

Feldenkrais Guild® of North America
E2.3.2.1 THE FELDENKRAIS METHOD® OF SOMATIC EDUCATION
STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

The Feldenkrais Method Standards of Practice apply to:

- Guild Certified Feldenkrais Teachers® and Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioners^{CM}
- Certified Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement Teachers^{CM}
- Trainees in training programs accredited by FGNA

OVERVIEW

The Feldenkrais Method of somatic education, developed by Moshe Feldenkrais, Ph.D. (1904–84), is informed by his study of child development, combined with his formal training in physics, engineering, self-defense, and martial arts.

The Method is intended to help people function with greater ease, efficiency, and choice, not by “correcting” or “fixing” them, but rather by facilitating their innate capacity to learn. The Method is educational rather than diagnostic or therapeutic.¹ However, it has been shown to have therapeutic benefits and may be used as a complement to other approaches.

Like other somatic methods developed in the 20th century, the Feldenkrais Method assumes that human beings have the potential to learn, change, and improve throughout their lives. It embodies the notion that motor and social-psychological development are inseparable and that in order to improve one’s function one must first learn to closely observe one’s patterns of self-use. These patterns, often shaped early in life by familial and societal expectations and other experiences, form habits that are expressed through our musculature and movement. To refine human functioning requires a particular kind of re-education, one designed to “speak” directly to the nervous system as it relates to our environment: in particular, the gravitational field in which we implicitly learn to operate. The Method is based on the idea that *movement* is the most direct path to the development of greater awareness, which can help us change our learned habits and refine our abilities.

In Dr. Feldenkrais’s day, the conventional wisdom was that the adult brain was fixed or hard-wired and would lose function as we aged. Dr. Feldenkrais challenged that conventional wisdom.² Neuroplasticity, the ability of the brain and nervous system to learn and adapt throughout life, later became well accepted.

The Method that has grown out of his teaching is expressed in two movement-based learning forms: one-to-one, hands-on guided movement lessons (Functional Integration®) and

¹ “I do not treat people. I do not cure people, and I do not teach people...I give lessons to help a person learn about himself or herself.” Moshe Feldenkrais, *The Elusive Obvious* (Cupertino: Meta Publications, 1981), 117-118.

² “You can, at any time of your life, rewire yourself...there is nothing permanent or compulsive in your system except what you believe to be so.” Feldenkrais, *The Elusive Obvious*, 117.

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verbally guided lessons, (Awareness Through Movement®). Both can help people refine self-use and acquire new skills. In applying the Method, it is the teacher's role to assess each person's goals and desires and work with them to achieve their aims by using strategies and tactics that respect each individual's pacing and potential — thereby allowing each person to develop an awareness of what they do and how they are doing it.

PART I: BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

Because the Method is grounded in universal principles of physics and human development, it has broad application to functioning of all kinds — from improving a pro's golf swing to helping stroke victims recover abilities. Feldenkrais® practitioner training programs and Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement teacher training programs attract people from many different walks of life — from performers and artists to medical professionals and bodyworkers, each with their own perspectives and skill-sets. Regardless of how teachers apply the Method, to be a certified Feldenkrais teacher/practitioner or certified Awareness Through Movement teacher means to employ concepts and practices developed by Dr. Feldenkrais, as preserved in his teaching, writings, and interviews, and as incorporated into the curriculum of all Feldenkrais training programs. These fundamental principles and practices include:

A. Employing movement as a learning tool

In his book *Awareness Through Movement*,³ Dr. Feldenkrais detailed his reasons for choosing movement as a primary learning tool and path to self-discovery and improvement:

- We learn through the brain and nervous system, and movement takes up the majority of the nervous system's processing capacity.
- Actions — from the largest movements to tiny changes in facial expression — originate in muscular activity and reflect the state of the nervous system, which in turn activates the muscles.
- Movement, including changes in our breathing, is palpable and readily available to our consciousness.
- For most people, the quality of movement is easier to read than either emotion or thought.
- People who might not be comfortable with emotion can be open to sensitivity to their movements.
- Physical build and the ability to move are both highly prized components of a positive self-image.
- Changes in the use of our musculature, which originate in the motor cortex, will have a reciprocal effect on our thoughts and feelings.

³ Moshe Feldenkrais, *Awareness Through Movement* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972, 1977), 33–39.

