

WISE-UP

## **An Emerging Science of Learning**

by Ilana Nevill

*“Throughout life, tomorrow’s learners will be called upon to master a wide range of skills, to solve a broader range of problems, to craft satisfying personal responses to a deeper and more complex set of freedoms and responsibilities than probably any other generation in the history of the world.”<sup>i</sup>*

WISE-UP - THE CHALLENGE OF LIFELONG LEARNING by educational psychologist Guy Claxton is a book many Feldenkrais teachers have been waiting for. It presents the reader with a many-faceted understanding of human learning which is both deeply perceptive and eminently practical and down-to-earth. The complex concept of learning teased out in this work is infinitely wider and richer than the ideas informing most current models of (largely product-, goal-, and achievement-oriented) teaching and training. The book itself is ‘symphonically’ structured with many subtle variations on the themes of learning in general and the development of learning-power in particular. As a Feldenkrais practitioner one is vividly reminded of a skilful “Awareness Through Movement” or “Functional Integration” lesson.

This is how Claxton defines the relevant terms:

**“Learning is what you do when you don’t know what you do. Learning to learn, or the development of learning-power, is getting better at knowing when, how, and what to do when you don’t know what to do.”<sup>ii</sup>**

Far from being a homogeneous activity, learning takes many different forms which “start to kick in” at different stages of development. Some occur naturally and require little in the way of conscious planning and deliberation; other kinds of learning are highly organized and structured.

The emerging ‘science of learning’ put forward in this book is supported by an impressive array of recent research findings in experimental and developmental psychology, cognitive science, artificial intelligence, and neuroscience. The distinctively characteristic ways of looking at one and the same phenomenon represented by these disciplines are reflected in a number of striking metaphors bound to stay in the reader’s mind - not least as a reminder that an integral science of learning needs to include a broad spectrum of disparate, even apparently contradictory views. To get anywhere near an understanding of the complex subject matter, all these views have to complement each other within a positively synthetic system, embracing both theory and practice (‘synthetic’ in the philosophical sense of “having truth or falsity determinable by recourse to experience”<sup>iii</sup>).

The final chapter entitled ‘The Future of Learning’ briefly describes this new synthetic discipline as follows: “The new science of learning tells us that everyone has the capacity to become a better learner, and that there are conditions under which learning-power develops. It is offering us a richer way of thinking about learning, one which includes feeling and imagination, intuition and experience, external tools and cultural milieu, as well as the effort to understand.”<sup>iv</sup>

The book’s central concern is the “urgent need to recognize and develop learning-power in everyday life; and the confused and sometimes subversive attitudes that may get in the way of this happening... outmoded assumptions that breed narrow approaches to learning, and beliefs...which turn practical uncertainty into personal insecurity and thus encourage a defensive rather than an inquiring mind-set.”<sup>v</sup>

The aim is to offer “a liberating conception, soundly based on up-to-the-minute research, of the capacity of the human brain-mind to magnify its own learning potential, and of the

climate that it needs to realize that potential. Nothing, in complex, confusing, fast-changing societies such as ours, in the midst of the age of uncertainty, could be more important.”<sup>vi</sup>

For Feldenkrais readers it will be particularly gratifying to find such vindication of Moshe Feldenkrais’s genius, his vision, thinking, and inspired practice. Feldenkrais tended to stress more or less the same issues as the educational psychologist when he talked about the failings of conventional education and the promise of more intelligent ways of assisting people to ‘become fully human’. Already in the mid-seventies he wrote: “Most of the evils from which we suffer are rooted in our false understanding that human education is the training of a completed being to do this or that, as if we were making a computer perform a desired activity.”<sup>vii</sup> (Claxton warns: “If we succumb to the metaphor of the mind as computer, we shrink our sense of what learning is...”<sup>viii</sup>) In the same article Feldenkrais expressed his belief in the potential of genuine education and learning: “It is still too early to condemn man on the strength of the small awareness he has acquired by change” [rather than by employing what he is endowed with as a birthright: his extraordinary capacity for learning]. “We have never yet really used our essential freedom of choice and we have barely learned to learn.” Throughout his life Moshe Feldenkrais was carried by belief in the learnability of learning. The same conviction runs like a guideline through the nearly three hundred and fifty pages of Claxton’s book. “Learning to learn is a possibility for everyone... Learning is learnable...[but] the development of learning can be neglected, or even undermined..... Whatever you are grappling with...you are also grappling with learning. Each bout of learning is also an opportunity to strengthen and elaborate learning-power.....”<sup>ix</sup>

