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Compassion & Balance Inside & Out

—by Catherine Mitchell, GCFP

There's a paradigm shift happening today. More and more people are realizing we "think" with our bodies. This shift recognizes the power of learning from inside and not just our heads.

For over 100 years, education has focused on teaching from our heads. Now a revolutionary look at how the body helps children understand information is coming alive in schools.

Our bodies are one big sense organ developing memory and perception. Ken Robinson reminds educational specialists, "A good deal of brain activity is not apparent to the conscious mind. Much of its work is a silent traffic with the rest of the body's automatic functioning..." (Robinson, 2001, p. 99). Children prove this fact.

After teaching adults for thirty years, I got the great honor to work with kids. They got it immediately! Children can still sense the magnitude of how sensations color our perceptions. After all, 85% of children are kinesthetic, meaning they move to think. They learn by sensations first, thinking second.

How can movement change what we think? Based on the *Feldenkrais Method*®, "movement" is redefined to mean life. Different than an improvisational dance or exercise, this movement with attention to the sensations fine tunes the process self-inquiry through the body. Like any x-ray machine, sensations triggered by motion make nothing hidden, physically or emotionally. This kind of "movement" magically shows awareness from a whole new perspective.

Katie, a 2nd grader, got a glimpse of what her body does with her brain. The good news is that even though it was only a glimpse, as the insight continues to unfold, it can change her future choices. On her journey, she had to look inside herself. This was foreign territory for Katie until the One Winged Butterfly lesson, a movement lesson that teaches compassion and balance inside and out. This type of movement, based on the *Feldenkrais Method*, isn't like a traditional exercise class.

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Catherine

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The *Method* uses movement as a vehicle to get information from our bodies about our brains. That's right, it switches around how to think about movement. Adults often say after this kind of movement, "I feel different, like the person I was when I was younger."

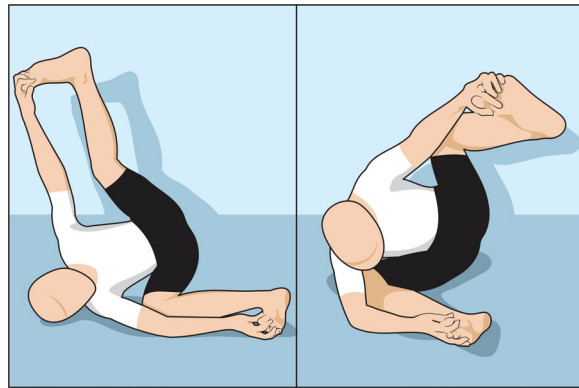
Katie, though a child, acted old. "I can't do this!" she pouted in class.

It was true, the lesson was challenging. It invited a movement that most children, or adults for that matter, missed in development the first year of their lives. In the One Winged Butterfly lesson, the head and pelvis learn to find each other and balance off each other. This gives us a sense of stability and foundation between the upper and lower body. This sensation of stability also supports confidence and self esteem.

With this lesson, children have to feel the physical weight and motion of the pelvis in relation to the head and vice-a-versa. The physical sensation between parts automatically starts to change areas of tension in the torso. Physical sensations and attitude change together when the whole body gets involved with its parts.

This action of rolling to sitting is similar to a movement an infant does. But when Katie tried it, her hip joints were stiff. She tumbled to the side like a rock the moment her foot lifted more than four inches off the floor. She growled. I wondered how her hip joints related to her attitude?

Katie's body looked like she'd missed this movement. She couldn't sit up comfortably. While sitting on the floor, holding onto her feet, her clam shaped spine showed that her hip joints were locked. With her head cocked backwards, looking out the bottom of



One-Winged Butterfly Lesson

her eyes, she complained, "I can't do this!" and crawled to the corner of the mat.

Her attitude and body mirrored each other; mind and body were locked in the same position. How we move casts a reflection of our history on our muscles. Our motor patterns feel the sensations of our dynamic doings. (Motor patterns are different than motor skills. Motor skills fine-tune an action. Motor patterns and their function develop perception.)

