

In Honor and Memory of Stanley Keleman Sonja Sutherland

Abstract

The author describes how, on both a very personal level, as well as on a professional level, Stanley Keleman has influenced her and her life deeply. Professionally, her years of experience and embodied understanding of Stanley Keleman's Formative Psychology® perspective and approach provide a foundation for her Feldenkrais® practice and also for the creation of her social emotional curricula for children.

Keywords: Stanley Keleman, Formative Psychology®, Feldenkrais, somatic education, elementary education, social-emotional learning, children

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The body is a poet giving
expression to the organizing process
of our inherited and personal life.
Players at the interface of living and dying
many shapes forming a personal
existence within one life.

Stanley Keleman, *Forming Your Aging Porosity and Poetry*. (2018), p. 26

Stanley Keleman lived an exquisite, embodied participation in the incredible gift of aliveness — of living and dying, of being a part of the pulsing dynamic of the universe, from the cosmic to the quantum. He developed a unique perspective and understanding of the universe within us, in our own anatomy.

Stanley's Gift To Me

In his writings, videos, and teachings, Stanley shared his rich and layered understanding of human anatomy as human behavior — as how we grow, develop, and form. He developed an embodied understanding of how to participate in, generate, and influence the pulsing rhythms within us, in our behavior, and in our relationships with others. This was Stanley's gift to me — helping me to recognize, generate, and influence the pulsing dynamic of my own bodily existence — the ebb and flow of my excitement and vitality, the waxing and waning of my body states, the waves of my emotional anatomy— and to form, with my own voluntary muscular effort, a personally rich and satisfying life.

Bringing Learning Home

Stanley always helped to bring learning home — to what was important for each of us in our own life, to how we could create meaning and value for ourselves and with others. He was deeply committed to his Formative perspective and approach, and its functional application to one's own self in whatever circumstance you were in — whether interacting with your loved ones, recovering

from injury, managing a conflict or a crisis, leading a group, doing something athletic or artistic, enjoying a sunset, or engaging in an everyday activity like eating and sharing a meal with others.

Formative Psychology® as a Foundation

Both on a very personal level, as well as on a professional level, Stanley has influenced me and my life deeply. Professionally, my years of experience and embodied understanding of Stanley Keleman's Formative Psychology provide a foundation for how I approach my Feldenkrais practice and also for how I create social emotional curricula for children.

In my Feldenkrais practice, people mostly come to me with physical aches and pains after accidents, injuries, surgeries, strokes, or chronic conditions from which they are seeking relief. Feldenkrais is a method of somatic education that uses movement as a means for learning. Through hands-on and verbally directed practices, I guide people in how to move through their life with greater ease and comfort. Over the years I have found that while it is wonderful to help people feel better, it is also very important to support them in how they relate to their experience and emotional reactions to their situation, as well as in how they can participate in the forming of their own way forward.

An Understanding of Anatomy as Pulsing, Emotional Behavior

Formative Psychology offers an understanding of anatomy as pulsing, emotional behavior. While the Feldenkrais Method focuses primarily on how we learn from a neuromuscular skeletal perspective, Formative Psychology emphasizes the importance of our fluid, visceral, pulsing nature of our emotional anatomy and how this informs how we function, feel, and behave. Human beings are mostly made of water and we bathe in the pulsing movements found in all our cells, tissues, organs, and viscera. Our whole being pulses — our heart beats, our brain and every neuron pulses, all our organs, viscera, tissues, and cells pulse. We pulse within ourselves and with others.

Formative Psychology recognizes how pulsation give us a dynamic, flowing structure, a frame for organizing and orienting how we are within ourselves in our own bodies, with others in our relationships, and with the world around us. This unique formative perspective provides an important foundation for how I recognize, approach and relate to how my clients function, feel, and behave.

An Added Essential Dimension

Stanley Keleman's Formative Psychology adds an essential, fundamental dimension to my work with clients because people come to me not only with their aches and pains, but also with how they physically relate to their dilemmas and to themselves — to their disappointment, shock, fears, and hopes. The formative approach gives me a way of working directly with how they react to and approach their situation and for empowering them to recognize, value, and influence how they form their attitudes and emotions.

Empowering Self-Influence

As I work with clients I can still hear Stanley saying, as he often liked to remind me:

“Empower self-influence. Even if your client can only create 1% of self-influence, help them do this.”

Through personal and professional experience, I have learned that the formative approach empowers self-influence on the most fundamental level, opening the door to new ways of

perceiving, approaching and engaging yourself. On this level of self-influence, 1% makes a big difference in your inner experience and in how you can relate to your circumstance and to others. Particularly in difficult dilemmas, engaging in the formative approach to influence your self, even incrementally, can cross the threshold between hopelessness and hope.

