

VOCAL AWARENESS

by Richard Corbeil

Voice production is based on intention, movement and breath, a combination of elements that reveal (and depend on) our organic status, somatic states and functional maturation. In other words, the qualities of our voice reflect the qualities of our being, and the qualities of our being are reflected in our voice. People involved in vocal research are often attracted by that reciprocity; studying voice leads to self-discovery, self-awareness and personal growth.

However, most traditional vocal trainings are based on the idea of;

- 1) Mastering (or meeting) the technical demands or characteristics of a given style or tradition (as well as the knowledge of that style or tradition), and
- 2) Conforming to accepted notions of artistic expression as defined by cultural opinion, taste and development.

Furthermore, as with most other disciplines in our Western society, the accent is traditionally put on the outcome ("just do it") rather than the underlying process generating and qualifying that outcome, while little to nothing is said about the impact of that organizational process on the performing subject itself.

After the experience of a formal training as an early music singer, The FELDENKRAIS METHOD® gave me the tools needed to investigate voice training beyond the traditional vocal technique. It has also shifted my consciousness so as to include and cross-examine my perspectives and points of reference as well. Consequently, the vocal domains I have been led to methodically explore and teach for several years as a *Feldenkrais practitioner*^{cm}, turned out to be of a rather unconventional nature, and yet quite valuable for my voice students, several of which being voice teachers themselves.

By the same token, let me say that as *Feldenkrais practitioners*, it is imperative to realize the importance of the use of our voice as a crucial part of our functioning and self-image, with features both elaborate and unique that contributed to our evolution as well as our distinct status of human beings.

I have noticed that students often come out of an *Awareness through Movement*® (ATM) or *Functional Integration*® (FI) feeling that there is more of themselves in their voice, more presence, ease and resonance. However, very little follow up is usually done that can really shift one's awareness regarding vocal functioning and efficiency. Considering the fact that a lot of attention is generally given to breathing, it is difficult to justify the lack of material in our curriculum concerning its interdependence with vocalization.

In regard to this situation, I have been experimenting for the last several years with a series of ATM and FI lessons that would provide an exhaustive overview of vocal functioning from the perspective of a *Feldenkrais practitioner*. The lessons are organized

developmentally, chronologically progressing from the most primitive or most fundamental voluntary vocal actions to more elaborate and differentiated ones, with contextual reference throughout their evolution to our social environment and our personal maturation, individual expression and esthetics. For example, as infants, our voices could have developed and adopted specific qualities in relation to the type of attention that we needed or wanted and the kind of reaction we could consistently get from our caretakers with specific vocal formulas . Later on, our voices could be further transformed by our desire to define, project and maintain a social image, or be true to our personality. As we grow and mature, vocal studies could be motivated by the pleasure of putting more and more of ourselves in vibration, enjoying the consequent unfolding of self-awareness and internal presence it requires.

I believe that vocal awareness can only be beneficial to our practice. We cannot be complete and potent unless we are willing to access and organize all the functions that make us what we are, our voice being one of the most significant. Furthermore, many people are interested in vocal activities for self-discovery, personal growth, and even rehabilitation, and rarely do they find all that they really want from voice teachers or speech pathologists. The FELDENKRAIS METHOD® gives us a magnificent approach to the uncharted territories of both our vocal functioning and awareness, while exploring the multi-dimensionality of our humanness.