research, overseen by an Institutional Review Board, on the effectiveness of the Feldenkrais Method from a scientific point of view. From the results, it is obvious that the Feldenkrais Method makes a big difference. Rather than one particular aspect of a child’s condition changing, it is the whole child who changes. “The quality of movement, the attention, and the intention change; there is a big shift in self-regulation. More profoundly, the child’s interest changes. We see maturation that is palpable,” Sheryl reports.

“For example, one five year old boy was an engaging and intelligent child, interested in the world around him, available to social interaction and as active as he could be, given his situation. However, he had very little interest in moving things, including things with wheels. Not animals, not other children. How could a five year old boy not be interested in things that move? As he progressed, he started to want to move things. He wanted to set up blocks and knock them over. He’d never been able to shift his weight from one side to the other, or lift his arm, and he began to want to throw a ball. Ball throwing became a passion! No one invited him to start throwing a ball. The emergence of this interest was natural to him – his improved function gave birth to ‘ball.’ It gave birth to things that move as he was able to move. That was very powerful to see.”

Such evolution is not surprising to Sheryl, who elaborates: “Every time children grow, they have to deal with their complexities all over again – and you want this to happen. The difficulties necessarily come into the foreground, not because the child has difficulties, but because this is the way we all learn. Even children who develop in a typical pattern, including toddlers, learn many skills through a ‘two steps forward and one step backward’ process. However, it seems horrific for the family of a child who struggles, because they don’t want the child to be confused again. Sitting, rolling, standing, walking, are what a parent looks for because uncertainty is uncomfortable. We would like to think that learning shouldn’t have any troubles!” says Sheryl, smiling.

“Parents often feel very pressured by social and therapeutic constructs,” Sheryl explains. “People are saying, ‘If she doesn’t sit herself up by age two, she’ll never sit up. If she doesn’t sit up by two, she’ll never walk.’” Sheryl gives parents the opportunity to share her perspective on their child’s development and potential. “If a child isn’t doing certain things, he or she may not yet have had the necessary experience that will lead to doing those things.” Feldenkrais practitioners aim to provide those missing experiences, understanding that each child is unique. As Sheryl puts it:

“The integrity of a child with special needs is not compromised. What is compromised is the child’s ability to bring what they need to themselves. So, there’s a mandate to everyone around them to create an environment that allows them to express who they are. So they can define – and declare – what they need, and how they’re going to utilize what is brought to them. Who can know what the limit of a child’s capacity might be? That’s the biggest leap. That’s the leap that many people have to take in relationship to children in general. It’s not just special children. Even in maturity, with another human being, it’s a big leap in relation to other human beings. The Feldenkrais Method offers the scaffolding that they can walk back and forth on by themselves so they truly integrate their learning.”

Moshe Feldenkrais believed that his method of somatic education could restore each and every individual to his or her human dignity. Sheryl and Kathy’s inspiring work with youngsters offers growing evidence that this is indeed possible.

Sheryl Field is the director of The Field Center for Children’s Integrated Development, with sites in Montclair, NJ and Manhattan, NY. Sheryl studied extensively with Moshe Feldenkrais, and has been working with children with motor difficulties for over 20 years. website: www.thefieldcenter.org  e-mail: info@thefieldcenter.org  phone: 973-655-0385

Kathy Yates, a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner™, is Program Director of One Little Step, now at Archway School in Atco, NJ. She is on the Faculty of the Feldenkrais Learning Center, NY and maintains a private practice in NYC. Kathy has studied kinesthetic anatomy with Irene Dowd and continues her Feldenkrais studies with Marcy Lindheimer, Anat Daniel and Sheryl Field.
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Two years ago, my student Claire felt in control of her life. A professional flutist, she had a full-time teaching schedule and played in two orchestras. She had just lost 40 pounds, worked out rigorously, and thought of herself as a tough, strong woman. Then suddenly everything changed: she began experiencing debilitating chronic pain. Doctors told her to stop most of her exercise regimen and prescribed anti-depressants for the pain which had side effects like shaky hands and dry mouth – not helpful for a flutist.