In a ‘broad canvas’ summing up a presently emerging science of learning, Guy Claxton makes explicit a conviction that constitutes the very foundation of Moshe Feldenkrais’s work:

*Life is Learning. Learning is Life.*

Moshe Feldenkrais’s credo as expressed in the famous handwritten statement resonates with that:

*Movement is Life. Without Movement Life is unthinkable.*

Feldenkrais was talking primarily about mental agility and freedom here. He considered physical flexibility (most importantly the amount of freedom of a person’s neck and head) as by-products and indicators of a mobile mind. As he used to stress: “What I’m after isn’t flexible bodies but flexible brains. What I’m after is to restore each person to their human dignity.” Feldenkrais hoped to achieve this by helping people realize through direct, irrefutable experience that:

- a) we act in accordance with the self-image we acquired largely during our early years;
- b) this self-image is nothing fixed and static but can continuously be changed through action – provided such action is not mindlessly automatic but coupled with awareness.

The following pages present a personal attempt at providing an overview of some of the features of Claxton’s science of learning which seem particularly relevant to exemplary practice of our craft. Feldenkrais colleagues will recognized a number of salient principles in their own practice of how to encourage ‘good learning’ and the emergence of awareness.

## I. Resilience, Resourcefulness, Reflectiveness

These are both essential and increasingly refined outcomes of all genuine learning and indispensable conditions for continuous, unimpeded unfolding of our inborn capacity to continue learning throughout life.

- a) Resilience is the ability to tolerate a degree of strangeness, confusion, uncertainty, insecurity etc. when facing new learning challenges. Resilience could

therefore be seen as the foundation-stone for all successful learning. In Feldenkrais work students are helped to develop sufficient resilience so as to be able to cope successfully with an ever lurking inclination to maltreat themselves by using inappropriate force, or to panic and 'give up' prematurely.

b) Resourcefulness denotes the growing repertoire of learning strategies including increasing competence in recognizing, using, and inventing or creating useful tools (both inner and outer).

c) Reflectiveness is one of the pinnacles of human learning. At the same time it constitutes one of the key conditions for successfully tackling complex learning tasks. This will always require a somewhat detached, neutral attitude to both self and the situation at hand. Reflectiveness is impossible without a certain degree of self-awareness and self-knowledge.

Everything Feldenkrais did, said, and wrote was ultimately intended to 'serve humanity' on its path towards greater and more accurate self-knowledge. At the individual level Feldenkrais wished to help people find effective ways and means of realizing their 'deepest dreams' (This was actually Feldenkrais's definition of health). The originator of the Method often stated that self-knowledge and reflectiveness in action must not be confused with the kind of nervous self-consciousness which inhibits spontaneity or an utterly dis-empowering self-criticism which blocks true learning. Nor with the compulsive need to analyse, explain, or justify what one is doing. A reflective attitude to self and world entails being able to stand back ("go into neutral" as we sometimes say), take a strategic view of one's own learning process, and assume responsibility for becoming one's own 'learning coach'. All responsible Feldenkrais teachers are intent on cultivating in themselves, in their pupils and clients, a growing capacity for self-directed learning. The mindfulness fostered in Feldenkrais work allows people to take note of harmful bodily-mental-emotional habits and compulsions, including unconscious or unquestioned assumptions. This opens their minds to new possibilities of being and becoming, to the discovery of new tools, and to increasing flexibility and creativity while employing already acquired knowledge and know-how.

