Amherst Perspectives

The 2011 Feldenkrais Method Annual Conference will be held in Amherst, MA this summer from July 7-13th. We’d love to see you there, learning why your eyes are important to your whole body with Bonnie Humiston, gaining a deeper understanding of research and the method with Pat Buchanan, and learning how to tune yourself before tuning your musical instrument with David Kaetz. All three presenters have articles in this issue of SenseAbility. Also, don’t miss Gabrielle Pullen’s insightful interview with Ralph Strauch.

For a complete list of public workshops, as well as information on free ATM classes and events, go to:
www.feldenkrais.com/events/conference/2011_public

SENSEABILITY

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Ever give up on doing something that was supposed to make your life better because, although it seemed to help a bit, it somehow fell short? Maybe it was sit-up exercises for a bad back, or eye exercises for nearsightedness, or lovemaking tips for a better marriage, or self-worth affirmation statements for success in sales. An outstanding example is prescription eyeglasses that do a fine job for reading the small print on the eye chart but are hard to live with because the rest of your body is left out.

Part of the unique wisdom in the work of Moshe Feldenkrais was in his repeated teaching that changes in functioning and behavior must be generalized in order to be permanent. In other words, movements must be attentively and intentionally applied in a variety of ways, involving many different parts of the body, to be fully integrated into our actions.

It is with the movements of our eyes that this is outstandingly so, which is perhaps why so many of Dr. Feldenkrais’ Awareness Through Movement® lessons include work with the eyes. As he explained it, “The head habitually moves with the eyes...because the eyes and the ears necessitate the movement of the head in order to direct themselves to the source of information... The movement of the head will come by itself if you stop holding the breath—that means if you do nothing, just let yourself be as you are. And with the movement of the eyes, the neck muscles will change, involving the rest of yourself.” When Feldenkrais had us move our eyes in different configurations in relation to the head, we became better able to move everything else.

What is so powerful about the Awareness Through Movement lessons he developed around eye movements is that we are led to consciously connect them with movements in all other parts of ourselves. This makes possible much greater improvement in our difficulties—improvement that lasts and lasts.

Here is a way we might understand how the Feldenkrais® work with the eyes can be so powerfully helpful throughout our whole self. Think of it as learning a conscious, intentional shift in how we focus our attention. Ordinarily, in connection with our eyes, our attention is focused on what we are seeing—on something external to ourselves. In Awareness Through Movement lessons we may be asked to look at a point on the ceiling, or look slowly around in a circle, all the time noticing what we have to do with our neck or legs in order to do that smoothly. This is a focus of attention that none of us would normally ever think of doing spontaneously. Our human nature is such that we need someone to guide and lead us into such awareness. With this kind of instruction we have great potential to change and integrate how we organize ourselves for whatever we choose to do.

Bonnie will be teaching her workshop, “Eyes Organize the Body,” Saturday, July 9th and Sunday, July 10th. For details, go to: www.feldenkrais.com/events/conference/2011_public/conf_event/3845
A Short Exploration: Moving the Eyes

–by Bonnie Rich Humiston, GCFP

Try Bonnie’s ATM on the following page.
1. Sit or lie comfortably. Slowly turn your head a little, looking right and left a few times. Notice which way is easier. Sense throughout yourself—your neck, chest, back, hips, arms, legs and feet.

2. Do all the movements with your eyes closed and your head kept in the middle, not moving.

3. Move your eyes, slowly, to the right and to the left. Do they move easily? Do they go all the way to the corners or only part way? Just sense what this movement is like now. Don’t force anything. Keep it easy.

4. Slowly move your eyes to the right, both eyes, from the middle to the corners and back again, a few times. To the right: your right eye goes to the outside corner and your left eye goes to the inside corner near your nose. Do your eyes go together or does one go differently? Keep doing this slowly for several movements. Does your head want to follow your eyes? If so, gently keep it in the middle, not moving.

5. Continue moving both eyes to the right and leave them there, at the corner. Move them up and down, a few movements around the corner—up toward the end of the eyebrow and down in the direction of the feet, then back to the middle of the corner. Is your left eye moving the same as the right? Are you breathing? Keep moving your eyes while you notice where the movements of your breathing are happening.

