

Reflections on Practice

To know slowly: How the Feldenkrais Method® has informed a dance performance and pedagogic pathway

Detta Howe

BA, MA, Senior Lecturer in Dance, University of Chichester

Contact: d.howe@chi.ac.uk

Abstract

This two-part essay offers a personal reflection on an emerging Feldenkrais-informed practice in dance performance and pedagogy. As a post-positivist piece of writing from practice, the essay acknowledges the first-hand experience of the researcher as documenter of embodied process. The essay makes reference to the research of Sylvie Fortin and Warren Long (2000) who explore the potential of Feldenkrais learning for the dancer. The writing of Moshe Feldenkrais (2010, 1990), Norman Doidge (2015) and Guy Claxton (2016, 1997) illustrate notions of organic learning and knowing slowly.

In Part 1 of the essay I reflect upon the impact of the Feldenkrais Method on my dancing. I highlight how the Feldenkrais Method offered me the opportunity to get to know the difference between the dancer that moves and the dancer that knows they are moving. Part 2 directs the reflection towards the experience of students I have been teaching at the University of Chichester, introducing an emerging practice, *Awareness in Motion (AIM)*.

Keywords

Feldenkrais, Dance Performance, Pedagogy, Somatic Practice, Learning, Stillness, Improvisation

Copyright ©: The copyright for this paper remains with the author(s).

Please cite: (First published in the) *Feldenkrais Research Journal*, volume 6; 2018-2019.

Service marks: The terms Feldenkrais®, Feldenkrais Method®, Awareness Through Movement®, ATM®, Functional Integration®, and FI® are service marked terms of the International *Feldenkrais*® Federation (IFF) and Feldenkrais professional guilds and associations in many countries. In keeping with academic conventions, they will not be service marked in the entire text as may be required in nonacademic use, but only for the first and most prominent use of the terms. In recognition that these phrases are formal terms referring to specific practices within the Method, and to the Method as a whole, capitalization of all the words in each term has been retained.



To know slowly: How the Feldenkrais Method® has informed a dance performance and pedagogic pathway

Detta Howe

BA, MA, Senior Lecturer in Dance, University of Chichester

Introduction

It was whilst training in the Feldenkrais Method® (2011-2015) that I first became aware of the possibility of moving slowly and began to experience a slower knowing. It was through this process of slowing and later stilling that I began to learn how to move again. This learning has evolved into a research pathway where I continue to discover more from the philosophy and fundamental principles of the Feldenkrais Method.

It is only now, upon reflection that I recognise how fixed my approach to learning was as a contemporary dance student, and how my moving had become automatic and unfelt after 25 years of contemporary dance practice. It was this realisation that sparked the beginnings of my new movement learning, developing my need to recapture moving as it happens, to wake up and fine-tune my potential to notice, discover, experience and breathe again.

Whilst acknowledging the risk of losing the clarity of the immediate through the dilution of the telling, I will aim to immerse the reader with both the subtlety and enormity of my performance practice and offer an auto-ethnographic view to highlight new perceptions of body, time and space as a result of enhancing the experience of moving for myself as a dancer, and later for those I teach. Reflections throughout will be italicised as a way to emphasise process and track the embodiment of new learning and change.

Part 1: *'to discover a lost body, my lost body'*

My Practice

I realised that I was moving without knowing what I was doing...I then saw that most people don't know what they are doing; they just don't know that they don't know.
Feldenkrais (2010: 96)

After four years of contemporary dance training (1987-91) which for the most part involved learning steps and relentless rehearsing, followed by freelance repertory work with small

companies (1991-94), I had no sense of who I was or quite how to place myself within the dance world. As I moved towards making my own work, I continued to create in the only way I knew, the way I had learnt, generally working with improvisation in the studio as a means to an end, a way to invent and fine tune dance material to devise a finished product. It was in 2009 that I first noticed a distance between myself and what I was doing, a separation of being, loss of reason and a desperate need for stillness. Constantly hurtling towards deadlines, in a cycle of performing, choreographing and teaching, I began to realise that something had been lost, something major was missing; little did I know at the time that it was me.

Through my introduction to the Feldenkrais Method in 2011 I started to notice that I was missing the phenomenal sensation of receiving and sensing. In the process of striving to rehearse and perfect what had been found, the richness of the original source had become less vivid. The raw, innocent, vibrancy in the improvisation itself was bypassed and crafted into something other.

I began the London 2 Feldenkrais Training¹ as a way to practice awareness, to get more intimate with being present and to discover more about the person that was moving. It was in this place that I learned to listen to my body and for the first time became involved in, engaged with and a part of my own experience.