Chas, an obese 3rd grader, also couldn't do the movement. But though his body was stiff, his attitude was full of giggles. He flew one leg up in the air while holding onto his foot, then tipped to the side, and landed on his elbow, reminding me of a kid on a circus ride. Reversing the movement seemed impossible to him, but that didn't stop him. He persevered tumbling and giggling until, "POP!" To his surprise, he came up to sitting.

The key to this lesson is to expand awareness among body parts and how they move. Then take a step further into the feelings and thoughts behind these parts. Movements teach psychological processes through the connection our bodies' have to our brain. To bring the awareness inside, the kids have to find enough patience and compassion for themselves to "muck about." Chas kept mucking about, playing with the joy of a puppy.

The room was filled with giggles,

except in Katie's corner of the mat. There she sat, curled on the floor, pouting. If a whole posture could protrude into the belly of a lower lip, she mastered it. There "it" is: perception wired into the motor patterns of body and attitude. "I can't do this! I can't do this!" she whined, crawling off the mat and under the table.

"Katie, no one can do it at first. Everyone plays with the movement to find their way of doing it," I replied.

She wasn't listening. "I can't!" she stated again.

Meanwhile, Chas was still grinning and giggling. After trying again and again, though chubby and out of shape, he was now gracefully rolling to his side and back up to sitting.

The process of movement is more important than the goal. Awareness of how we are with ourselves physically and emotionally is key. Each time he tumbled onto his back, Chas fine tuned his balance. By the end of the lesson he could stay balanced all the way down, tipping slowing to his elbow and back up to sitting.

I walked over to Katie's and squatted below the table. "Katie, have you ever had a new born puppy?"

"Yes," she replied letting go of her feet.

"Did the puppy ever go potty in your

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house?" I asked, sitting on the mat facing her.

She giggled, "Yes."

"Did you get as mad at the puppy as you are getting to yourself right now?"

She looked at me with eyes of wonder. It never occurred to her that she was the one being so hard on herself. "Imagine you're a little puppy learning something new. If you don't get it right away, would the puppy give up?"

I went on getting a bit too philosophical, "There will be times we want to give up. If those times happen every day, it is up to us to see what we are doing that is getting in the way."

This didn't really make any sense to a six year old. Though there was a glimpse of curiosity, her body's motor patterns were still stuck in the attitude, "I can't." But she tried it again.

"See? I can't," she whined.

Monitoring her level of frustration, I decided to give her more clues to what was happening inside her. I guided Katie to release her neck and head, as that was where her body held the attitude of "helplessness." While holding her feet, I tilted her head towards a knee as she rolled to her side. Her neck tried to lock again as

she mumbled, "I can't."

To understand the engineering of the spine, think of the Golden Gate Bridge. The spine is like a suspension bridge. One end of the bridge affects the movement at the other end. Both Katie's lower and upper spine and neck were locking up her hip joints.

"Let go of the attitude 'I can't.' It is getting you stuck. Let go of your head."

Katie did it. She was shocked...and elated!

"Ok let me try on my own?" she stated as a question.

She tried lifting her foot and this time her foot rose two feet above the ground before she fell over. Though she did better, Katie couldn't make it back up to sitting without letting go of her feet. It didn't matter. Her attitude shifted and so did some of the tension in her hip joints.

Class was over and we all met for the closing. Katie was disappointed again. First, her frustration made her want to give up. Then, it took playtime away. She wanted to continue the movement once she got the hang of it. I called her over to the circle.

Sitting in a circle, the kids commented they felt taller. I asked them what

changed? They weren't sure. We laid down in "Pancake Body" to see if we could feel any differences. Most everyone felt "the floor got softer."

We talked about our process and how our bodies affect our minds. "When we get stuck in a movement, it can be very frustrating," I mentioned trying not to look at Katie.

I continued, "If we don't give up, we have more time to play around with what we want to learn." I wanted Katie to become aware of how often her anger took away her joy.

