

Interviewee: Barbara McCrea (BM) Feldenkrais Technique Practitioner

Interviewer: Nicola Visser (NV)

Topic: On the understanding of eyes, seeing and looking with reference to Barbara's practice in Feldenkrais.

'Everything is Interesting'

Barbara McCrea: I will tell you a little of the eyes and how I use it in my work
When we are very young and how we learn to see what is important
There is not a differentiation when young about what is important or not important - to look at everything is interesting. I feel sorry for babies with crude mobiles thrust on them. Everything is interesting.

Certainly observing Gabriel growing up - everything was interesting. A lightbulb or a toy or something outside he didn't know what he was supposed to find interesting or not. That changes as people's perceptions are steered in certain ways and they stop looking at one thing or another.

Perception is really interesting. I learnt a lot from a boyfriend who was a landscape painter. He never minded waiting as he would just look around at lights and shapes. I found it fascinating how he would see light, shape, colour and that opened my eyes to how we can all be seeing different things. After him, a boyfriend who was an engineer would notice pipes and lighting fixtures and technical aspects - how a room would be wired - and he would find that interesting.

I have a reputation of botanising, for having sharp eyes and I find it interesting how I hunt down a plant. So I sometimes let myself open my vision out (arms out sideways). I am the one who can spot something. I can see it easily. That whole topic about perception and how we see and express what we see - I notice it because I am short sighted and was from a young age. From age eleven I cut out a lot of what I could see. My head would focus forward and I wasn't lively and looking out of windows or good at sport. Where it's not just the ball you are kicking, but where everyone is on the field plus the goalpost and so you open up the vision in particular ways. I was good at studying. Some professional footballers do eye exercises to train visual capacities to sense the whole but also their part in it. There are very few elite sports people wearing glasses who achieve high level in any kind of sport. Healthy eyes go with healthy movements.

I was self conscious in early adolescence - so when in Port Alfred on holiday.. a walk from sunbathing towel to the sea - I would be looked at, as that is what people do. I hated that. I

felt awkward and didn't feel I had any prettiness. What helped me was that my glasses were not on and I did not have to be aware of viewers and that helped me make that walk down to the beach painless. I have dabbled in Contemplative Dance Practice with Katy but the thought of people looking at me moving is pretty horrible and it comes with a feeling of being judged. And well people aren't automatically judging - and you are training to be a witness - but people can't help it: she's a bit saggy today - or she looks a bit down, and you immediately put a thought in your mind about that person. It would be extraordinary not to. So you might want to have your eyes closed to feel how you might want to straighten yourself up. It would be advanced to open your eyes and take in what is coming to you. That would be an amazing practice for someone who doesn't like being looked at.

Ja, so then the other thing I realised about being short sighted and glasses and being shy is that it creates a rigidity in the neck. Very few people with eye problems who don't have a stiff neck. You lose mobility of head, neck and body with changes in eyes. Especially the neck. So in Feldenkrais Technique some of those exercises of uncoupling. You move where your eyes are taking you - this is neurological wiring - when you are *uncoupling* you are doing a major shift into the nervous system and it feels odd and uncomfortable and not very pleasant to do. However there is a big repertoire of eye exercises in Feldenkrais Technique and they can be very useful for freeing up the neck. The eyes and tightness of neck are absolutely there if you stare, concentrate or feel angry alarmed or those feelings those suboccipital muscles will stiffen.

Group exercises like one lying down and the partner slowly roll their head from side to side. Then in the middle ask them to feel a real REAL sense of rage - incensed. - then you see that you CAN NOT move that person's head. There is a rigidity in those emotions that are astonishing when you feel what actually happens. If you feel those emotions a lot of time rage anger etc then there is a stiff neck.

Nicola Visser: Fear too?

BM: Yes, definitely and look at it language wise we say 'rigid with fear' 'rigid with terror'I know times when I have been so cross that my body is so stiff - it is that kind of thing it is not a nice wide armed expression in a self help group - it is a tightening of note.

So then I take people into being in a happy place and immediately the head and neck will free up. Amazing what our eyes do.

NV: I remember the uncoupling exercises you did with me - they were so surprising and subtle yet strong

BM: Those uncoupling things can help break the rigidity in the neck - roll the head one way and the eyes go the opposite way. I showed it once to a very good physio and she said she would use it with all her neck patients and it worked much faster.

