

Feldenkrais for Children

is a way of helping Special Needs Children learn, grow and develop.

The Jeremy Krauss Approach

from Jeremy Krauss

I was first exposed to working with children through Dr. Feldenkrais. This was during the time I spent with him at his home in Tel-Aviv after the 3rd year of my training in Amherst in 1982. At that time there were children coming to get lessons from him. Two of the children were Elizabeth and Hadar - (who can be seen on the IFF video's) who were coming to see him regularly. I many times had discussions with him about the children, the parents and what he did in the lessons after the families had left. Dr. Feldenkrais as with everything had a very broad view that encompassed all aspects of the child and his/her surroundings.

Since that time I have always worked with all kinds of children as part of my practice. I never considered what I did with children and understood about children and development special or unusual. I considered it very normal in the context of the Feldenkrais Method that I practiced and taught. A few years ago I had a number of experiences with people that changed my perspective regarding this. This in turn changed my entire perspective on trainings in general and education regarding child development and special needs children in particular. I began to teach advanced trainings for practitioners around the topic of children with special needs. During these advanced trainings I discovered rather quickly that a large majority of practitioners do not have a good grasp and an in depth understanding of the developmental process of the child. Without this understanding one cannot really be effective in working with special needs children applying the Feldenkrais Method.

The training programs as they are now do not go in depth into any one specific direction. They are basic trainings in the Feldenkrais Method. They educate people in an overarching way in the Feldenkrais Method. This is done by learning to sense, feel and understand themselves in a deeper way than they were before and train them to be beginning practitioners in ATM and the basic practice of Functional Integration. This is not something small and is in itself a great accomplishment.

During the process of these advanced trainings I had many discussions with my students and practitioners. It became clear to me that there was a great need to develop a training program to teach practitioners in a deep and fundamental way the developmental process of the child in all its aspects. There was no-one who developed or was teaching training programs specifically for learning to work with Special needs Children in Europe. There are an extraordinary amount of special needs children. The Feldenkrais Method has a tremendous amount to offer in this domain if practitioners are trained and educated properly in how to apply the method to work specifically with special needs children.

I decided I would dedicate myself to this and two years ago I started to develop the training program and during the past year 2012 I started. I wanted it to be a program that in a set period of time practitioners



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could learn the skills and understanding needed so they could go out from the program work and directly apply what they learned in the training.

The purpose of my training is to educate practitioners to work specifically with special needs children. Learning this and about development has many aspects. Neurological, biomechanical, emotional, cognitive, social, environmental and others. All of the aspects are very important. I have found that for Feldenkrais practitioners starting with an in depth work on knowing the elements of the developmental movements is quintessential. I start with this bio mechanical aspect first.

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This deals with an in depth look and experience with the developmental aspects of movement. The developmental aspects of movement for me means understanding what are the basic and fundamental elements of movement during each phase of the primary stages of growth in years one and two. These are specific elements which are connected and depend one on the other for further growth and complexity. One needs to learn in various contexts how to recognize the specifics of these elements and be able to observe how they emerge in each growth phase. The ability to know what to look for, how to recognize and describe it, to know the importance of it and what to do with it practically in a functional way facilitates the practitioners skill in fostering a step forward for a special needs child. In the training program I have developed this is expedited through an emphasis on observation, description, recognition, sensing, moving and feeling of the primary and secondary elements of the different phases of development. There is a learning comprehension how to single out small elements from a complex process of a moving child. With each of these elements one learns how to distinguish and replicate the movement and its kinaesthetic sensation as well as the movement effects that it evokes in oneself. Sensing and moving in these fundamental and more complex sequences of the developmental movement processes gives the practitioner an expanded field of ability to join in an intersubjective way with a special needs child. I have found that if practitioners can single out the sensations of specific details of movement they become much clearer in their capacities to clarify aspects of the complex needs of a child. How to construct and also deconstruct developmental patterns of movement gives the practitioner greater confidence in his/her abilities to manage interactions with a special needs child. Interactions and interplay with a special needs child goes far beyond the elements of only movement comprehension. Yet what distinguishes our work is that we work through the medium of movement. This must be the foundation on which the practitioner must build on. With this confidence in the expanded observational, descriptive, sensory and movement skills the practitioner can move forward to join into the realm of the child's inner world. Flow and response with positive interaction exceeds any formalized construction of educational material. It gives a greater access to right brain to right brain communication. This promotes a freedom and strenght to rely on ones own capacities to help support a special needs child take a step forward in its growth and development.

After the developmental aspects of movement there is a focus on the emotional development. My own work with children has very much has been affected by the work of Dr. Allan Schore. He is one of the current pioneers in the field of Regulation Theory and Interpersonal Neurobiology. This work has its basis in Attachment theory of John Bowlby. In my approach to special needs children a clear understanding of the process of attachment and regulation is very important and this brought into the education in practical ways. The understanding of attachment and regulation entails strongly emphasizing the importance of positive affective interrelation with the child you are working with the child as the basis of connection and interaction. It also means that each of us needs to be aware of, understand and accept our own attachment process and how our relationship to this part of ourselves immediately affects interactions we have with the child we are working with. To 'see' the child as he/she is.