6. Bring your eyes back to the center and rest them. Turn your head right and left and see if it moves differently from the beginning.

7. Repeat instruction 2, 3, and 4 moving your eyes to the left, then bring them to the center and rest. Turn your head right and left and see if there’s any difference.

8. Now looking from the center straight forward, move both eyes upwards a little and to the right following your eyebrows. Then move both eyes down a little toward your feet, then to the left, back and up to the center where you started, like making the outline of a box to the right. Do this slowly several times.

9. Repeat instruction 8 to the left.

10. Rest. Turn your head right and left, noticing any differences throughout yourself now. Turn your head right and left now with your eyes open. Does it move easier now?
A 1964 article by Moshe Feldenkrais entitled “Mind and Body” is now available in a recent collection of his papers, Embodied Wisdom. In this paper, Dr. Feldenkrais summarized and explained the foundation and principles behind his method. I share some quotations from “Mind and Body” throughout this article as I consider the relationship between the Feldenkrais Method® and research.

Dr. Feldenkrais’ training as a scientist and researcher with expertise in mathematics and engineering is evident in his writing. So, too, do his thoughts and actions make apparent the interconnectedness across scientific domains and cultures. He simultaneously recalls the natural philosophers—who sought new knowledge prior to the rise of the silos of contemporary academic disciplines—and presages the interdisciplinary, integrative approaches of today’s researchers grounded in dynamic systems theory—who recognize the self-organizing interrelationships among subsystems across time from which emerge the functioning of the whole system.

I believe that the unity of mind and body is an objective reality. They are not just parts somehow related to each other, but an inseparable whole while functioning. (p. 28, compatible with dynamic systems theory)

To me, it has always been obvious that research is one important way that we can continue to develop and grow the Feldenkrais Method. Not all agree, of course. But I reflect on how it was that Dr. Feldenkrais saw a need in others for another way to learn to learn, to learn to improve. He made good use of his education, training and cross-cultural experiences to synthesize his method grounded in knowledge across many disciplines. He used research in its many forms to do so.

An immense field for inquiry is opened once the organic ties of social orientation are followed up into the muscles, nerves, and skeleton. Not only can individual development or abnormality be followed through the body, but so can even wider cultural and racial differences in attitudes.

The introversion, the nonattachment, and the indifference of the Hindu with corresponding looseness of hip joints, and the extroverted, holding-on, time-is-money attitude of the industrial nations (with their utter inability to sit cross-legged), are a few examples. (p. 33, an example of bio-psycho-socio-cultural observational research)

On July 8 this year, a meeting for people interested in

 Attend

Feldenkrais® Science Network: The Evolution of Knowing & Learning

Friday, July 8th
Hampshire College,
Amherst, MA

www.feldenkrais.com/events/conference/2011_public

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research relevant to the *Feldenkrais Method* will be held in conjunction with the Annual Conference taking place at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. Whether seriously engaged or seriously interested in research, “*Feldenkrais*® Science Network: The Evolution of Knowing & Learning” will afford participants opportunities to learn about recent developments, exchange ideas, and reflect on how our understanding of human behavior has changed since Dr. Feldenkrais taught his last students at Hampshire before his death in 1984. (Read more at http://www.feldenkrais.com/events/conference/2011/conf_event/3918.)

In my examination of the bodies of several thousand people before and during re-education, I have found there are some norms for the definition of health and normality. In particular I have looked at the distribution of tonus throughout the bodies of these people.

(p. 31, an example of biomechanical observational and intervention research)

The featured presenter during this meeting is my friend and colleague, Cole Galloway. He and I met at Indiana University while studying and working with developmental psychologist Esther Thelen. (Read more about Esther at http://www.feldenkrais.com/resources/esther_thelen_phd_gcfp_research_and_education_fund/) His talks are always entertaining and stimulating, as the title of his presentation suggests: “Babies Gone Wild: Unleashing Infant Exploration.”

