

International Symposium on the Science of Touch (ISST-2004)
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
Saturday May 15, 2PM to 3:30PM

Title of the workshop: Touching, for Learning Body Awareness

Among the various intentions and methods of touch, we will distinguish here a form that we will call: “*somatic-learning*”. This form of touch allows a person to learn how to be aware of one’s own body movement through space. The intent of such a form of touch is NOT to correct a person, nor to act “on” them or on their pathology. Instead, the intent of “*somatic-learning*” touch is to inform a person about their own doing, and to suggest variations in their behavior.

A first approach to using touch for “somatic learning” we will call: “**somatic-reflection**”. With the contact of his hands, the practitioner reflects, mirrors to the student their own sensations, their own organization, muscle tone, posture, breathing patterns, movement patterns. The person can thus develop a greater feeling of what happens (A. Damasio). This reflective touch can facilitate one’s awareness at the surface of the skin, in the soft tissues, in the skeleton and also in the whole perception of oneself as a systemic unit.

Secondly, “*somatic-learning*” touch becomes a “**somatic conversation**”. The practitioner now offers movement options, variations in sensation. Here again, the priority is to make sure that all the proposals are accompanied by the student’s own attention and presence, giving them a chance to feel what happens and to choose one’s behavior rather than being “done to”. The issue is not to act upon a body but to propose awareness and variations with the acquiescence of the person.

This bi-modal approach to “*somatic-learning*” touch, first through reflection then through conversation is at the heart of the disciplinary field of somatic education. Within somatic education, we find a variety of methods that share a common objective: *learning the process of body awareness through movement in space*. To name just a few of these methods better known in Quebec:

- the Feldenkrais Method
- the Alexander Technique
- “l’anti-gymnastique”
- “l’approche globale et la méthode de libération des cuirasses”
- Gerda Alexander Eutony
- “la gymnastique holistique”
- Body-Mind Centering
- Laban Movement Analysis.

In somatic education, whether guided by words or by touch, the intent is to develop one’s kinesthetic and proprioceptive skills. Therapeutic benefits and performance enhancement emerge in that context of learning rather than through some intervention to correct oneself or to treat a form of pathology.

The use of touch for “*somatic-learning*” requires a very special preparation for the practitioner to be first and foremost present to oneself, so that listening and feeling the other person can be done on a background of neutrality, with detachment from the results but also with a good knowledge in one’s experience of anatomical possibilities and optimal physiological options. We will call state of being and doing: “**somatic empathy**”.

In this workshop, participants will:

1-delineate the disciplinary field of somatic education and it’s objective of learning the process of awareness of the body through movement in space, whether through touch or words.

2-experience both from the giving and receiving end, “*somatic-learning*” touch, and the specific modalities of reflection and conversation as emerging from “ somatic empathy”.

3-determine how touch for “*somatic-learning*” can be useful in the context of various forms and intentions of touch.

Biographical note:

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YVAN JOLY is a registered Psychologist, Practitioner-Trainer and Educational Director of Feldenkrais Professional Training programs. In the last 20 years, he has trained practitioners of the Feldenkrais Method ® in 15 countries over four continents. He has applied his expertise in body awareness to issues in the domains of health, sports, the Arts and education. Mr. Joly has received his Master in Psychology in 1973, from the Université de Montréal, with a specialty in cognitive science. He is certified by the *Feldenkrais Guild of North America* as practitioner-teacher since 1983 and as trainer since 1995. Mr Joly was the co-founder and first president of the Quebec Regrouping for Somatic Education. He is one of the world leaders in the establishment of the field of somatic education. He founded in 1992, the Feldenkrais Institute of Somatic Education. He is a lecturer at the Dance Department of L’Université du Québec à Montréal in a program called: *Diplôme d’études supérieures en éducation somatique*. Mr. Joly has written many articles, both for the community of somatic educators and for the public.