

Abstract

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE FELDENKRAIS METHOD

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This research studied the lived experience of the Feldenkrais Method of somatic education using a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach. There has been little qualitative or phenomenological research into this practice. This study addressed that lack. The potential contributions of somatics practices to integrative healthcare have also not been extensively explored.

The hermeneutic-phenomenological approach used was congruent with the experiential nature of learning fostered by Feldenkrais Method. It provided tools for interpretation of the description of bodily experience and for integrating researcher reflexivity. Eight informants from 45 to 85 years of age, with between two and 30+ years of experience as students of Feldenkrais Method were interviewed. Their in-depth experience was drawn upon in their verbal descriptions. Initial interviews included a stimulated recall exercise in which each informant did a Feldenkrais Awareness Through Movement lesson from a recording. Follow-up interviews were undertaken. Iterative textual analysis was used to develop individual and common themes.

Common meta-themes uncovered by the study were: (a) learning how to develop awareness and change bodily experience through movement, (b) improvements in bodily experience in and through movement, (c) developing and making use of increased bodily awareness, (d) changing perceptions of the body-and-mind, (e) an experience of calming, and (f) a shift in ways of being and feelings of well-being. The structure of the experience which emerged was of *the Feldenkrais Method as a process of self-caring*. Constituents of this experience were (a) coming to the Feldenkrais Method, (b) experiencing improvement, (c) feeling good, (d) discovering how to take care, (e) a sense of I can, and (f) doing it: continuing practice in life.

This study contributes to knowledge of the professional fields of Feldenkrais Method, somatics practices, and mind–body medicine. It suggests that further research would be valuable, including using phenomenological and micro-phenomenological methods, self-report measures (e.g. of pain, functional improvement, mindfulness, self-compassion, self-efficacy or coherence), and mixed measures.

This study supports the value of movement-based bodily self-awareness practices for pain and stress reduction, improved movement and self-image, greater self-efficacy in health, and for the development of well-being, including the value of this practice in integrative healthcare.