

***The Feldenkrais Method® for Musicians. Improving Sound Quality
and Reducing Pain.
An Overview
By,
Joyce Ann OTR/L, GCFP***

Our habits, which are formed through life experiences, can either help us or hinder us. Unless we understand what our habits are, we are unable to change them. Playing a musical instrument requires many repetitive movement patterns, which often can leave the musician in chronic pain or discomfort, often to a point when it is difficult to play the instrument. The amount of freedom effects how the individual plays, including positioning the instrument, the individuals' technical capabilities, movements involved in creating the sounds, and the comfort and feel of the instrument and music as it is being played.

Learning to balance, weight shift and easily flow and transition with and without the instrument, requires freedom to move in the torso, including the ribs, sternum, clavicles, and spine. The Feldenkrais Method® of Somatic Education teaches students to become aware of their bodies, to notice unhealthy and unnecessary movement patterns (habits) and learn more comfortable and efficient ways to move.

Often times in order to learn new movement patterns, it is necessary to learn the movement in a different position than we are used to doing it. For example, musical instruments are played in an upright position, and these habits are strongly patterned in us and difficult to change. One way to create more change is by doing these movements or variations of movements in a laying down position. The explored movements can then be integrated into our movement habits in the upright position for playing the instrument.

Israeli scientist Moshe Feldenkrais DSc (1904-1984) was a nuclear physicist and engineer, and the first European to earn a black belt in judo. He received his doctorate in physics at the Sorbonne in Paris, and worked closely with Nobel Chemistry Laureate Joliot-Curie. During the 1940s, Dr. Feldenkrais was barely able to walk due to a serious knee injury while playing soccer and was given only a 50% chance of improving his condition with surgery, which he could not accept. He began exploring movement patterns, and observed how people form movement habits. He mastered the sciences of anatomy, kinesiology, and physiology, and combined these with his knowledge of physics, engineering, and judo. Eventually, he restored his ability to walk and began his life's work of helping others improve their functional abilities and to move through life with grace and dignity.

The Feldenkrais Method can be learned in two modes. Awareness Through Movement® classes are taught to more than one individual at a time and the Functional Integration® (FI) lessons involve individual hands on interventions. Both modes teach individuals to improve movements habits by learning to differentiate and redistribute movements throughout their body, looking at and exploring the relationships between one area of the body and another. When effecting change in one area of the body, other areas are effected and therefore movement habits change. This allows individuals to normalize their muscle tone and utilize appropriate muscle groups in the appropriate situations.

Differentiation requires learning to move areas of his skeleton independently of other areas. Undifferentiated movements involve moving large areas as a unit using more primitive or simple movement patterns. Both are necessary so that in the appropriate circumstance, the individual can access the pattern necessary for the most efficient movement.

The Feldenkrais Method® teaches the musician to explore movements more fully. With more evenly distributed movements of the skeleton, the individual learns to transmit force and generate powerful movements with less muscular effort and less wear and tear on all connective tissues. When an individual is able to move physically with less effort, this not only allows for more efficiency in playing, but also improves the individual's ability to pay attention to more than just the notes. Results are not only less pain or discomfort, but also a more resonant sound and enhanced expression through the instrument.