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As students develop greater self-awareness, they broaden their movement “vocabulary,” discovering possibilities that are more functional, varied, precise, reversible, and powerful. In short, they move beyond the habitual.⁴

The ability to better organize in relation to gravity and the environment can ease physical effort and anxiety, which is why students often report feeling a reduction in pain and greater ease and calm after a lesson.

B. Learning as the basis for improvement

Although this is a movement-based practice, Dr. Feldenkrais conceived of this work not as exercise or treatment, but rather as a system of learning.

To facilitate learning, the teacher directs the student’s attention to bring unconscious patterns into consciousness. Through this process, students come to detect changes and distinctions, allowing them, over time, to improve self-use and have more freedom to choose how they move and act.

In Dr. Feldenkrais’s words, “[l]earning takes place through our nervous system, which is so structured as to detect and select from among our trials and error...We thus gradually eliminate the aimless movements...We sense differences and select the good from the useless: that is, we differentiate.”⁵

Dr. Feldenkrais defined the ideal conditions for learning as slow, unpressured, and free of judgment.⁶

C. The relationship of gravity to human functioning

The Feldenkrais Method is notable for its emphasis on how a person behaves and organizes for action within the field of gravity.⁷

As they develop skeletal awareness, students learn to more efficiently use ground forces to

⁴ “The object of education should be to eliminate compulsive states and to help the person to acquire the ability for potent action.” Moshe Feldenkrais, *The Potent Self* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 10-11.

⁵ Moshe Feldenkrais, “*Learn to Learn*” [booklet], (Publisher unknown, date unknown), 4-5.

⁶ “Organic learning is slow, and unconcerned with any judgment as to the achievement of good or bad results. It has no obvious purpose or goal.” Feldenkrais, *Elusive Obvious*, 30.

⁷ “The never-ending activity of our nervous system directs itself through our muscles and skeleton to move and act in an environment which therefore becomes part of ourselves.” Feldenkrais, *Elusive Obvious*, 124.

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sense their central axis in relation to gravity, thereby reducing muscular effort and shearing forces in their joints. The result can be greater stamina and freedom of movement.

Dr. Feldenkrais identified three elements of efficient movement within the environment: timing, orientation, and manipulation. This last term refers to how the nervous system senses the environment and “manipulates” the skeleton through the action of the muscles.

PART II: WHAT FELDENKRAIS TEACHERS/PRACTITIONERS and AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT TEACHERS DO

A. Overview

The Feldenkrais Method includes lessons in two complementary forms: Awareness Through Movement (ATM®) lessons and Functional Integration (FI®) lessons. While often thought of as independent of each other, Feldenkrais himself said that they are two sides of one coin, as both explore fundamental or synergistic neuromuscular relationships in order to facilitate the choice of healthier, more efficient patterns of movement and self-organization.

Because this work is individual-specific, teachers often adapt the lessons to suit the learning styles and needs of specific students, while remaining true to the principles of the Feldenkrais Method. This may involve dividing a single lesson, as taught by Dr. Feldenkrais, into component parts or combining short processes into longer lessons or workshops.

- Guild Certified Feldenkrais Teachers/Practitioners offer both ATM and FI lessons.
- Certified Feldenkrais ATM Teachers offer ATM lessons only.
- Trainees may receive temporary authorization to offer ATM and FI lessons.

B. Functional Integration (FI) Lessons

In FI lessons, the student’s learning process is guided primarily by the teacher’s touch. The use of touch in FI lessons is distinctive from, and unrelated to the use of touch in professions that focus on manipulation of soft tissue. With the student fully clothed, the teacher uses touch to heighten the student’s awareness of what they are doing and how they do it and to redirect or redistribute the action paths of the muscles through the skeleton.

In what is essentially a sensory feedback system or “conversation,” teachers may use touch to heighten students’ awareness of their existing self-use patterns. Depending on the person’s responses, the teacher will gradually introduce new movement patterns and choices. These new patterns — often established and facilitated while the client is lying down — may also be explored in other positions and orientations.

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C. Awareness Through Movement (ATM) Lessons

Dr. Feldenkrais developed ATM lessons with the explicit intention of reaching the greatest possible number of people. ATM lessons, most often taught to groups, can also be used with individuals. During an ATM lesson, the teacher verbally guides students through a structured series of explorations involving moving, thinking, sensing, and feeling. Within a thematic framework, participants are presented with opportunities to safely discover new movement options. The process supports integrating these discoveries into their daily lives.

ATM classes are informed by transcripts and recordings of Dr. Feldenkrais’s teachings; as the work evolves, teachers may improvise variations in response to students’ needs.

