

EXCHANGE

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Exploring The Alexander Technique: Its Central Hypothesis and Teaching Modalities, Part II

by Holly Sweeney, M. A.

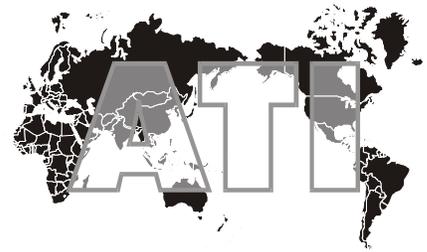
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The Teaching Modalities of the Alexander Technique

If you were to observe an Alexander teacher giving a lesson in the Technique, here are some things you would most likely see. If the student was a beginner or injured, the teacher might work with him while he was lying down on a massage table. On the massage table, the student would not have to support himself against gravity and may find it easier to release habitually contracted muscles. You would see the teacher gently touching him and perhaps supporting and slowly moving his limbs, frequently returning to his head and neck area to guide the student's musculature towards release as well as to adjust the support beneath the student's head to the height which best accommodates the curvature of the cervical spine. You would note that the teacher spoke to the student, keeping him informed about what is going on in the lesson and encouraging him to express his sensory experiences in language.¹⁴

You would also see the teacher working with the student off the table in a variety of everyday activities such as getting in and out of a chair, standing, walking, speaking from a seated or standing position, bending, lifting, and reaching. The teacher would assist the student with light, guiding touch, frequently in the head-neck area. The guidance would facilitate the neuromuscular response of spinal lengthening (the "primary control").⁵ The stimulation of the student's primary control would allow him to experience the sensation of upright balance with reduced muscular effort. This phenomenon is one of the unique aspects of an Alexander lesson: The teacher actually gives the student *the experience* of balanced coordination on a sensory level.³ Again, you would notice that the teacher spoke frequently with the student, giving him attention focusing cues and encouraging him to express in language his sensory experiences and the reasoning process he was employing to direct his coordination.¹⁴

continued on page 19



ATI Vision and Mission

To establish an open means of global communication for people to discuss, apply, research, and experiment with the discoveries of F. M. Alexander.

To foster the use of the F. M. Alexander Technique in social and environmental interrelationships.

To create a vital organization whose structure and means of operation are consistent with the principles of the F. M. Alexander Technique.

In This Issue...

Editor's Page	2
From the Chair	3
Emotion and the Alexander Technique	4
Annual General Meeting	10
Getting Started with the Alexander Technique the Hard Way	11
ATI on the Internet	14
Coming Events	17

Editor's Page

Welcome to volume 7, number 2 of ExchangeE! It is my honor to assume the editorship of ExchangeE. Won't you all join me in a rising round of applause for my predecessor, Pat Nicholson? Pat has left us a strong legacy in her work with ExchangeE for all these years. I only hope I can do half as good a job of it.

When Jamee Culbertson, the new Alexander Technique International chair, asked me to help with ExchangeE I knew it would be a lot of work. And so it has been, but insignificant compared with the opportunity to work with the ExchangeE contributors. The historically very high level of quality of ExchangeE will be much easier to maintain with the excellent submissions I've seen so far.

I have in my possession a copy of *The Use of the Alexander Technique with Autistic Children: A Pilot Study* by Shirley Duckworth Oates. This is an enormously interesting piece of scholarship, in my humble opinion. It is too long to publish in its entirety in ExchangeE, but I'll make the copy I have available as a loan to anyone with an interest. See the masthead below for my contact information. From the abstract:

The objective was to investigate the effects of the Alexander Technique (AT) on children with autism. A multi-method design was used involving an experimental study with case study intervention. All participants and controls had been medically diagnosed with autism and selection was offered on the basis of having written parental approval to participate. After ten AT lessons, changes in behavior were observed and measured quantitatively and

qualitatively. The study was carried out at a school for special educational needs. There were seven participants and eight (no AT) controls. Statistical evaluation was by repeated measures matched-pairs design, pre- and post-Alexander Technique lessons.

Shirley adds that the paper should be available through university resources with the following information:

Oates, Duckworth Shirley (1998) *The Use of the Alexander Technique with Autistic Children: A Pilot Study* (BSc.Hons.) Thesis, Health Sciences Department, University of Salford, Salford, UK.

I ask your forbearance with a personal indulgence. In this issue we have *Getting Started with the Alexander Technique the Hard Way*. It's the story of how my brother, David, was introduced to the Technique after a pretty nasty car accident. We approach it as sort of a team effort, with contributions to the story from David, our Alexander teacher, Jamee Culbertson, and from me. The important point of the story is the acceptance of the Technique by health professionals. I hope that ExchangeE can further this acceptance.

You may have noticed that this issue is just a little late getting to you. The computer used to produce ExchangeE (my computer), suffered a rather nasty crash. Although I had many of the submissions stored offline, the basic shell of ExchangeE from volume 7, number 1 was lost. There is always a silver lining, however. Many of the small changes to the design of ExchangeE that I had put off in order to meet the deadline have now been made, since it pretty much had to be done from scratch anyway. I'll be using safer procedures in the future to prevent the kind of problems that can cause an issue to be late.

EXCHANGE

ExchangeE is published quarterly by Alexander Technique International (ATI), the purpose of which is to promote and advance the F. Mathias Alexander Technique. ExchangeE is designed to disseminate information regarding the technique to ATI members and the public.

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ExchangeE welcomes letters to the editor and submissions. Electronic (e-mail or file) submissions are preferred. Contact Dan Arsenault, editor, at dan.arsenault@iee.org or by mail at:

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From the Chair

by Jamee Culbertson, Chair of Alexander Technique International

We have news to report on the attempt by several states to license somatic practitioners under massage therapy laws. State legislatures in several of the United States are once again considering legislation that could affect the Alexander Community in the United States. There have been, and continue to be, for instance, efforts in several states to classify Alexander Teachers as massage therapists for purpose of licensing.

