

Using The Feldenkrais Method[®] To Improve Health and Wellness

by Susan Marshall

I like what I do. No, I love what I do. I am a Feldenkrais Practitioner.

The Feldenkrais Method has been around since the middle of the last century. But in the United States few people know about it. In Germany, by contrast, Feldenkrais classes are as common as yoga classes. But the Method is getting more attention here these days.

Feldenkrais Method Receives Acclaim From Major Media Outlets

In 2015, New York Times Best selling author, Dr. Norman Doidge devoted two chapters to Dr. Feldenkrais and the Feldenkrais Method in *“The Brain’s Way of Healing: Remarkable Discoveries and Recoveries from the Frontiers of Neuroplasticity.”* A little over a year ago, the New York Times published an article *“Trying the Feldenkrais Method for Chronic Pain”* (October 30, 2017) by their Personal Health Editor Jane Brody, who described her recent positive experience with the one-on-one Functional Integration[®] lessons of the Feldenkrais Method as a way to relieve chronic pain. This past year Lisa Rein of the Washington Post published a longer article *“A Different Way to Relieve Years of Back Pain”* (September 27, 2018) focusing on the benefits of the Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement[®] classes.

Using Somatic Education to Evoke Change

Although Dr. Feldenkrais began to develop his method in response to a knee injury he got from playing soccer a century ago, technically the Feldenkrais Method of Somatic Education is not a healing technique. It’s an educational method—with a healing effect. Dr. Feldenkrais wrote five books on his philosophy and practice of what later would be known as the Feldenkrais Method.



He personally gave lessons to thousands of people, trained hundreds of practitioners who in turn have trained others worldwide. Sometimes referred to as the “grandfather” of neuroscience, he was a neuroplastician long before it had a name.

Dr. Feldenkrais often said if you don’t know what you are doing, you can’t do what you want. He was one of the early proponents of learning through the experience of the body-mind (soma) awareness. Being aware of your own true capacity to change is just the beginning. To actually feel or experience the change is even more powerful. This somatic awareness is most efficiently developed by accessing the nervous system directly through hands-on work and verbal coaching by a Feldenkrais Practitioner.

In a physical sense our nerve impulses trigger our muscles, our muscles pull our bones and movement results. However, if our nervous system goes awry, it can make our movements inefficient and often painful. But our nervous system can be coaxed to bypass the brain and re-pattern our movements directly with a light directive touch.

What a Functional Integration Lesson Is Like

In a hands-on session, I connect my nervous system with that of my client to feel how I can support them in changing movement patterns and old habits.

I observe and guide a client’s awareness of differences in how they occupy their body. This is how our nervous system learns—by recognizing distinction. Due to the global nature of our nervous systems, what changes in one part of our body affects the whole. In this event we can say that our body and mind “learn.” And when presented with options, luckily our nervous system always chooses the more efficient way to be and move.

I love what I do because I help people grow and change for the better. People come to see me for various reasons: hip and knee replacement recovery, chronic pain, car accident injuries, limited movement associated with aging, “bad” posture, feeling emotionally disconnected from their body and just plain curiosity. But more than anything, people come to see me as a last resort. Other healing modalities have ceased working for them, leaving them in pain and functioning less efficiently than they could be. They still have a deep desire to improve their movement and eliminate pain. They often leave a session feeling taller, more at ease, less anxious, more mobile and in less pain. This effect lasts longer each time, leading people to increase functionality and joy in their lives. How cool is that?!



*About the Author
Susan Marshall is a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner located in Portland, OR. She is the former Executive Director of the Feldenkrais Guild of North America.*

For the last three years (2016-2018) she has received a Natural Awakenings “Nattie” Award in the category Favorite Massage Therapist/Body Worker. She can be reached through FeldenkraisPDX.com.