

Science and The Feldenkrais Method

by Deborah Bowes, PT, GCFP & Cliff Smyth, GCFP

In December 2002, we attended a four day science conference in Paris entitled “Learning, the Brain and Movement”. Within the beautiful old rooms of the Cercle Republicain building near the Palais Royal, we and 180 Feldenkrais Practitioners from around the world met with noted research scientists from the fields of movement science, physiology, dynamic systems, kinesiology and motor learning. Taking pages of notes, we listened to each person present some of their research.

They had been prepared for the conference with ‘homework’ (*Awareness Through Movement* lessons on tape, and a video with explanation of a *Functional Integration* lesson). They were asked to steer their talks to research that might offer insight to the scientific underpinnings of The Feldenkrais Method.

For example, Professor Beatriz Vereijken, Department of Movement Science at Trondheim University, Norway, reported research on teaching people to use ski training machines and how strategies that encouraged people to experiment were more effective than detailed, step-by-step instruction. Feldenkrais lessons follow this exploratory strategy.

Dr. Karl Newell, Chairman of the Department of Kinesiology at Pennsylvania State University, felt that Moshe Feldenkrais was far ahead of his times. He discussed how information can be augmented to help people improve movement skill. He found that rather than demonstrating the skill or giving information about the outcome, it was more useful to give people cues about what sensations to attend to. This

is what he calls ‘transitional information’ and we would call ‘learning to learn’.

Professor Alain Bertholz, of the prestigious College de France and author of *The Brain’s Sense of Movement* (Harvard, 2001), taught about the relationship of the vestibular system and perception, making connections from movement and emotions to architecture! His findings, for example that the eyes lead movements of rotation, can be experienced in many lessons created by Dr. Feldenkrais. Bertholz’s latest research shows the importance of multi-sensory integration — between the eyes, the otoliths and semicircular canals of the inner ear, proprioception (the sense of position and movement from muscles and joints) and the haptic senses (touch and pressure) in our perception of our action in the world.

From them and other presenters, including Esther Thelen, a researcher and Feldenkrais Practitioner, we discovered there is a large body of research evidence to support the basic and developing theory of The Feldenkrais Method.

The conference provided a strong boost to the agenda of developing further research into The Feldenkrais Method and developing relationships with leading scientific thinkers and researchers. The applications for The Feldenkrais Method continue to expand in learning, education, health, wellness, rehabilitation, sports, and the performing arts. As we learn better to express what the method is and communicate that to others, more people will benefit. Participating in conferences like this will help us to develop a language to talk and think

about The Feldenkrais Method more fully and clearly.

Deborah Bowes is an internationally known Feldenkrais trainer. Cliff Smyth is the current President of the International Feldenkrais Federation (IFF). Their practice is located in San Francisco, CA. Visit them at www.feldenkraisf.com

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In addition to our fully licensed physical therapists, each staff member is a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitionersm.

We offer both individual sessions and seven ongoing weekly public classes:

Mon	6:00 PM
Tue	1:00 PM
Wed	6:00 PM
Thu	12:00 PM
Thu	2:00 PM
Thu	6:00 PM
Thu	7:00 PM
Thu	8:00 PM

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Wear loose comfortable clothing.
Mats are provided. Clean, quiet, non-competitive atmosphere.

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