

Breath timed phonation, BTP

By Aase Orsted, Speech-and Language Therapist, Denmark.

During my training to become a Speech and Language Therapist in Copenhagen I was only taught two different voice training methods, Forchhammer's Auditory Analytic Method and Sven Smith's Accent Method, which made me believe that those two methods were the only ones existing in the entire world. However, on an IALP conference in 1983 I heard mention of the Nasality Method by Dr. Johannes Pahn and Breath Timed Phonation by professor Horst Coblenzer and my curiosity arose. This was the starting point of my further education, where I studied under professor Coblenzer in Switzerland and under Dr. Pahn in Rostock, DDR. I was especially enthusiastic about Coblenzer's BTP method, and I therefore attended all his different courses several times in Switzerland during the period 1984 - 2002. In 1994 professor Coblenzer certified me as a teacher of the BTP method and I started the BTP education for colleagues in Denmark in 1996.

Having completed all four parts of the BTP education and run a few courses in West Midlands, England, I regarded myself a skilled Coblenzer therapist and took a sabbatical year in 1988. During this year I worked as a speech therapist at Southland Hospital, Invercargill in NZ, and ran workshops for colleagues in Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland. In Australia, I ran workshops in Melbourne and Adelaide and taught a couple of weeks at the Academy for Performing Arts in Perth. The workshops were well received and that convinced me that this very dynamic and creative method was able to compete globally.

On BTP

Breath Timed Phonation means that you adapt the length of your spoken phrases to your natural, individual rhythm of breathing – and not the other way round let your thoughts control the stream of speech, causing arbitrary gasps for breath.

BTP is also the English name of a method, which during the 1960's was developed by professor Horst Coblenzer by the German name of AAP (Atem Rhythmisch Angepasste Phonation). The most important principle of BTP is that the phonatory respiration should always be natural and physiological "quick, noiseless and effortless" as Coblenzer, himself, puts it. The method might just as well have been called "The Rhythmical, Intentional Method" or "The Physiological Partner Related Method".

Professor Coblenzer and his method

Horst Coblenzer was born on the 1st of August 1927 in Bochum, Germany. He worked as an actor and speech master in Germany, until he was employed as a teacher of respiration, voice and speech at Max Reinhardt Seminar, the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna 1961-1997. He wrote a doctoral dissertation on "The Significance of Phonatory Breath Rhythm for the Actor's Speech Production" and became a professor at the university. He also worked as a guest teacher at the Academy of Performing Arts in Moscow and in Stockholm.

He was taught Eutonia by Gerda Alexander in Copenhagen. Eutonia means the optimal muscle tension and is also the name of Gerda Alexander's psychophysical method of relaxation and movement. He integrated the principles of this system in his own method, AAP.

He was familiar with the extensive German phoniatic literature and had concentrated his efforts on learning the methods of voice treatment by German phoniaticians, such as Gundermann, Schilling, Schlaffhorst/Andersen and Aderhold. Many of these methods have a broader approach to voice training with involvement of gross motor and psychic processes than the few earlier known methods in Scandinavia.

Furthermore, professor Coblenzer has performed scientific research in collaboration with lung physiologist, professor Franz Muhar, Vienna. By means of X-ray and EMG examinations of the diaphragm during phonation, they established that the diaphragm is not only a breathing muscle but takes part in everything we do, feel and think. It can have an activity of its own, enabling it to render an adjusted inspiratory counter-tension during phonation. One of their X-ray videos clearly demonstrates how diaphragms of wind players follow the musical accents, so that downward movements do not only correspond to inspiratory breaks but are expressions of support-creating energy, exclusively caused by commitment. These results differ strongly from Jo Estill's intellectual, mechanical view, according to which you arbitrarily stretch your neck and torso and train the "brain computer" to adjust to the targeted support tension at any time. Coblenzer and Muhar have written the book "Atem und Stimme" (Breath and Voice), which was published in Vienna in 1976. My Danish translation appeared in 1988.

The most important characteristics of the BTP Method

Coblenzer works from the basis of the phonation and focuses on the function of the diaphragm. An important trait is the use of the relationship between movement and respiration. Each movement has got its own breathing, and since it is easier to imitate a way of moving rather than a way of breathing, a great part of Coblenzer's exercises are accompanied by gross motor movements or gestures, facilitating the phonatory

breathing and making it easy to establish the lasting deep costo-abdominal phonatory respiration. This makes the method dynamic and child-friendly.

The relationship between psychic tension and breathing is an essential principle. Excitement influences the tonus adjusting nervous system, which means that intentional work with intensified attention will supply extra energy and air pressure for the speech. Mechanical exercises cannot be totally avoided, but trying to make the exercises intentional and meaningful will make the work motivating and done "con amore". One way of accomplishing this is to choose working texts of good literary value. This way you obtain better and quicker results of the voice therapy.

It is an important rule that all speech is communication. The goal of the therapy is therefore to foster healthy speech organs and the ability to serve the message, so it is easy to hear and understand for the interlocutors, hence the speaker must maintain intensity and contact all the time.

The many gross motor and intentional exercises make the method holistic and ensure the variation and intensity of the programme.

Coblenzer does not take credit for techniques invented by others. He is standing on the shoulders of his predecessors and has always given them credit. His book contains comprehensive literature references. Personally, he is especially known for his rocking exercises and bow bending. It is, however, to his credit that all techniques are linked together coherently, with a shared underlying theory.

The BTP Method is rich of techniques. The speech therapists really get their toolboxes filled up already at The Fundamental Course. It also contains a comprehensive, dynamic programme of articulation.

