

From: Yvan Joly, 105011,2207
Date: Merc 07 juil 1999 , 15:42
FELDYFORUM

DEFINITIONS OF SOMATICS, SOMATIC EDUCATION and the FM of SE.

1) The overall domain of somatic systems is a vary vaguely defined domain. I personally distinguish the overall domain of Somatics, or somatic approaches from the specific domain of somatic education. The overall domain may include bioenergetics, yoga, biofeedback, body-oriented psychotherapies, martial arts, relaxation techniques and many many other approaches, including the domain which I personally have defined more precisely that is called somatic education and that I will present in the next paragraph. The overall domain of somatics or somatic systems if you like, includes potentially all the methods that consider the living body (the soma, as defined by Thomas Hanna, "The living body as experienced from within") as a locus and potential access for a whole person's experience, whether intellectual, emotional, sensorial and even spiritual. Through the movement of the body, the process of attention or awareness, the expression of the living body, with a variety of bodily based processes, somatic systems intend to experience, teach, treat, train or heal. Some methods have a clear medical though alternative model, often a therapeutic intention, others seem more educational, if not spiritual in intent. Some somatic systems are oriented towards emotional expression and emotional release, some others are more traditional from oriental cultures and philosophies, perhaps meditational or energetic; a few are of more recent scientific background. All consider that one can reach a whole person through their bodily experience and virtually through any channel.

2) Within somatic systems, a subset of methods share an educational perspective. I call these methods 'somatic education' methods. Somatic education is the disciplinary field of methods that concern themselves with:

the learning of awareness of the living body (the soma) through movement in space.

I have written numerous articles on this topic (many in French, unfortunately for English only readers). I have also given many lectures too on that topic (one of them at an annual conference of the Feldenkrais Guild, 2 or 3 years ago, and the tape is available through the guild office.)

The definition of somatic education addresses:

Body-Movement: refers to the physical principles applying to the displacement and posture of the human body in the field of gravity. This may include, anatomy, physiology, kinesiology, biomechanics, ergonomy, from a third person perspective and most of all from an experiential phenomenological perspective.

Awareness: refers to the ability of living systems to self-regulate their behaviour, according to the feedback that they produce and monitor in their own action. This is done by paying attention to sensations, feelings and thoughts as experienced through movement, in action.

Learning: refers to the ability of such living systems to develop, improve and mature in their ability to self-regulate. Somatic education methods bring concrete approaches to facilitate

somatic learning. And they may use touch and/or verbalization to convey their teaching. The accent on learning is an important distinction when relating to other methods in the broader somatic domain where the therapeutic aspects may be more foreground, whether that is in "physical-therapies" or "psycho-therapies", where the interventions of the practitioners are oriented towards the difficulty, towards the understanding of the symptoms and their causes and towards the relieving and healing of traumas and wounds. Though Somatic Education methods may have healing benefits, it is neither our primary concern nor our field of competence as such. Also in this educational stance, we differentiate ourselves from most of the medical, psychological and pathological models. This seems important strategically and politically to all the representatives of the different methods involved in "Le Regroupement".

The environment: refers to the necessity of understanding and approaching the body in its space i.e. the person in its context, where there are other human beings, other species and in a continuity with the environment. Our interest is not limited to self-awareness by going deep inside to stay there. We also do not want to grow an awareness that is limited to the surface of the skin. Yes, epistemologically Somatic Education focuses on the embodiment of our lives but as a basis for perception and action in the world.

3) The Feldenkrais method is a method of somatic education. In other words, as defined earlier, it's a method to: learn awareness of the movement of the living body (the soma) moving in its environment. Some of the distinctive characteristics of the Feldenkrais learning system compared to other methods of somatic education are:

- The implicit model of the FM includes the optimization of the use of the skeleton in the field of the gravity, the proportional distribution of work in the joints, the uniform distribution of muscle tone and the growth of the self-regulation possibilities of the nervous system.

- The pedagogy offers a 'guided discovery' process rather than a teaching of 'correct' movements: students have to rely on their own experience to identify their patterns of movement and improve both the efficiency and quality of their movements. Teachers don't demonstrate, but rather create learning situations, and students have to discover through their own guided research, the variations and options that serve better their comfort and efficiency. The movements proposals for that guided research process are often unhabitual movements, and allow an identification of one's patterns and the discovery of new options.

- The FM has both an individual hands-on modality and a group, verbally guided modality, each modality complementing and reflecting the other. It's also easy to use audio or video materials at home for personal use.

- The FM uses a functional integration approach i.e. movements are considered from the point of view of the whole somatic system acting in the world. Body parts are not studied or approached isolated from the whole self. Actually, it's the proportional distribution through the whole self that is intended.

- The FM has applications in virtually all fields of human interest. It has very useful contributions to make in the Arts, in sports and training, in education, also in health, where therapeutic benefits can come from the educational process.

-The FM is finally a very opened method. It includes a set of values, principles, practices and empirical resources for the development of human potential. People who learn the FM also learn to: slow down, feel and sense more clearly the way of doing, not force the issues, detach the process from the result, respect their limits, treat themselves gently and intelligently, sustain a learning project through time and difficulty etc.

Voilà, I hope that this is helpful to our community and to the identification of:
The Feldenkrais Method of Somatic Education

Sincerely
Yvan Joly.