

# Improving the Ability

## A Theory That Can Be Put Into Practice

An Introduction to the Feldenkrais Model  
of Learning to Learn – Again

Seminar in Vienna, February 2, 2025  
with **Eva Laser**

**Handout**

# Feldenkrais Skolan

## Introduction

The aim of these pages is to provide an overview and orientation of the vocabulary as well as the paradigm within which Feldenkrais learning operates. My experience is that for some students, Feldenkrais is so different from their usual view and way of practicing with themselves, that a few preliminary explanations can facilitate intuitive understanding and thus leave room for the necessary space for learning anew.

Moshe Feldenkrais did not want his students to take notes during lessons but to devote their full attention to taking in and perceiving the suggested explorations. The intention of this material is to arouse curiosity and to be a support before and after the seminar.

In simplistic terms, the biological life process is about either moving towards something that we desire or distancing ourselves from something that we don't want and that may even be dangerous to our survival so that we need to seek protection. In the seriousness of life, the unknown with all its uncertainties has a strong tendency to evoke the reaction of distancing. It therefore remains unknown forever and our degree of adaptation to *what is* remains unnecessarily and counterproductively restricted. But there is also curiosity, the voluntary approach towards the unknown. Feldenkrais lessons seek to create a context where we retreat from the seriousness of life to learn more about knowing ourselves in simple, playful ways just as an infant matures into a life of balance, one leg at a time, and in harmony with its environment.

January 2025, Eva Laser

## Method/ Model/ System/ Pedagogy

Moshe Feldenkrais talked about *my Method*. He also talked about *his Way* or *his Path*. In Sweden where I live and have been teaching Feldenkrais since 1991 we call it *feldenkraispedagogik*. It is also to be seen as a *cybernetic system*, a system of processes that are built from and by feedback loops.

I use the term *model* to draw attention to the fact that the principles and theory underlying the teaching rest on a scientific ground. Over the years, neuroscience has developed, and the early theoretical explanations in the Feldenkrais literature need to be modified. However, the Feldenkrais model still represents in its extensive and developed practice, how a human brain matures into the handling of gravity and a life in action with the ability to continuously refine itself based on its neuroplasticity and to be reshaped based on an orderly and conscious learning.

## The Brain as the Target of Inquiry

The neuroscientist György Buzsáki uses a description and nomenclature that is congruent with the theoretical formulation and use in the Feldenkrais model.

*“The Brain from Inside Out’ advocates that the brain’s fundamental function is to induce actions and predict the consequences of those actions to support the survival and prosperity of the brain’s host. Brains constantly test their hypotheses by producing actions rather than searching for the veridical objective world. Only actions can provide a second opinion about the relevance of the sensory inputs and provide meaning for and interpretation of those inputs. In this inside-out framework, it is not sensations that teach the brain and build up its circuits. Instead, the brain comes with a preconfigured and self-organized dynamics that constrains how it acts and views the world.”*

– György Buzsáki, *The Brain from Inside Out*

### The Distinction between Lower and Upper Levels of Control

In Feldenkrais thinking, we use the term *control* in an understanding from cybernetics. Control is what gives the ability to do something one intends to do. It is therefore worth striving for.

*“The lower level manifests its control and initiates activity in the following areas:*

1. *in hereditary reflexes*
2. *in conditions of danger when quick defensive reactions are evoked*
3. *in early-achieved motor patterns such as antigravity mechanisms*
4. *in emotionally loaded actions*
5. *in states of regression such as occur after trauma or disease*
6. *where there are neurological deficiencies, whether peripheral or central*
7. *where there is pain*

*The upper level of control manifests itself in quite different functions:*

1. *in selecting single strands of information from a muddle of noise*
2. *in exploring, such as the way in which an infant learns about its immediate environment*
3. *in asking questions*
4. *in comparing things, experiences, ideas, possibilities of action*
5. *In playing games, acting, teasing*
6. *in performing refined, intentional actions*
7. *in programming intentional, goal-directed activities*
8. *in a "meta-attitude" toward any activity, namely, the act of "looking at" an ongoing activity*

– Yochanan Rywerant, *Teaching by Handling*

## The Biological Posture

Humans have the most unstable posture of all land-dwelling creatures. Schematically, it can be summarized as standing on one or two legs, upright but not straight. Their gait is achieved by interacting with a supporting leg and a swinging leg. When they run, both legs are sometimes in the air at the same time. When sitting, they use several points of support; two sitting bones, two feet, as well as the design of the sitting surface.