At the same time, I participated in the Solo Commissioning Dance Project with choreographer Deborah Hay² which provided an opportunity to explore this new-found awareness in its infancy. I did not expect it at first, but it soon became clear that Hay's philosophy of moving and the Feldenkrais Method would inform each other quite beautifully. Both share similar principles that include the importance of getting there opposed to arriving; recognising movement habits; embracing uncertainty; and keeping an enquiry alive with playful questioning - all of which aim to heighten the experience of moving for the mover.

It was here, whilst dancing in an improvised score that I experienced feeling at the moment of moving, the instant sensation of the whole of me, the felt sense of being, a human being moving. This is what I had been missing, this was where the dance was, this was where I was.

¹ The Feldenkrais Training London was held from 2011 to 2015. This was the second training programme of the Feldenkrais Method to be held in London and was organised by Scott Clark (UK) and Elizabeth Beringer (USA).

² Deborah Hay is an experimental choreographer from USA who has been a seminal influence on post-modern dance practice and one of the founder members of Judson Dance Theatre. The Solo Commissioning Dance Project (2011) was hosted annually by Independent Dance (London) and gave freelance dance artists the opportunity to work intensively with Hay in Findhorn, Scotland. Hay devised a score for each commission and worked with the dancers to explore the potential of the score and in the process developing a solo for each artist. After the two week intensive, there followed a nine month period in which each artist was asked to continue a daily practice of the score to enable the process to 'marinate', enrich and develop a depth of understanding, both knowing and not knowing before it could be performed.

Increasingly intrigued by the unknown, interested in the unwritten, and curious about the notion of readiness, perception and awareness in the pursuit of presence in performance, my understanding and interest in the potential of dancing had changed. It took me 4 years on the Feldenkrais Training programme to begin to retrace, relearn and ultimately to re-feel, remembering what it was/is to sense and notice, becoming more intimate with being present.

My danced body that had become absent and empty, gradually became more present and full, gaining power and meaning, enriched with new sensations, new possibilities, new life. But what was it about the Feldenkrais Method that released me and allowed me to become known to myself?

For me the Feldenkrais Method unearthed everything necessary to discover a lost body, my lost body. A method that allows time to explore and discover, gently unwrapping layers of doing and done to experience the unknown and the undone. I was introduced to terms such as ease and pleasure, something I had long forgotten in relation to dancing.

The idea of replacing judgement with curiosity, investing in the process opposed to reaching for the end goal and the strategy of moving slowly were all elements that had been overlooked as part of my dance training and concepts that I realised would need time to absorb.

Thankfully I found time to allow these concepts to seep into my movement learning, with each lesson offering the invitation to slow down and the opportunity to encounter new spaces in the body and as a result, a new body in space.

In his book *The Brain's Way of Healing* Norman Doidge emphasises the importance of moving slowly in the Feldenkrais Method, explaining that 'slowness is the key to awareness and awareness is the key to learning' (2015: 172). Guy Claxton reinforces the importance of 'the slow ways of knowing,' suggesting that only when the 'brain-mind's activity is...meandering can it spread and puddle' (1997: 214), and in doing so notice familiarity and habitual pathways of motion. Claxton elaborates that 'to tap into the leisurely ways of knowing, one must dare to wait. Knowing emerges from, and in response to, not-knowing' (1997: 6). Claxton's thoughts here capture my interest in the practices of Feldenkrais and Improvisation, both knowing and not knowing, emphasising the importance of how this learning is a 'process of coming to know' which Claxton concludes, 'emerges from uncertainty' (1997: 6), a starting point for any improvisatory score.

My Learning

'....knowing oneself....that learning is the gift of life.' (Feldenkrais 2010: 58)

Feldenkrais Method Awareness through Movement® lessons (ATM®) propose questions and new movement challenges that can confront and expose habit and effort by returning to the simplicity of the bones and moving slowly. When moving is small and slow, sensory distinctions

can be made between movements; as Claxton suggests, spreading and puddling this new information throughout the system so that change is possible.

Moving slowly however, was not part of my movement vocabulary when I began my Feldenkrais training, and I can remember wondering: 'what is the purpose of working so slowly and repeating the same movement when nothing seemed to be happening?' So used to copying material from other bodies, and using my eyes to make sense of what I was seeing, I was now offered the option to close my eyes and respond to moving in a different way, sensing and feeling, listening and responding, searching for answers to questions and suggestions through a process of discovery.

With so much time given to a simple idea, there was no alternative but to slow down and notice it and with this awareness alone, I began to sense change. In those early stages, I was unable to put these sensations into words but knew this was something I needed to pursue further in an attempt to unravel what was happening.

As I reflect, I realise that my early experiences of the Feldenkrais Method exposed the kind of learner I was and also the trained dancer in me. I was very much a 'hare,' wanting to find an answer, to reach the end of a movement, but in time I realised how much I was missing in my eagerness to arrive at the end point.

