

...they sing and learn differently...

My Experiences with, and Observations of the Influences of the
Feldenkrais Method on the Students in my Voice Studio
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Introduction

Annelise Kohler - voice teacher at the Conservatory of Music in Bern, Switzerland - and I have been experimenting with this novel format of team teaching November 2006. Each morning and afternoon session begins with Annelise leading the participants through vocal warm-ups. Then, in ensemble, they sing a chorale. Next, I teach a Feldenkrais Awareness through Movement (ATM) lesson chosen for its relation to the theme of the vocal exercises and chorale. After the ATM, Annelise once again takes the class through vocal exercises and ensemble singing.

Then we begin working with individuals. The student sings an Aria or Lied with accompaniment as if he/she were in a performing situation. The other participants listen and watch. When the singing is finished, Annelise leads the student into a discussion about how they felt and what they'd like to improve. She then critiques the performance from the perspective of a voice teacher. I give feedback from my experience as a Feldenkrais teacher. After discussion about the similarities and differences in our observations with the student, we all three decide what will be the focus for the individual Feldenkrais lesson, or Functional Integration, (FI) that follows. Below are Annelise's comments and observations on the results of our working together. *Introduction and translation, John Tarr*

In both group and one-on-one lessons John and I combined the Feldenkrais Method (FM) with vocal pedagogy in a form of team teaching. In both cases, the students first sang and then worked with John in the FM. After the FM, the students sang again to integrate the learning from the FM and compare the results to the beginning. During the one-on-one work after the initial singing, the student, John and I discussed what the student needed and what might help him/her specifically in performing.

Some of the changes I've noticed in my studio have been very subtle and others visible and audible. The more subtle changes were noticeable amongst the whole class. All of the students made progress in their own personal ways. Being open and curious, they deepened their interest and motivation for music making and learning how to use their voices more easily. This was noticeable right after the Feldenkrais work where the students had the immediate experience of singing better and more directly.

Since the introduction of the FM, my students have developed an increased ability to use their kinesthetic sense to improve their singing as well as to have more awareness of their own experiences. The students experiment with their voices, describe their discoveries and judge for themselves as to how they sound. They are better able to verbalize where they sense the movement or vibration in their bodies, how their voice feels and to work with different possibilities of expression. The awareness for the acoustics of the room and how they breathe has changed for the better. Their voices have become richer, their expressive capabilities have grown and singing has become easier as well. They are even more creative in the practice room. From my point of view, they seem better integrated in their bodies and breathe more easily. Their movements seem more fluid and energetic.

Some of the students have said, "it's become very simple, I don't feel any obstacles. I sing as easily as if I were speaking." After three Feldenkrais group lessons (Awareness Through Movement), one student who was having trouble in the high register and difficulties with her head voice was suddenly able to discover the resonant space and expansion of her voice she needed to sing in the higher register.

Another student who was having trouble finding a posture that suited her singing, found a different way to stand after just one group (ATM) lesson and was able to cultivate an improved stage presence while singing. In the words of yet another student, "since last Saturday, my jaw feels as if it were transformed and it's not really so important if I sing better or not but in some way I feel differently while singing now."

While working with my students in ensemble for a series of upcoming concerts, I found that the students demonstrate a greater presence in the rehearsals. They possess a richer palette and more beautiful sound quality. Additionally, their abilities for greater expression have increased and while conducting, it seems as if the energy between us flows more intensely. Interestingly, not all of the ensemble members participated in the Feldenkrais lessons but they seem to profit from the others' experiences in that they also exhibit similar tendencies of improvement.