## II. Major Learning Modes

Particular learning modes emerge at different stages of a person's life. Each single one will go on growing in scope, power, and sophistication throughout life (unless prevented by outer interference or illness). The four major learning modes highlighted in Claxton's science of learning all play their part in the essentially natural, organic evolution of human resilience, resourcefulness, and reflectiveness. This process is described in neuro-physiological terms as a continuous expansion of the growing human being's 'brain-mind'. This term was coined in cognitive science to denote 'the mysterious conglomerate of nervous tissue and conscious experience' whose workings are not yet really understood.

### I.1. Immersion or Learning Through Experience

Guy Claxton calls this the 'first compartment in the learning toolkit', which every newborn baby possesses in rudimentary form as a kind of 'starter kit' and will keep adding to and refining throughout life. As in animals too, this learning happens naturally and spontaneously, requiring no teaching or supervision. In fact such activity would only interfere with this kind of learning. In constant contact with the world we are born into, our brain simply keeps detecting and actively integrating recurrent patterns. This happens across a whole range of diverse contexts and experiences. In the domain of hearing and rhythm this process starts before we are born.

Neuro-physiologically, such evolutionary growth could be described as follows. Effortless immersion in meaningful activity sets in motion growth processes in the ‘brain-mind’ which lead to lasting changes in the ease with which electrical charges jump the synapses between nerve cells. Functional grooves are created along which the brain’s activity comes to prefer to flow. The gradually evolving and continuously diversifying system of nerve channels constitutes what might be called an individual’s ‘brain-scape’ (denoting the neurological domain) and ‘mind-scape’ (the experiential domain). Later, with the development of language, the ‘word-scape’ (an even more explicitly culturally determined sphere) begins to interact with these two mental planes in the most complex ways. These three planes are always inextricably interrelated, becoming ever more complex and idiosyncratic as a consequence of each person’s unique experience and the practical know-how and abstract knowledge they acquire. However, it is relatively rare that a person’s knowledge and know-how, rhetoric and actions, actually match. (In all disciplines and arts one can find at one extreme accomplished ‘masters’ utterly incapable of talking about their practice, and at the other highly articulate ‘experts’ whose practical skills may be somewhat wanting, with all kinds of gradations in between.)

As Feldenkrais teachers we know about the crucial importance of giving our students ample opportunity to immerse themselves in experience, get deeply absorbed in their own learning, and thereby (re-)discover the surprises, joys, and perplexities all genuine learning (as they knew it in early childhood) holds in store.

Even if this does not always happen consciously, we also rely in our teaching practice on the potency of ‘basic amplifiers’ which help to expand and consolidate the organic quality of somatic learning with which we are concerned.

### II.1.1. Basic Amplifiers of Learning through Experience

#### A. Attention and its three dimensions: Focus, Absorption, Robustness

(a) The ability to alter the focus of attention is something we try to foster and cultivate (in ourselves and in our students) both in “Awareness Through Movement” classes and in “Functional Integration” lessons. This is becoming ever more urgent because of our culture’s pronounced tendency to stay permanently at the ‘tight focus’ end of the continuum. While this kind of narrow focus acts like a spotlight, singling out details, ‘wide focus’ attention acts more like a floodlight, allowing us to see the greater whole. However, since few of us have had much practice in this mode, we frequently don’t ‘see the wood for the trees.’ In our movements and actions we don’t always succeed in becoming aware of ourselves as an integral whole whose ease of functioning depends on the harmonious interplay of its separate parts. (No wonder that the larger picture tends to elude us – whether it is a question of comprehending ourselves as more than an assemblage of fragmentary parts, seeing life on this planet for what it is, or resonating with the miraculous harmony of the cosmos).