"Let's see if we can play with even our homework. Find a new way to play with struggles. See if playing helps us not give up. This movement lesson isn't just about rolling on the floor. It's about looking at how we are in home and school, too!"

Katie raised her hand. "But I didn't know how to do it?"

I asked Chas, "Did you know how to do it when you started?"

He nodded, "No."

"Pat, did you know how to do the movement when you started?"

Pat nodded, "No."

"Wendy did you?"

I asked each child in the class.

"Katie, did you know how to do the movement when you started?"

Katie nodded no, but this time she had a smile on her face.

Katie learned awareness about her attitude from the movement in her

"How we move casts a reflection of our history on our muscles."

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body. Learning awareness from the movement helped her step back and view herself from a different perceptive.

Moshe Feldenkrais knew how to make movement in our bodies change how we think. To affect the brain, the movement has to change the character of motor patterns. When we feel the concreteness of how we move, we see our experiences wired in motor patterns.

This type of awareness allows for compassionate understanding of how motor patterns get addicted to attitude... and attitude gets addicted to motor patterns. The more addicted we are to who we think we are, the more entrenched the motor pattern.

Behavior, mentally or emotionally, changes when motor patterns are reeducated. With a trained eye, a teacher analyzing movement can recognize how children think and, thus, need to learn. Moshe Feldenkrais explains, "... it is possible to analyze a personality solely by the study of his muscular behaviour" (Feldenkrais, 1979, p. 35).

Let's help children begin life with awareness. Sensing our physical movement patterns presents awareness of the grand mirrors of perception, fiercely determined to help us recognize what we did that got in the way of who we truly are... "awareness."

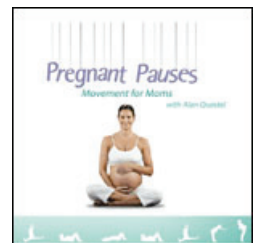
Catherine Mitchell is the Director of the Wellness Through Movement® program, dedicated to enriching the well-being of children's authentic nature in the areas of self-care, performance and potential from the body to the brain. She is also the author of two children's programs integrating the State and National Department of Education's physical education benchmarks for elementary school kids with the Feldenkrais Method®.

*Please feel free to contact her:
www.WellnessThroughMovement.com
or info@wellnessthroughmovement.com*

Special Sale on Alan Questel's DVD series Pregnant Pauses - Movement For Moms

In order to celebrate Alan Questel's recent write up in *People*, Pregnant Pauses will be on sale through the FEFNA Bookstore for \$39.95 (normally \$85.00) until Christmas.

Drawing on his more than 25 years of experience teaching the *Feldenkrais Method*®, Questel has created a program especially for pregnant women. Each "Pregnant Pause"-a series of gentle movements done for only 20 to 40 minutes a day- helps women adjust to the stages of pregnancy and eliminate pain and strain. Themes include breathing, decreasing stress and learning to transition comfortably from one position to another.



Alan Questel was trained by Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais and has a full-time *Feldenkrais Method* practice.

Call, email, or go online to place your order for Pregnant Pauses, (FEFNA item #6117) with FEFNA Bookstore Manager Sam.

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You can read Questel's write up at:
<http://celebritybabies.people.com/2011/11/20/pregnant-pauses-dvd-series-alan-questel/#more-148608>

Transformations: The Story of Peggy D.

-by Greg Hullstrung, P.T. Co-Founder, H&D Physical Therapy

At age 65, Peggy D. leapt from the couch into a wonderful world of movement

Sometimes patients come in for physical therapy, fix the problem, and leave. Case closed.

Other times, their lives are transformed in the process of healing. This was the case with one of my patients, Peggy D. She had a frozen shoulder, but she also had postural problems, a painful hip and felt her balance was unsteady.

Peggy made good progress in physical therapy. Over time, her shoulder range of motion increased and her pain decreased. As treatment was nearing an end, I asked her if she had given any thought to embarking on a home exercise program so she could maintain her hard-won gains after she left physical therapy.