The human ability to rotate around their own axis in a vertical position is unique – compare it to a spinning dancer, a whirling figure skater, a tumbling gymnast or a diver. It is around this rotation that posture is organized. An upright standing posture is the neutral position, the lowest common denominator, that must always be passed in the sequence of events from one action to the next. In the movement from sitting or lying to walking, a standing position is always passed, and with each step there is also a standing position.

*A good biological posture is defined as the readiness to move in six directions without hesitation or preparation.* Simply put, it means standing up and bending or sitting down, moving forward and backward, and finally turning left and right.

In a broader understanding and a holistic perspective, the idea of the biological posture means to *provide and maintain life-sustaining functions*. The drive for *self-preservation* with various innate and acquired protective mechanisms against dangers and the *ability to reproduce* are also included.

Based on this, the concept of *posture* should be understood as something more than being straight or upright, immobile like a statue. In an active posture there is a “How do I do it?” which is the basis for how the individual acts and does, that is, an approach to the environment. Since the environment is constantly changing, a flow or process, posture is a dynamic concept.



Hellenistic life-size marble sculpture portraying a swordsman, created at Ephesus about 100 BC

## The Self-Image

*“The image precedes the action.”*

– Yochanan Rywerant

Based on the predictive functions of the brain, there are internal images or maps that represent our behaviors and actions, inherited as well as learned and forming part of all actions. Before we perform an action, this personal self-image precedes and is the basis for the image of action or achievement. This self-image has a dynamic component that is susceptible to unlearning, relearning and new learning. It can be activated without exerting any muscle activity but simply by imagining the intentional action.

*“We act in accordance with our self-image. I eat, walk, speak, think, see, love, etc. in accordance with how I feel when I perform these actions. This self-image of ours comes to us partly through inheritance, partly through upbringing and partly through self-study [...] Of the three active factors that shape our self-image, only self-study is to some extent in our hands...”*

– Moshe Feldenkrais

The Hebrew word for “self-image” that Moshe Feldenkrais originally used in his textbook can as well be translated as “character” or “personality”. The teaching addresses the improvement or restoration of the self-image being a concept of human entirety as opposed to body-mind dualisms.

### The Four Components of Human Action

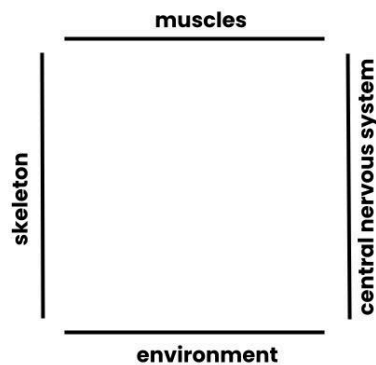


- *“To **think**, for example, a person must be awake and know that he is awake and not dreaming. That is, he must sense and discern his position in relation to the gravitational field. Hence, **movement**, **senses**, and **feeling** are also used in thinking.*
- *To be **angry or happy**, a person must be in a certain position and in some relationship to another person or object. That is, he must **move**, **feel**, and **think**.*
- *To **see, hear, or feel in space**, a person must be interested, startled, and notice what happened. That is, he must **move**, **feel**, **sense**, and **think**.*
- *To **move**, a person must use at least one of their senses, consciously or unconsciously. That is, **to feel**, **to sense**, **to think**.*

*When one of the components is so small that it disappears completely, the action is involved in a real danger to existence. Without movement it is difficult to exist even for a fairly short time. Without senses there is no possibility of existence at all. Without emotion there is no drive to live; the feeling of suffocation pushes to breathe. Without minimal thinking, reflex thinking, even an insect cannot grow old."*

– Moshe Feldenkrais, *Improving the Ability, A Theory that Can be Put into Practice*

## The Four Open Corners - Structure and Function



*"We can define four relevant factors that constitute a human being acting within his or her environment. Each of these requires the special professions that can deal with the respective issue: orthopedists, surgeons, neurologists - psychiatrists, and professionals who deal with the various aspects of the environment - constructors, architects, carpenters, and the like. We can envisage the four factors as the four sides of a quadrangle:*

- a. the skeleton,*
- b. the muscular system,*
- c. the central nervous system,*
- d. the environment.*

*a. The corner 'environment-CNS' symbolizes the interface through which sensory information arrives from the sense-organs to the brain and serves there as the basis for planning suitable actions, either to change parts of the environment, or to adjust to it. The Feldenkrais Method deals with efficiency and with the possible alternatives for those processes as well.*