As chair, I believe we must resist such efforts for a number of reasons, and, toward that end, there are several things we can do, both individually and as an organization. I am including a letter by Joel Kendall, ATI Liason to the New York State Coalition of Non-Massage Organizations. This group, which includes ATI and AMSAT, has been active on the legislative front to make sure that New York State authorities treat the Alexander Technique properly, and they deserve our support. Here is Joel's letter:

Through its association with the New York Coalition of Non-Massage Practices, ATI is in the process of clarifying for the New York State Board for Massage Therapy how and why the Alexander Technique is not massage. The New York Massage Statute defines massage as "...engaging in applying a scientific system of activity to the muscular structure of the human body by means of stroking, kneading, tapping and vibrating with the hands or vibrators for the purpose of improving muscle tone and circulation."

As we all know, the Alexander Technique does not stroke, knead, tap or vibrate with the hands. And importantly, we do not diagnose, we do not make health claims, we do not do therapy, and we do not advertise that we carry out these activities.

Continued on page 14

Alexander Technique International

For membership information please contact Debi Adams at the address below.

ATI membership \$55.00 per year.

Teaching membership \$120.00 per year.

Membership includes a subscription to Exchange. Subscription to Exchange alone \$25.00 per year. Please send check or money order in U. S. funds to:

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Emotion and the Alexander Technique

by Raewyn Haywood

What are emotions?

Emotions are complex physiological and chemical changes in the body perceived as a state of being. They govern how we experience ourselves and our world, give us our humanity, our passion, and carry messages which enable us to respond to our lives. They have been the food of poets, painters, musicians, and lovers through all of time.

Emotions are an integral part of our health. In Chinese medicine emotions are considered to be energy or “chi” in the body which is governed by the organs. Imbalances in the emotional system will in turn affect specific areas of the body with illness. For example the kidneys affect the hair on the head and are linked with shock and fear, hence hair literally turning white as a result of severe shock.

Marie-Francoise le Foll makes the analogy of our emotional lives being like a paint box of colors of all hues, all possible responses to the stimulus of life. Emotions are indeed a rich and wonderful gift to the human race. The problems arise, however, when our range of response becomes limited to only a few colors, when the reality we are perceiving is stuck, painful, and repetitive.

Pain in Chinese medicine is a stagnation of chi in an area of the body. Emotional pain is, in my opinion, the same thing. A freedom of movement, a freedom of response has somehow been lost and contracted. Our system becomes stuck. The colors of the paintbox lose their range and texture.

Dr. Candace Pert, a prominent scientist and researcher in the United States, gives us an interesting physiological picture of what emotions actually are. In her work she discovered that we produce chemicals called neuro-peptides which attach to specific receptor sites in the body. When the neuro-peptides attach to these sites, we experience certain states of being, certain emotions, pleasure, sadness, euphoria etc. Our systems are constantly being flooded with different neuro-peptides as we respond to different stimuli. If the receptor sites are damaged however, which is possible under a variety of conditions, our ability to receive the chemical information we are producing and respond appropriately is severely impaired.

The picture of emotion that I see is one of a movement of states of being, of chemical change, of energy moving in the body. Emotions literally are energy in motion: “e-motion.”

What is happening then, that this aspect of ourselves can be so stuck, so difficult, such a prison. Emotional pain is a multi-billion dollar industry, the thing that keeps anti-depressants, Prozac®, sedatives, sugar, and pills and potions of all varieties pouring into our systems every day.

I think that we have invested culturally in a suppression of our emotional selves, developed a resistance to flowing with life and listening to our body’s wisdom. This is reflected in our language in aphorisms such as “brace yourself,” “keep your chin up,”

“pull yourself together,” “don’t lose your head,” and “keep a stiff upper lip,” all advice in holding ourselves, in managing our experience and our emotions.

As Alexander teachers and students we are well acquainted with the body as a reflection of the internal thoughts, habits, beliefs, and experiences of a person.

The most obvious manifestation of emotional resistance in the physical body is muscular tension, the results of which have a dramatic impact on the functioning of the person as a whole. This holding in the body causes interference on many levels. The breathing suffers due to the diaphragm being constricted. Poorer respiration means less oxygen in the blood stream. This means less food for the cells, less effective repairing of damaged cells, less blood flow, less information received and processed. Therefore our connection and exchange with the environment is not as dynamic as it could be. Organs are compressed, peristalsis and therefore digestion slowed and interfered with.

Very often we see people stuck in some variation of the startle reflex or “fight or flight” response, shoulders raised, breathing shallowed, head forward and down, knees locked. Under the right conditions this is a wonderful defense stance, essential to our survival in nature under conditions of acute stress. It suspends normal bodily

processes, allows energy to redirect to allow the most effective response to the immediate danger. Frank Jones observed that “...fear, anxiety and pain all show postural derivations from the norm similar to those seen in the startle pattern.” (Gelb, pp. 51) We become unable to release ourselves fully into an open, balanced and receptive state.

The picture of emotion that I see is one of a movement of states of being, of chemical change, of energy moving in the body.

Holding in this way interferes dramatically with our musculo-skeletal system as well, leading to joint immobilization, less synovial fluid in the joints, cartilage which is not as nourished or lubricated, and the adhering of connective tissue around the joints. The soft tissue surrounding continually contacted musculature, over time, begins to set, holding the muscle in a limited position and reinforcing the downward spiral into less and less movement and freedom. This kind of habitual tension and interference in our system has a profound effect on our emotional lives.

When excessive and concentrated areas of tension are present in our system, the structure of the cells themselves is distorted. Dr. Pert found that under such conditions the receptor sites which perform a vital function in receiving the emotional information carried by the neuro-peptides can become unavailable hosts. The receptor’s impaired performance as hosts leads, in turn, to a reduced emotional experience and therefore a limited pattern of behavior and response.

In terms of where we experience emotions, Dr. Pert found major receptor sites not only in the limbic system (those parts of the brain traditionally associated with emo-

Emotion and the Alexander Technique

tional response), and also in the gut and around the spinal column. Sites were found in smaller concentration throughout the whole of our selves. In this instance the mind and body are truly inseparable as sites of emotional experience.

Tension in the system also interferes with the feedback loops to the brain which signal when enough of a chemical has been produced. The failure of feedback leads to the flooding of the system by neuro-peptides which in turn causes receptors to shrink and decrease in number. The domination of the system by one chemical sets up a pattern of limited behavioral response. The possibility of the range of experience is dramatically reduced.

