

Article

Research and the Feldenkrais Method: Sharing a Different Vision with the World

Matt Taylor

PhD, PT, RYT, Dynamic Systems Rehabilitation

Abstract

The practice of the Feldenkrais Method affords both teacher and student new lenses through which to experience the world. The perspectives gained by participating in a Feldenkrais lesson expand both parties' awareness while fostering creativity and efficient action. The understanding and sharing of this phenomenon is critical in our world today as human beings face increasingly complex and urgent challenges that require such creative action. As an outsider looking in, there appear to be many important opportunities for the Feldenkrais community to contribute to the body of human knowledge through research.

Stephens and Ginsburg provide excellent summaries of the technical aspects and limitations of research on the Feldenkrais Method. This article acknowledges those issues, but will address practical observations for consideration. Looking beyond the obvious studies of relative measurable movement improvement and direct comparison trials of intervention types, the Feldenkrais Method has many opportunities to influence traditional movement research and also bridge movement into the various social sciences. How this might be done, including possible study suggestions and questions will be addressed first. Additionally, suggestions are offered on how research on the Feldenkrais Method can enrich our language and transform traditional movement paradigms by articulating and documenting new forms of inquiry.

Keywords

Feldenkrais Method, movement research, paradigms of movement, somatic education

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Research and the Feldenkrais Method: Sharing a Different Vision with the World

Matt Taylor PhD, PT, RYT
Dynamic Systems Rehabilitation

The practice of the Feldenkrais Method affords both teacher and student new lenses through which to experience the world. The perspectives gained by participating in a Feldenkrais lesson expand both parties' awareness while fostering creativity and efficient action¹. The understanding and sharing of this phenomenon is critical in our world today as human beings face increasingly complex and urgent challenges that require such creative action. As an outsider looking in, there appear to be many important opportunities for the Feldenkrais community to contribute to the body of human knowledge through research.

This article is influenced by three levels of experience. The first is as a consumer having attended many Feldenkrais workshops and personally experiencing the results of both Awareness of Movement (ATM) and Functional Integration. The second level of experience is as a physical therapist of 25 years having employed certified Feldenkrais practitioners and introduced ATM lessons to patients as a form of therapeutic intervention and reading many of the classic Feldenkrais texts as personal professional self-development. The third experience is over 10 years as a senior level yoga therapist, having trained predominantly in the integrative yoga therapy tradition that includes somatic education in all levels of its training. In the two somatic/mindfulness based rehabilitation clinics that the author directs, the shared principles of somatic movement education are used daily in both client care and personal development.

Stephens² and Ginsburg³ provide excellent summaries of the technical aspects and limitations of research on the Feldenkrais Method. This article acknowledges those issues, but will address practical observations for consideration. Looking beyond the obvious studies of relative measurable movement improvement and direct comparison trials of intervention types,^{4, 5} The Feldenkrais Method has many opportunities to influence traditional movement research and also bridge movement into the various social sciences. How this might be done, including possible study suggestions and questions will be addressed first. Additionally, suggestions are offered on how research on the Feldenkrais Method can enrich our language and transform traditional movement paradigms by articulating and documenting new forms of inquiry.

Traditional Movement Research and Social Sciences

The decision to use a Feldenkrais lesson in our clinic is driven by a number of factors, including expediency both then and at home (i.e. one activity vs. multiple exercises to address all of the movement components), immediacy of results, and to provide an environment for learning vs. repetition. Research into each of the above areas would provide valuable new perspectives on the clinical reasoning process of traditional exercise prescription. The impact in traditional physical rehabilitation settings of limited visits and restricted access to visits by third party payers has placed a premium on new solutions. Routinely our clients present with 20 – 40 previously prescribed exercises that require too much time, give no immediate

benefit, and are by their report dreadfully boring. Documentation of both the qualitative and quantitative experience of Feldenkrais ATM lessons could provide important new resources toward solving these issues in traditional movement settings.

Closely related to this is the question of compliance to home lessons. As a significant issue in traditional movement settings, is the Feldenkrais Method experience any different? Certainly there are challenges in methodology as ATM lessons by definition should lack standardization, but if students grasp the playful, inquiring nature of the movement, do they still get down on the floor any more often or effectively than individuals prescribed therapeutic exercise? If so, why? If not, why not? How do students learn to explore on their own? What do they discover when they do? What is their decision making process to comply with the lesson frequency and is there a difference in prioritization of time vs. traditional therapeutic exercise given the many other options competing for their attention? All of these questions might provide new insights when articulated from the multiple systems perspectives of the Feldenkrais Method compared with the more linear approach of traditional western movement science.

This multiple systems perspective can serve as a bridge into the social sciences as well, utilizing many tools of measurement regarding quality of life, satisfaction and personal efficacy⁶ that is available in the social sciences. How does increasing efficiency of movement influence these areas of human experience? Should mental health and spiritual counselors and therapists be screening gross movement inefficiencies as part of their intake process for referral to movement educators? To the Feldenkrais practitioner the answer is obvious, but who has documented or published the evidence to influence the social scientists and practitioners to modify their practice? Would this open up important new referral sources for somatic educators? Can the Feldenkrais Method contribute to the development of the language of awareness in such a way that it bridges professions that are discovering the integral nature of consciousness and perception that is available within the Feldenkrais Method? Is the Feldenkrais community up to the larger challenge of moving the collective awareness along those important incremental steps of learning through the rigor of meeting the student (professions) where they are in their traditional understanding?

Should the Feldenkrais community be up to the above task, a final important point that requires investigation and substantiation for both traditional movement providers and the social sciences is the concern regarding increased, limited accessibility to care. Part of this problem is due to the economic constraints of the one-on-one model of care so dominant in the western medicine. What would be the influence of the Feldenkrais Method demonstrating the efficacy of ATM lessons for various diagnosis specific groups where students obtain measurable benefit at marginal cost as has already been demonstrated for some groups?^{7,8} All of these questions point to what seems to be one part of Feldenkrais' role in the transformation of human consciousness and society that is presently underway.

Enriching and Transforming Paradigms of Movement

Clear and well-articulated research of the Feldenkrais Method will be an important component in transforming paradigms of movement/action/relationships in our communities and the world. Feldenkrais practitioners ask embodied questions in a disembodied world. They recognize the importance of their own personal practice of development and awareness in the student-teacher interaction. Recording and describing such a phenomena would revolutionize the subtle, but stark dehumanized process underway in traditional movement/health care professions. There provider and receiver are hurried, unconsciously violent to themselves by the unmitigated stress of work productivity levels and spiritless interactions with those with whom they are supposing to be caring for in their suffering.

As each reader knows, once awareness has been expanded beyond the old limitations, it is difficult, if not impossible to ever return to that previous limited perspective. As a fellow

somatic educator who “can’t go back”, hopefully each of you will take on the above mentioned opportunities as your response-ability to changing our world. Be it through research, financial contributions to those that do the research, or raising local awareness, the time is now to take ‘skillful action’⁹.

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