Claire spent a good deal of time in our first few lessons talking about cause and effect, hoping that she could find the cause of her pain in order to control and remove it. But this approach was backing her into a corner – it meant that she had to restrict her activities to a very narrow scope. She didn't know what caused the pain to grow more severe, and became afraid to do anything. When I asked her if she felt in control, she answered, “No. The pain is in control.”

We in the West are very taken with the idea of being in control. We like to be in the driver’s seat; we value independence and individual choice. We believe that if we exert enough control over ourselves, we can have good health, a successful career, a perfect body. The Feldenkrais Method® is a good antidote to this preoccupation.

In Body and Mature Behavior, Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais writes that our nervous systems are so complex that it is impossible to have a pure thought, a pure emotion, or a pure motor impulse. Each movement we make also has components of thought and emotion involved; each thought and emotion involves some degree of movement and sensation. Our conscious minds cannot possibly monitor and manage such a complex system. What they can do is learn to let go of managing, stand back, and observe what changes as the system organizes itself.

Try the following brief scanning exercise. It is an example of how the Feldenkrais Method offers opportunities to observe rather than trying to control:

Lie on your back, legs long, arms at your sides. Observe how your arms are lying. Does one feel longer, shorter, lighter, heavier than the other? Next, notice how your head is lying – is your ear on one side closer to the shoulder than on the other side? Is it possible to notice these differences without judgment? Can you be aware of asymmetries without straightening them out?

Now observe your breathing. Can you follow the movement of your breathing in your chest and abdomen without changing the rhythm or size of your breaths? How does it feel to pay attention like this?

Bring this same open-minded attention to an area of discomfort. Can you keep your attention gently there, without shifting to get more comfortable? What is the quality of the discomfort – muscle tightness; achingness; sharp pain? Now notice an area of yourself that is comfortable. What is the quality of sensation in this area? Notice that you have both areas of comfort and discomfort, of varying size, degree, and quality. Without judgment, scan your whole self and notice these varying sensations. Do you notice any changes? Without judgment, scan your whole self and notice these varying sensations.

See if you can gently roll to your side, stand, and walk around while maintaining this awareness of yourself. How do you feel after having asked these questions? Do you notice any changes?

This type of non-judgmental, exploratory scanning is a great skill we can learn from studying the Feldenkrais Method. Asking questions is often more useful than finding answers. Feldenkrais® lessons have helped Claire explore her own use of attention and expand her awareness of her movements and sensations. She is using the scanning technique described above to help with pain management. As she shifts from a focus on control to an exploration of her movements and sensations, the scope of her life is gradually beginning to open up again.

Stacey Pelinka is a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner™ and a professional flutist living in San Francisco.

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Welcome to our first Regional Feature. Each new issue of SenseAbility will look at a region and spotlight events and information relevant to readers in that area. If you want more information on practitioners in your area, please visit www.feldenkrais.com/guild/find to see what’s happening in your neighborhood.

The Feldenkrais Guild® has 10 regions within North America, and has designated representatives from each one. The Southeast Region covers a huge geographical area of 12 states, from the “deep south” to Oklahoma and the eastern half of Texas. While some people may be fortunate to live where there are many Feldenkrais® practitioners, others might find only one practitioner in their town, or county. The Southeast Region is dedicated to providing opportunities for practitioners to feel part of a larger community as well as offer more opportunities for students throughout the region.

In that spirit, Feldenkrais practitioners from around the Southeast Region gathered over Memorial Day weekend in Carrboro and Durham, NC for a weekend of business, learning, and fun. As Moshe Feldenkrais said, “this work is a method of learning how to learn.” When practitioners have the opportunity to step back into the process of learning, clients benefit.

The Carrboro area is also the site of a Feldenkrais Professional Training Program that has trainees from the SE Region and beyond who will be graduating after 4 years this November, bringing a whole new group of practitioners to a city or town near you.

Regional Collaborations:

Karen Dold of Chapel Hill, NC, taught a 10-week series of classes at the Duke Institute of Learning in Retirement during the winter semester 2006. She has been invited back into the renamed program: The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Duke University (OLLI at Duke). Details: Contact Karen at movewithelan@earthlink.net

Astra Coyle, in Celo, NC recently completed a residency teaching movement to artists and crafts people at the world renowned Penland School in NC. The participants, many of whom were instructors, agreed that Awareness Through Movement® lessons enhance the thinking and creative process.