Gradually reducing power and speed, I had time to notice subtleties of movement. A felt connection and collaboration between mind and body evolving, responsive and open to sensations and feelings that had become unfelt, unseen and unheard. The 'tortoise' was beginning to stretch its legs!

The great value of this technique is that by reducing tension in a particular group of muscles, it provides a methodical study of the entire self-image, and through study, improvement....You discover, rediscover yourself as your structure is capable of being yourself to the limits of your body. You can be reborn. (Feldenkrais 2010: 106-107)

An Awareness Through Movement lesson will often begin by inviting participants to lie on their backs, offering quiet space and time to arrive, to shift from a place of doing and busy to resting and peace. The process continues with the practitioner guiding the participants through a scan of their bodies to wake up and notice that which may have been forgotten or far from daily thinking. This scan allows attention to be directed internally to broaden perception and awareness to feeling and sensation. A simple movement is often used as a way to notice change and direct awareness to a particular part of the body. This small movement can be a place to begin and can be referred to again and again as the lesson unfolds. It could be to notice how the head rolls, the shoulder lifts or the pelvis lies, or simply to notice sameness or difference in the whole self, whilst resting on the floor.

It was being in contact with the floor, in moments of restful awareness that I began to sense the wonder of moving slowly and became intrigued by stillness; how each time the experience was new and ever changing. It was through this invitation to be still that I rediscovered how to move.

Stillness allows time to arrive and be, to receive and follow, encountering the places between doing and not doing, dancing and not dancing, the moments between sensing, interpreting and responding.

As a result of finding stillness and giving time for myself to settle and listen, the smallest of initiations seemed magnified, purely through my awareness and attention given to them. The intimacy of both moving slowly and beginning small took me to unknown places, both physically and emotionally, discovering moving in a way that was new to my vocabulary.

The Feldenkrais Method often directs attention to the skeleton and explores the movement possibilities of the architecture of the bones, enhancing sensitivity by reducing effort through suggestion, enquiry and provocation.

Discovering movement through increased awareness of my bones altered everything I understood about moving. I felt a stronger connection with the ground which in turn, fuelled the rest of me, allowing muscles to be soft and mobile as opposed to hard and held; each lesson inviting that which was unknown, unfelt and ignored to become part of my knowing body.

Awareness Through Movement enabled me to experience a new sense of myself, what it is to be here now, a space to become who you are as opposed to who you were or, who you think you should be. Moving with this enhanced understanding transformed my improvisatory practice, encouraging new possibilities of creativity and enriching the experience of the moment of moving.

I began to realise that the Feldenkrais Method invited self-learning, self-knowing and self-acceptance, shifting the emphasis from head to body and in doing so encouraging the potential to free self from the image and known to the felt and knowing. By rejecting the traditional mirror image used in much dance training which tends to externalise, distort and alter perceptions of self, I moved towards a practice where reflection is internal and sensitive, nurturing self-understanding and growth.

The investigative nature of Awareness Through Movement lessons enhanced my studio practice utilising the principles of slowing, sensing and processing, layer by layer. This enabled me to find new strategies in which to reclaim lost or forgotten moving. It is a practice that allows time for learning and space for awareness to discover potential, new knowing, new self, here-ness, now-ness. The sheer immediacy of body in time and space – where am I now, this moment, this feeling, this knowing. As Claxton writes

Time spent discovering things for yourself, even though someone could have simply told you the answer, or given you the information, may be time well spent if the outcome is greater confidence and competence as an explorer. (1997: 220)

Performance

My interest in performing shifted as a result of my Feldenkrais learning. With renewed awareness, I recognised how much of my dancing had been about giving, attempting to rise to the expectations of others rather than nurturing, noticing and satisfying my own curiosity.

This unexpected shift came into being as a result of discovering what it feels like to breathe, and for that to become part of my dancing experience. Within each Awareness Through Movement lesson there is time to notice breath, and each time I did I felt more connected, a wholeness evolving that had not been present before.

As the spaces in my body were infused with breath I began to notice expansion; ribs softening, opening, spreading, and the ripple effect of this echoed its way to other parts of me. Discovering new found space inside my body affected a change as to how I perceived space outside of it. I moved differently, walking, sensing, noticing, seeing as if for the first time; sky, clouds, buildings, trees, flowers, grass, people: blinkers removed, inviting an explosion of colour, sound and texture that made moving in the world an altogether new experience.

By returning to my breath and bones, I discovered a sense of me in the world again and my performance practice highlighted this change. I explored dancing in gardens, galleries, on beaches and other diverse venues where the space became part of the experience, adding more texture and variety to feed my senses.

As I began to discover more of me, I enjoyed the prospect of having a dialogue with an audience, dissolving the 4th wall and allowing them to participate and feed the investigation. The audience and the space became part of the dance as they were part of my awareness, alive, breathing together.