It is a *neurological trick* but it does work. Let legs sway from side to side and take eyes with or opposite to the knees. You can do lots of oppositional movements with the head and the rest of the body and eyes, head and rest of the body.

NV: Does Feldenkrais Technique work with eyes closed as well?

BM: When you want to access a deep state you automatically close your eyes. I think it's just hard to—unless you can leave your eyes very restful and leave them open - But i think so. One to one I invite people to close their eyes if they are watchful and alert. I tell them close eyes and their whole system relaxes.

Alexander Technique encourages eyes open and they don't want people too drowsy. They want people to connect to the outside - connecting is important. In Feldenkrais Technique the eyes also do that - really connecting the person to the space around —near or far. Sometimes I get people to look at different things - I am looking at a basket now - eyes to look and follow around it.

Sometimes I get people to do what I do in horse riding. It is to develop what they call *Soft Eyes*. If you have soft eyes and you open your peripheral vision, your body will be less tense. In many many disciplines developing soft eyes is important and that becomes more difficult to access as we are looking at text and information and using our eyes in those ways. It is important to look out and at horizons and be a bit dreamy and access those states. It is something I teach and encourage. The contrast between focused eyes and the other way. Like looking at a train timetable -for the facts. You can't look at the timetable and go 'oh that's nice' and let the images come to you. It's a very different look- the look at the timetable and the look that is allowing things to come. The image I use is the images or the light goes to the back of my head And then I am perceiving or apprehending something rather than peering.

That's been good for me with short sightedness as I have done a great deal of peering. Bi-focals for the first time will get people to the physio very often. They get sick from that change of their vision. People can't see and then are shifting their distance and the neck is compromised from the eyes. The eyes are unbelievably important for movement. Any kind of sport. When riding a horse I just have to look in a direction where I want to go and the horse will go there as he senses *my body organisation*. He will feel a tiny shift in my head and shoulders and a tiny shift in my pelvis and that's enough for him to know what I am asking. To get over the jump you look over the jump and then you will get over it.

These are observations in my life and potted history of it.

Zoom is tricky - inevitably my image comes back to me and its distracting - at times I prefer meeting with no visual image and I can just hear their voice rather than see.

NV: Oh. You can hide self-view. It's amazingly nice. I feel much relief. My eyes aren't being pulled toward my image. And I am more capable to focus on you.

BM: That great

Laugh

Laugh

Not as a teacher of a zoom class as I have to be aware of what I am showing.

NV: How does your body support the action of receiving the view?

BM: There is no survival instinct - there is nothing kicking in. I am just open - but this has to be taught - people don't always do this.

N: When does this change?

BM: I don't think (...zoom glitched)

NV: In the beginning you spoke of looking for plants - botanical hunting. I recognise something similar when going to the forest when looking for mushrooms. It is much harder to find one if I go looking for it expecting to see it - a complete shift has to happen when I walk there. It is almost like tricking myself. For me - '*I don't need to see the mushroom*' is the one trick the other is *to look in a sweeping way*. When you speak of opening your vision wide - what is happening there?

BM: I think it's broader than looking in a narrow focused way. It's just that it would be called opening peripheral vision. I don't know the effects on my body but I am probably breathing better and just more at ease.

NV: Do you switch something inside you to change into that gear?

BM: Sometimes I would know to switch into it consciously and other times I might just go into it without knowing. I do like to look out. I do like to look out to the sea and the mountains (arms wide). I like looking out and about - and looking at things - rather than just looking down and reading and stuff like that. I have also noticed that a few people who use their eyes really well. One is my late brother who was birder. He had phenomenally good eyes and didn't need glasses until his 60s or so. He could see a bird in a tree while he was driving. He wasn't looking for it but somehow he picked it up. I have seen that with game rangers in the bush. You don't know how they have seen that particular bird or animal but they are trained to pick up slight movement or something that is slightly different from one day to another. They are using the senses in a very whole sort of way - *they are seeing whole* - eyes have to be connected to all the sensesand the other is the landscape painter never needed glasses either - always playing with his eyes in some way.

So ja

Those are some people. Another one is a horse rider who I know - she also hasn't needed glasses much. I think also what I notice going to Europe how many young people are wearing glasses and in SA. The population can't afford not to, but there might be a different way of using the body and being in the body and looking which makes less need for glasses? In London - just everywhere - there are glasses shops. Everybody's eyes are so poor.