Cole will be sharing his recent research that demonstrates the importance of self-directed, powered mobility (as in babies driving robotic vehicles!) to the development of young children in areas of cognition, perception and emotions—particularly for infants who are delayed in learning to walk. While some would be surprised to learn that moving oneself about the environment is key to progressing in other areas of behavior, *Guild Certified Feldenkrais Teachers®*, their students, and dynamic systems researchers would not. Cole’s research is one example of how scientists can be mindful of the interactions among moving, sensing, thinking and feeling and conduct research that is relevant to and appropriate for the *Feldenkrais Method*. (Read more about Cole’s work at the University of Delaware at http://www.udel.edu/PT/About%20Us/People/galloway.html. Be sure to scroll down to “Dr. Galloway in the News.”)

My inmost belief is that, just as anatomy has helped us get an intimate knowledge of the working of the body, and neuroanatomy an understanding of some activities of the psyche, so will understanding of the somatic aspects of consciousness enable us to know ourselves more intimately.

(p. 34, examples of basic research and interdisciplinary research)

I never met Dr. Feldenkrais, but he continues with us. For me, his words encourage us to seek new knowledge and continue to learn. That is central to his method for self-improvement: become more aware, make finer distinctions, and use those insights to improve and change. Research is one option for applying his instructions. Perhaps I will see you July 8 in Amherst.

There is still a vast field left unexplored in the realm of body and mind. But a useful start has been made that provides means to make considerable changes in behavior. There can be no improvement without change.

(p. 43, suggestive of the need for translational, basic and applied research)

Reference
David Kaetz, GCFP, will be teaching his workshop “First, Tune the Musician - Radical Listening in Musical Improvisation” on Monday, July 11th.

SA: David, can you tell me a little about how you first had the idea for leading this workshop?

DK: I’ve been a musician since I was a kid, and I’ve always had something of an issue with the idea that music is what’s on the paper on the stand in front of you. It seems to me that music is intrinsic to who we are as people. And yet somehow many people, as they grow up, lose access to music - occasionally by way of the darker side of “music education.” It occurred to me that if we were taught to walk and talk the way we’re sometimes taught music, we would not be able to walk without a map or talk without a script. Just as people with a sense of curiosity can walk without a map when they encounter a new landscape, likewise, can we not meet a new landscape musically, without instructions? Of course, study and practice are essential, but they are intended to liberate you, not to freeze you in dependence and the fear of errors.

“Awareness through Movement®” suggests another way of working with the musical self. As learners, we proceed from one mistake to the other, and we learn from our mistakes, just as we learn to walk and talk by making one mistake after another. This is jazz: you fall lovingly from one mistake into the other, and you do that ever more gracefully, in good company, and soon you are in the flow.

I have been teaching music and improvisation since long before I was a Feldenkrais® teacher. But the Feldenkrais Method® takes us very close to the core of improvisation – how do we find the next harmonious move? We have to be present and listen. The method offers a context, and a set of tools, to refine this ability – in fact, a splendid set of metaphors for working with creativity in general.

SA: How do you do Feldenkrais work with musicians?
DK: When [the] Feldenkrais [Method] is mentioned with regard to musicians, it’s often considered a way

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of unwrinkling them: of addressing their wrist problems, helping with their breathing, or dealing with professional difficulties that come with repetitive movements. And all this is true, but it’s not the end of the story.

**CN:** So working with their bodies instead of their music?

**DK:** Yes. With experience in the field, it becomes apparent that the music that comes out of a well-tuned musician is a different music. Just as the music that comes out of a well-tuned instrument is a different music. It would be funny for a fiddler to tune only two strings on a fiddle and then try to play. Yet often musicians play without tuning themselves. That’s the poetic premise of the workshop: that the musician is where the music first comes from, so the musician needs to tune up first.

**SA:** So what does a “musical” ATM class look like?

**DK:** First there is ATM – Awareness through Movement - and then there is MTA – Music through Awareness. We go back and forth from the mat to the instruments, the voice, and small group exercises, all the while building this quality of listening. The same quality of listening you get when you lie on the floor and you look for the harmony between the arm and the turning of the head. You’re listening to stress or harmony, to how things go together, to relatedness. How does the movement of the leg affect the breath? How do these things go together? Musicians are used to listening to apparently disparate things and finding how they work together.