D. Remote Feldenkrais Lessons and Awareness Through Movement Lessons

Awareness Through Movement lessons and Feldenkrais lessons may be taught remotely. Remote Feldenkrais lessons may apply the principles of Functional Integration lessons but do not include touch by the teacher. Functional Integration lessons are not provided remotely.

E. Methodology

Dr. Feldenkrais believed that goal-oriented learning, which prizes effort over exploration, was inimical to self-knowledge and transformation. Therefore, he built into his Method certain tactics and strategies for learning, which apply to both the teacher and the student:

- 1. Self-organize.** Teachers strive to embody Feldenkrais principles by organizing themselves — physically, mentally, and emotionally — as a precondition for working with students. In FI lessons, teachers learn to use ground forces to direct movement through the student’s skeleton with the most refined touch. Teachers structure ATM lessons and modulate pacing and tone to deliver a clear and consistent narrative.
- 2. Work with patterns of action.** All functional movement is a whole-body action. When working with clients, teachers look for consistency and fluidity throughout any given movement, regardless of range or orientation of the body. Using their hands (in FI lessons) or observation (in ATM lessons), or some combination thereof, teachers sense changes in the quality and ease of movement and in the ability of the student to reverse or change course, smoothly, at will. When sensing difficulties, the teacher stops, changes course, or works within a smaller or different range of possibilities.
- 3. Use Reversibility.** Reversibility is the ability to move back and forth along the same path (trajectory) and to easily change direction without hesitation. Dr. Feldenkrais called reversibility “the main feature of correct acture.” It was a term he coined to describe a way of being that is ready for action, and which he preferred to the word posture, which

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implies static uprightiness.⁸ One of the most significant aspects of reversibility is the “pause” that has to happen in order to return along a path or change direction. The pause — often tiny and momentary — is an indicator of a person’s capacity to control movement in an intentional way.

- 4. Meet students where they are.** Teachers do not attempt to “fix” problems or impose ideals or standards of what is good or proper; instead, they assess what students want and need, and what they are capable of at any given moment.⁹ Both FI and ATM teachers retreat from actions that cause pain, discomfort, or disorientation. Teachers encourage students to listen to themselves and listen with them, changing course to find new pathways to explore, reversing as needed, to stay within a range that helps students learn in safety and comfort .
- 5. Work slowly.** In ATM lessons, teachers instruct students to do movements slowly, which gives them opportunities to sense differences, and allows the nervous system time to respond. In FI lessons, teachers also work slowly to allow time to sense and feel the response to touch and adjust accordingly.¹⁰
- 6. Do less.** In ATM lessons, teachers remind students to keep movements within a comfortable range and to rest frequently. In FI lessons, when touching a student, teachers apply just enough pressure to provide information and transmit force through the skeleton. This approach gives students an opportunity to feel and observe *their own* movement.
- 7. Listen more.** As teachers work, they use their full presence. They observe and sense changes in breathing; look for ease and what is available, stopping before they sense difficulty or resistance; and continue orienting their own actions and those of their students toward efficient functional patterns. In FI lessons, their nervous system joins with that of the student and they use non-verbal and verbal feedback to guide their actions.
- 8. Introduce novelty and variety.** The nervous system learns and grows through exposure to novelty presented in a non-threatening way. Each lesson introduces students to unfamiliar relationships and combinations of movements designed to bring what is unconscious into consciousness, thereby increasing both ability and awareness so that positive change can take place.

⁸ Feldenkrais, *The Potent Self*, 113.

⁹ “There is no intention to correct you. Your trouble and mine is that we are trying to behave correctly...at the cost of quenching, with our own consent, our individuality.” Feldenkrais, *Elusive Obvious*, xii.

¹⁰ “Fast action at the beginning of learning is synonymous with strain and confusion which, together, make learning an unpleasant exertion.” Feldenkrais, *Learn to Learn*, 3.

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PART III: MAINTAINING & ASSESSING COMPETENCE

Feldenkrais teachers/practitioners and ATM teachers are required to renew certification annually, and to meet requirements for competency assessment, continuing education, professional practice, ethical conduct, use of service marks, and other FGNA policy requirements.

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Adopted 1992 by The Feldenkrais Guild Board of Directors

Reference Policies: <https://www.feldenkraiguild.com/page/professional-policies>

Code of Professional Conduct

Service Marks, Certification Marks and Trademarks

Feldenkrais Practitioner Certification

Certified Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement Teacher

FGNA Feldenkrais Practitioner Profile

IFF Competency Profile