The question stunned Peggy. "It put me into a slight state of shock because I don't exercise - at all," she explained. "At age 65, being a life-long couch-potato, the only exercise that appealed to me was yoga or Pilates. I didn't know anything about them, but I thought of them as something quiet that did not make you sweat."

I suggested she see our staff yoga teacher and movement therapist, Deborah Quilter, for a *Feldenkrais*® lesson. This method involves gentle movements through either verbal instructions or hands-on sessions. Through these lessons, movement that has been painful, uncoordinated or difficult becomes effortless and easy. I have experienced this work, and thought it would be helpful to Peggy. She said she'd try it out.

The next time I saw her, I asked how it went. "I felt taller for two days!" Peggy reported enthusiastically. This happened without conscious effort from her.

The following week, after another lesson with Deborah, when she got up from a chair, her knees felt "light and strong." Using her newfound awareness, she was able to recapture the length and effortlessness she felt after the lesson through sensory memory. "The lightness and effortlessness happened because Peggy was aligned through her bones, and thus did not need to rely on sheer muscular force to stand or move," Deborah noted.

Using her newfound awareness, she was able to recapture the length and effortlessness she felt after the lesson through sensory memory.

Peggy was very pleased with her progress, but felt she wanted to keep the results longer. The next time they met, Deborah showed her some exercises designed to strengthen certain muscles and lengthen other muscles so that the bones would stay more aligned. Peggy instantly saw the value of this work and eagerly signed up for Deborah's Thursday evening yoga series in addition to private lessons.

"For the last three weeks I've seen appreciable progress," said Peggy. Using this holistic approach has helped much more than her shoulder. "When

I woke up this morning, I wasn't stiff," she added. "Later that evening, I bounded off the couch without thinking about it!" Getting up usually required some doing.

Later sessions yielded even more dramatic improvements. After leaving a session with Deborah one evening, Peggy boarded a bus for home. "Normally, when I stand up to get off at my bus stop, it is quite an awkward, jerky, ungraceful process, partially because the bus is still moving and partially due to my own body movements," she explained. "This is usually accomplished in three steps: from my window seat, I scoot over to the outside seat, then grab on to something to lift myself up with knees bent, then side-step to the center aisle and grab something else to stand upright until I can gain my balance and feel

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steady on my feet.”

But that night she went from sitting by a window seat to standing in the center aisle in one fluid movement without even trying. “I was so startled by this that I asked myself (silently) ‘How in the world did I just do that?’ I was astonished - truly astonished!” she exclaimed.

One of the visions that my partner, Rob DiLillo and I had in founding H&D twelve years ago was to incorporate complementary techniques in our clinic to give patients the optimum healing experience -- and techniques to help them help themselves. I have a passion for helping people fulfill their dreams. Nothing thrills me more than witnessing the self-transformation that can occur when people embrace the tools that heal them.

Peggy D. is a shining example of how that can happen.

In her own words, Peggy D. tells her story:

Deborah Quilter introduced me to a combination of quiet, non-strenuous but very effective body movements and I have loved every minute of them. Working with her has given me an awareness of what my own body actually does and how it makes me feel when I do it.

Instead of someone “explaining” to me how I should position myself - I have been guided to figure it out for myself - based on how I feel. It is quite an extraordinary concept and definitely a revelation to me. For example, in order to improve my posture, I have figured out my own way (not someone else’s) to give myself the self-direction I need in order to stand erect.

This approach works for me like a charm. I know my posture is improving by my own design. It is not difficult or stressful, and I get a big kick out of knowing that I have “developed” my own solution.

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Art Influences

the *Feldenkrais Method*®

-by Margot Schaal, GCFP

"I feel my curiosity peak when I watch you work," said a colleague. "I don't know what I'm sensing. How is your *Feldenkrais*® practice influenced by your art background?"

