

1 Physical Sensitivity

When the body is actively involved with sport, drama or music, when it is used as an “instrument”, it is essential that we learn to become physically aware and internally sensitive.

By “internal sensitivity” we mean the perception of delicate inner movements and events when feeling physically “normal”, i.e. at and beyond the pain threshold on one hand and enjoying a feeling of well-being due to a state of extreme relaxation on the other. Our various lives and experiences with their conscious and unconscious learning processes during childhood and puberty mean we perceive “physical sensitivity” individually and subjectively – there is no common measure. Any kind of teaching concerned with inner physical processes is, therefore, difficult and complicated.

Much about a person’s general and current physical and mental condition, however, can be read from his outward appearance – the way he moves, speaks, stands and plays his instrument. The psychologically trained eye of a doctor allows him to draw conclusions from the way a patient moves, for example, about the presence of illness or neurosis. In the same way an experienced music teacher knows that the production of a certain sound is the result of a particular physical disposition. He is able to draw conclusions about the student’s physical sensitivity from her mental sound. Nevertheless, she will never know exactly how she plays – she physically “felt” at the time of her previous playing.

Teaching which involves physical contact between teacher and student would therefore appear to be the most successful method: it would be possible for the teacher to see and to feel (by touch) before assessing and making a judgement. Despite that, his diagnosis will also be subjective. In fact, the teacher cannot see inside his student’s body. The student (especially if she is a beginner) at the same time is having to focus on internal sensations, which is difficult to do. The teacher’s initial diagnosis for the teacher is initially complicated by vague terms which will make further diagnosis difficult. This method of contact is a problem as a rule. It may work with singing teachers, who can alter their own physical condition. The student may also be able to do this, thereby sharpening his or her perception of the accompanying physical sensations. These can be remembered and repeated. Teaching without direct physical contact between teacher and student must be a good deal more difficult because of the lack of any possibility for the teacher to check and control, leaving the student entirely dependent on her own powers of judgement. It therefore becomes even more important for her seriously to try to comprehend the teacher’s verbal and pictorial imagery and to engage with other techniques for developing the imagination for herself.

PREVIEW
Low Resolution

Exercise 1

Take a five minute break to sit on a chair and attempt to think of nothing. After a while observe your breathing and describe it. Draw the movement of your breath with your hand, taking care to ensure that your hand movement corresponds to both internal and external breathing motions.

Make an upwards movement for inhalation and a downwards movement for exhalation.

- How fast is your hand moving?
- Do the motions of inhalation and exhalation follow seamlessly one after the other?
- If there is a pause after exhalation, how long does it last?
- Do parts of your body move during breathing? If so, which ones?
- What do you think of your breathing – is it deep or shallow?

What did you discover?

The breathing process is in three phases: inhalation, exhalation, rest.

When in a state of rest, the amount of air used is very small, breathing is experienced as shallow and exhalation takes longer than inhalation.

The transition to the rest phase after the end of the natural flow of breathing is the longest phase and the phase can vary.

Enjoy a peaceful state of awareness during the rest phase and notice the subtle changes in the body.

Exercise 2

Experience various conditions in which your breathing is stimulated in the following particular ways:

1. while walking
2. during a meal (e.g. rice)
3. climbing a flight of stairs or fourth floor with heavy shopping
4. while listening to music
5. while watching a film
6. during an argument in which you are furious?

	Amount of Air	Tempo	Physical Feeling	Effect
1.	Lots	Steady	Complete	Calm movement
2.				
6.				

Exercise 3

How do you breathe in when you:

1. call out to someone who is some distance away
2. suddenly get a cramp while swimming in the sea and have to cry out for help
3. whisper in someone's ear
4. yawn
5. cough
6. sneeze?

	Amount of Air	Tempo	Physical Feeling	Effect
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

Exercise 4

How do you breathe out when you:

1. blow up a balloon
2. are finally able to put down the heavy shopping bags
3. blow a bit of fluff from your clothes
4. blow out the candles out one after the other on the birthday cake
5. blow out all the candles together in one puff
6. blow out just one candle
7. breathe on to your sun glasses before cleaning them?

	Amount of Air	Tempo	Physical Feeling	Effort
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

Note:

In everyday life breathing is unconscious. Your inhalation has a direct relationship to the action: you breathe in as much air as your body needs for the following action. The speed should be slow when it is relaxed and conscious breathing is used when it is most entirely directed to the needs of the following action; e.g. when playing a particular instrument with its special requirements and breath pressure or when meeting the dynamic or expressive requirements of a musical passage.

Amount of Inhaled Air

Try a few different ways of breathing. Imagine the following:

Swimming you are suddenly engulfed by a massive wave – your head is held under water for a long time and you urgently need to take a breath. You suddenly emerge from the water and gasp for air, sucking it in as fast as you can until you are full!

Exercise 2

You accept air as though it were a gift. With open arms, mouth, throat and relaxed abdominal muscles, the air is allowed to “fall in”.

Describe the difference in the way your body feels as well as the speed and volume of air inhaled.

**What did you discover?
for 1)**

The rapid sucking in of air tenses the abdominal muscles almost to the point of pain, the upper part of the body rises and there is an audible rush of air due to the tensed vocal chords. Inhalation is short, fast and jerky.

for 2)

A deliberate loosening and relaxing of the abdominal muscles, neck and throat is required some time before the actual taking of breath. This method of inhalation will therefore be experienced as slow and calm. Because the throat is set wide there is no sound of rushing air. Breathing occurs almost unnoticed by observers.

Aim of the Exercise:

Following repeated execution of the exercises until the difference can easily be felt, idleness on the "glottal breath" and constantly to reduce the time between relaxing your body and the actual taking of breath. Concentrate in particular on the relaxation of the throat. Inhalation occurs silently (as if with the mouth closed) but happy "Ah" with your mouth open and vocally smooth.

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