As my practice of the Feldenkrais Method and improvisation continue to collide and coincide, I am often overwhelmed by a sense of presence and being; at times, so deeply present to become almost absent, disappearing further into self as discovery and sharing take place together.

Awareness Through Movement lessons normally take place in silence, with only a spoken voice interspersed to guide, offer and suggest. Exposure to the richness of silence unexpectedly released me from my dependence on music as part of my creative process. Once reliant on recorded sounds, I am now inspired by the ambiguity, humour and vulnerability of silence, listening to my newly discovered movement language, whilst responding and interacting with the audience and the space; a physical conversation that is raw, vibrant, teasing and real.

In 2015 I devised a dance called 'sometimes' in which I chose to use my spoken voice.

Dancing in this solo performance had a new feeling; everything magnified, enriched and full of flavours; allowing the vulnerability of not knowing to become part of the dance, part of being human and something to share with an audience. I evolved from a dancer that moves to a dancer that knows they are moving, valuing and enjoying the paradox of knowing and not knowing in my body and in the dance space.

I intend to return to the performance practice of this work through the lens of my current learning, to challenge the new familiar, once again experiencing movement from stillness, the sound of movement from silence and the stimulus of language in order to inform my practice and further enrich my process.

Continuously inspired by Awareness Through Movement lessons, intrigued, confused and often overwhelmed by what I might find and where I would end up, I knew this organic sense of self-discovery was something I needed to share with my dance students, offering them the opportunity to explore new moving in their habit bodies.

The following section tracks the emergence of my pedagogic practice, Awareness in Motion (AIM) where I draw upon the Feldenkrais Method to nourish and support my continued learning. I will share examples of how this teaching approach aims to transfer the potential of the Feldenkrais Method into a dance practice that may inspire and encourage self-awareness for others in the moment of their dance training rather than waiting to discover it 30 years later.

Part 2: 'to be a conscious dancer'

Preface

Somatic education is not only something new and unexpected, it is something of momentous consequence: It entails a basic transformation in our understanding of the human species and of the capacities of the human individual. (Hanna 1980: 188)

The field of Somatics was first defined by Thomas Hanna in the 1970s (Hanna, 1976, 1980. See also Eddy 2009: 7) to describe an approach to movement inquiry that encourages 'easeful, mindful, efficiency of the body' and looks at 'each person as a functional whole' (Fitt 1996: 304).

Almost 45 years later Hanna's understanding of the 'inner-relational process between awareness, biological function and environment' (Hanna 1976: 30) has never been more prevalent.

The impact of working and living in the 21st century has recently seen a huge rise in the awareness of Health and Wellbeing in the workplace. Providing people with methods to relax and reduce stress levels, offering practices that provide a rescue remedy to unwind, rebalance

and recover. Somatic practices which aim to integrate and encourage a more holistic approach to moving and being now seem to be more recognised and accessible for all.

With increased knowledge of bodywork through the growth of somatic practices alongside the development of dance science, practices such as Alexander Technique, Pilates, Rolfing, Ideokinesis and the Feldenkrais Method are now highly regarded and recognised in many Higher Education Institutions for dancers in training. The potential of this learning has been slowly seeping its way into the dance education sector. For me it began in the early years of my training (1990) when I first experienced a contemporary dance class informed by the Feldenkrais Method. This was taught by Scott Clark, now a highly influential practitioner based in London, who was a professional dancer before training to be a Feldenkrais Practitioner in 1987. Skip forward 24 years to 2011, when I participated in the second London Feldenkrais training programme, where I had the opportunity to work with Scott again (he is now currently co-directing the third training programme, 2016-2020) Coming from a dance background, Clark has been a huge inspiration to many dancers like me who have pursued the Feldenkrais Method as a way to inform their own practice and take this learning out into the field.

I am in the fortunate position of being able to develop a teaching programme and share my learning with the students at the University of Chichester. This is made possible by the legacy of work of those practitioners who have paved the way, passionate about the person as a whole functioning being and interested to discover and disseminate ways to enable ease, efficiency and pleasure in our moving and being.

Awareness in Motion

The Feldenkrais Method 'provides an environment where mistakes are accepted and questions are encouraged, 'where 'the student's curiosity is fostered, playful exploration is nurtured, and self-discovery is the key' (Lessinger 1996: 330).

This sounds like the perfect place to learn? Unfortunately this was not part of my experience as a child through my school years or as part of my dance training. If I had access then to what I know now, how different my experience of learning and getting to know would have been. In the following writing I aim to share how my understanding of learning has changed through personal Feldenkrais Method practice and the consequent evolution of my role as a movement educator, where I attempt to offer dance students the freedom to make mistakes, to learn through play and fundamentally to realise that 'the body is our first and most profoundly relevant teacher' (Fitt 1996: 367).