NV: mmmm I think there is something in that - how we are in our body affects the quality of how we see.

BM: A New Zealander called Peter¹ has done the most interesting work on eyes - spent his life starting with the Bates method and the eye improving exercises. He has developed a lot of work around improving vision and he writes in the most interesting way. An Alexander Technique teacher and they look at mandalas and they really try to get people not to wear glasses right away and improve things. If you look up Peter - eyes - New Zealand you may be able to track him down. He is the best person to connect eyes, body and exercise.

NV: In the beginning you spoke of babies. Everything is important to them. It's lovely hearing you say that as it starts to cut away the hierarchy of things. The dancer who developed Contemplative Dance Practice - Barbara Dilley- she offered five eye practices. One is Infant eyes - seeing without naming.

BM: That is beautiful. Not prioritising one thing or another. Its amazing to watch babies - obviously very stimulated by mummy or daddy - the way they make eye contact with strangers. It is unbelievable and then they learn it's not the right thing to do. And sometimes you don't know what they are interested in their eyes are roving - everything is interesting - necklace, eyes, faces.

NV: it is always interesting how a baby will find another baby immediately in a shop - they will lock on and track them. A little forcefield.

BM: Is that so?

NV: I noticed it with the kids. Can you speak more to 'locking' - in the neck with emotions - what about panic and trauma?

BM: It is the same root and ja, often you can see people develop inexpressive face from the use of the eyes. You can close down and your face becomes rigid and mask-like depending on the person- what they have done. With mobile eyes - generally people have mobile faces.

NV: Fixity of eyes - can I go back to the thought ...

BM: Something about —seeing with ready made concepts - —sometimes we don't see - we see what we expect to see - you find what you are expecting to find. A confirmation bias as well. People are convinced they remember something one way - *you see what you look for*. So if you have an open mind /attention to see something that you are not looking for, takes a fluid sort of person really - ja .

NV: I don't know if it is 'uncoupling' - the neurological shifts that happen with your practice of the head moving -mmm mmm. It's a small thing - often when talking to someone I notice their eyes drift when they remember or think or imagine.

BM: In Neuro Linguistic Programming they watch people's eyes acutely so when someone's eyes are moving off to the right they are remembering and if to the left - something else - it's clear categories -when past or imagining -the eyes drift away from eye to eye contact.

¹ Peter Grunwald <https://www.eyebod.com>

NV: I notice I do it a lot and I don't always like straight eye contact.

BM: It's not that easy but that is a whole other topic. Look up NLP² and eye movements. They will look at the eyes to know the state that person is accessing.

NV: It's so great that our bodies can help us to go to places that are not physical and have different textural qualities.

BM: We read people's eyes all the time. I have a client with neurological difficulties who is dependent on looking while talking (as her hearing is damaged) and she picks up an amazing amount from the eyes. And then people who - like H- he hasn't really learnt how to separate the movement of his eyes from his body - essential to coordination - when he is driving and looking at something across the road - his body and his car start drifting across the road.

A well coordinated person will be able to separate the movement of the eyes from the body. You can stay in the middle even if your eyes are moving - something developmental that did to happen back in the crawling stage. And then there are other people who don't separate their eyes from their heads - the tongue and eyes will be doing things as they master coordination with the hands and eyes are everything. They have evolved with everything, everything despite the windows to the soul and all of that.

NV: There is a wonderful book - called *eyes of the skin*.

BM: So it's about perception linking eyes and touch and skin.

NV: My son F does a lot of gaming - the body is riding the eyes - tiny fine motor things in the hands micro world.

BM: Very refined the eyes.

NV: Thank you Barbara - I am most grateful- I love to think of you jumping with your horse.

44 minutes 21 seconds.

² Neuro Linguistic Programming (nlp) teaches us that people make movements with their eyes (Eye Accessing Cues) that will indicate which representational system they are using. It is said that we all go inside and access information by eye movement, and people store information in a certain way so that they use their eyes to locate the information either visually, auditorally, or kinaesthetically.

The six areas the eyes will go to, to find information are; visual remembered (top right as you are looking at them); audio remembered (middle right as you look at them); self talk, or calculations(lower right as you look at them); visual constructed (top left as you look at them); audio construct (middle left as you look at them); tactile (lower left as you look at them).