Being able to vary the ‘cone of attention’ is a skill which we constantly encourage in our work, even if we do so unconsciously. We get our students to learn how to cope with a whole range of learning conditions and tasks. Sometimes quiet receptivity may be required (‘listening inside’); at other times sharply focused attention on some detail in the overall picture. Ultimate mastery involves being capable of swiftly switching from one mode to the other and back, as it were simultaneously tuning inside and into the intellectually utterly ‘ungraspable’ complexity of the immediate life situation.

We know we have to take into account that fear of failure, or the compulsive need to succeed or ‘achieve’ etc, is often responsible for a learner’s ‘tunnel vision’. In this case the ‘cone of attention’ becomes rigidly fixed onto whatever is pre-consciously judged as important and

relevant. Such narrowness breeds a closed mind, seriously impeding the growth of awareness and the unfolding of learning.

A great deal of understanding, inventiveness (resilience, resourcefulness), and skill is required to help the person in question overcome that kind of handicap.

(b) Absorption and concentration involve the proportion of total attention that is given to a learning task. Moshe Feldenkrais used to remind his students that ‘concentration’ (in the narrowly effortful, obstinate sense) stops them from being in touch with their own inner resources and with the possibilities inherent in a given situation. However, as most of us know from experience, unconditional deep absorption in the learning process imbues this with a quasi magical quality of surprisingly effortless ‘flow’.

(c) The robustness of a pupil’s attention is another aspect we have to take into account in our work. For instance, some of our students/clients find it initially very difficult to engage with learning how to become more aware of what they are doing. Some resort to talking incessantly, others keep hopping from one unstable focus to the next. Those whose attention is less unstable usually have little difficulty in coping even with serious distractions or disruptions.

### B. Exploration and investigation

These ‘learning amplifiers’ usually arise naturally as a manifestation of inborn curiosity as soon as a baby (or newborn animal) begins to engage more actively with its environment. Moshe Feldenkrais never tired of stressing the crucial importance of curiosity in all genuine learning. His own childlike curiosity and intense interest in ‘what makes us humans tick’ was capable of infecting at least those among his students who were not completely cut off from the inborn drive to explore and investigate.

If he were still alive, Feldenkrais would scarcely be surprised about some rather worrying signs of our times. Relevant research has shown that in some parts of the Western world up to 50% of four-year olds are already too inhibited to allow their curiosity free range and no longer dare engage in spontaneous exploration. The main reason seems to be a wish to please and live up to other people’s expectations. This is usually accompanied by fear of being judged ‘inadequate’, ‘stupid’, or a ‘failure’. Feldenkrais used to stress that parents and educators are misguided if they keep dishing out praise for what any healthy child experiences as completely natural and deeply satisfying in itself. Recent studies have proved him right: ‘carrot’ and ‘stick’, praise and threats, are equally damaging to children’s learning.

### C. Imitation and Observation

Infants (and young animals) learn a great deal by observing the actions of adults and soon begin to imitate them in their play.

As a rule Moshe Feldenkrais stopped his ATM students from looking around and trying to imitate others. Although this was a normal reaction when people didn’t understand or couldn’t do what he was inviting them to do, he wanted them to learn to rely on themselves in trying to explore and work out how to proceed and eventually succeed. Occasionally, however, he asked participants in a class to observe and imitate each other, comparing different ways of doing the same thing as had emerged within the group. Subsequently they were asked to decide for themselves which movement or self-organization felt most natural, least effortful, most elegant etc. Mia Segal has developed this aspect of mutual learning into a highly accomplished art. (See p.10)

### D. Practising

This involves deliberately seeking out learning challenges or setting oneself tasks in order to explore and consolidate skill in action. According to relevant research the sheer amount of

practice seems to be the best predictor of a person's level of expertise – whether this happens to be in music-making, in some practical craft, or theoretical science etc.