Dr. Pert also found that the body stores a memory of powerful emotional events. If someone experiences a trauma which chemically overwhelms the system, the imprint of that trauma literally stays in the root of the receptor until such time as the tension is removed, the energy released, and the cell healed.

So, what are we, what is left if we remove interference, if we release and unwind patterns of doing and holding and let go of the unnecessary tension in our systems?

If we undertake this process [of learning the Alexander Technique], we begin to discover that we are a remarkable organism of biological and physiological balance and support. In Alexander terms, if we allow ourselves to inhabit the primary control which is our birthright, we find our natural grace, poise, and ease. Rediscovering ourselves in this way allows us to live much closer to a state of neurological integrity and opens the possibility for profound connection with our environment and community. Getting in touch with this internal and external support system of our world allows us to find more appropriate and more creative responses to life's stimuli. We have some freedom from fear, an opportunity to respond from the present moment, from our "blue sky" rather than our "clouds," as Marie-Francoise le Foll described it.

When we live from this truth as David Brazier describes it in *The Feeling Buddha*, "We delight in the miracle of daily life, enjoy each breath, savor each taste and look quite naturally with eyes of love." (Brazier, pp. 110) Our Buddha nature is revealed. On a cellular level, through dissipation and release of tension, cells are restored to their true form and as a result distortion and compensation are removed. Emotionally the possibilities for response open up. The range of colors in the paintbox are restored.

So how do we transform our emotional lives? How do we become whole, healed people living from our true being, connected to the world and responding with freedom of choice?

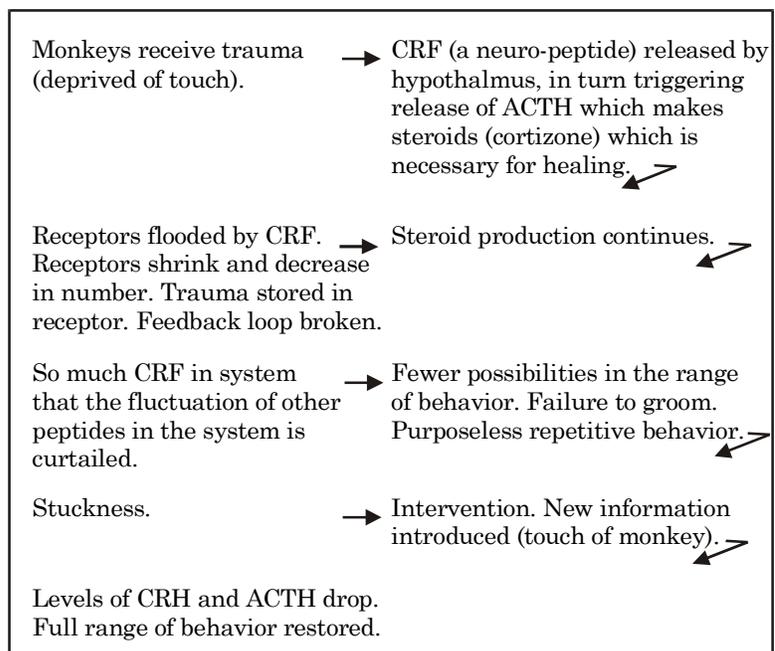
We need a willingness to experience our genuine and authentic emotions without trying to create a diversion, an escape. Feeling what is there in us can be extremely painful and uncomfortable. It can challenge our illusion of self, self-image, and ego. We must be willing to let go, to surrender to the process, to let ourselves "experience our experience," as Tommy Thompson said in a recent workshop. We must be willing to leave who we are for who we can become.

This doesn't mean abandoning ourselves to a self indulgent emotional bloodbath. To do so is not helpful, nor is repressing or holding in what we feel. One creates an overwhelm of energy and confusion in the system, building even more chaos and emotional energy, the other continues the cycle of tension and fixity.

By allowing ourselves to fully experience what we feel, it's almost as if we sink further and further through layers of feeling and as we stop reacting to them, our emotions can change. Anger gives way to sadness, sadness to fear. Sometimes we don't even know what we feel, just that nothing works. Fully acknowledged and released however, the system itself will spontaneously respond, bringing the person back up in a buoyancy of lightness, release, and ease. To struggle and resist this process, to hold on to these states, is to lock them in for another day.

As well as experiencing ourselves authentically, there is another part in the equation to emotional health, to restoring ourselves to integrity. As part of the healing process we need to be open to new information. At some point we need to invite in a new construct, idea, or perception that will enable us to move out of the loop of emotional entrapment. We need to return to the sites of old wounds and painful experiences with a new tool kit with which to repair ourselves.

In an experiment conducted using monkeys as subjects, Dr. Candace Pert showed that introducing new information was a critical part of repairing the feedback loop and thus restoring the system to a full range of response. The experiment was conducted as follows:



Emotion and the Alexander Technique

continued from previous page

Dr. Pert observes that people who are depressed are often in a chronic state of ACTH production. She also states that in suicide victims there is sometimes up to a tenfold level of CRF in their cerebro-spinal fluid, suggesting the possibilities of chemical and therefore emotional change with the intervention of new information into the cycle.

As the experiment shows, even on a cellular level, the system always has the potential for healing. Receptors which are distorted due to tension or shrunk and decreased in number as a result of the system being flooded, are revitalized once the interference is removed, and the feedback loop is restored.

A model which I feel explains the healing process very well is in Peter Levine's *Waking the Tiger*. He talks of the creation of a "healing vortex," where "...we pick up the support and resources needed to successfully negotiate the trauma vortex." (Levine, pp. 199). By moving in a figure of eight motion between the two vortices we move between feeling the depth of our experience and trauma and reaching for new information, for a place of support and expansion. In this movement "we release the tightly bound energies at their cores, as if they were being unwound." (ibid) In a physical parallel, Donald Epstein, founder of Network Chiropractic, has observed that a healthy spine free of interference oscillates in a 3-D figure-of-eight.

