How to Help Teachers' Voices

Margarete Saatweber

Logopaedic Practice, Wuppertal, Germany

Key Words

Teacher's voice • Voice training • Method of
Schlaffhorst-Andersen • Holistic approach

Abstract

It has been shown that teachers are at high risk of developing occupational dysphonia, and it has been widely accepted that the vocal characteristics of a speaker play an important role in determining the reactions of listeners. The functions of breathing, breathing movement, breathing tonus, voice vibrations and articulation tonus are transmitted to the listener. So we may conclude that listening to the teacher's voice at school influences children's behavior and the perception of spoken language. This paper presents the concept of Schlaffhorst-Andersen including exercises to help teachers improve their voice, breathing, movement and their posture.

Copyright © 2008 S. Karger AG, Basel

Introduction

The Schlaffhorst-Andersen method is based upon the correlation between breathing, voice, and movement or posture. The motor function of these three systems is closely linked with emotional processes and vegetative responses. Verbal and nonverbal communication is determined by posture and movement. Thus, any influence exerted on a person's physical features affects his or her personality.

A central feature of this approach involves optimizing the functions of the diaphragm, with the aim of restoring

the three-phase cycle of breathing (inhalation – exhalation – pause). The same principle can also be applied to every other type of muscular function: making deliberate use of the pause allows regeneration to take place within a sequence of activities.

Rotational motion, pendular motion ('Schwingen'), and rhythm – the so-called means of regeneration according to Schlaffhorst-Andersen – plus breathing and vocalizing are used in order to develop a physical awareness of muscle tonus, posture, movement, voice, mood, and breathing, as well as their interdependence.

By the so-called 'Schwingen' rotational, pendular and rhythmical movements are combined with breathing and vocalizing. This pendular motion is like playing with the body's state of equilibrium, affecting muscle tonus and breathing function in a regulating and 'eu-toning' manner.

Using pendular motion for regeneration the following aims can be achieved:

- balancing/'eu-toning' the muscle tone as a prerequisite for an optimum (vocal) performance;
- regeneration of the three-phase respiratory cycle taking into account the person and his or her life situation;
- improvement in postural alignment;
- breath stimulation by activating the diaphragm, better mobility, improved supply of oxygen, better circulation, maximizing vital capacity;

This text was presented in a lecture at the PEVOC7 in Groningen in August 2007.

- regular breathing rhythm allowing for a relaxation and regeneration phase;
- training awareness of different body functions and their interdependence;
- coordination of internal (respiratory) and external movement;
- economizing respiratory, vocal, and motor functions in order to achieve maximum performance with minimum effort;
- ‘eu-toning’ the muscles in order to improve the body’s permeability for vocal vibrations;
- opening resonance cavities for a powerful, more sonorous voice, improving vocal endurance.

Training

Voice training for teachers and other public speakers may be subdivided into four main aspects:

- movement and posture;
- breathing behavior;
- articulation;
- voice function.

This paper describes some aspects and a selection of exercises based on the concept of Schlaffhorst-Andersen helping teachers to improve the functions of their voice, of breathing, movement and posture.

Movement and Posture

- Stretching the whole body. Our body is part of the instrument voice. We need all the cavities in it for resonance.
- Tapping the whole body. This massage helps to relax the muscle tonus so that blood circulation will be stimulated.
- Rotational movements with the arms for relaxation of the neck and shoulder region.
- Rotational movements with the arms guided by breathing to improve the three-phase respiratory cycle.
- Pendulating movements with the arms and legs to liven up the body and release muscle tension.
- Improving the contact with the ground by tennis ball massage. The quality of the ground contact is decisive in the physiological respiratory process and upright posture.
- Pendular movement of the whole body in upright position for ‘eu-toning’ the body muscles.
- Rotational movement of the whole body in upright position for ‘eu-toning’ the body muscles.

- Putting sandbags on the top of the head by going around for improving upright position.
- Pendular movement using a skipping rope.

Breathing Behavior

- Perception of breathing by lifting the arms up and down, becoming aware of the pause. Breathing guides the movement of the arms: up (inhalation) – down (exhalation) – pause.
- Training of the three-phase respiratory cycle by imagining the movement of the diaphragm, flexion of the hands when inhaling, extension of the hands when exhaling and relaxation of the hands during the pause.
- The same exercise with the arms, stretching them forwards, to the sides and upwards, always being aware of the pause.
- Training breathing through the nose by closing one nostril during inhalation and exhalation. Mucous membranes will have better blood circulation, resonance cavities will be opened.

Articulation

- Stroking the face with both hands, beside the nose, over the forehead and along the jaw, by opening the mouth.
- Moving the jaw up and down, circulating and pendulating.
- Massage of jaw joints.

There are a lot of exercises for the different muscles we need for correct articulation. All these muscles need to be extended and ‘eu-toned’ in order to be ready for every kind of speaking or singing.

Voice Function

- Supporting the voice by movement (for example throwing sandbags or/and tennis balls using the voice).
- Using all resonance cavities while speaking and singing.
- Using all sounds of the language.

The so-called ‘phonological function work’ includes not only practicing articulation but also making efficient use of the mutual interdependence between the sound and its specific effect on the organism.

Conclusion

All exercises are designed to train awareness. You cannot change things if you don't know that they are changeable and if you don't know how to change them. That means for teachers and other public speakers that they have to know the function of their voices so that they are able to avoid dysfunctions.

They must be trained to speak:

- without force, with pauses;
- with a voice that is guided by breathing, neither too loud nor too high;

- in upright position with good contact to the ground;
- with contact to the listeners, attracting and keeping their attention;
- with a good voice and correct speech articulation;
- aware of their body language, facial expressions and gestures.

Based on the idea that body, mind, and soul form an integrated whole, the concept of Schlaffhorst-Andersen does not only take care of a person's symptoms but of the whole person and thus can be described as a holistic approach.