Hope ... is in the ability to regulate, with voluntary muscular effort, a pattern of expression, a new way to act that gives the organism a different orientation of faith in its self to invent behavior, to act, or find an orientation to live with what is.

Personal email communication; Stanley Keleman, June 2012.

A Body-based Approach to Social-Emotional Learning for Children

For twenty years, I have been developing and teaching “Creative Learning through Movement”, a body-based approach to learning for elementary age children. By “body-based” I not only mean experiential learning through doing, but also how your body can be a resource and the lab for your learning. My desire to address and support the children’s emotional needs in movement classes led me to focus on creating age-appropriate somatic practices and body-based games to help the children recognize, relate to, and influence their emotions in action.

While steeped in weekly formative practice classes, regular workshops, professional meetings, and individual sessions with Stanley, I began creatively applying principles from Formative Psychology to my weekly classes with children.

Empowering Personal Choice versus Compliance

In recent years, I have noticed that there is a trend in elementary education toward teaching social-emotional skills in schools. I appreciate this interest in supporting the children’s emotional development. However, in my experience visiting classrooms, I find an emphasis on corrective teaching — telling students how they need to behave, or how to get into the “right zone” where they are calm and quiet. Similar to Formative Psychology, I am interested in empowering self-influence over time, fostering personal choice versus compliance.

In my classes the children discover, explore, and learn for themselves about how they shape their attitudes and emotions. “So what do you do when you are frustrated? What kind of body shape do you make? Show me.” I play the drum and the children move around the room in their frustrated ways. When the drum stops, the children freeze-frame their body attitude and I guide them in modulating the intensity of their body shape to experience how this affects how they feel. When the drum plays, they discover how this informs how they move, act, and interact with others. Each time the drum stops, I guide the children with questions and open-ended directives. Each time the drum plays they explore and discover how they shape, experience, and form their own behavior. Instead of trying to learn the “right way” to behave, the children learn how to participate in the way they are behaving and to develop self-influence.

Addressing the Bodily Act of “How?” and “How Much?”

I also notice in classrooms how children who are having difficulty sitting quietly in a group setting are often given fidget toys and other sensory tools to help them focus better. They are taught to take “body breaks” where they take time out to “shake your sillies out”, stretch, or take deep breaths as a means to “reset” themselves and then return to focusing on the class activity. While these tools may be useful, I am interested in supporting the children in recognizing and relating to their bodily act of how they pay attention.

Drawing from Stanley Keleman's Formative approach, my classes address the "How?" and the "How Much?" of behavior. The children learn how to differentiate their body shape and how this influences how they feel. They explore how they shape themselves along a continuum of body shapes. They discover how their body shape and inner state affect each other, and how they can influence their expression, their experience, and how they relate to their world within them and around them.

A few years ago, I began writing blog posts and developing *Thinking Bodies, Moving Minds* with visual aids to support teachers in bringing this perspective and approach into their classrooms.

Stanley as Role Model

Stanley Keleman was a highly creative person who was prolific and generative in his work and life. He was a master of creating, growing, pruning, shaping, and forming his embodied understandings and insights into his own Formative legacy over his lifetime. He was always forming forward. Just shy of his 87th birthday, Stanley had recently published a new book *Forming Your Aging: Porosity and Poetry*. He had just finished his annual July workshop and was preparing for his next workshop just a few weeks away. Stanley kept on generating, creating, and forming himself and his work right up until he passed away.

What happens when we accept our continual forming instead of seeking permanence? We discover that our lives are an adventure, an emotional odyssey.

Stanley Keleman, S. 1981. *Porosity and Poetry*. p. 25.

Words cannot express how appreciative I am of all Stanley embodied and co-bodied with me, for how much he shared and cared. I will always remember his generosity and commitment to engaging, to relating, to forming with me. He will always live in my heart and in the marrow of my bones. With every voluntary muscular effort I make, Stanley will be right here with me.

BIOGRAPHY

Sonja H. Sutherland, MA, GCFP, has been an experienced Feldenkrais practitioner® since 1997. For 18 years, Sonja studied with Stanley Keleman in Formative Psychology®. Sonja maintains a private practice in Berkeley, California where she offers individualized hands-on sessions for children, adults, and seniors. She also leads somatic workshops and retreats. She holds a black belt in Aikido and a Masters in Choreography and Dance Education. This is Sonja's 20th year developing and teaching a body-based approach to working with elementary school children. She is currently writing a series of publications focusing on social-emotional somatic curricula for children under the title: *Thinking Bodies, Moving Minds*. (*ThinkingBodiesMovingMinds.com*) Email: sonja@learninginaction.org, Website: www.LearninginAction.org

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