One of the greatest skills we can develop within this area is learning to observe our responses to life. By developing awareness of our reactions we engage our conscious mind, bring conscious choice to our actions. Observing our response to stimuli and pausing before taking action allows a chink of light into lives lived unconsciously and unaware. As we know, Alexander called this process "inhibition." He said, "Inhibition is a human potentiality of the utmost value in any attempt to make changes to the human self, and my experience has convinced me that it is the potentiality most in need of development." (Alexander, pp. 114) Inhibition is an empowering process of movement. By inhibiting we gain awareness of what we "do," of the interference our systems have been subject to. As we consider habitual reactions, and say yes or no to them, we gain access to a greater freedom of response, setting in motion the wheels of change and growth in ourselves.

This process of bringing conscious awareness to our everyday reactions is what the Buddha meant by enlightenment. The Buddha asked that we open our eyes to the reality of our lives, that we rise above suffering, harness the energy and live fully with spirit and passion. He did not talk of the avoidance of suffering, or of the avoidance of relationship or any other aspect of our humanity, as has often been construed. The temptation to use inhibition as a means to avoid our experience is also a misrepresentation of the function of the tool.

The journey into emotional freedom is one of immense process, cycles, and change. It demands on-going work, committment, courage, and consciousness not only to find what we feel and feel what we feel, but consistently make choices of response and action that are aligned to our true nature.

Raewyn Haywood is an Alexander Technique teacher from New Zealand who recently finished her teacher training in the Boston area. She is currently Alexander Technique International's administrative assistant. Raewyn holds a bachelor of arts in Japanese Language from Auckland University.

So as teachers of the Alexander Technique what is our role in assisting people to improve the quality of their emotional lives?

We must be committed to working from our own integrity, our own true being. This intention allows us to hold space for a student, a space where they can experience themselves, to maybe choose to let go old patterns safe in the knowledge that they are held by an unjudgemental and compassionate support.

The nature of the support offered translates, in the Alexander Technique, as profound touch, a dynamic of connection between our self, the student, and the environment. Offering the touch of compassion and possibility at the same time allows the student to be fully acknowledged, and introduces new information. This in turn interrupts habitual patterns and loops in the system, creating the possibility of freedom of movement or rather movement into physical and emotional freedom. The process of awareness is set in motion, and with it the possibility of change.

The journey into emotional freedom is one of immense process, cycles, and change. It demands on-going work, commitment, courage and consciousness not only to find what we feel and feel what we feel, but consistently make choices of response and action that are aligned to our true nature.

It is an enormous learning process and path to take, but one full of rewards, full of moments of recognizing the true self. Rediscovering the vibrant richness of the palette lying before us allows us to paint freely the canvas of the lives we choose to live.



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Annual General Meeting

We've found the sites for the next two Annual General Meetings, and thought you'd like to hear about them, since both have date changes from our usual meeting time.

The 1999 AGM will be at Sevenoaks Pathworks Center, Madison, Virginia (not far from Charlottesville) and instead of the first week in November it will take place the *second* week, on Thursday, November 11 to Sunday, November 14. We thank Jan Baty for finding this excellent possibility, and feel fortunate this date opened up for ATI.

The beauty and healing energy of the land at Seven Oaks supports the Pathwork Center, a spiritual educational center. The 130 acres lie at the foot hills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The center has beautiful meeting spaces, and is known far and wide for the quality of its food. Shared rooms and baths are in a large central building and four smaller guest houses.

Suggestions to the AGM agenda planning committee at agenda-plan@ati-net.com are still welcome.

We are for the first time lining up a site more than a year ahead of time. We plan to be at the Armada Hotel at Spanish Point, West County Clare, Ireland on the weekend of October 14-15, 2000 and perhaps extra days (Thursday Oct. 12 and Friday Oct. 13 on, or earlier). It's about a half hour from Shannon International Airport, and we'll have the whole hotel to ourselves. We thank Rick Brennan for the suggestion of this beautiful site and we're already pursuing entertainment by traditional Irish musicians whom ATI members know. This will be our first AGM east of the Atlantic.

Please feel free to suggest possible sites for future AGMs (2001 and after) to site committee chair Jim Froelich at agm-site@ati-net.com. We'll be getting out more detailed information and reservation forms for the '99 AGM at Sevenoaks soon.

Jim Froelich, for the AGM Site Committee ☺

Editor's Page

continued from page 2

As a member of ATI, this is *your* journal. Submissions for publication are most welcome. See the contact information in the masthead (on page 2). Digital submissions (on disk or as part of e-mail) are much preferred. Most of all, though, I look forward to hearing from as many of you as have contacted me already. The worldwide Alexander community certainly has its share of wonderful humans.

Exchange will continue to serve its core audience, the members of ATI, as it always has. Additionally I hope to move the editorial direction of the journal in such a way as to more often serve the needs of readers at large. I think ExchangeE can serve a larger function in spreading the word about the Technique than it does currently. I'd like to see ExchangeE, for instance, distributed in medical professional's offices *and* their waiting rooms. Do we have the budget for this? Do we have the will to get out and do it? Time will tell.

The next issue of ExchangeE will be our Annual General Meeting special edition. Starting with this issue, ExchangeE will be available in portable document format (Adobe Acrobat) on the ATI web site. Each issue will be placed on the site as the next issue goes to press, so look for this one in October. See the web site for more information on how to get the reader software.

When I first started Alexander Technique lessons, I wondered why I had never heard of something so wonderful before. We've got great work to do in getting the word out about the Alexander Technique (and lots of it), and I very much look forward to helping.

Dan Arsenaault ☺

Getting Started With the Alexander Technique the Hard Way

by Dan Arsenault, David Arsenault, and Jamee Culbertson

Editor's note: Contributions to this story come from three authors. In order to spare some confusion, three typefaces are used. Contributions from Dan Arsenault look like this. Contributions from David Arsenault are italicized. Contributions from Jamee Culbertson look like this.

The irony is not lost on me. When I got the phone call from my sister-in-law Laurie that my brother David had been in a bad car accident, I was just getting ready for an Alexander Technique lesson with my teacher, Jamee Culbertson. It was the eve of the Thanksgiving holiday, the start of a four-day weekend. I'm sure I was not an apt pupil at that lesson, but, on my way out, Jamee offered to see David as soon as he was well enough.

I had a car accident on November 25, 1998. I broke both my hips and shattered my right kneecap.

