

Engaging Curiosity and ‘Living in The Questions’ – an article to accompany the
‘Transitions Matter’ ATM lesson recording

As a newly qualified practitioner, in 2005, I started work with a new client who, after about her 3rd Functional Integration lesson wrote, thanking me, and she included the poem by this name, which is by Rainer Maria Rilke. The last few lines have become etched on my heart and in my mind - and I was reminded of them when thinking about this quality of our human nature, Curiosity, and preparing the recording that accompanies this article, for 2023 National Feldenkrais Awareness Week:

*“So – try to live the questions like closed rooms
And like books in a strange language.
You have to live it all!
If you live the questions
maybe you will live
more slowly
without noticing
that one strange day
You will live in the answer”*

What do you think it is to be curious?

Perhaps you will pause for a moment and notice your response.

And when you are ready, read on:

When I was studying, I learned that when Dr Feldenkrais was developing his Method, and was teaching his students, he brought spheres of understanding to his work that were less than usual. He understood how we humans really learn. And this is where the human quality of Curiosity comes in.

When I am teaching Awareness Through Movement lessons - the generic name for all verbally guided Feldenkrais lessons - which are about learning organically - I have noticed that one of the most common concerns I hear from my students is “Am I doing it right?” Although I’d say this is quite a forgivable response, since the lessons often ask for quite unusual movements, I notice that they ask because they often carry an assumption that there is something to achieve, a ‘right way’ to do it -whatever it is that day. It is understandable because most of us spent our formative years in an educational environment doing academic learning which does tend to involve learning something that one has to try and get right – and, there is the element of it being helpful to please the teacher.

In the context of Awareness Through Movement however, thinking like this misses the point.

Dr Feldenkrais’ wife was a Paediatrician. He learned about children and how children learn. As you, reader, probably know, and may remember in yourself, children are by nature curious little beings, who will stick their fingers into everything – and then their fingers into their mouths after sticking them into everything – to make discoveries about the world they newly find themselves in. They explore their own bodies too. They also figure out how to become a grown-up, meaning how to roll over, get up, stand, walk, run – feed themselves, protect themselves, function with success and meaning in the world, and, reproduce to

secure the continuity of the species. It is a process that probably couldn't even happen without the innate childlike quality of Curiosity.

Learning by trial and error, exploring, and naturally using the felt sense. Curiosity inspires engaging with and discovering things about the environment, and the movements and abilities of the body. It encourages wanting and desire, necessary qualities for betterment and growth. Curiosity relies on direct experience, presence, now-ness, the intimacy of the felt sense. Curiosity has an inherent innocence, or a 'not-already-knowing' quality. The qualities of expansiveness and openness that accompany rediscovering curiosity usually feel quite good. However, one of the biggest obstacles to Curiosity is believing that we already know.

So going to a Feldenkrais class and doing Awareness Through Movement is an invitation to tune in to your felt sense and to listen to your internal experience while you allow yourself to become curious, and explore the various movements suggested by your teacher. Did you catch those words I used there, "explore" and "suggested"?

What is being offered is a 'movement experiment' – something to try out, and the 'achievement' is within the experience itself. The journey is the goal.

Rather than the usual external focus, your attention is directed inwards, towards your physical experience as you follow the suggested movements you are verbally guided into - and the invitation is to follow what comes easily and enjoyably or pleurably, and to notice your limits and keep the exploration within your comfort zone. That is the sure-fired way to genuine and lasting improvement in capabilities.

The lesson I chose is about the simple everyday transitional movement of rolling from back to side, which I hope will provide a suitable framework or structure within which you can explore your relationship to curiosity. I hope you will enjoy it and that what I have written might provide some useful contextualization.

And, Here is the whole Rilke poem I've quoted from above:

*"You have to let all things their own way
in silent development without disturbance.
It comes from the deep part in you.
Nothing can push it or press.
Everything must come to its own fullness
And then birth.
Mature like a tree
who doesn't press his juice
who stands in trust
in the storms of the Springtime
without fear that summer couldn't come
The summer will come to the patient humans
who are living as if
eternity lay in front of
them – very calm, free and wide.
You have to have patience
Because there are things you haven't solved in your heart.*

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And like books in a strange language.
You have to live it all!
If you live the questions
maybe you will live
more slowly
without noticing
that one strange day
You will live in the answer.
Rainer Maria Rilke –*

With Best Wishes,

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