It’s precisely this harmony that we’re looking for in ourselves: when a movement gets more harmonious, more and more integrated, until the entire self is felt to be somehow part of that movement. You could even say that we are composing ourselves. To compose, at its Latin root, means to put together. We’re looking at the spontaneous composition of music as we’re putting ourselves together.

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**Check out**

*Singing with Your Whole Self: The Feldenkrais Method & Voice*

*Singing with Your Whole Self* teaches performers to use the Feldenkrais Method® to ameliorate problems of tension, muscle strain, and illness in order to obtain optimal vocal performance. This book contains 18 unique, modularized Awareness through Movement® lessons specifically designed for liberating function in all musicians and in singers in particular. Modularized lessons allow the user to choose between functionally useful short segments or entire lessons. Includes an index referring performers to the lessons most effective for a specific problem.

[www.feldenkraisshop.org/](http://www.feldenkraisshop.org/)
If Structural Limitations aren’t as they Seem, What Else is Possible?

—by Gabrielle Pullen, GCFP

The Information Age seems to have devolved into the Miss-information Age as we are inundated with transmissions, opinions and perceptions paraded as truth. Sometimes our perceptions are fixed by previous experiences that are completely individual, yet form the lens that we view our reality through. How do we sort it all out? The thinking of Moshe Feldenkrais offers a dramatically different paradigm from which to respond.

In this practitioner spotlight, I spoke with Ralph Strauch, a practitioner who has practiced full time since 1983. His academic training was as a theoretical mathematician specializing in probability theory, with a Ph.D. in statistics. He is also author of *The Reality Illusion: How you make the world you experience*, and the recently released DVD entitled, *Living In Gravity: that can help you recover your natural balance.*

SA: What was the initial draw that made you interested in the work of Moshe Feldenkrais?

RS: I attended a weekend workshop that Moshe gave in Los Angeles in 1980. I had been exploring movement and body-mind interaction for some time, and was enthralled by his tools for exploring those issues. I went to most of the five day intensive he gave following the weekend, and learned there about the upcoming Amherst training.

When I thought about the training, the standard objections came up. I was in my mid-forties with a mortgage and two teenage kids, and couldn’t run off and do something like that. I applied, thinking they would probably be full and wouldn’t accept me, but then it would be their fault I didn’t go rather than mine. They accepted me, and I went. When I entered the training, I had no interest in becoming a practitioner. My interest was more in picking Moshe’s brain and understanding how he saw the world.

SA: What were you looking for?

RS: Basically, I went to explore my own layers. He seemed to have interesting tools for doing that. Then, as I got into the training, I also got a deeper sense of what he was about than I had had going in.

SA: Was there a shift in your world view?

RS: I had made most [of] that shift already. It was a shift from thinking that the world is how it seems and that the limitations you come up against are inherent in who you are and how the world is.

SA: As opposed to the common tendency to point the finger to blame someone else?

RS: Yes, going from that to a realization that you are really much more responsible for your experience than you’d thought. It was a sense that by inquiring much more deeply into HOW you assemble that experience, you can increase your capability and open yourself to new possibilities that you DIDN’T KNOW WERE THERE.

SA: Any examples from your own life?

RS: Well, certainly in the area of my own physical
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capabilities. It also affected the sense of responsibility I bear for my own health and well being.

SA: When contemplating something as dramatic as the changes in direction your life took around the time you met Moshe, and before that, some might call it a mid-life crisis; others might call it a ‘coming to your senses.’

RS: It’s both. But again, for me, it was a process I had been engaged in for several years already. For me, it’s hard to find big jumps. The changes seem to accumulate in little bits.

One instance that comes to mind was in the second year of the Amherst Training. We were doing some ATM where there was obvious torque on the rib cage and Moshe said something about noticing how the sternum (breast bone) is moving. The thought that immediately came to mind was, ‘What is he talking about? Sternums don’t move. I’m forty-four years old and my sternum has never moved.’ Then, while I was pondering that contradiction, I became aware of the fact that my sternum was moving. There was another level of understanding in terms of what I learned from that. What seemed to be fixed and rigid structural constraints aren’t. That sort of change, once you’ve institutionalized it in yourself, opens up all sorts of possibilities.

SA: What were your impressions of Moshe?