We all need to remind ourselves of that when we get depressed and feel we will “never get it”, whether as students in training programmes, as newly graduated practitioners, or teachers with some experience who feel that spontaneity and intuition keep eluding them. “Intuition comes from practice.” This, according to Mia Segal, was Moshe Feldenkrais's answer to students who asked him about the role of ‘intuition’ in our work.

#### E. Playing or ‘learning beyond success’

As Feldenkrais teachers we are very familiar with this ‘learning amplifier’ . Feldenkrais himself never got tired of stressing that playfulness is the best approach to learning. As Claxton points out, this approach is much superior to practising in the sense of mere repetition (or, even worse, ‘pattern drill’). If we follow the originator of our Method and ask our pupils to do the same movement “many times” we need to remind them occasionally that ‘playing around’ with various options may be a good idea, just exploring different directions, rhythms, etc. This means doing everything with ‘beginner's mind’. “Learning is doing the same thing differently” was one of Feldenkrais's favoured definitions of learning. He also used to say that unless you are able to do a thing in at least three different ways, you have not really begun to be human. We learned from him that playfulness includes deliberately making mistakes and maybe discovering something exciting and new in this way. Research has shown that true experts have achieved a level of mastery that permits playfulness and even breaking the rules – especially in response to unexpected and unusual challenges. Feldenkrais was probably hinting at something like that with his somewhat controversial statement: “My only principle is that I have no principle.”

#### II.2. Imagination, visualization, sensory imagery or “learning in the mind's eye” (The second compartment in the learner's toolkit)

As Feldenkrais frequently demonstrated (usually to the utter surprise of everybody present), playfulness can enormously enhance learning when converted into purely mental activity. For instance, just imagining a movement for a few minutes on the left side after having explored it actively for quite a while on the right, unfailingly proves to be even more effective than the previous ‘learning by doing’. Anybody who has experienced this aspect of somatic learning will remember their utter astonishment at finding the ‘second side’ which only moved briefly in the imagination, reaching a hardly conceivable degree of ease and perfection.

There is now ample evidence that just imagining an action is as good for the human brain as executing such action in actual fact. It has also been found that observing somebody else doing something has the same effect on the spectator's (or a monkey's) nervous system as if they were performing the action themselves.

Visualization and sensory imagery are also frequently used as ‘learning amplifiers’ in our work. However, there is considerable scope for exploring what kind of sensory images have intended and which have rather unexpected/unintended results. Sensitive students, for instance, may not always respond favourably to the kind of images or metaphors which Feldenkrais took from engineering or mechanics.

#### II.3. Language and the use of symbols (The third compartment of the learning toolkit)

This domain within Claxton's science of learning is of particular relevance to us as ‘teachers’ who have to rely more or less entirely on verbal communication in their ATM classes and workshops, and therefore need to reflect on how they use language: Does this actually have the desired effect?

There is a kind of paradox here. What we say and do in our practice is intended to help people transcend the sphere of words and verbal thinking – as well as an ingrained tendency to see the teacher as an ‘authority’ to be obeyed, becoming instead their own ‘teaching coach’; to get immersed in experience and begin listening to the subtle sensory-mental-emotional cues which can tell them whether they are really moving and acting as a well-organized organic whole. We want them to determine for themselves whether they really experience themselves as a unified whole in harmonious action or just imagine this while (unconsciously) continuing to use habitual, compulsive, and quite inappropriate force in order to ‘achieve’ an outer semblance of wholeness and ease. The kind of language we use is also of enormous importance when presenting the Feldenkrais Method to the general public or entering into dialogue with other disciplines such as science and medicine. Werner Schacker discusses this question (and also that of congruence and in-congruence between our lived experience and the language we use) in an excellent article entitled “Finding a language of our own” (feldenkrais zeit, No. 4)

Like Claxton in the chapter on language and learning, Werner Schacker also refers to Eugene Gendlin’s ‘Focusing’ method which the philosopher-psychologist developed on the basis of very extensive research. Gendlin’s studies proved conclusively that success in psychotherapy depends less on the particular ‘school’ or the therapist’s personality than on the patient’s ability to shift the focus of attention from the head (and purely verbal strategies) to the body. While fumbling for words to describe what initially seems only a vague ‘felt sense’ (of inwardly observed patterns of emotional-sensory-mental experience), patients can come to extraordinary insights manifesting in a sudden ‘felt shift’. As a result helpless confusion or feeling ‘blocked’ are left behind while new meaning and understanding become accessible to the person involved.