While I was recovering at home I had a visiting nurse and a physical therapist but it was obvious to those who knew me that I was really uncomfortable, not in any undue pain but my body no longer seemed to fit very well. My brother told me he knew someone who did something called the Alexander Technique, and he thought it might help. I met Jamee two weeks later and began lessons. From the first few minutes it was clear to me that this was helping me a great deal. Like many people who have had massive trauma, I felt delicate and tense, as if I was trying to hold myself together by brute force. The lessons have taught me to find the time and to allow myself the room to move freely. Jamee would frequently talk about making some room in the joints and allowing me to find my proper place.

to find the time and to allow myself the room to move freely. Jamee would frequently talk about making some room in the joints and allowing me to find my proper place.

When I first went to see David he was at home in a hospital bed recovering from his injuries. I wanted to approach him easily and gently at first without much overt movement until I found out what his limitations were. He had had surgery on both hips and his right knee and there remained a considerable amount of hardware inside keeping him together to aid in the healing process. He suffered temporary nerve damage in his left leg, which left him unable to flex his foot very far. While we were saying our hellos, I assessed just how I wanted to approach working with him in the most cooperative way. The head of the bed was up against the wall so I couldn't put my hands directly on his head and neck right away. There were movable brackets on both sides of the bed but it seemed the most unobtrusive to begin at his feet. I pulled up a



Jamee Culbertson working with a bedridden David Arsenault early in 1999.

Getting Started With the Alexander Technique the Hard Way

chair and began at his left side making contact with David through his feet. There was no interference in David's ability to access his postural reflex, what F.M. Alexander calls the primary control, "...that which governs the working of all the mechanisms and so renders the control of the complex human organism comparatively simple...it depends upon a certain use of the head and neck in relation to the use of the rest of the body..." (quoted from *The Use Of the Self*, pp. 59-60). The Primary Control is a first and primary movement that allows for a freedom of movement throughout. Head-neck reflexes are the central mechanism that orients us to our environment. It is "...the primary relation upon which all more ultimate relations depend." (Frank Jones, *Body Awareness in Action* pp. 60). David first noticed a lengthening along his left side as a sigh of relief came over him. He moved to stretch a bit and discovered that he could flex his foot farther than he could before.

After passing the life or death stage there is a natural tendency to rely on the wisdom of the medical professionals. While I knew what benefit David could derive from Alexander lessons, I'm sure David would have been highly circumspect about doing anything that his medical team did not know about and approve. The key here was an enlightened physical therapist.

I told my physical therapist what I was learning at the lessons and she approved heartily. She had heard of the Technique and knew it to be beneficial. She thought that in conjunction with doing the prescribed exercises the Technique would allow me to use myself to my best advantage and allow my recovery to proceed faster.

David was finding a great deal of relief in the lessons. The first report was more mobility with his left foot, a decrease in his pain medication and *finally*, a good night's sleep! David has a growing understanding of what Alexander called "Inhibition," an awareness of indirect action, a decision to cease giving permission to habitual unconscious reactions. "In the presence of a stimulus to move, inhibition facilitates lengthening of the spine and adds to the efficiency of the movement. Too quick a response will shorten muscles in the neck and prevent the lengthening of the spine." (Frank Jones *Body Awareness in Action* pp. 149.) Inhibition has allowed David to learn to bring conscious choice into his response to the stimulus created by his desires. At first we worked with his reaction to the pain he was experiencing so that his reaction to the pain would not make his overall experience worse. "The Alexander Technique is the only method of improving human use and functioning which teaches an indirect method of consciously preventing interference with one's best use and functioning and is the only method where its teachers consciously use these principles at the same time they are teaching the Technique to others." (Quoted from the ATI Professional Development Committee report on the ATI web site, www.ati-net.com.)

Around Christmas I was allowed to stand, and at the end of January I began to learn how to walk again. The Technique was very helpful in these early stages. In the beginning walking was very awkward. My legs did not feel as if they belonged to me and would obey very few commands. I had a walker at first and crutches a week later, but even in this sort of condition the Technique helped. I needed to be conscious all the time of my position and how I wanted to move. Jamee and I discussed the rare opportunity that presented itself in learning how to walk almost from the very start but with an adult sensi-

bility and the Technique to apply. It was mid-March when I traded in my crutches for canes. We kept doing lessons all along and by the time I could stand a little straighter on my canes I was ready to do so. Although most of my lesson happens with me reclined we always focus on the kinetic aspects of the Technique and as I became more kinetic it helped more and more. This last week I have been able to discard my last cane, I had been walking with one cane for the last month. At all these stages there has been improvement in my posture and in the way I use my hips to move. As I learn to control my muscles again and as the strength comes back into them it becomes ever more important to apply the things I have learned. I get both lazy and occasionally stupid and forget to apply what I know, but fortunately there is a price to be paid almost immediately so I tend to remember more often.

I am about half way through my recovery now, but I hope I am only starting to learn the Alexander Technique. As I continue to grow stronger and better I hope to apply what I learn to improve how I use my body. I am an amateur actor so I hope to be able to apply some of the Technique to my work on stage. I am in a fall production so we shall see how well I have learned. There are so many things to try to remember when one is on stage that the Technique will have to be well ingrained. I am also a piledriver and I hope to get back to work around Thanksgiving if the doctor gives the O.K. This will be the real test for me. The type of construction work I do can be very demanding, but I feel certain that I will be able to do it again.

While I knew what benefit David could derive from Alexander lessons, I'm sure David would have been highly circumspect about doing anything that his medical team did not know about and approve. The key here was an enlightened physical therapist.

"She thought that in conjunction with doing the prescribed exercises the Technique would allow me to use myself to my best advantage and allow my recovery to proceed faster."

I am waiting somewhat impatiently to see how the Technique will affect the way I perform both on stage and at work, but also how it will be when I really am recovered. I hope that I can learn to do things wholly and with better focus so I can enjoy the act in each case for itself. We shall see.

It goes without saying that David's trauma was not his alone. His wife, Laurie has, understandably, had a lot to deal with over the last several months. From bedpans to 'helpful' relatives, from finances to somehow finding the strength to continue. Laurie has also been taking Alexander lessons with Jamee. It has been of equal benefit to her, I believe, although in a much different way. Laurie, I think, sees the Technique as a treat for her body and soul. She typically can't wait for her next lesson.