RS: He was a very complex personality. I didn’t find him particularly likable. He could be a really egotistical and crotchety old man at times. But I took what I wanted from him. I never developed the closeness with him that some people did.

SA: Could you talk more about how Moshe worked with people in ways that really caught your attention?

RS: There was an American concert flutist who had been shot in the arm during a terrorist attack on a bus in Israel who visited the Amherst training at one point. It’s hard to play a flute with one hand, and, after the attack, he felt like his career was over. He then worked with both Moshe and one of his assistants, Yochanan Rywerant, and recovered significantly. He still didn’t feel comfortable on the concert stage, but was again willing to get up there. Moshe made him tell us the whole detailed story.

My initial impression was that Moshe was showing off -- making him tell us how much Moshe had done for him. Later I heard that it was Moshe’s plan to make him tell the story over and over until he got bored with it. At that point, it would lose its hold on him.

SA: So, Moshe had him tell the story over and over again until he was sick of it?

RS: It wasn’t so much a matter of getting sick of it, as of getting done with it.

SA: What’s the difference?

RS: The difference between getting sick of it versus getting done with it is that you can get sick of it in a way that it still holds emotional hooks in you. When you’re done with it, it doesn’t have those hooks anymore.

SA: Just to clarify the difference even more, you mean to say that when the hooks are no longer present, the person can hear the story, speak about it or be reminded of it without having an emotional reaction?

RS: Yes. You can deal with what’s happening now instead of what happened ten or fifteen years ago... What the Feldenkrais Method basically does, both Functional Integration (FI) and ATM, is to put you more in touch with what’s happening now in your immediate, current experience. As you get more in touch with your immediate experience, then it becomes easier to see what your options are, and what the choices are, and where they will lead.

SA: We all have so many reasons why things are not going as we would like, such as the economy, or the job market or the stock market or the war. Is there a way to have your own internal experience that’s independent of what’s going on in your environment?

RS: People really only get upset about one thing: that the world isn’t behaving the way they want it to. Then they get angry or resentful about it. That’s what creates the limitations.

SA: Are you saying that the inability to live with what is right now is part of what creates the limitations?

RS: That, I think, is the main thing that limits us, because then we fight against something that isn’t there. A lot of
the rigidity and pain comes from being afraid, from trying to keep things out.

SA: People become rigid in the attempt to protect themselves?

RS: It isn’t self-protection so much as the illusion of self-protection.

For example, I was working with a woman who was a German Jew whose family had gotten out during the war in 1939. Eventually, she moved here. However, she still had a lot of memories that had hooks for her from the days in Germany. She talked about going to school with the other neighborhood kids, to walking to school on the opposite side of the street from them, to walking down the street while they taunted her, to not being able to go to school anymore - that kind of progression. That kind of trauma can often carry with it a kind of a poster frame, a visual image. For her, she described it as an image of “holstered pistols and black leather boots.” She remembered hanging on to her mother’s skirts as her mother was being questioned by two gestapo officers about where her father was, looking straight into those holstered pistols and black leather boots.

At a psychological level, that left her with a strong aversion to uniformed governmental authority. At a somatic level, it left her with a lot of tension patterns in her body that ‘embodied’ that aversion. As we worked in FI, it was around a knee and a balance issue and relaxing around what came up. She didn’t have any sudden cathartic release, but one day she arrived for her session a bit late just grinning from ear to ear, looking very happy. And I said, ‘What are you so happy about?’ ‘I got a ticket!’ she replied. Then I said, ‘Most people are not that happy when they get a ticket.’ And she said, ‘I joked with the motorcycle cop.’

Here was this embodiment of her demon with the high leather boots and the pistol by his side, and that demon had lost his hold over her. The emotional loading was gone. It isn’t the past that is the problem, but how you organize yourself around it.

SA: She was free of it.

RS: The core of what Moshe’s teaching has to offer is SELF-empowerment. Learning to be driven by your own sense of what’s right rather than by any external authority.

SA: It’s not about embracing the ideals of a guru.

RS: No, it’s not about doing something in a particular way because that’s how he said to do it. It’s about finding your own way to do it, because through your own explorations you’ve discovered that that’s the way that makes sense. And what you get from Moshe is help in that exploratory process, not the answers at the end.