Many dancers are drawn to somatically informed ways of working, often as a result of injury, fatigue, curiosity, maturity and/or just another way to inform their movement learning. The Feldenkrais Method has influenced dance practitioners, and many of those have informed the

current discourse about practice.³ Experienced practitioners and movement educators Warren Long and Zoran Kovich have continued their dance practice into their later years as a result of re-learning through the Feldenkrais Method. They, as I, discovered the possibility of moving without causing further injury and re-discovering what it is to feel pleasure in and ease of motion. I am therefore aware of and intrigued by how they and others have taken the Method into the dance studio, whilst at the same time finding my way. As a starting point, I take inspiration from Awareness Through Movement lessons, noticing growth and change from a simple seed of an idea and carry this new movement knowing into the dance studio to see where, if given time, my improvisation would choose to take it.

Weaving my way through the potential of Awareness Through Movement and my evolving practice, Awareness in Motion (AIM), I will attempt to discuss as Claxton describes

a kind of knowing which is essentially indirect, sideways, illusive and symbolic; which hints and evokes, touches and moves, in ways that resist explication.....accessed not through earnest manipulation of abstraction, but through leisurely contemplation of the particular. (1997: 173)

Learning sideways

Both Feldenkrais and Claxton highlight the need for tacit learning, believing that 'learning power grows through experience' (Claxton 1997: 222) and it is the experience of doing, feeling and sensing that help us to understand, notice and make sense of the world around us.

In biology classes at school, children are introduced to the term osmosis to explain how plants absorb water to prevent them from wilting. It does this through the cell walls which are semi-permeable and thus the process of osmosis is much like a sponge absorbing water slowly and continuously, to keep the plant alive. This concept of absorbing or soaking up the plants life blood can be related to the term organic learning, coined by Feldenkrais among others, believing that learning is an organic process and much like the needs of a plant, requires slow and continuous absorption to enable growth and change to take place. Claxton refers to the notion of learning by osmosis, explaining that

The greater part of the useful understanding we acquire throughout our life is not explicit knowledge, but implicit know-how. Our fundamental priority is not to be able to talk about what we are doing, but to do it.....and the corresponding need for the kind of learning that delivers know-how...learning by osmosis ...is not one that we outgrow. (1997: 20)

Between the ages of 0-5 years we experience the most influential learning of our lives, mostly due to the fact that it is tacit, experiential learning through a process of trial and error. Learning

³ Influential practitioners exploring the interplay between the Feldenkrais Method and Improvisation practices for learning include Simonetta Alessandri, Thomas Kampe, Jackie Adkins, Caroline Scott, Sylvie Fortin, Warren Long, Zoran Kovich and Jenny Roche.

to sit, stand and walk are enormous milestones for any child, but to reach this place of stability and locomotion, the child needs to fall and recover, to try one way then another, building layers of understanding and know-how. This evolves from a body that is given time and space to explore, be curious, slowly absorbing strategies for motion and cultivating body knowledge.

Herein lies my interest in learning, which has been enhanced through my experience of the Feldenkrais Method and led to the development of my practice AIM, an approach to movement discovery from the inside out.

It was being exposed to the essence of organic learning which tapped into my awareness and unwrapped my curiosity, and in doing so made me realise how important it was to refresh and invigorate both what and how I was teaching. I began to question how much I was doing in an attempt to encourage and inspire, very quickly realising that I was working far more than the students. They were following 'externally' but with little thinking or processing taking place.

As I began to learn more about my potential to move and the circumstances in which this learning was allowed to unfold, I began to shift my emphasis on doing to feeling, and for that I needed to encourage the students to find more for themselves opposed to me trying to find it for them. This was and still is the hardest part of my pedagogic journey.

Teaching began to require a similar approach to my performance practice. Rather than giving and entertaining to fulfil a certain expectation of what it is to teach, I needed to learn to share and engage, converse and respond, listen and wait. Allowing time for thinking, questioning, searching; providing a space for dance students to experience themselves in motion; a place where learning happens and the student becomes part of their own organic process.

The Feldenkrais Method helps to bring us back to now, back to the body and reintroduces the potential of learning again, organically, slowly, absorbing as by osmosis, in the way that a child absorbs. The Method offers lessons that allow for playfulness and the opportunity for self-discovery, moving with ease, pleasure and wonder. It is this sense of play and exploration that I believe is vital for a dancer and why I evolved Awareness in Motion (AIM). This practice aims to give dancers in training the opportunity to experience their being in motion as a way to learn more about their being; It uses words to find the body; body to find a language; language to find a voice. A practice that consciously engages with the notion: where am I now? A dance practice and study for the 21st century that aims to disrupt, dislodge and dismantle in order to unearth, discover and renew.

The Practice

The following outlines my growing practice, *Awareness in Motion*; moving away from the more vertical, linear, known routes, to something more meandering, off centre and horizontal.