Dialogue with Focusing practitioners (some of whom are Feldenkrais colleagues) might help us clarify the elusive “living relationship between language and experience”<sup>3x</sup> which is one of the most potent features of Moshe Feldenkrais’s work.

Claxton’s science of learning makes clear that there now exists a great deal of research about the emergence, expansion, and role of language and symbols in general. Verbal skills have been shown to be indispensable in opening up a person’s path towards intellectual development, discovery of the power of verbal thought, and previously unimaginable independence. The originator of our Method is a case in point. Having left his native Russia in his mid-teens to emigrate to Palestine, he began a process of self-education which continued until his death, picking up several languages in which he conversed and taught with relative ease, and accumulating and drawing on a vast store of knowledge from the most diverse fields. Feldenkrais’s library in Tel-Aviv documents how much he must have studied and absorbed (apparently mostly at night).

Moshe Feldenkrais had an extremely ambivalent relationship to language and verbal thinking. He could inspire his students with fabulously interesting ‘lectures’, and dazzle them with thought-provoking analogies and metaphors - demonstrating incredible facility in pointing out connections between the most disparate domains of science (occasionally remaining quite oblivious of the fact that his listeners were waiting for the next ‘movement instruction’.) Frequently, however, he made very clear that ‘thinking in words’ was anathema to him. He felt very strongly that students’ preference for verbal thinking impeded the broad attention, open-mindedness, intelligence, and creativity he wished them to attain through his Method.

One of the conclusions Claxton draws from relevant research findings agrees with this assessment. Western culture’s longstanding obsession with rational argument and (mainly verbally) focused consciousness as the primary tools for learning needs drastic re-balancing. Most educational practice does little to prepare students for an open-minded, really intelligent approach to learning and problem-solving. The recently coined term “dysrationality” denotes a widespread symptom amongst pupils and students. This manifests in hasty, untidy thinking, jumping to premature conclusions, narrowness of outlook, undue tolerance of ill-defined

concepts and unexamined assumptions, unfocused, rambling, and sometimes downright incoherent argumentation etc. Such typical indicators of ‘dysrationality’ lie significantly below the level of rational thinking and behaviour of which the individuals concerned are in actual fact capable.

During their training NLP students may have been given the following statement attributed to Moshe Feldenkrais:

*There are multiple descriptions of the same real world situation. The only justification for language is to empower yourself. If the verbal description you create of the situation you find yourself in leads to paralysis and ineffectual behaviour, then throw those damn words away and find yourself a new set. There is always some useful description of the world that empowers and gives you choices, and your task, if you are going to use words at all, is to find that set of words.*

#### II.4. Intuition: The power of “soft thinking” and the art of not trying too hard (The fourth compartment of the learning toolkit)

“Soft” is one of the words which Moshe Feldenkrais employed incessantly in his teaching practice. “Soft!/ Softly!” continues to be heard over and over again in Feldenkrais lessons all over the world.

The distinction between “hard thinking” (always related to effort and striving) and “soft thinking” (related to open-ended inquiry, intuition, and creativity) should be of interest to all Feldenkrais teachers who try to reflect more deeply about their practice and their students’ learning: How to use words, occasionally pursuing aloud verbal trains of thought with sufficient sensitivity and skill while ‘teaching’ awareness? How to give ‘instructions’ (or rather utter ‘invitations’ to explore certain movements) which are truly capable of evoking “soft thinking” in the people wishing to engage in the process of somatic learning, moving more slowly, gently, softly, while listening inside – to the richness of their immediate experience?

