

Dynamix June 2009

Feldenkrais® and VocalDynamix News from Maggy Burrowes

Where is the Summer?

Things are grey and gloomy down here in Deptford, but there are some harbingers of summer to enjoy; the foxes are screaming, the trees are glorious, the birds sing away regardless of the hour, and the mosquitoes are already biting - oh the joys of living near the creek! Plus it is only a short walk to Greenwich where you can buy an ice cream, hang around by the riverside watching the river traffic go by, and feel just like a tourist.

In this issue:

Summer Workshops

June Workshop Taster Lessons

What is Functional Integration?

Classes and Workshops

Many people have discovered that regular attendance at my Sunday workshops at **the Sunflower Centre** keep aches and pains at bay, so I have planned a new series of days to appeal to first timers and regulars alike. **Core Mobility** and **Lightness and Grace** both have new days allowing deeper exploration of their themes: both workshops are designed to encourage long term changes in both posture and movement, and both are still particularly relevant to the demands of performing whether you are a singer, actor, martial artist, dancer or sports person.

I have a new workshop dedicated to improving **Ease in Sitting**, exploring some of the many wonderful Awareness Through Movement (ATM) lessons designed to be done sitting on chairs; *this day may be an hour later than usual, and please note that the fee is slightly higher as numbers will be lower to allow for chairs taking up space in the room.* This workshop will be particularly useful if you sit down to work, whether in an office, an orchestra, a garden, or a nursery.

I am also introducing a new day focussing on the integration of the **Neck and Upper Back** - I strongly recommend it for improving upper body functioning, but it will be more demanding than **Ease and Mobility in Neck, Face and Jaw** (coming up in the Autumn), so call me for a chat if you are not sure if the day - or any of the days - are suitable for you. See below for full details of my Summer programme.

It is traditional in Feldenkrais to organise workshops around particular themes, but be aware that generally our work is about improving how you function in your daily life, and ATM lessons are always for the whole self, no matter what the title of the workshop is.

The Drop-in Class at The Telegraph Hill Centre in St Catherine's Church continues, though I may take a short break in August, depending on how keen you all are.

As usual I would like to nudge you towards my **Customised Courses**: I am still on the lookout for a venue to teach VocalDynamix weekends, or possibly even the full 5 day course. If you think there is a suitable teaching space in your area do let me know.

I am always interested and available to teach customised courses for small groups in private venues, so if you have an interested group, a suitable space, and would like VocalDynamix, Awareness Through Movement, or a specially designed singing course, then give me a call and we can design your perfect movement and awareness day.

Other news:

Performance Workshops in Dalston and Deptford with Katie Ellen. Katie's teaching is sophisticated and her workshops come highly recommended. She worked in musical theatre in the West End and is now a jazz vocalist performing in various jazz venues in and out of London. To book a place please contact- ktellen@hotmail.co.uk/ 07986 381066

Summer Workshops @ The Sunflower Centre

Workshops are Sundays 12pm - 6pm £45 (£35 concessions)

Developing Core Mobility and Strength - June 7th

We will stimulate and re-educate the deeper muscles of the torso, connecting your limbs to your natural power source and encouraging internal elasticity. You will experience better balance, more fluid coordination and increasing whole-self awareness. This is a great day for anyone concerned with loss of vitality or posture issues.

Sitting with Ease on Chairs and Floors - June 28th (£50 / £40)

Please Note this workshop may run from 1pm - 7pm

Whether at a desk or on the floor, healthy, happy sitting for long periods requires flexibility, mobility and efficient use of your spine, your lower back and your hip joints. This day will develop greater awareness of your natural balance in sitting, standing and walking and may be particularly useful for the relief of sciatica, and back, neck and shoulder pain.

Ease and Mobility in Neck and Upper Back - July 12th

This workshop is designed to increase flexibility and encourage fluid movement in your upper spine, neck, shoulders and rib cage. We will use rotation, flexion and extension to reawaken your natural poise. Useful for the relief of neck pain and possibly even chronic headaches, but please call before booking if you feel your neck is delicate or easily injured.

Ease and Mobility in Hips, Knees and Ankles - July 26th

Problems in the knees are often a sign of subtle imbalances in our whole skeletal structure. Improving connections and mobility in the lower joints can relieve pain in your neck and upper spine as well as locally. It was avoiding surgery for an early knee injury that inspired Feldenkrais to develop his method as a highly effective approach to self improvement.