My art background sometimes comes into the foreground as I teach the *Feldenkrais Method* – foreground/background creates (depth) perception in art. Figure-ground is a play between them which invites you to shift which is which, not unlike how my attention moves to different parts or aspects of a person as I work with her and how we ask *Feldenkrais* students to shift their attention throughout a lesson.

In art, I am making things, looking

at things various ways – different angles, different thought patterns/ ideas, boundless possibilities of exploration, perception, playing with possibilities! The same approach giving a *Feldenkrais* lesson results not in a new thing, but in influencing another human being through her nervous system; offering another expanded choice/s in how she can do or feel or be.

To unravel some of my art experience, I unrolled a three by twenty foot scroll of figure drawings. I enjoyed seeing them. I saw movement, transmission of force, weight, mmm – humanity. I appreciated many; made criticisms of a few. Criticism may be one of the

greatest differences between making art and doing the *Feldenkrais Method*. Perhaps this is where my *Feldenkrais* work can influence my approach to making art – instead of the process of examination being criticism, let it simply be, noting distinctions and making choices that please me... I found the precision of dexterity required to evenly roll the paper into a tight roll again – challenging!

The inspiration to make art comes from a desire to present a perception of the external or internal environment, or both. This alertness to environs relates to what we teach in *Feldenkrais* lessons. We teach people how to develop their self awareness, to attend to their internal world while living in the external world, and we practitioners continue to develop awareness of ourselves.

Bringing my presence to the easel or *Feldenkrais* table affords the most effective beginning. Bringing all of oneself to the moment allows inspiration to arise from what is – the natural world or manmade world or the complex living organism of a person. This requires lots and lots and lots of observing. Feeling in my body the place I sit and the human being I view, whether to draw or touch, I



Pastel, Garden, Camp Joy, by Margot. ©Margot Schaal. Used with permission.

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may consider multiple ways to do something before acting. Keep open to whatever arises (Surprises. Possibilities!) And let it guide a lesson or a work of art. Then be willing to try something different – again and again.

An artist develops the ability to see the inherent structure and qualities of something. She can relate and feel through multiple senses, an awareness of essence, and idea. In the *Feldenkrais Method*, structure is understood as the result of habitual use of oneself. Recognizing that a living being is always moving, Moshe Feldenkrais replaced “posture” with “acture.” Instead of a static model of posture, our attention is on movement.

In making art, I often mimic with my body or my voice or with gesture/ marks on materials – sticks, leaves, paper, wood, clay – anything! or nothing, just witnessing. It is a sensory and somatic orientation, as is the *Feldenkrais Method*. I look at drawings

from student days - many drawings of a massive Henry Moore sculpture, from different points of view. I went on hands and knees in the plaza to feel in myself the shapes of the sculpture, the relationships of the forms.

The artist chooses the medium, elements, and their relationships. Some approaches are cerebral, some primarily intuitive – the possible processes run the range of human experience – thinking, feeling, knowing, sensing, seeing, touching, smelling, listening, being. Everything exists relative to everything else. One continually makes comparisons, distinctions and connections in making art, just as one learns about relationships within oneself through the *Feldenkrais Method*.

