

## Learning to Learn

By Gisela Moellmann, PhD, GCFP

I understand the absence of visual input in teaching *Awareness Through Movement*<sup>®</sup> lessons as being on the same level with doing movements crucial for efficient walking while lying on the floor. That is: To make the learning experience as far removed from habitual behavior as possible. Having to interpret instructions that come exclusively through the auditory system opens learning channels different from those coming through the visual system and again different from those coming through touch or the kinesthetic sense. Our learning years are so dominated by external visual images that other sensing systems go into hibernation and cause us to suffer from habitual sensorimotor amnesia. This concept is applicable also to the Suzuki Method of instrumental music education, which Shinichi Suzuki has named not Music- but Talent Education. Learning to play a musical instrument is the tool. No note reading until the sense of hearing and the kinesthetic sense of playing the instrument by anticipated sound have become second nature. These children develop a phenomenal memory and unflinching security in playing and performing. They become excellent students in school.

It's a matter of offering choices other than the usual. In the book *The Elusive Obvious*, Moshé Feldenkrais writes: "Processes go well if there are many ways to influence them. We need more ways to do what we want than the one we know even if it is a good one in itself." He repeatedly asserted that the movements per se were immaterial, -he even used the word 'idiotic', - that his teaching went far beyond movement. Of course, his brilliant movement lessons can't hide the thought, intelligence, and knowledge that went into them and the importance he gave to his thousands of integrative movement sequences, which are said to be as effective when done in the imagination as when executed on the mat.

My sister is a violinist, a graduate of the Yale School of Music. She has immersed herself in the *Feldenkrais Method*<sup>®</sup> for two decades and marvels at the fact that learning to do all those movements, which overtly have nothing to do with violin playing, has given her the skills to automatically use new fingerings and new ways of drawing the bow in order to produce the sounds she internally hears. For my six-year old granddaughter, her first *Awareness Through Movement* lesson was one of imagining her body partially filled with dried beans that gradually shifted position as she slowly turned onto her side. This half-hour lesson

caused instantaneous integration of her habit to sound out words letter-by-letter, into fluid reading of any text she laid eyes on, including words she didn't know. This is integration, the integration of dormant skills waiting to be integrated into function.

On the light-hearted side, there are simply delicious physical after-effects from *Feldenkrais*® lessons, like the experience of a mid-octagenarian who phoned me after getting home: "Mrs. Moellmann," she shouted in excitement, "when I got into the car after your lesson, I was looking OVER my steering wheel!"

The more intricate a movement, the more we learn to learn and to outfit ourselves with choices within action, including choices in movement. We learn to be ready to find and choose among many, many choices, on the spot, at the moment of need or opportunity.

This route of learning, referred to by Moshe Feldenkrais as organic, has its most outstanding manifestation in the behavior of babies and toddlers (who devise 'Feldenkrais' lessons on their very own!) and in the treatment of nervous system disorders, in the latter instance with the help of precisely directed touch that leads to awareness and eases spasticity while simultaneously allowing spontaneous integration of intention into function.