Theresa Claytor of Ft. Lauderdale, FL will be doing a special presentation at the Green Festival, sponsored by Co-op America and Global Exchange in Washington, DC, October 14–15. For info contact her at: fitatlast2000@yahoo.com

Research and Publications:

North Carolina practitioner Paul McAndrew participated in a doctoral study initiated by Glenna Batson, PT, through the Department of Neurology at UNC Chapel Hill School of Medicine. The study was titled: “Effect of Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement on Balance in Adults Post-Stroke.”

Paul taught 6 weeks of Awareness Through Movement lessons to 10 participants with stroke with varying motor deficits. The majority of the group improved on balance tasks and walked faster at the end of the study.

Practitioners Betty Akiba and Joe Strain assisted with the study.

For further information about this and other studies on Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement lessons and stroke, contact: Glenna Batson, DSc, PT, MA glenna@mindspring.com (919) 732-1640

Sandy Burkart PhD, PT, GCFP from Boca Raton, FL recently presented several research papers at the Stroke Rehab 2006 Meeting in Goentberg, Sweden in April, 2006. These papers included:

• “Recovery of Arm and Hand Function Following Stroke Using the Feldenkrais Method, and Other Therapies”

• “Assessing the Recovery of Standing Balance and Gait Following Removal of a Meningioma Using the Feldenkrais Method and Other Therapies”

• “Recovery of Hand Function Following Stroke Using the Feldenkrais Method.”

For info on these papers, contact Sandy at sburkart@bellsouth.net

Taught by Ann Harmon:
*Avenue of Expression: A Feldenkrais® Approach*
November 9-12, 2006
Tampa Florida

*Movement-Based Bodywork: Understanding the Temporomandibular Joint*
March 24-25, 2007
Florida School of Massage (Gainesville)
Day 1 open to general public, oriented toward people with neck problems or TMJ syndrome. Day 2 for hands-on professionals only.

Feldenkrais for Yoga Practitioners
November 8, 2006
Stillpoint Studio, Lutz (North Tampa), Florida

For further information, contact Dr. Ann Harman.
352-466-4940 or afn29901@netzero.net

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Taught by Brenda Rasch
*Moving with Grace and Ease: A workshop in the Feldenkrais Method®*
Friday, October 6, 2006 6:30 -9 pm
Saturday, October 7, 2006 9 am - 4:30 pm
Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church
2931 Kingston Pike
Knoxville, TN  37922

For information about the workshop contact Brenda Rasch. 865-363-6416, raschb@bellsouth.net

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Taught by Lavinia Plonka
*Talking, Laughing, Kissing (and Eating): Exploring the Mouth*
Saturday, September 30, 2006 9:30 AM – 1 PM

*The Art of Seeing: Exploring the Eyes*
Saturday, Nov. 4, 2006 9:30 AM – 1 PM

Asheville Movement Center, Asheville, NC
828-275-4838  www.ashevillemovementcenter.com

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Upcoming Workshops and Events
In the Southeast Region:

*Body & Mature Behavior*, by Moshe Feldenkrais, was originally published in 1949.

Feldenkrais’ first book about his method is finally back in print after a long hiatus and includes a new foreword by Carl Ginsburg, Ph.D.

Laying the foundation for what would become the *Feldenkrais Method®* of enhancing human development, *Body and Mature Behavior* provides a succinct overview of Feldenkrais’ theories.

Available at the FEFNA Bookstore:
www.feldenkrais.com/store
Come learn more about the Method and meet Feldenkrais® practitioners at our Annual Conference.

The following workshops are open to the public:

- The Feldenkrais Method® Among the Trees: Finding Our Place in the Natural World
- Gross Motor Development Ages 0-3 Years: Creating Effective Lessons for Infants and Toddlers from Applicable Awareness Through Movement® Lessons
- Putting Your Best Voice Forward
- A ‘Bread and Butter’ Lesson: Bringing Ease to Walking and More...
- Fighting Roots of the Feldenkrais Method

www.feldenkrais.com/events
e-mail: conference@feldenkraisguild.com