*b. The corner 'CNS-muscles' denotes the processes that come into play with the intentionality of the action itself: deciding to take the action or choosing a non-habitual way of acting, etc., again, typical considerations of the Method. "*

*c. The corner 'muscles-skeleton' refers to the conversion of muscular effort into movement, and all the considerations of alternative options and efficiency are our concern.*

*d. Finally, the corner 'skeleton-environment' alludes to a twofold interaction: adjustment to the environment, including the tendency to look for support and the various anti-gravitational responses, and the actions by which one does work on parts of the environment, by exchange of energy. Here again, the Method has its own way of clarifying the situation and seeking efficiency."*

– Yochanan Rywerant, *Acquiring the Feldenkrais Profession*

## The Lesson

*“One part of the self explores another part of the self.”*  
– Yochanan Rywerant

### The Floor

During lessons, the floor is used as an active part of the learning process. Lying down is safe; one cannot fall in a lying position and the anti-gravitational muscles can rest or be involved in other functions. But not only the floor, the walls and the ceiling and how the self relates to the spatial is part of the exploration. The self is constantly in a dynamic relationship with its environment and making this communication and connection visible is part of the lesson content.

### The Movement

The tool in a Feldenkrais process is movement, which is the concrete, observable component of action. The self moves exploratively and purposefully in the environment, noting the position of all its parts in relation to each other and to the environment.

### The Inquiry

*“Know what you are doing, and you can do what you want”* - this guiding quote by Moshe Feldenkrais is a call for inquiring and exploring the unknown in order to improve the abilities of survival in the broad sense of the word. Lessons are formed around questions, sometimes stated, sometimes unstated and seeking after clarifications.

### The Non-Habitual

Each lesson should address curiosity and be somehow complicated, unclear, and confusing at first, in order to create a new clarity over the course of the approximately 45-minute process. In order to break ingrained patterns, the non-habitual is addressed and new synapses can be wired, facilitating learning to occur.

### The Learning

We are, in the end, looking for a learning that eventually becomes integrated in a way that we can rely on automatic and unconscious controls of good actions thus being less energy intensive, serving our survival more efficiently than by the attentive control necessary in the earlier stages of the learning process.



## How to Explore

Here are the practical rules that constitute the Feldenkrais way of exploration and learning.

- You acknowledge that learning and life are not the same thing.
- You look for a pleasurable experience.
- You practice slowly.
- You complete easy simple actions.
- You reduce effort. It is easier to feel differences when the effort is small.
- You switch between details and the whole and relate to the room.
- You don't try to do the exploration well, nice and right.
- You don't say at the beginning what the final goal will be.
- You do a little less than you are capable of.
- You don't force yourself to be efficient.

## Eva Laser

I was born in Solna, a suburb of Stockholm, in 1952. After finishing high school, I went to Israel to study physiotherapy at the Wingate Institute. In 1974 I came across Feldenkrais and participated in open classes at Alexander Yanai. I returned to Sweden in 1978 working in Primary care as a physiotherapist and ergonomist. I received a diploma in 1985.

In 1988 I began my studies with Yochanan Rywerant in Stockholm to acquire the Feldenkrais profession. In 1994 I took part in a meta-meta training to learn to understand the requirements for a trainer approach to the elusive model at hand, getting a diploma from YR to train teachers to be. I have chosen to give advanced seminars to teachers with an insufficient theoretical background.

I have run a Feldenkrais practice since 1991 integrating physiotherapy in a rehabilitation setting with the principals of Feldenkrais pedagogy and have been fortunate to engage in long processes with my clients and can see how with time the promises of the theoretical framework materialize. I publish my recorded group lessons (in Swedish) and have built a concept of learning recorded lessons with private lessons in order to get a more flourishing integrated process. I have translated two of Moshe Feldenkrais books to Swedish and find a specialization in a well-integrated theoretical and practical approach to be very rewarding and effective. In 1996 I published an essay in a Swedish book about Feldenkrais and since then I have been writing about the process and the special features of the Feldenkrais model I nae Classical Feldenkrais. I run 3 websites. [www.somatik.se](http://www.somatik.se), [www.svenskaatmpodden.se](http://www.svenskaatmpodden.se) and [www.yochananrywerant.com](http://www.yochananrywerant.com) [in English].

Being partly retired I continue to teach and write about the Feldenkrais path.



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