Awareness in Motion (AIM) aims to provide a wider context to explore sensations experienced in an Awareness Through Movement lesson through improvisation, offering the students more time to experience what they have noticed. The sensations of newness are explored through play in the studio to discover the potential of these movement choices. Improvising in this way allows a dancer freedom to discover moving in their bodies, time to notice what is happening in this moment and the next. Judging the aesthetic with the use of studio mirrors soon becomes outweighed with sensing and feeling. Learning that is not comparable with anyone else's, unique and personal and as a result more powerful than anything any teacher can give.

AIM can direct learning in a variety of ways, sometimes informed by a quality or texture of the moving experienced from the preceding Awareness Through Movement lesson or an idea or concept from the lesson that might feed an improvisatory exploration. An example of an AIM exploration here highlights a particular favourite Awareness Through Movement lesson, often known as the *Four Corners* which I enjoyed as part of Feldenkrais Training: Spring 2012.

This lesson draws attention to the right and left shoulder and the right and left side of the pelvis, to enhance a feeling of width, depth and distance between each. Connections are made linearly and diagonally as a way to notice movement in the spine and how the rest of the participant's body responds to the idea of pressing and lifting each corner towards and away from the floor or each other.

From this lesson, the consequent moving enquiry can begin from lying on the back at the end of the lesson to explore the feeling of pressing and lifting in other parts of their body, expanding the investigation to notice similarities and differences in sensation. Feeling as one part presses, another lifts; one becomes heavy and weighted whilst the other becomes light and without weight. This exploration can evolve from lying to sitting to standing and then interact with all three to experience the potential of giving and taking weight in unexpected, unplanned ways.

A more conceptual challenge would be to encourage the students to explore around a theme, which in this instance, I refer to the terms towards and away. This can begin on the floor as before or in standing where the dancer is given time to play with the notions of towards and away, in the space, from an embodied perspective and/or in the imagination. As with pressing and lifting, when movement occurs with the intention of towards, that same movement is simultaneously moving away, which can enhance a more global sense of the self in motion. These are ideas that may encourage dancers to think differently about who is moving and how they are doing so, which may allow new sensations and awareness of movement to arrive.

This learning however, takes time and needs continuous soaking as does a plant, and as Claxton writes with reference to the work of [the] poet, 'we hang motionless for a moment in the presence of something made strange and new...', and here, 'one must not search for meaning... but marinate oneself in the poem' (1997: 177).

On occasion I carry the fundamental principles of a lesson through to more conventionally taught movement sequences, where the student watches and tries to emulate that which is demonstrated. Early research carried out by Fortin and Long in 2000, looked to discover ways to encourage a somatic awareness when dancing in a more known practiced way, searching for language to inform the practice and allow students to find their way of moving and sensing the material given. It is within this teaching framework however, that for many students it is all too easy or automatic to fall back into habits of externalizing what they see opposed to noticing what they feel. To support this difficult transition I add thoughts, questions and movement pathways introduced in the Feldenkrais lesson to encourage a new way of thinking about the learning potential that is now available within a given movement. This process enhances the notion that learning material can be more than merely picking up steps; it can be about pressing or lifting, moving towards the elbow or away from the ceiling. As with Fortin and Long, I have realised that it is very much about language choices, suggestions and questions that can begin to support this transition from seeing and doing to sensing and feeling. Long highlights using initiation as a way to explain and instigate a movement as well as directing attention to sensation, comparing these sensations, and describing skeletal functioning, all concepts adapted from the principles of the Feldenkrais Method (2000: 6).

Rewriting a language, searching for ways to describe sensation and guide another to experience their own is very much at the forefront of my research, to enable the students to embody what is theirs and within that place, find more of themselves opposed to habitually copying and becoming another.

The student experience

My teaching practice has grown with the support and interest of the Dance Department at the University of Chichester, who have recognised a change in the students as a result of this learning.

Initially I delivered a 15 week module teaching once a week for an hour and a half as part of the technique programme, which began in the Academic year 2016. This programme was designed for first year students (28 in total) as I felt on arrival at the University each will bring their particular movement history, but will more than likely still lack a basic awareness of their bodies. In these lessons, with no one to follow copy or pretend to be, they have just time and space in which to discover the possibility of getting to know themselves.

At the end of each class, discussion took place to allow those who were willing to share their experiences, providing the students with a supportive environment to understand and articulate their findings. At the end of each module the students were given a questionnaire, allowing those the opportunity to write when speaking might be difficult and also, all a chance to reflect on their process, what they had discovered, enjoyed or found difficult. The students were aware that their answers were purely for me to learn from their learning and that their participation was optional. I explained that this was an informal research process and their comments would

provide a way for me to gather feedback to reflect on and improve my practice; these comments when given were anonymous.

