

Excerpt from Integrative Healing

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INTEGRATIVE HEALING

Developing
Wellness in the
Mind and Body

Z ALTUG PT, DPT, MS, CSCS



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CHAPTER 10

FELDENKRAIS METHOD® FOR HEALTH

This chapter was completed with the assistance of Bridget Quebodeaux, LMFT, GCFP. Bridget is a Guild Certified *Feldenkrais Practitioner*™ with over 20 years of experience. In addition to completing a four-year Professional *Feldenkrais*® training program, Bridget earned an MFA in acting from the California Institute of the Arts in 2000 and a Master's degree in Psychology in 2013. She is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and is on the faculty of the Dynamic Emotion Focused Therapy Institute (DEFTinstitute.com). Bridget has a private Feldenkrais practice (feldenkraiswestla.com) and sees clients at the Center for Physical Health in West Los Angeles (physicalhealth.com).

Bridget's clients come to her for a variety of reasons. She sees people who are recovering from an injury or surgery, managing the symptoms of a chronic illness, suffering with anxiety or depression, and seeking to improve athletic or artistic performance.

For more information about projects Bridget has completed, please refer to the following:

- *Emotion-Focused Workbook: A Guide to Compassionate Self-Reflection* (2015) (amazon.com)
- *Anatomy of Attunement, Feldenkrais Method® Awareness Through Movement® audio* lessons for psychotherapists (anatomyofattunement.com)
- *Posture With a Purpose, Feldenkrais Method® audio* recordings (achievingexcellence.com)

“Make the impossible possible, the possible easy, the easy elegant”

—Moshe Feldenkrais

Russian-born engineer, physicist, and judo master, Moshe Feldenkrais (1904–1984), was the creator of the *Feldenkrais Method*®, a system of learning and human improvement. Better posture, improved balance, greater range of motion, pain relief, and stress reduction are commonly reported benefits.

Feldenkrais's own chronic knee injury led to the discovery of ways to tap into the processes through which children learn to move and behave and to use these processes to enhance functioning at any age. He wrote eight books (Feldenkrais 1944, 1949, 1952, 1972, 1977, 1981, 1984, 1985). Over a period of 40 years, Feldenkrais formulated his ideas into an educational method for improving how people move, think, and feel. The method is divided into two parts: *Awareness Through Movement*® (ATM®) and *Functional Integration*® (FI®).

Awareness Through Movement lessons incorporate verbally directed movements, visualizations, and guided attention for group or individual work. In

these lessons participants explore developmental movements, like crawling and rolling, and functions, such as posture and breathing. There are over 1,000 *ATM* lessons, offering an opportunity to develop awareness of habitual movement patterns that contribute to discomfort and limitation and discover easier, more comfortable ways of moving and being.

Functional Integration lessons employ a one-to-one, hands-on approach. During an *FI* lesson the practitioner uses gentle movements and touch to help the client become more aware of how he or she currently holds and organizes his or her body for action and to introduce new, more effective, more pleasurable possibilities.

CASE EXAMPLE

(FROM BRIDGET QUEBODEAUX)

Paula, a 76-year-old woman, came to the *Feldenkrais Method* hoping to get relief from pain and stiffness in her neck. The great difficulty she experienced in turning her head made her afraid to drive and caused her to give up many activities she once enjoyed. Over her lifetime, Paula had developed habitual ways of using her body that put excess strain on certain areas like her neck. In addition to these movement patterns, which included holding her shoulders up and keeping her chest rigid, she had learned attentional patterns, like ignoring her body and pushing through pain.

Paula participated in once-weekly *Functional Integration* sessions during which her practitioner helped her to sense her body more accurately and come to understand how certain habits interfered with easy, coordinated movement. Gradually she was able to retrain her brain to feel and move her body differently. After her third session, Paula sat up with more relaxed shoulders and a more mobile torso. She looked toward the window beside her with a new coordination of previously ignored parts of herself, which now supported the movement of her neck, and she exclaimed, "I can turn my head!" Paula continued weekly sessions for a month and then began *Awareness Through Movement* classes to reinforce her new and improved ways of moving and attending to herself.

Z. ALTUG'S PERSPECTIVE FOR DOING THE FELDENKRAIS METHOD

In my clinical practice as a physical therapist, I typically recommend the *Feldenkrais Method* to patients and clients who need to manage pain and stress,

increase mobility, and also improve function in daily activities. Other general reasons to try the *Feldenkrais Method* include:

- Relieve stress and tension
- Improve overall health
- Improve flexibility
- Improve breathing
- Improve posture
- Help manage pain
- Help prevent falls
- Help find inner peace

*“What I’m after is not flexible bodies, but flexible brains . . .
what I’m really after is restoring people to their human dignity.”*

—Moshe Feldenkrais

BRIDGET QUEBODEAUX’S PERSPECTIVE FOR DOING THE FELDENKRAIS METHOD

The name of this chapter is *Feldenkrais Method for Health*. Moshe Feldenkrais talked about health not only in terms of avoiding injury or illness, but also in terms of the capacity to recover. Doing this work presupposes the belief that all humans have learning and healing capacity within them. As a *Feldenkrais Practitioner*, I help people tap into that capacity. Sometimes this means that a particular injury or condition will be no more. Sometimes it means that in the face of a diagnosis or structural challenge that cannot be reversed, a person will come to adjust their use of self so that they can live more fully. In my work with clients, I emphasize both awareness and attention to quality of engagement with self. To mindlessly repeat a movement or behavior that is painful or ineffective is to practice the habits that make that movement or behavior problematic. In contrast, to explore what a person does and how he or she does it with compassionate interest is to unlock the human potential to notice, care, learn, and change.

LET’S SEE WHAT RESEARCH SAYS . . .

- The *Feldenkrais Method* could help middle-aged people strengthen their balance, especially for those with certain disabilities (Torres-Unda et al. 2017).
- The *Feldenkrais Method* may offset age-related decline in cognitive function (Ullman et al. 2016).