To understand in oneself that the child in front of you has a unique genetic endowment but also that the interaction of this genetic endowment with the relationships in the infant's environment has a large impact on the development of the 'self' of the child. To learn to become aware of, attentive and listen to all the 'non-verbal' communications that take place in the intersubjective domain. A practitioner needs to be clear that there is a great importance in the development of the functions of the non-verbal right brain for the special needs child no matter what his/her difficulty may be. One's ability to have broad parameters of observation, communication, feeling and interaction with oneself and together with the special needs child so as to foster a better ability of the child to regulate more parts of its own internal world and relations to the outside world.



The Family constellation, organization and emotional attitudes are part and parcel of any child's development and growth. This is also very true with a special needs child as the demands and adaptation on all members of the family are great. It is necessary for a practitioner to learn how to observe and become aware and attentive to the interactions and organization of the child's family members (i.e. parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, caretakers) and their emotional environment. One must learn to learn how to interact with a special needs child's family members as well as the family organization that the child lives inside of.

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A good example can be seen in the photo of We see two sisters, a father and myself. What can be seen in particular in the photo is how all four of us who are interacting are completely and totally immersed in the positive affect of the situation. The two sisters are very attentive in their interacting with me with tremendous joy and pleasure while the Father is happily participating and observing the wonder of the situation as it emerges and unfolds in front of him. The two sisters are focused on me and I on them while with my left hand I have contact with the older sister's arm to direct the learning how to rock forward and back and my right hand has the younger sister's left arm to help sense the rhythm and direction of movement without losing balance.

The youngest child was brought to me because of difficulty in the use of her legs and walking. She wears very hard braces on her legs which fixate her ankles and knees. At first the child was very reluctant to interact or to be touched. It was noticeable how she clung to her older sister and looked to her for emotional cues while her Father sat somewhat at a distance despite my encouragement to stay near.

Already at a young age the older sister had taken on a role of caregiving, protecting and comforting. This was with a great concern and attention to her younger sibling. I could see and feel how she was aware of the needs of her sister and of the situation. She was attuned to her younger sister and quickly attuned herself also to me. While observing the two sisters and the reluctance of the younger one I started to relate directly to the older sister. I could see in her eyes the understanding that if she became involved with me her younger sister would soon come along. And so it was. Within a few minutes the younger sister joined. Everything I did with the older sister the younger copied. The lesson progressed until I was easily moving and touching both of them in very functional ways to help the younger child improve the use of herself.

Many developmental movement explorations and games followed with both. The younger became enraptured with the positive feelings, and sensations of the movements. She called to her Father to join in with us. He did so and the lesson became a complete and wholesome family interaction embedded with a very positive learning experience. I never had any hesitancy to follow the spontaneity of the situation as it unfolded. At the same time I clearly and intentionally directed in specific functional ways the situation for the child.

My priority being the needs of the youngest child and the improvement of her functioning and abilities. In this situation as with many others the way to arrive at this is through the involvement in a very positive manner the entire organization of the family. Each family situation and constellation is very different and one must learn to observe the entirety of the family and what is possible for all of them. In the one year training program I teach also about working with the family constellation. This is done through example, pointed observation and discussion.

The training is divided into 4 segments over a one year period of time. Each segment is 8 days long. During the segments and in the times between the segments I make use not only of the traditional ways of teaching but of the many different mediums that are available today technologically. This is for in class study as well as use of the different possibilities of the internet in between segments to help foster and solidify the learning and understanding of the students.

Normal developing children as well as special needs are brought into the training to be observed. Video sequences and still photos in various forms showing different kinds of children are used in a variety of ways to help develop the skills of observation, description and understanding. They are also used to help analyze lessons that are given to the children. After a lesson is given to a child sections of the lesson are reviewed and gone over slowly with explanations of the ideas, sequences, patterns and singular movements which the child goes through and learns. Elements of handling skills are picked out in slow motion video to show, clarify and demonstrate how to use one's hands and work with moving children of different stages and ages with various kinds of difficulties. Screen casts of different types are used in between segments for learning and review. Atm's I have constructed in new ways are done daily. These Atm's fit specifically to the developmental theme or phase of development that is being studied at the time. There are also Atm's given online in between the segments. There is FI practice in various ways with children and adults related to the various phases and stages of development. Children move much more than adults in FI and because of this there is a need to learn to give FI with another while they are moving and you moving with them. This demands a variety of ways to teach the FI. Classical ways of FI are taught as well. There is hands on mentoring together with me and a special needs child. All the FI is videoed and made available online for review and study. Books and articles and suggested and used are used to enrich, bolster and deepen the learning experience both in class, after class and in between the segments. The training takes place in the beautiful country side on the Tegernsee lake where I live with my family.