During Laurie's first lesson she said with tears in her eyes, "This is the first deep breath I've had in weeks!" They continue to be apt students and are making their way through this challenging time together. ☺

Alexander Technique on the Internet

Alexander Technique International uses the Internet in a number of interesting ways. Log into the ATI World Wide Web site at www.ati-net.com. You can also log in to Alexander Online at www.alexandertechnique.com/online. This site provides links to the rapidly growing number of Alexander Technique resources on the Internet. Alexander Teacher listings can be found both the ATI web site and on the Ask Dr. Weil web site at www.drweil.com.

ATI maintains an Internet forum of members called Interchange. You can send e-mail to all listed members by addressing your e-mail to interchange@ati-net.com. You can send mail to the ATI board as a group at board@ati-net.com, or to individual board members at:

chair@ati-net.com
assistantchair@ati-net.com
treasurer@ati-net.com
execsec@ati-net.com
correspondsec@ati-net.com.

ATI Web-site a Winner!

This issue brings word from David Gorman of an exiting new link into the ATI web site. It seems that the ATI website has been selected by the BBC Education WebGuide for its "quality and educational content:"

re: Alexander Technique International - Library

Dear Website-Owner,

I am pleased to tell you that your website has been chosen for inclusion in the BBC Education Web Guide. The Education Web Guide team were particularly impressed by the quality and educational content of your site and have placed a short review of it in our searchable database which can be accessed by internet users everywhere.

The BBC Education Web Guide brings you the newest and best websites for learning at home, at school and at college and university. The sites included in the BBC Education Web Guide have been hand-picked by a team of subject specialists and scrutinised for educational rigour by experts at BBC Education. The Guide provides a one-stop shop for the best educational resources on the internet and is the focal point for all of the BBC's educational resources.

Yours sincerely,

Tanya Piejus
 Online Editorial Assistant,
 BBC Education Web Guide,
 British Broadcasting Corporation

Glenna Batson Site

In making some final changes on my website, the address is now corrected to:

www.med.unc.edu/mahp/rsi

This website is an online tutorial for occupational therapy students comparing the medical model with that of holistic healing. There is a section on the Alexander Technique and

From the Chair

Continued from page 3

We are educators. We provide movement education/reeducation. We help clients change movement/thinking patterns. We use our hands to guide these changes in thinking/movement.

The New York Coalition of Non-Massage Practices is creating a strategy for lobbying New York State and New York City elected officials. There will be procedures and material explaining why the Alexander Technique is not massage and should not be under the auspices of the New York State Board for Massage Therapy. New York ATI members and interested New York citizens can use this material and these procedures to lobby effectively.

Recent Events:

The New York State Board for Massage Therapy determined that Reiki was not massage. This is an important precedent because Reiki is a hands-on modality. We have had two upsetting instances recently in New York which the Coalition is monitoring.

In May, 1999, the New York City Vice Squad arrested a shiatsu practitioner in Greenwich Village in a sting operation, (we have heard that Russian prostitutes in the Village were claiming to be Shiatsu practitioners). In June, 1999, a state inspector who was investigating a cranial sacral issue at a well-being center in Albany noticed in the center literature that two Alexander Teachers were teaching there. He told the well-being center owner that the Alexander Technique teachers were practicing without a license. The well-being center has told the Alexander teachers that they can no longer work at the center.

The Coalition is creating a web site, www.adeptsys.com/nysnon-massage. ATI members and interested parties will soon be able to follow New York events closely.

Joel Kendall, Commitee Chair

While ATI, acting as an organization, can be effective, individual acts are im-

Alexander Technique on the Internet

From the Chair

portant too. We must, each of us, keep our eyes and ears open to economically motivated political action against us like has occurred in New York and Pennsylvania.

As chair, I urge you to report any such legislative and political actions to us. See the contact information on page 3.

Whew! So much for the heavy stuff. On a much lighter note I can tell you that this year's AGM will be well worth attending. I'm very excited about the presenters and the presentations slated for this AGM. See the AGM brochure for more information, and I'll see you there!



its usefulness in helping prevent repetitive strain injuries. The video component (showing me giving an Alexander lesson to someone at a computer who is at risk for carpal tunnel syndrome) will be completed in June. The text is there, however, for those who want to see it.

From Interchange (ATI's Internet Forum)

The following exchange between Rick Brennan and Catherine Kettrick appeared on ATI Interchange. A discussion of directions, it appears here for the benefit of those of who do not get Interchange, with the permission of the participants:

Rick Brennan:

Hi All,

I was having a discussion about the Primary Directions with my first year trainees and this brought up a couple of questions.

- 1.) In the order "allow the head to go forward and up," what is the definition of the neck? Is it the connection between head and spine (i. e., the atlano-occipital joint) or is it the entire neck (i. e., from the atlas to C7)?
- 2.) What phrases do other teachers use to mean the same thing?
- 3.) Do other teaches use images to help their pupils get this release? If so what do they use?

Any comments on these or any of the other directions would be greatly appreciated.

Thanks

Rick Brennan (Ireland)

Catherine Kettrick:

It is raining, so the garden and I will both have a rest, and I will take this opportunity to enter the directions discussion.

I studied with Marj Barstow, and was never formally introduced to the "directions" from her. She would say "Let your head move up, and your body follow," or "Think of your whole head moving up and your whole body following," and variations: whole heads and bodies, heads and whole bodies, etc. After Frank Ottiwell and Judith Stransky came to Lincoln one summer Marj began saying "Let your head move forward and up...." She didn't always say it, but it began to appear in her vocabulary. Often, she didn't refer to "directions" at all, just saying something like "Now you just watch your thinking..." or "What are you doing with your thinking?" and sometimes "What are you doing here?" where "here" was the place she would be indicating with her hands.

I began playing with "formal" directions for myself when reading *Evolution of a Technique* one summer. A number of us were doing so, as I recall. I decided it would be a good idea to have a "go" at what F. M. had done. I also remember talking about the whole idea

Alexander Technique on the Internet

of giving directions with Marj. She didn't look very favorably on it, not because of the directions themselves, but because of how people went about "giving" them. Often when people did what they called "giving directions" they became rather stiff and blank faced—definitely not thinking in activity!

