

HABITS...and one really worth investigating!

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Years ago, when I would ask a class, “What are your habits?” they would say things like smoking, drinking, being late...almost all negative things. But the world has changed; now it’s brushing my teeth, cleaning my house, walking my dog...much more on the positive side. Either way, everyone still has habits and still needs them.

Over time I began to ask another question, “What do you do that is not a habit?” This seems to come as a surprise to most people. At first they struggle to come up with an answer. They do find things, like coming to a Feldenkrais class (assuming it's the first time they are coming). But when they begin to examine this more closely they realize that “how” they come to something for the first time is abundant with all kinds of habits. A rich hierarchy that has developed over a lifetime of practicing doing things over and over again.

As Feldenkrais® practitioners we know all about habits, but there is one aspect of our habits that underlies almost everything we do. The habits of how we have learned how to learn. The idea is a bit tricky. Often when attempting to describe what learning how to learn is we come up with descriptions about learning. But they are not the same thing.

Learning how to learn is about “how” we bring ourselves to learning anything and it is fertile with all kinds of habits that we aren’t aware of. Much of it shows up as internal conversations, telling us what we are good at or not good at. It includes things like “I will be the best one at this” or “I will never learn this” or “everyone else is getting this and I’m not.” It also involves things like where we sit in a room; how near or how far we are to the teacher, taking or not taking notes, even fooling around or behaving during a class.

Understanding how we have learned how to learn is not so easy to investigate. Mostly because the usual contexts we are learning in are too important to us, too dependent on an outcome, on some level of success. There isn’t enough space or time for us to listen to what is underlying what we are doing and how we are doing it when we are in the process of learning something.

As Feldenkrais® practitioners we are fortunate that we are able to create contexts where we, and others can learn about learning how to learn.

In *Awareness Through Movement®* we guide people through a process that is outside of the normal contexts of learning. Most of the time the person doing the lesson

doesn't know where it is going or what it is about. The sensory guidance we provide puts people deeply into their own process. Of course people pay money and want to get something out of the class, but they aren't expected to demonstrate some particular level of ability or skill at the end of the class. Everyone is encouraged to go at their own pace, to get to wherever they can easily and comfortably.

We could say that *Awareness Through Movement*[®] is a context without context. Even though we might be exploring a functional theme, it's not evident, which can allow someone to place their attention on aspects of themselves they normally aren't able to attend to.

For example, 'working hard to achieve the movements' is one habit of learning how to learn we can see in many people. But just this discovery, 'that I am working hard to achieve something' is showing someone something about how one has *learned how to learn*. The same insights can apply to how we rest, how we begin to engage in an action, how we stay with something or give up and many, many other characteristics of ourselves.

Just as our habits have developed over a long period of time, it takes time to uncover different aspects of how we have learned how to learn. We need to be in this *non-context context* many times before we can begin to observe this aspect of ourselves.

Of course playing with habits like how we interlace our fingers and toes is fun and interesting, but we offer much more.

Becoming aware of the habits of how we have *learned how to learn* is a gift people rarely have access to. It is one of the fundamental things we offer. As teachers, if we understand how we create an environment where others can learn something about how they *learn how to learn* we do them a great service; one that can transfer over and be applied to other arenas of learning in their lives. Understanding the habits we bring to learning can make learning easier and bring people more pleasure and appreciation for whatever they engage in.