One way of distinguishing the two modes of thinking is by metaphor:

- In the ‘hard-thinking’ mode the brain functions like Venice. An intricate network of canals highlights what is plausible – usually because it is familiar or conventional and therefore expected.
- ‘Soft thinking’, on the other hand, needs a brain to function more like a river delta in which different currents of sensing/feeling/thinking are able to blend and enrich each other, leading to new intuitions and creative solutions.

However, any mature behaviour and intellectual or artistic work requires both modes. As 19<sup>th</sup> century mathematician H. Poincaré succinctly stated: “It is by logic that we prove, but by intuition that we discover.” There are many similar personal statements by artists and scientists (from Mozart to Einstein). Ultimately the two modes of thought complement each other and truly creative individuals find it relatively easy to allow their brain to move freely between them.

#### “Bottom-up” and “top-down” information-processing

Hard thinking tends to thrive equally well in an intentionally or unconsciously closed mind. Such a mind largely ignores challenges and uncertainties which do not fit into the ‘normal’, expected picture, thus keeping the subjective world familiar and cosy – but also more or less learning-free. The type of information-processing at home in this highly protected world is what is known as “top-down” processing.

- In contrast, so-called “bottom-up” processing is the rule in open-ended forms of learning through experience. In this case information flows from the periphery of

the nervous system towards the centre, and from simple to more complex conceptual patterns, bringing about continuous expansion and maturation.

➤ In “top-down” processing, on the other hand, seeing and perceiving happen in terms of past experiences and current expectations. Sensory clues selectively activate pre-existing concepts and ‘scripts’ (interpretations of the situation). These start functioning as unconscious hypotheses which then loop back into experience by influencing all aspects of sensory processing. As a result sensory perception and analysis are effectively biased towards confirming unconscious hypothesis and unexamined assumptions.

This approach can be highly effective when one is under pressure, when a quick response is required, and also when this mode of perception is employed as an intentional strategy of using one’s knowledge and expectations within a tightly circumscribed context.

### The Problem of Transfer

The question about how to ‘teach for learning transfer’ preoccupies many trainers whose graduates sometimes find it hard to apply in the ‘outside world’ what they have learned to do very well in the ‘sheltered’ training-context. Claxton stresses the following points:

- Encourage learners to *play* or *dance* (one of Feldenkrais’s favourite words with regard to Functional Integration) with the task. Give them opportunities to approach the learning task with an exploratory attitude. Encourage learners to make mistakes which will allow them to re-assess which strategies and tools are most suited to the task.
- Deliberately create *variety* in content, contexts, and purposes in order to help people to discover forms of valid transfer based not on superficial aspects but rather on less obvious, more structural-perceptual similarities.
- Give learners sufficient opportunities to explore and practise in order to dissolve explicit comprehension back into intuitive expertise.

With regard to the relationship between theory and practice, knowledge and know-how, we need to remember that attempting to understand *what* you are learning *while* you are learning can occasionally even obstruct the learning itself. As soon as there are signs that this is the case, teachers need to resist the ever present temptation to invite their students into an intellectual, ‘figuring-out’ frame of mind and instead use the more promising immersion approach. The kind of understanding Feldenkrais teachers foster in their version of the immersion approach involves the harmonious-creative interplay of the learner’s mental-emotional-sensory-motor processes and is expected to manifest in spontaneous, intelligent, and efficient action. Mia Segal, for instance, helps her students shift from purely verbal-analytical investigation into experiential-exploratory mode by politely interrupting them with the words: “Don’t talk. Show me what you mean!” This is usually the beginning of a fascinating demonstration of how to ‘teach-learn’ awareness, allowing the two techniques of ATM and FI to reveal themselves as two sides of the same coin. Everybody is invited to get involved; everything that is said (by the student who feels s/he has a ‘problem’, the teacher who opens up an understanding that we are ultimately responsible for our life, and the observers who begin noticing things) is directly related to a complex, all-inclusive concretely practical learning process. Repeated practice in such an approach makes for relatively easy transfer of what is being learned.