My own experience is that the formal directions give me a framework within which to work. I change them from the "traditional" ones. I use: my neck to be free (sometimes I say "my neck to relax") so that my whole head can move forward and up my whole body can lengthen and widen. I did indeed practice "giving" my directions for "successive days, weeks, and sometimes even months"—and eventually stopped trying to do them! Usually I did this when engaged in an activity that didn't require a lot of attention—falling asleep, walking around the lake, pulling weeds, etc. Now when I even think about giving directions, I notice a change before I even "begin" to "give" them. Thinking doesn't require words, and words aid thinking. I still at times actually say the words in my head when engaged in an activity where my coordination is vitally important (practicing aikido), and I don't have to talk at the same time (teaching) and find it a very clear framework for organizing my coordination.

Rick, you asked about what the neck included: I think it very important to have an accurate body map. Anyone who thinks that the top of their spine is half way down their neck will have some trouble with their head moving forward and up in a coordinated way, and people who think the middle of their body is about waist level will have a hard time letting their whole body follow.

Now about not "doing" the directions: Here is something I use with students to help them understand "thinking."

"Think of bananas," I tell them. "What happened?" "Well," they say, "I thought of bananas," or "I thought of my breakfast this morning" and some wise guy always says "I thought of monkeys." The point is, they thought of something. "Think of horses... What happened?" "Well, I thought of horses... thought of the book I was reading about racing..." Now: "Think of your neck being free..."

Every time I do this I see a change in their coordination. Every time. And most of the time when I ask "What happened?" they report a change themselves. Then I let them have the punch line: "It takes no more effort," I tell them, "to think of your neck being free, than to think of horses or bananas or anything else—and that's zero. Thinking is easy, it is effortless, you don't have to *do* it."

Well, this is certainly long enough, and the rain has stopped, the garden calls, and I'm outta here. ☺

Coming Events

The Fourth Annual Alexander Technique Summer Program, **University of Colorado at Boulder**, USA. With Lynne Nathan, James Brody, Edward Bilanchone, Anne Waxman. Week-long course: July 6 to 10, 10:00am to 12:30pm or one-day intensive course: Sunday, July 11, 1-5pm.

Join us this summer in beautiful Boulder as we learn and apply Alexander's unique method of mind-body education. Classes meet in the mornings, leaving afternoons free for hiking in the scenic foothills of the Rocky Mountains, or exploring downtown Boulder's shopping and art galleries.

The courses are designed to accommodate both the novice and the more experienced student.

Course Fees: Tuition for the week-long course is \$200, \$150 for students. Tuition for the Sunday Intensive is \$75. One hour of graduate credit through the CU Continuing Education Division is available for an additional \$75.

Contact Lynne Nathan, pjnate@aol.com
272 Willow Drive
Little Silver, NJ, USA
(732) 530-4010

Cathy Madden Alexander Technique Intensives **Seattle, Washington** USA July 12 to 16, 1999. Meeting in the morning with a class limit of eight.

Contact Cathy Madden at 206-368-8544, email: cathmadden@aol.com.

Alexander Technique on Alonnisos, two week individual Alexander courses given by Penny O'Connor on **Alonissos**, an island in the Aegean. On-going from July 13 to September 7, 1999.

One lesson every morning whilst holidaying on a beautiful Greek island. Open to all. Unique opportunity for those of you who've always wanted to learn but never have the time at home, and don't want to be tied to a residential course. Contact Penny O'Connor on penny@interco.com or +44-171-253-2022 before 13 July 1999 for further details re: travel and accommodation. After 13th July 1999, fax me on the island +30-424-65839. Or just turn up.

ITMA Third Annual Summer Workshop, **Birmingham**, England, July 25 to August 6, 1999. Residential/Non-residential.

This great fun, residential/non-residential "summer camp" is open to everyone, from beginners to professional teachers of the Alexander Technique. The Interactive Teaching Method makes the work of F. M. Alexander accessible to the wide-ranging group of people that this summer workshop attracts.

For a brochure, contact emma@quesnelbc.com. Telephone Canada: 1-250-992-7636 or UK: 0117-907-0992

Alexander Technique and Natural Vision Improvement, six-day Welsh holiday retreat in the U.K. Buckland Hall at **Bwlch, near Brecon** in the south of Wales, United Kingdom. 26 July until 1 August, 1999.

This unique six-day residential has been developed over the past 10 years in New Zealand. Participating will help you to:

Understand about the visual process and your unique visual function.

Learn about the Alexander Technique and apply this to the Bates Method.

Study and apply The Eye 'Body Reflex Patterns'® developed by Peter Grunwald.

Enhance Primary Control mechanism through depth perception.

Experience kinesthetic awareness of the entire visual system in movement.

Learn specific Eye Directions for improvement of vision and fine body motor skill.

Learn Dart Procedures to enhance seeing. Breathe/blink easily while you see without effort.

Read and see without blur, strain or fatigue.

This fun-filled holiday with depth of application is open to both the introductory student interested in eyesight and postural improvement as well as for the seasoned Alexander and Bates teacher.

For information on booking and venue details contact Peter Grunwald,

p.grunwald@clear.net.nz or visit our web page at

www.voyager.co.nz/~tara/visionimprovement.html

For free brochure and bookings:

Mrs. Marjory Fern (M.STAT)

An Skyber,

Rinsey,

Cornwall,

TR13 9TS, U.K.

Phone/Fax +44-(0)1736-762923

Participation is limited, the venue exquisite. For Alexander teachers and trainees, an extra free day of teaching is provided on Monday, 26 July.

Richard Brennan Alexander Technique Workshop, **Lios Dana, Co. Kerry**, Ireland, July 30th - August 2nd, 1999 (bank holiday weekend), residential workshop.

This will be three-day residential course on the west coast of Ireland at Lios Dana Holistic Centre which overlooks Dingle bay and the beautiful mountains of Kerry. It is an opportunity to combine the beauty of west of Ireland with the inner stillness

Coming Events

that the Technique enhances. The course starts on Friday evening at 7 p. m. and finishes on bank-holiday Monday at lunch-time. Cost £185 fully residential. Contact: Lios Dana, Inch, Co. Kerry, Ireland. Tel. 00353 - (0)66 - 58189, or Richard Brennan, rickbrennan@tinet.ie or see <http://homepage.tinet.ie/~alexandertechnique>.