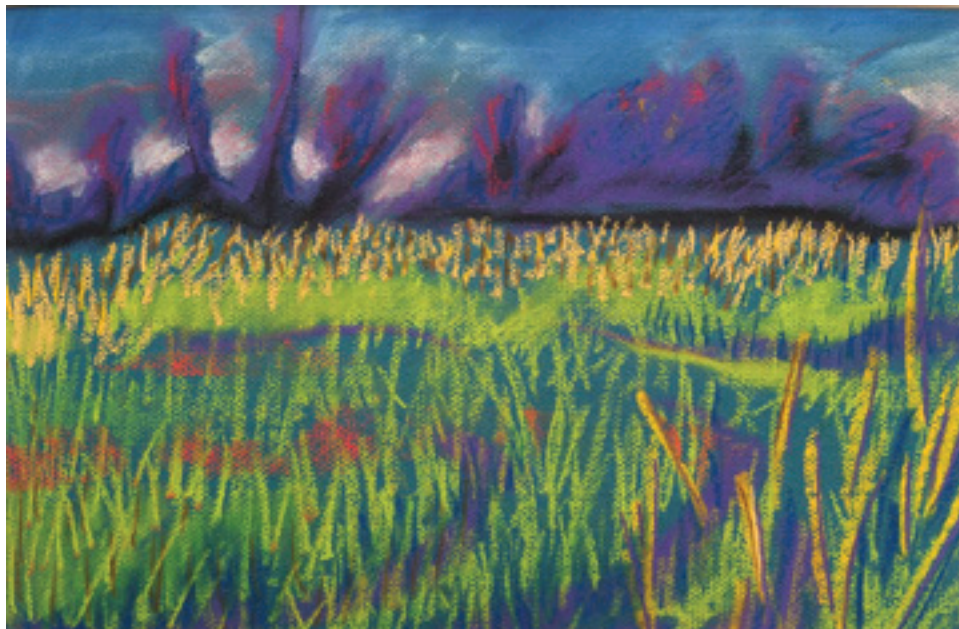
Learning to see over years of practice allows the sense of what you see to enter you through vision, and other ways, to move through you and release onto paper/canvass/wood/etc. Sensing



Margot working with a client.

the weight of something without touching it, its gesture, its constrictions and freedoms, its essence; seeing with the eyes as if touching each place your eye passes. Through practice, the artist gives attention to the whole, even while working in layers and regions and details, just as a *Functional*

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Pastel, Wisconsin, by Margot. © 1991, Margot Schaal. Used with permission.

...Art Influences

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Integration® lesson or *Awareness Through Movement*® lesson uses global attention and specific touch/movement simultaneously.

Making art is in the experience of doing it as much as in the product. Likewise, in a *Feldenkrais* lesson, the process is as important as the end result – an odd notion to a person in severe pain, but it works! The quality of presence that begins a lesson is employed throughout the creative process of making art. Most artists instinctually know that when they dip out of the focused zone of creating it is time to take a break. In *Awareness Through Movement* and *Functional Integration* we rest periodically, allowing the

nervous system to integrate new information.

Like practicing the *Feldenkrais Method*, making art involves continual learning, always sharpening, honing, refining. If the learning stops, the art may stop too. An artist's influences are – historical, contemporary and non-art; teachers, colleagues and critique – yet as in the *Feldenkrais Method*, you learn from yourself – your experience as you work, your feeling and thought processes.

An artist engages in ongoing decision-making, experimentation and experience and a lifetime of aesthetic decisions. And simultaneous spontaneity! An idea can be liberating;

the same idea can be limiting. The skill we teach students of reversing an action can be important in making art, also. In a *Feldenkrais* lesson, a certain posture or acture is optimal in a given situation, but not in all situations. The wider your vocabulary of movement, and the more you learn to control your positioning, the more options are open to you.

The simple aspect/idea, the abstraction in a work of art gives it power, just as in a *Feldenkrais* lesson, one guiding idea for a lesson makes it strong, clear. At the end of her first *Functional Integration* lesson, a client asked what she could expect from continuing to work with me – for her, I gestured a large globe in the air, “in general, softness.”

She has developed softness, does not try as hard, carries less tension, and has learned how to function more to her satisfaction. Less is more - as in art, so in the *Feldenkrais Method*.

Each group of drawings is wrapped in a special way – done with care. There are no commercially made portfolios, but long rolls of newsprint with figures that are closed with a piece of masking tape that says “cut here” to open or cardboard portfolios I made myself with string tied with a half knot that readily opens. The quality of care is complete.



Pastel, 940, 25, by Margot. ©Margot Schaal. Used with permission.

Margot Schaal teaches Head to Toes *Feldenkrais*® to individuals, classes and workshops in Marin and Sonoma Counties, Northern California.
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