Developing Lightness and Grace - August 9th

This day will continue to explore and develop the themes of Moving With Lightness And Grace. We will be moving from lying to sitting to standing to traveling in any direction with an easy vitality, discovering the source of elegance. A great introduction to Feldenkrais for dancers, martial artists, acrobats, clowns and anyone wishing to "dance with gravity".

Ease and Mobility in Arms, Shoulders and Hands - August 23rd

Decrease tension in the arms, shoulders & hands, and increase flexibility and ease in the whole of the shoulder girdle, reconnecting the arms deep into the torso. It will also influence the muscles of the neck and is thus a natural partner to the neck themed workshop. Particularly helpful for people with upper back or shoulder pain, or any symptoms of RSI.

Awareness Through Movement lessons take place on the floor and you should wear loose, comfortable clothing, and bring a blanket or mat to lie on. Notes will be provided to help you achieve the maximum possible improvement from continued exploration and practice following the workshop.

Functional Integration: In between growing up and growing old...

"Feldenkrais is the most sophisticated and effective method I have seen for the prevention and reversal of deterioration of function. We're condemning millions of people to a deteriorated old age that's not necessary".

Margaret Mead Ph.D. in Human Health, Anthropologist

...things go on in our lives that manifest themselves physically in all kinds of ways. Maybe you have an ache in your neck that sometimes intensifies overnight so that you wake up with numbness or tingling in your hand; maybe you get intermittent bouts of sciatica without any obvious trigger; maybe playing your instrument or typing several days in a row gives you knotted shoulders or lower back pain. Is there something you love that you don't do anymore because it causes you problems? Perhaps you have given up tennis, horse riding or running due to persistent injuries. Perhaps your back aches if you spend too much time at an art gallery, or browsing in a department store. Perhaps you catch sight of an unexpected reflection of yourself and think "Oh! I must be getting old".

The sad thing is the way so many of us accept these steady deteriorations as an unavoidable part of life; for most of us these problems can be eased or even eradicated over time, by tackling the day to day limitations we place on ourselves without even being aware of them. Feldenkrais is notoriously difficult to describe, and we teachers tend to develop several overlapping descriptions so we can tailor our explanations to each listener, which is of course appropriate for a method so carefully designed to adapt itself to the needs of the individual. I like to describe it as an anti-aging device. So many of my trainers were older women who were full of vitality and still able to somersault forwards or backwards with little preparation! It is completely understandable that people tend to come to me for private lessons in Functional Integration (FI) only once they are already in serious pain, when it is usually the case that the crisis they are experiencing has been building for many years. It is a pity that they may have spent a lot of money already on methods that have been a partial success, and may thus be unable to commit to regular Feldenkrais work, when this method might give them the best chance of maintaining improvements they have already made through osteopathy, physiotherapy or other structural techniques.

Awareness Through Movement lessons take familiar patterns of action - rolling out of bed, getting up off the floor, twisting to look behind you, reaching upwards etc - and break those patterns up into smaller sequences that stimulate new learning in your sensory motor system. One-to-one Functional Integration sessions use sensitive, highly-focussed touch to stimulate new learning, communicating with your nervous system through your skeletal connections, which subtly encourages chronic contractions in your muscles to switch *themselves* off. Improvements are usually noticeable by the end of your first lesson and I will encourage you to be aware of the differences, and will give you mini ATM patterns to explore at home to help you retain the changes you are feeling.

You are learning a new way to be by unravelling your old habits layer by layer. There is no speedy route to establish these beneficial changes in self-use, and consistent improvement will come with regular awareness practise and focussing on your self development and growth. Fortunately new students can usually tell very quickly if the method is working for them. People tend to book private sessions only when they are injured, in chronic pain, or have developed a condition from cumulative misuse like RSI, Housemaid's Knee (Bursitis) and Tennis Elbow, but it is so much quicker, easier and cheaper to prevent these problems than it is to cure them, so please consider coming to me for a short series of lessons before a problem has become fully established, when you are still just getting the warning twinges. I am always happy to negotiate an affordable fee if that enables you to make a regular commitment, so don't hesitate to talk to me about concessions. This work also very effective for people with more serious problem with the nervous system such as Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease, or brain injury (including Stroke and Cerebral Palsy). You are always welcome to call me for a chat without feeling ready to make a decision. **I am available to teach Function Integration one-to-one sessions at The Sunflower Centre on Thursday afternoons, and at my home in Tanners Hill at other times, and I can also visit you at home if you are unable to travel. My fee per hour is £45.00, concessions £35.00 or by arrangement (home visits £15.00 extra) . Mention this article when booking for £5.00 off your first lesson.**

