



Integration in Manner of Use

Your Postural Embouchure: Understanding and Developing It

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In the early days of the *Breath as Postural Process™* (BPP) certification program, I had asked a candidate—a professional flutist—how she was coming along with Chapter 7 of my book *The Posturality of the Person: A Guide to Postural Education and Therapy*, which is a prerequisite "user manual" for those wishing to qualify in this work. There, I give detailed instructions for and information about the specific muscular coordination that is the basis of BPP. When she replied with some reservation about whether she was "getting it," I wrote back, "It's your new breathing embouchure, so to speak, and most of us players know what it's like to change embouchure, right?" To which she responded, "Aha!!! - excellent points of reference with extremely meaningful focus!" As would any wind player in the same situation, knowing the bedrock importance of proper embouchure to ultimate performance on the instrument and having gone through the rigorous process of developing it. So, since the analogy of instrumental to postural embouchure is almost perfect, and since most breathers aren't wind players, this article aims to give this particular perspective—as one eye gives perspective to the other—on BPP as a foundational aspect of Use.

"Embouchure" (ahm'-boo-shoor) itself derives from the French for "mouth"—*bouche* (boosh)—and it refers to the specific manner in which facial structures are used to connect the player's body

at the mouth with the instrument's sound generator, either a reed (single or double), a cupped mouthpiece, or (as in the flute) a hole across which the player directs the air stream. The functional requirements of an embouchure, like that of posture itself, are dual: on the one hand, *support*, and on the other, *movement*. In an instrumental embouchure, the support function is mostly in the facial musculature around the mouth; that of movement is in the lips themselves. Coordinating this dual functionality to the point of reliability and endurance in the highly specialized action of producing tone on a wind instrument takes years of dedicated practice under competent instruction. Very often, the embouchure that a self-taught player has developed needs to be changed when entering into serious study; this is a transition fraught with peril, as the habitual means—whereby now understood to be unsatisfactory—are still the only ones available, and the player must make a conscious decision to forego the familiar and embrace the new through strenuous and prolonged practice, a decision which, at the outset, can only be based on trust in the teacher and faith that the indicated means will eventuate in the desired ends. Thus we can see how my flute player could say so strongly, with regard to her uncertainty about the BPP coordination, "Aha!!!" And also how developing the new "postural embouchure" of BPP can be—as is sometimes and somewhat euphemistically said in psychotherapeutic circles—"challenging"!

Where the types of instrumental embouchure are diverse, depending on the specific sound generators involved, the postural one is singular, because we are all basically the same structurally, notwithstanding individual variations. From the support standpoint, the most important requirements of posture are a lengthened spine in back and properly toned muscles of the abdomen—bone-wise the skeleton's Great Sahara of empty

space—in front. In terms of movement, distinction needs be made between the external ones primarily of locomotion and "limbing"—mainly the use of arms and hands to operate directly on the environment—and the internal ones of balance and breath. It is with these latter, particularly breath, that the question of the postural embouchure becomes not only relevant but crucial, given the existential importance of breath in the functioning of our body, the "ultimate instrument."

As mentioned above, in my book under the name *Breath as Postural Process* I have given in great detail the theory and practice of what I consider to be an optimal muscular coordination for respiratory efficiency in metabolic functioning. My purpose here is not to elaborate on that, but rather to show how the concept of an embouchure can be helpful in understanding and developing a new bodily coordination that will be almost certainly as unfamiliar as it is desirable in terms of overall body mechanics. In words, then, what is involved is an internal resolution of forces, generated muscularly, such that the contraction of the diaphragm on inhalation lifts the rib cage over the fulcrum of the viscera as stabilized by the contraction of the lower abdominal muscles. If you wanted truly to get what those words mean in terms of behavior, you would need to study my Chapter 7 or work with a BPP Teacher; suffice it to say here that when the manner of use indicated by those words is realized, a dynamic postural "shape", an "embouchure", as it were, results in which stabilization of one thing allows movement of another. To quote F. M. Alexander, "In the process of *creating* [his italics] a co-ordination, one psycho-physical factor provides a position of rigidity by means of which the moving parts are held to the mode in which their function is carried on" (*Man's Supreme Inheritance*, Centerline Press Ed., p. 60). One understands this rather abstract

statement clearly when the coordination of BPP is experienced.

The analogy between the instrumental and postural embouchures (IE and PE) being *almost but not quite* perfect, it's necessary to make some distinctions:

1. The IE serves a very specific purpose, where the PE pertains to all bodily functioning in erect posture.
2. The IE is developed through repetitive and dedicated exercise, usually "long tones," where many single notes are successively held for a whole breath in order to maintain focus on the new formation, minus the distraction of the multiple factors of actual musical performance. By contrast, the PE is developed only through experiencing the new coordination, practicing it to reliability, and then *remembering*—sporadically at first—to use it in real time.
3. The IE is held by force of trained habit through the full duration of the musical action, where the PE always involves a conscious decision contingent upon remembering it, the habit of which develops through repetition over time, and which, more and more, becomes muscle rather than conscious memory.

Thus, to the beginning student of BPP, who may well be uneasy or even skeptical about "all those conscious breaths," I counsel, sometimes with the advice I heard while waiting out three years in the US Army, "Don't get nervous in the Service," and also sometimes with the "Three P's" of all skill acquisition: Patient, Persistent Practice. Or even with, as A. R. Alexander once said to Frank Pierce Jones, "Be patient; stick to principle; and it will all open up like great cauliflower."

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