Human vocal production is a phenomenon that requires the development of complex integration skills in ourselves, with elaborate features that have contributed to our evolution and distinct status of human beings. Our voice, which gave birth to language, expresses the different qualities of relationship between ourselves and our physical and cultural environment. It also serves as a tool to assert our status and rights within our social order. To fulfill those needs, we must develop a clear image of the physical movements necessary to produce the intended sounds, to organize these movements in space and coordinate their timing.

When we pursue our ability to better understand these sensory-motor processes and study how to use them more effectively, voice production becomes an art. Perhaps it is because of this tradition as an art form that most vocal trainings focus on mastering the technical demands of a specific style, as defined by the cultural opinion and ideas of a given time.

Where most voice trainings typically rely on artificial exercises and vocal gymnastics that have little to do with the natural development of our voice, the Feldenkrais Method inspired me to put together numerous sensory-motor lessons that playfully imitate and amplify the organic processes by which we formed our voice, stimulating vocal evolution to its full maturation.

I usually start with the student lying down and through the gentle movement guidance of Functional Integration® begin to free the breathing processes from the unnecessary tension often experienced when standing and talking. The breath then takes a particular quality, unique and different for each person, with the kind of speed and pressure that is just right for the reorganization of the vocal apparatus. Take for example the original babbling that differentiates the lips (“p” or “b”) or throat (“k” or “g”). Notice that it implies a total stop and restart of the exhalation. Very few people realize that they can achieve this simply by the closing and opening of the lips or throat, without using the jaw or regulating the airflow by overworking all the muscles of the torso. The human larynx is very sensitive to any effort involved, and will most likely respond by closing, limiting sound, resonance, and vocal agility. Making sure that the breath adapts smoothly to the closing and opening of the lips or throat while the jaw remains free, will improve the quality of the breathing and the functioning of the voice. Those changes can then be transposed to sitting and standing and extended to speaking and singing. There are an infinite number of sound-creating movements to explore in an endless number of ways to free one’s entire voice.

This approach assures vocal flexibility and choice rather than the rigid application of rules and vocal techniques. Each sound, phoneme or melodic line can be purified, filtered from the tension, overwork, or preestablished idea of what is “right” or “wrong,” leaving only a unique, living body making sounds in the simplest, healthiest and most efficient way it finds. This voice training, based on the Feldenkrais Method, which I call Natural Voice Training, provides a healthy foundation for extensive speaking and singing. It opens abundant resources for vocal rehabilitation, while paradoxically, the accent is on the person, not the voice.

– by Richard Corbeil Richard is an early music singer, voice teacher and Assistant Trainer of the Feldenkrais Method®. While he lives and works in the Seattle area, he also has taught extensively in the USA, Europe and Australia. His background in the performing arts and clinical rehabilitation gives him a unique perspective on the related fields of health, personal growth and the arts. Contact him at: 425.820.0399 or email at RCRBL@aol.com.
Learning to Speak FREELY

As a Practitioner and college voice professor, I have used the Feldenkrais Method to help young singers learn to cope with performance anxiety and to use its energy to produce beautiful sound. You can use some of these techniques to help with your preparation for any kind of spoken presentation. The first thing to understand is that the nervous system is designed to maintain balance throughout the bodymind. The sympathetic nervous system prepares for action while the parasympathetic nervous system maintains us in a state of rest and safety. Whenever there is a change, such as getting up in front of an audience, the sympathetic system is checking to see if the situation is dangerous. At the same time, the body prepares for action with the uncomfortable physical sensations that make us feel terrible, and our voices feel out of control.

The important thing to remember is that the sympathetic system requires action in order to dissipate these symptoms. Movement, breathing and making sounds can help to calm your system and create a sense of safety and confidence. When these activities are done using the strategies of Awareness Through Movement lessons, the change can happen fairly quickly. These strategies can be used in rehearsing a speech or just before the speech, to calm yourself. You may choose to do this short lesson lying on the floor or sitting in a chair.

Begin by speaking the opening paragraph of your speech, or something else you’d like to read out loud. Observe the state of your bodymind. Are there parts of the body that are uncomfortable? Observe the sensations in your neck, shoulders, elbows, hands, back, chest, abdomen, and legs. Notice the different sensations of discomfort. Are they all the same or are they different? Observe your breathing without attempting to change anything about it right now. Do you breathe high into the chest? Do the ribs move when you breathe? Is there any movement in the back when you breathe? Is there movement in the lower abdomen? Can you focus your attention on the breath as it is without needing to change it?

Continue to observe your breath in this manner for a minute or two. Now begin to follow the path of the breath from the nostrils through the breathing passages and throat and into the lungs as you inhale and exhale. What is the shape of that path? Where are the bottoms of the lungs located? Can you imagine the shape and movement of the

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diaphragm, the large, dome-shaped muscle that divides the organs of the chest from those of the abdomen? The diaphragm goes down toward the feet on inhalation and relaxes up toward the head on exhalation. Can you imagine that movement as you pay attention to the breath? Rest briefly.