I have edited the feedback below with the aim to share thoughts that came from individual students as examples of the kinds of comments I received, recognising of course that the few who did not take part may have had more negative comments or simply found it difficult to exchange their experiences for words.

In response to some of the given questions listed below, I have attempted to categorise the answers. You may notice however, that each answer could quite happily sit under any of the given headings:

1. As a result of the Awareness through Movement (ATM) lessons, did you experience a different sense of yourself as a person/dancer?
Can you explain/describe your findings?
2. As a result of your practice of AIM did you have a different sense of the possibilities of yourself as a mover in everyday life and in the context of improvisation?
Can you explain/describe your findings?
3. As a result of your experience of both ATM and AIM, do you feel your experience of moving has changed?
4. Do you feel you have more understanding of the potential of improvisation as a tool for exploring your movement?
Can you explain/describe your findings?

Student feedback

The first group of responses I have categorised as self-learning, or maybe the term 'selfing' would be appropriate, coined by Elizabeth Beringer as the 'ongoing process of becoming self' (Seminar discussion, Feldenkrais Training programme 2011-15). Beringer was introduced to this idea by Dr Heinz Von Forester in 1977, who explained that the self is not a collection of attributes and should not be considered as a noun, but rather a dynamic process: selfing (Beringer 2001: 36).

- I understood something that changed my way of thinking and dancing completely
- It felt amazing to be discovering how easy movement can be
- The possibilities of movement now seem endless and exciting! I don't see my body parts as they were before, I see the back, side and front of them giving me a more 3-dimensional sense of myself that allows me to move in new ways.
- My dancing in this class is a lot more 'whole'...after one exploration, my body and mind felt so alive, it almost made me cry... I felt so incredible

- I feel more connected
- One thing moves another follows
(personal communications from students, University of Chichester, 2016)

Self-acceptance also seemed to alter as a result of this practice

- I have started to care a bit less about how I look
- I feel like I can be myself without being judged for doing it wrong
- The lessons helped me to accept my body more, so I am not constantly concentrating on my inadequacies
(personal communications from students, University of Chichester, 2016)

And a new sense of knowing seemed to be apparent, self-knowing

- Through this experience I don't feel limited anymore because I know my body has infinite possibilities of moving
- I feel more confident
- All of a sudden I lost all of the anxious feelings I had and I felt like I had found myself
- The first time I felt myself
- I feel as though I can hear my body now
(personal communications from students, University of Chichester, 2016)

Although this is not a large number of participants, I believe that from these responses it is possible to see with this new found sense of awareness, that the potential to move in other ways becomes a choice. Through this practice I could see the students grow week by week, making more connections, learning more about themselves in motion and gradually becoming less fearful of the unknown.

I found it a privilege to observe their dancing as they grew in confidence and trust in the process, sharing the intimate with the expansive, the sensitive and curious with risk taking abandon.

One of the most rewarding moments in the taught sessions occurred when I could hear, see and sense all those in the room breathe, and then find rest and new movement through stillness. This was by far one of the most challenging aspects of the Method I have found for today's dancers. Managing the high speed living of the 21st Century alone can be exhausting, but add to this the workload of a dancer in training, where they often put themselves and their bodies under intense physical stresses, risking fatigue and potential injury through overuse or bad practice. Rarely do they have time to be slow or the confidence to be still. It was fascinating to notice how the majority of students at the beginning of the programme would twitch and wriggle, stretch, flex, and look around, unsure about what they were doing and why they were doing it.

As the weeks accumulated and layers of learning were added to each lesson, anxiety and judgement seemed to dissolve, replaced with curiosity and increasing trust, until the magical moment, approximately half way through an Awareness Through Movement lesson, where stillness pierced the space. Here I would allow the students to linger and ‘marinate’ (Claxton 1997: 177) in that unique learning place where the nervous system settles, becomes quiet and less busy, ‘defences dissolve, walls come down, vulnerability becomes the door to intimacy, to being ourselves, to being real, to being where we are’ (Almaas 2008: 53)

There is something about experiencing and sharing uncertain vulnerability in the dance studio or on stage that I believe allows a dancer to unfurl; softening, discovering and getting closer to the person inside. It can provide a playground to restore the innocence and curiosity of the child back into the adult, the being back into human, the human back into dancing.

A major point of departure for my learning and one which I continue to practice, question and share, is the ability to accept, enjoy and bask in the unknown, to enter a studio or performance place unplanned but ready and receptive to what may arrive. Experiencing a new relationship with time and space, drifting into now opposed to fast falling into the future, allowing the unknown to unfold rather than reaching, grasping, going and getting.

AIM continues to grow as I consider how Feldenkrais lessons can best support the dancer in the early stages of their training, how much to challenge and disrupt when their process is a matter of weeks rather than years. Providing a nurturing environment to enable the students to shift away from curriculum/syllabus led learning to something which may feel less secure and unsettling, but a process that allows the human being to re-establish a new sense of stability and awareness of choice in a world of limitless possibilities.

