

Abstract

This dissertation explores the process of applying principles from the Feldenkrais Method, a form of somatic practice focused on developing physical awareness, to the author's practice as a pianist performing Western Art Music. The study examines the author's experience with the Feldenkrais Method over an 18-month period and its influence on his approach to practising, teaching, and performing at the piano which culminated in the presentation of three recitals. The research is grounded on a flexible research design which gathered data from multiple sources including literature, video recordings, reflective journaling, and interviews. Through the analysis of this data a multifaceted perspective is obtained that expresses the unique experiences, insights, and changes which occurred throughout the study.

The Feldenkrais Method promotes a holistic approach to learning, one that views the mind and body as equals in the act of music-making. The enquiry uncovered deep rooted physical habits that were inhibiting the author's ability to perform with freedom and ease. These habits were linked to broader psychological perspectives concerning anxiety and instability. The investigation drew several conclusions from the findings, these are: the importance of an inclusive physical mindset while practising, the influence of physical awareness on interpretation, developing technique on the basis of dynamic equilibrium, and the importance of cultivating physical awareness within the domain of artistic research. Furthermore, findings are also drawn concerning the elements that would characterise a piano pedagogy influenced by somatic practices through the analysis of five semi-structured interviews. These elements are firstly, an understanding of the importance of viewing the student from the border perspective of the mind and body, an aspect that is reminiscent of the Feldenkrais concept of the self-image, and secondly, the cultivation of an explorative mindset in the practice room.