Make a soft, gentle humming sound and notice how the breathing changes. Do you begin to feel anxious when you make sound? Continue to hum and move your jaw slowly right and left, keeping your lips closed. Allow your tongue to move freely as you do this. Can you reduce effort in your neck as you hum? Be aware of your feet, knees, and hip joints as you continue humming. Rest.

Repeat the opening paragraph of your speech, noticing how resonant your voice sounds to you. Now place the tip of your tongue on the bottom teeth on the left side of your mouth and leave it there as you begin to speak the text of your speech again. Can you shape the vowels and consonants while bending the tongue to the left? What parts of your tongue, jaw and mouth begin to move when you make language in this way? Repeat the experiment taking the tongue to the right. Is this easier or harder to do with the tongue in this position? Rest.

Read the speech once more with the tongue moving normally and notice any changes in resonance, clarity of diction, or feelings of calm or anxiety in the body.

– by Carol McAmis. Carol specializes in working with performing artists and educators. She is also a Professor of Voice at Ithaca College where she teaches Awareness Through Movement classes for music majors in addition to her work as a singing teacher. Contact her at: 607.274.1721 or email at mcamis@ithaca.edu

Author of New Book Speaks Up

How does one develop an internal feel for what sounds good? How do you learn to use all of yourself when singing? What is the relationship between the felt sense (kinesthetic), effort, and good sound? These are the questions that led to this book, Singing With Your Whole Self. And curiously enough, they are questions that seem not to be addressed in books on the teaching of voice.

The voice pedagogical literature contains numerous exercises to assist students of voice in the development and teaching of voice. But nowhere is there an in-depth exploration of developing kinesthetic sensitivity, what this does for sound, and how to bring all of one’s self into use while singing.

There are 18 full-length lessons in the book. The lessons have been broken down into 8 to 10 minute modules. Below is the first module from the lesson, Relating Head and Pelvis. This lesson aids vocalist by helping them to get their power from the pelvic region, and in positioning the head for a free and open sound. If you are a singer, vocalize both before and after doing this module and notice the changes.

1. Sit in a chair that has a firm, flat bottom. Gently raise and lower your head. Go only as far as you can comfortably. Do not force your head back or push to touch your chin to your sternum. Just allow yourself to feel what your comfortable range is. Repeat this movement 2 times. Pause a moment.

Now begin rocking your pelvis forward and backward so that your back rounds and arches. Do this 3 times. Be certain that you lead this movement with your pelvis. Pause and rest for a moment.

2. Slowly turn your head left and right several times. How far does it go in each direction? How easy is it to turn your head? Raise your right hip slightly. Did you do this by lifting up on the right or putting the weight down through your left buttock? Raise your right hip 2 more times, focusing on putting the weight down through the left buttock. Pause and rest.

Now raise the left hip slightly 3 times focusing on putting the weight down through the right buttock. Stop and rest. Notice how you are sitting now. How is your weight distributed? How heavy does your head feel?

3. Slowly rock your pelvis forward, arching the back as you raise your head. Repeat this 4 times pausing after each movement for as long as it takes to make the movement. Did you lead this movement with your pelvis or your

Singing with Your Whole Self: The Feldenkrais Method and Voice
by Samuel H. Nelson and Elizabeth Blades-Zeller
Available from FGNA. Call 1.800.775.2118 or email sales@feldenkrais.com

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head? Repeat this movement and switch the lead. How did this feel? Can you tell now why it is preferable to lead with the powerful pelvic muscles when there is a choice?

Leading with the pelvis, slowly round your back and look down with your head. Repeat this 3 times. Pause for a moment.

Now combine the two movements so that you rock forward and back with your pelvis as you look up and down. Go slowly and see if you can allow this to be a unified movement where both the head and pelvis move through their range at the same time. Repeat 4 times. Sense how you are sitting now. What are your thought patterns like now?

4. Turn your head to the left as you raise your right hip. Repeat this 4 times having the sense that the weight goes down through the left hip to lift the right. Now turn your head to the right as your left hip rises.

What does your chest do as you make this movement? Repeat the movement 4 more times. Pause for a moment.

Combine these movements so your head goes left and right as the opposite hip rises. Repeat 3 to 5 times until you have a sense that this is smooth and easy. Rest.

Turn your head left and right. How does this feel now? What has changed since the first time you made this movement? When you are ready, stand up, walk around, and see how this feels.

– by Samuel H. Nelson, Ph. D.  Dr. Nelson is a graduate of the Toronto Professional Feldenkrais Training Program (1987). He has held a seminar on the Feldenkrais Method each semester at the Eastman School of Music for the past thirteen years. He has presented seminars at music schools in Indiana and Ohio, and has presented workshops for musicians at several area high schools. He has a private practice in Rochester, New York, and also works part time in a pain clinic. Contact him at: 716.264.1846 or email at SamNel@aol.com

“IN DEVELOPMENT, THE PARTS GROW, IMPROVE, AND STRENGTHEN IN SUCH A WAY THAT THE WHOLE CAN CONTINUE TOWARD ITS GENERAL DESTINATION.”

Moshe Feldenkrais, from Awareness Through Movement

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