Following on from the first year of this teaching model, in Sept 2017 I delivered the module again to a new cohort of students, with a few tweaks and adaptations as a result of the previous years’ experience and my understanding of less is more.

In Sept 2018, the first year module continued with the addition of a new programme of lessons designed for the second year students (21 in number) in which I introduce them to the notion of the *Fish Body* to discover the potential freedom of moving the ribs. The Fish Body is a term I first encountered in a workshop with Malcolm Manning⁴ at ImpulsTanz (Vienna 2011) where the potential of moving the rib cage was paralleled with the skeletal structure and movement of the fish. I have explored this notion further through the writing of Dr Keith Harrison, *Your Body, The Fish that Evolved* (2007) and Neil Shubin, *Your Inner Fish* (2008). With this analogy, combined with movement research, I have increased the potential of my dancing, which for the most part involved discovering movement in my ribs and breathing. I have become more aware of how the majority of young dancers are often confined by holding the spine straight and rigid, and how their ribs act somewhat like a cage, trapping moving potential inside. The Awareness Through

⁴ Based in Finland, Malcolm is a somatic movement researcher, educator and performing artist

Movement lessons chosen, alongside studio play time, aim to share some of my learning and invite others to experience the movement potential of *Feeding the Fish*, the proposed title for the paper I hope to disseminate in January 2020.

Giving myself permission to go slowly, be gentle and rest, I aim to infuse, inform and nourish my ongoing artistic practice with breath and new knowing, which will emerge later this year as I encounter the unknown stories of '*this time*' (the sequel to '*sometimes*' referenced in part 1). My pedagogic enquiry will continue to search for language which can soak seamlessly into the dancers' body to enable learning without looking, to bring the sideways to the vertical whilst maintaining contact with the first person. I will be devising the third part of my evolving teaching practice for September 2019 in which I aim to play with particular Awareness Through Movement lessons that can offer third year dance students the opportunity to discover freedom in the neck, shoulders, eyes and tongue, all with the aim to enrich the sensation of themselves in motion, to experience a new movement language, to be a conscious dancer and ultimately to become their own best teacher.

References

- Almaas, A. (2008) *The Unfolding Now*. Boston: Shambhala Publications Inc.
- Beringer, E. (2001) 'Self-Imaging'. *Feldenkrais Journal* 13, 33-38
- Claxton, G. (1997) *Hare Brain Tortoise Mind*. London: Fourth Estate
- Claxton, G (2016) *Intelligence in the Flesh*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press
- Doidge, N. (2015) *The Brain's Way of Healing*. New York: Penguin Books
- Eddy, M. (2009) 'A brief history of somatic practices and dance: historical development of the field of somatic education and its relationship to dance'. *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices* 1 (1), 7. available from
<<https://wellnesscke.net/downloadables/AbriefhistoryofSomaticanddance.pdf>>
- Feldenkrais, M. (2010) *Embodied Wisdom: The Collected Papers of Moshe Feldenkrais*. ed. by Beringer, E. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books
- Feldenkrais, M. (1990) *Awareness Through Movement*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers
- Fitt, S. S. (1996) *Dance Kinesiology*. 2nd edn. New York: Schirmer Books
- Fortin, S., and Long, W. (2000) 'Integrating the Feldenkrais Method within Dance Technique Class'. available from

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265274558_Integrating_the_Feldenkrais_Method_within_Dance_Technique_Class> (30 March 2019)

Hanna, T. (1976) 'The Field of Somatics'. *Somatics: magazine-journal of the bodily arts and sciences* 1 (1), 30-34. available from <<http://somatics.org/library/htl-fieldofsomatics.html>>

Hanna, T. (1980) *The Body of Life*. New York: Knopf

Harrison, K. (2007) *Your Body: The Fish that Evolved*. London: Metro Publishing

Lessinger, C. (1996) 'The Nature of the Feldenkrais Method and its Value to Dancers'. in *Dance Kinesiology*. 2nd edn. ed. by Fitt, S.S. New York: Schirmer Books

Shubin, N. (2008) *Your Inner Fish*. London: Penguin Books

Biography

Detta Howe is a Senior Lecturer in Dance at the University of Chichester, teaching on both BA and MA programmes and co-directing their postgraduate company *mapdance*. In 2013 Detta completed her own Masters which furthered her interest in improvisation and awareness in motion, challenging her working processes and curiosity about the dancing body. She has continued her research pathway both as a soloist and with independent artist Cai Tomos, investigating an embodied understanding of presence in performance, deepening her enquiry through improvisational practices. In August 2015 Detta completed a year Feldenkrais Method training; the philosophy of which continues to inform the development of her understanding of awareness, efficiency and choice and continues to enrich her performance and pedagogical practice.