### Developing a learning culture

It is becoming increasingly obvious that effectively ‘scaffolding’ the learner’s learning, i.e. of supporting people in self-directed exploration requires more than cleverly constructed curricula, lists of learning objectives etc. Claxton sums up the research findings as follows:

“Teaching for learning-power is much more about the creation of a culture than about the design of a training programme.”<sup>xi</sup>

The implications of this insight need to be worked out by individual Feldenkrais teachers, by educational directors of professional training programmes and their teaching staff, and by anybody interested or involved in continuous education.

As a young profession still ‘in the making’ we need to pool our resources and really work together in order to develop a mature and clearly recognizable culture of Feldenkrais learning. We need to ask ourselves, for instance: To what extent are our actions and our words really congruent or in tune with each other? What values, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, strategies of problem-solving, habits of mind, etc, do we explicitly transmit to our students? And what do we actually embody? In other words, what is being transmitted implicitly - through our behaviour, body-language, the kind of words and the tone of voice we use in our teaching practice, the forms of social interaction we choose, the way we organize the learning environment etc? Are we sufficiently aware of the fact that emotions play an important (as yet hardly recognized) role in learning?

A striking ‘science-of-learning’-statement reminds us that it might be wise to pay a little more attention to this aspect than the originator of the Method was willing or capable of accepting:

“Learning often takes place close to the emotional point where challenge may tip into threat.”<sup>xii</sup> As a result “learning can feel like an assault on one’s very belief in oneself.”<sup>xiii</sup>

Most Feldenkrais colleagues would probably agree with the statement: “Learning is fuelled by the embodied belief that patterns *do* exist, *can* be found, and are *worth* discovering. Learning is essentially open-ended, and offering diversity within security respects that.”<sup>xiv</sup>

This key statement of the ‘science of learning’ might serve us as a guiding light in the creation of a genuine learning culture. It might also help us to discover ways and means of reflecting and embodying the essence and spirit of the Feldenkrais Method in our largely non-verbal practice and an increasingly practice-oriented language.

If you are interested in a 15 page precis of Guy Claxton’s book (ca. 350 pages) please contact Ilana Nevill at: [timneville@compuserve.com](mailto:timneville@compuserve.com)

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<sup>i</sup> WISE-UP – The Challenge of Life-Long Learning, Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999 p.334

<sup>ii</sup> ibd. p.11

<sup>iii</sup> The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, 6<sup>th</sup> edition

<sup>iv</sup> ibd. p.331

<sup>v</sup> ibd. p.329

<sup>vi</sup> ibd. p.19

<sup>vii</sup> Moshe Feldenkrais, “On the primacy of hearing”, Somatics, Autumn 1976

<sup>viii</sup> ibd. p.59

<sup>ix</sup> ibd. p.9f

<sup>x</sup> e-mail communications about “finding our own language” (30.1./1.2.2004) from Focusing practitioner Josiah Hincks who believes that “staying in the practice whilst developing/sensing/testing/embodying the concepts seems the way to go. Having the practice and then having theories about it is not the way to go. It is concepts that enter into experiencing in its occurring that are important.” Josiah suggests that we ought to explore Eugene Gendlin’s THINKING AT THE EDGE model for working from felt-experiencing and embodied meaning towards practise-based generation of a living-conceptual language. (The 14 step template TAE model was developed as an aid for full theory construction.)

<sup>xi</sup> WISE\_UP, p. 17

<sup>xii</sup> ibd. p.12

<sup>xiii</sup> ibd. p.52

<sup>xiv</sup> ibd. p. 262