Letter from an R. S. I. sufferer:

I worked as a subtitler for ITN which meant that I had periods of very fast, intense keyboard work, interspersed with downtime. I - along with many of my colleagues - would suffer regular bouts of Repetitive Strain Injury as an occupational hazard. The company physiotherapist was sympathetic, but offered me little in terms of short-term relief or long-term healing. Osteopathy helped to take away the pain, but Feldenkrais gave me a far greater understanding of how to prevent the pain in the first place. Private Feldenkrais sessions helped me learn how to take care of myself and look after my posture while working, as well as providing me with exercises to tackle both the pain, and the underlying problems, if R.S.I. reoccurred.

I now work at the Cabinet office, and occasionally feel twinges of the old pain, but as soon as I feel those twinges I go straight back to my exercises. knowing I can deal with the problem myself means I just don't have to worry about it anymore.

Jane Parsons

Mini ATM Workshop Tasters

Getting the Most Out of These Mini Lessons

- i. Whatever movements you are doing, **always put your own comfort first**. Never continue with anything that feels uncomfortable or painful. Take a rest as soon as you feel like it
- ii. **Go slowly** - moving slowly will make it easier for your senses to be aware of what each of your muscles is doing. You will learn more quickly this way.
- iii. **Repeat each movement several times** - find a way of moving that is light, easy & pleasant to do.
- iv. **Don't strive for perfection**. Once you have found the light, pleasant movement, you will have achieved grace and elegance without unnecessary effort,.
- v. **Do a little less than you can** - and that way you will find that you can do much more than you thought you could. It is often unfamiliar to work this way at first, so it is vital to keep your own comfort in mind at all times. If working with maximum effort is 100%, then think of yourself as working at between 30% and 60-75%. *It is only by working this way that you will discover how powerful it is to work this way.*

These are interesting movements to spend 5 - 10 minutes on. It is a good idea to start and end lying on your back for a short while, paying attention to what you sense about yourself from your contact with the floor. At the end of each lesson, it is also useful to spend a bit of time walking around and noticing any changes to your gait.

Sitting with Ease on Chairs and Floors on Sunday June 28th

1. Sit on the edge of firm kitchen-style chair and **lean forward to touch the floor under your chair with the backs of your hands**. How far can you reach, and how comfortable is it to make this movement?
2. Sit on edge of chair as before, hands resting on thighs, and **lean forward and back with your spine straight**. How much is your head moving? Can you feel your sitting bones?
3. Can you **make your spine curve backwards towards the chair**? What happens to the pressure on your sitting bones? Can you find a way to make this movement with your **head staying directly above your pelvis**? Where are your eyes looking? Notice that the more your spine bends, the easier it is to keep your head from moving forward and backward, and that your head inclines instead so that your forehead moves towards your pubic bone.
4. **Breathe out as you round/flex your spine, and inhale as you lengthen/extend**.
5. As for 4, and **press down with feet on floor as you flex, and release (your feet lighten, but do not lift) as you extend**.
6. **Lean forward and reach under chair as before**- any easier? Can you reach a little further?

...and on a similar theme...

Ease and Mobility in Hips, Knees and Ankles on Sunday July 26th - Loosening the lower back extensors and touching your toes!

1. Bend over to touch your toes - how far can you reach, is this action easy for you? **Stand on your hands and knees**. What is the most stable and supportive position for your limbs? **Slowly lift your waist up to the ceiling, arching/flexing as much of your spine as you can comfortably, allowing your head to drop, and steadily breathing out** so that your torso becomes a little more compact. Repeat.
2. Same position. **Reverse the movement so that your belly moves towards the floor and your spine curves in the opposite direction (extension), inhaling and allowing your head to follow the direction of the spine upwards** so as to look forward. Repeat this movement several times, and then alternate between the two positions.
3. **Stand with straight legs, and bend forward at the hips to rest your upper body on a table**, head resting on your arms. **Flex and extend your spine as before** (note that your head cannot join in as fully). Connect with your coccyx in your imagination - picture yourself erecting your tail and then tucking it under you.
4. Step back from the table and bend over to touch your toes again; can you reach further now?