The development of AAP in the German speaking part of Europe

Already at the beginning of the 1960's Coblenzer ran summer courses in the course centre Boldern in Männedorf at Zurich Lake in Switzerland. These courses - three courses over three successive weeks in July - were well visited with around 150 participants each week from all the German speaking part of Europe as well as the Netherlands. When I joined in 1984, a large number of speech therapists participated. During the 1990's the method had become widely spread and fully integrated in the logopedic educations in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Holland, and the participants were now mainly business people who wanted to improve their public speaking skills. In 2002 Coblenzer reached the age of 75 and ran his last courses, after which he sold the concept to his staff members. Since then the courses have changed as to content, frequency and location with much fewer participants.

My reconstruction of BTP in Denmark

I have made an effort to pass on the method as purely and loyally as possible, but of course I have also left my own stamp on it, as I have targeted the BTP education for logopedic practice, combining the techniques I acquired in Switzerland with my own clinical experience from testing the effects on patients in the hospital, where I worked.

My educational courses are - just like the courses in Switzerland used to be - organized into four parts: The FUNDAMENTAL Course, The Continuation Course I: VOICE, The Continuation Course II: ARTICULATION, and finally The Continuation Course III: SPEECH. Each course lasts 5 days, and the classes consist of alternating theory and practice.

The goal of The FUNDAMENTAL Course is to establish the physiological phonatory respiration. Many gross motor speech and voice exercises are included, which are extremely useful for both children and adults. These balancing, rhythmical and swinging exercises that have a tonus adjusting effect cannot be found in any other known methods in Scandinavia.

The Continuation Course I: VOICE starts with a test, demonstrating the participants' ability to control their speech respiration (covered in the first course). A voice protocol is compiled for each participant, recording status and progress during the week. The most important rules of this course are to anchor the respiration and make space in the pharynx in order to achieve bigger voice volume with less effort. The work from The FUNDAMENTAL Course continues, and fine motor voice exercises with starting points in larynx and the vocal tract are added. Similar exercises from other compatible methods, such as Forchhammer, Pahn and Estill, are included in order to give a fuller picture of voice therapy and enable the participants to work in an eclectic manner.

The goal of the Continuation Course II is to further a plastic articulation by means of gross and fine motor, mechanical and intentional articulation exercises. An articulation protocol is compiled for each participant at the start of the course. Coblenzer worked with texts in order to improve actors' interpretation skills, whereas I choose the texts for logopedic purposes, according to the qualities I want to encourage, be it a good flow, rhythm, pauses, modulation or distinct articulation.

The Continuation Course, III: SPEECH was established in Denmark in 2007. This course gives the general view of the whole method and has to do with communication and the role of the speech therapist. Coblenzer's own Speech Course was purely rhetorical. I have reshaped it to meet the needs of speech therapists. Uniquely for this course live workshops with patients are included.

In Coblenzer's courses the warm-up exercises were separate to the rest of the course and guided by professional movement therapists. I have integrated the warm-up

exercises into the course using yoga-, eutonia-and Schlaffhorst-Andersen exercises, all belonging to Coblenzer's background. In my experience it is a good principle to include gross motor warm-up exercises at the beginning of each course of therapy and finish with gross motor/phonatory integration.

My way of teaching is different from Coblenzer's, as I more explicitly explain the theory. Coblenzer got angry if people asked too many questions. He wanted to avoid a superficial intellectual approach. There is a great difference between **knowing** and **being able to!** Therefore you have to experience the exercises on your own body. It is essential that course participants have a clear understanding of how the method works to empower them to work consciously with the method, thereby enabling them to target the delivery to the clients' needs. After having performed a series of exercises, they will be reviewed, and the participants get the chance to capture their own observations.

In all the courses the logopedic dimension is emphasized, as the exercises are put in relation to the voice and speech problems, to which they empirically have proved effective.

The Development of BTP in Denmark

Already after I attended my first course in Switzerland in 1984 I started running short BTP courses in Denmark. Many colleagues were enthusiastic like me, but I also met much resistance and criticism. It was not generally understood that each exercise has its own clearly defined educational purpose. Many believed that the accompanying gross motor movements were just for fun in order to look smart and please the children.

In the first years I ran short one, two and three day courses, where I in a simplified way accentuated the most important elements of the method but had to leave out the fine details. These reduced courses led some of the participants to believe that they fully understood the BTP method. In 1996 I started running proper educational courses, which enabled me to cover the total content of the method in a complete and satisfactory way.

I have run the educational courses many times in Denmark and twice in Norway. My impression is that the introduction of BTP has caused a paradigm shift in the practice of speech therapy in both countries. For instance, the child-friendly techniques now make it possible to work with small children's hoarse voices.

In the beginning my impression was that Coblenzer in his work with the students was a bit too zealous and strict. But after having worked for many years with the propagation of the method I understand him better. It may seem paradoxical that a method, apparently so playful and easy, demands such discipline and care. However, if the

exercises are carried out in a slack and sluggish manner they simply do not achieve the desired effect.

BTP in the Future

In Denmark I have started certifying colleagues that meet the following criteria: they have completed all four courses twice (the second time as teaching assistants) in a satisfactory way, they have clinical experience and good voices. We have just founded a Danish union for BTP practitioners and other interested colleagues to preserve the pure and unspoilt quality of the method in the future.

In international logopedics, I realize, much is staked on reductionist teaching, control examinations and machines. I would argue that better results can be achieved with a method that encompasses pleasurable gross motor and intentional exercises appealing to the whole person. In fact, this seems to be aligned with the latest neuroeducational research.

In my own long career as a speech therapist the BTP method has shown - often to my own surprise - very beneficial in the work with patients and students.

About the author

Aase Orsted is a retired Speech and Language Therapist. She now works privately with voice and dysarthria patients, besides running courses in the BTP method.

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