

## START TEACHING YOUR STUDENTS

# BODY MAPPING

by Ruth Kasckow

*Every teacher has students who find themselves unable to master difficult technical passages, students who can't reach their expressive potential, or students who complain of discomfort and pain.*



**W**e repeat verbal instructions and demonstrate countless times trying to help students, but the problems persist. William Conable, professor of cello at Ohio State University, had the same problem with his students. He realized that his students had difficulties because they each had completely different mental images of how the body moves. Their understanding of the body was not the same as his understanding. He called these mental images body maps.

The body map is your perception of how you think your body is put together and how it moves. A body map can be accurate or inaccurate. One example is the hand. You can see that the hand includes all the bones of the fingers, thumb and wrist. Movement occurs between each of the 27 bones. An inaccurate map of the hand might not

include the eight separate wrist bones, but instead perceive the wrist as one big, solid bone. This perception would limit all the available movement at the wrist bones, affecting any musicians who use their hands to play. The good news is that inaccurate body maps can be corrected. The process of figuring out what your body map is, determining whether it's accurate or not, and correcting it is called Body Mapping.

The application of Body Mapping for musicians was developed by William Conable. Barbara Conable founded Andover Educators to train music educators to teach musicians Body Mapping. Body Mapping has emerged as a practical educational tool for helping musicians improve their playing and avoid injury. It is now being taught in colleges, universities, conservatories, and music studios around the world.

Body Mapping can be taught to students of any age, level or instrument. Students first develop their sense of kinesthesia, or movement sense. This sense tells us the quality of our movement, whether it feels free or tense, coordinated or uncoordinated, clear or unclear, and everything in between. Students also learn how the body is actually structured and designed in a clear, accurate way to suit the students' needs.

In my teaching as a Licensed Andover Educator, I have encountered misconceptions, or inaccurate body maps, that are common to many students. Below is an explanation of how Body Mapping works followed by examples of two common misconceptions: head balance and arm movement.

First you identify the misconception by asking your students questions. For example, do you know how your head is balanced? Do you know how your collarbones move? You are teaching your students to be aware of how their body moves. They may describe their movement as hard or easy, feeling good or feeling bad, or tight or loose. The next step is to present the reality in clear, accurate language supported by images, models, videos, books, and correct examples. Along with presenting information, the hands-on activities are explored to experience the movement physically. Always follow up with questions and applications to playing and singing.

## HEAD BALANCE

**The Problem:** The head is cranked forward.

**Misconception:** The head is balanced somewhere on the neck close to the level of the chin.

**Effect:** This position can cause physical discomfort, limitations in breathing, decreased arm and finger movement, and excessive muscular effort.

**Reality:** The head is actually balanced on the top of the spine. The joint is much higher than most people think, located at the level of the bottom of your ear holes. The top most vertebra of the spine is called the atlas, and the joint between the atlas and the skull not only balances the head, but also enables a gentle nodding motion.

**Hands-on Activities:** Put your fingers on either side of your head at the level of the bottom your earholes. Gently nod your head in a "yes" motion. Pretend your head is a bobble doll head with a very easy nodding motion.

See what it feels like to move your arms and fingers with your head balanced and with your head cranked forward. Do the same thing with breathing. Play your instrument with your head off balance and in balance.

**Result:** There is increased arm freedom, increased breathing capacity, better tone production, less fatigue, and better alignment throughout the whole body.

## ARM MOVEMENT

**The Problem:** Lack of arm mobility and stiffness when playing.

**Misconception:** There is no movement between the collarbones and sternum (breastbone).

**Effect:** This causes stiffness in the upper chest, limited breathing, decreased arm movement, and tight shoulders.

**Reality:** The arm structure includes the collarbones and the shoulder blades along with the upper arm bones, the two forearm bones, and the hands. The collarbones are the two bones in the front of your body above your ribs.

The sternum or breastbone is located in the front of the chest as part of the rib structure. The collarbones are attached at joints to either side of the sternum. This is the only place where the arm structure is attached to the rest of the body. The two joints allow the collarbones to move in different locations.

**Hands-on Activities:** With your left fingers, find your right collarbone. Walk your fingers toward your sternum until you find a notch that is the joint. Move your right arm up and down, and forward and back to feel the movement at the joint. The sternum is stationary and the collarbone moves. Notice the connection between the collarbone and your arm movement and do the same thing on the other side.

Move your arms forward and back, and up and down, without moving your collarbones. Do the same with moving your collarbones and notice the difference in arm movement. Feel the movement at the joint between the collarbone and sternum by pretending to swim.

**Result:** There is greater range of motion and mobility in the arms, freer breathing, less shoulder tension, and more flexibility in the upper chest.

With continued exploration of one's body maps changes are inevitable. The singing student will start to feel more breathing capacity and less tension because she understands how the head is balanced. The piano student will feel that he has a larger reach and more movement because he understands that there are joints at the sternum that connect to the collarbones and the entire arm structure. And the guitarist will feel less tension and discomfort in his hands because he knows that the hand includes wrist bones.

*continued*

## BODY MAPPING

Music teachers can easily integrate Body Mapping into lessons with the help of visual aids, a little research, asking questions, and exploring movement. Start with something simple and explore together how the body works. Apply it to performance and see what changes occur. Consult Body Mapping

books to learn more. Licensed Andover Educators are also a good resource to help teachers and students in workshops and lessons. You can find many resources at [www.bodymap.org](http://www.bodymap.org).

Teachers now have an effective and practical tool to help their students overcome their difficult technical pas-

sages, reach their expressive potential, and avoid discomfort, pain, and injury. When teachers and students work together to learn how the body is actually structured and designed to move, improving performance and preventing injury becomes easily attainable. ■



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