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Brainlore/Bodylore

For the past four years, I have incorporated Dr. Feldenkrais' work, both theory and praxis, into a junior level university course entitled "Brainlore/Bodylore" at Truman State University, a highly-selective public Liberal Arts institution in the US Midwest. The challenges of integrating the Feldenkrais Method into the academic model is in many ways a microcosm of the challenges of trying to bring FM to wider recognition generally.

Under ordinary circumstances, FM is ill-suited to the traditional academic system: (1) universities are deeply entrenched in maintaining disciplinary boundaries: FM is neither Anatomy/Physiology, nor is it Physics, nor is it clearly any of the pre-professional strands (eg pre-Med, pre-PT, etc), nor is it Sociology, nor Education Theory, nor Philosophy. As anyone even fleetingly familiar with Feldenkrais' writings knows, his work "fits" in all of these spheres—none exclusively. (2) FM is profoundly experiential—unlike the professional training in many other modalities, (e.g. Masgustova Reflex work, some Alexander programs, etc.) no trainings exist as lecture and demonstration in the absence of personal, engaged experience; as such, FM depends upon individual and often practically unverifiable processes. The experience of increasing personal potency through improved mind-body integration by differentiation in FI and ATM alike—the hallmark of the Method—is often solipsistic and unpredictable. In contrast, the traditional academy depends upon the ability to verify measurable outcomes in regular, unambiguous, and testable ways: at its core, traditional university-based education in the last 150 years at least has become profoundly a matter of grades, scores, and competition. Such a system valorizes an external measure of achievement that is the very opposite of the nuanced individual maturation that Feldenkrais advocated.

"Brainlore/Bodylore" is able to sidestep the otherwise insurmountable challenges of trying to "teach" FM within these grade-driven confines. As an interdisciplinary seminar, it is housed outside any one discipline, and Truman State's institutional commitment to interdisciplinarity has meant that the usual suspicion and "turf-protection" that such a course might otherwise meet does not (mostly) exist. Further, by framing much of Feldenkrais' discoveries against the currently evolving neuroscience of brain plasticity (which Feldenkrais had hypothesized at a time when brain imaging was in its infancy), I reassure students about the "legitimacy" of the subject. As part of a grade-driven curriculum, however, this course still has to accommodate the second challenge to bringing FM to the academy: external evaluation and assessment. To try to evaluate the degree to which a student in an ATM is bringing her attention to bear on fine

sensorimotor experience would be a futile exercise. Moreover, reference to external “authority” would undermine the Method’s goals of developing personal, internal attention. In order to avoid this fundamental problem and still measure student achievement fairly, my students are asked to journal extensively about their ATM experiences. These journal entries are graded on the basis of clear criteria (clarity of written expression, detail of summary of the lesson, and logic of connection to Feldenkrais’ principles from their class readings); this satisfies the necessity for transparent external assessment. Significantly, these students come to deeper understanding of their own experience through this enforced narrative activity of personal reflection and revision in light of their readings (e.g. of *The Elusive Obvious*, *The Potent Self*, etc.).

The larger problems of bringing Feldenkrais’ work to a wider audience are reflected in this course experience. We live in a world in which information is only valued if it comes in a recognized form: we do not trust ourselves to form our own opinions, based upon our experiences, but rather depend upon some authority to tell us what is true and real. A physician tells us we have “poor posture,” and we believe him without asking what this really means. FM does not come packaged in clear trappings of recognizable authority: it is rarely covered by health insurers, it is seldom prescribed by a physician. People hear about it from others who have experienced the transformative potential of the work; yet it is all too easy to dismiss such reports as the enthusiasm of a convert. In such a context, it is up to us who know the value of the work first hand to find ways to help people to undo the training of a lifetime of submission to authority and help them find a space where they can begin to “listen” to their own, authentic inner experience. Finding that fertile soil is the challenge for the Feldenkrais community—teachers and students alike.