Conscious Seeing through the Alexander Technique with Peter Grunwald (M. STAT) from New Zealand, **Freiburg, Germany**, 16 to 20th August, 1999 (following the International Congress for the Alexander Technique), Monday to Friday, 9 a. m. to 1 p. m., a limited number of private lessons are also available.

Applying the Alexander Technique Principles to the process of seeing and enhancing eyesight naturally is the core of this workshop. It is open to Alexander teachers and trainee students. Contact: Susanne Stiess email: p.grunwald@clear.net.nz. Address: Schule fuer Alexander-Technik, Adelhauserstr. 10, D-79098 Freiburg, Germany, Fax: +44-(0)761-287650

Judith Grodowitz, **Folegandros, Greece**. August 25 to 30, 1999, Inspiration in the Aegean. This annual workshop on the beautiful island of Folegandros is open to all; complete beginners, students and Alexander teachers. Simple movement studies, improvisations, and imagery from ancient Greek mythology are incorporated into our investigation of Alexander's principles. The island provides an inspiring environment for study with its sparse landscape, classic Cycladic village, and buoyant, clear sea. Daily class is held for 4 hours in a one-room schoolhouse - students are free for the remainder of the day. Housing is in local hotels. For more information please visit: <http://users.aol.com/metisnow>. Contact Judith at: email: metisnow@aol.com telephone/FAX: 1 (212) 675-1094, 337 West 21st St, #5A, NY, NY 10011, USA

Cathy Madden Alexander Technique Intensives, **Seattle, Washington**, September 6th - 10th, 1999. Meeting in the morning with a class limit of eight. Contact: Cathy Madden at 206-368-8544, email: cathmadden@aol.com.

Richard Brennan Alexander Technique Workshop, Little Grove Education Centre, Bucks, England, September 11th - 12th, 1999. Non-residential/residential workshop. A weekend non-residential or residential course at Little Grove which is in rural Buckinghamshire, yet within easy reach of London by underground. This course will start at 10 a.m. on Saturday and finish at 4 p.m. on Sunday. The cost is £65 (non-residential) or £102.50 (fully residential). Contact: Little Grove, Grove Lane, Chesham, Bucks, HP5 3QQ. Tel: 0044 - (0)1494 - 782-720. Richard Brennan e-mail: rickbrennan@tinet.ie web site: <http://homepage.tinet.ie/~alexandertechnique>. ☺

Exploring The Alexander Technique: Its Central Hypothesis and Teaching Modalities, Part II

continued from page 1

If the student were more advanced in the study of the Technique, you may see the teacher assisting the student with an activity that was of particular interest to the student, such as singing, reciting, dancing, swinging a tennis racket, driving, working at a computer, etc. You would notice that the teacher followed the same general procedures; light touch, delicate guidance of the head-neck relationship, attention focusing cues, and questions which illuminate the student's sensory experiences and thought processes. With an advanced student, you might notice that the teacher relied more on language than on touch to convey important ideas.¹⁴

Since the whole intent behind a lesson is to assist the student in learning a more effortless and efficient organization of his whole body during the activity, you would *not* see the teacher use physical force to manipulate the student. Externally applied forces can illicit unwanted reflexes, such as the "startle response," which would elevate the level of muscular tension throughout the student's body.⁷ Force would also disorganize the student's coordination by imposing an externally produced shape or position on him. It would also distract his attention from the true goal of each lesson, which is learning how to activate and utilize "primary control" within his own structure.¹⁴

You would *not* see the teacher give the student a set of "prescriptive" exercises. This follows Alexander's own teaching beliefs about exercises; that there were no magical

exercises that could, in and of themselves, teach students and improved *use* of themselves. Alexander noted that students brought the same poor habits of "use" into exercising as to every other activity. If a student's manner of "use" was not constructive to begin with, exercises served to reinforce bad habits and further increase the strain on an already overstrained body.¹⁴

Alexander classified the *whats*, or the *skills*, learned through Alexander training into three basic skill sets; awareness, inhibition, and conscious constructive thinking.

You would see the Alexander teacher working with the student who is doing regular exercises to help him understand how to bring a constructive quality of "use" to all the exercises he performs. The Alexander teacher will always stress that the Technique is a method of using himself in a better way in real life, in *all* his daily activities.¹⁴ "Each lesson becomes a living experiment in bringing intelligence into the activities of everyday life."³

...

Now that the teaching of the Alexander Technique has been generally described, the methodology can be analyzed in terms of exactly *what* is being taught and *why*.

Alexander classified the *whats*, or the *skills*, learned through Alexander training into three basic skill sets; awareness, inhibition, and conscious constructive thinking.

Exploring The Alexander Technique: Its Central Hypothesis and Teaching Modalities, Part II

To understand the *whys*, the reason the Technique is taught through certain methods, it is necessary to determine: (1.) How do the skills taught relate to and support the theoretical basis of the technique, and (2.) The efficacy for the methods which are employed to teach those skills.

Awareness, in the context of the Alexander Technique, means a conscious perception of one's "use" as a somatic act that an individual can perceive themselves from within.⁵ Practicing "awareness" requires heightened kinesthetic alertness while moving. Scientists now believe that kinesthetic information results from neural inputs from all the afferents in joints, connective tissue, muscles, and skin—there is no one receptor that is primarily responsible for sensory intelligence in the moving musculoskeletal system.⁵ "Dynamical systems theory describes movement behavior as emerging from the interaction of many systems, both internal and external, and at many levels of a system simultaneously."⁵ The understanding of the meaning of movement results from being able to sense the relationships that exist between all parts of the system. From Bernstein, the great pioneer in kinesiology and cybernetics, "The higher the primary level for the control of movement, the higher the degree of consciousness and the more voluntary the movement."¹⁵

Coghill made an interesting discovery about the relationship between awareness and the primary pattern, i. e. the "total pattern of the head and trunk dominating the partial pattern of the limbs."¹¹ When *Amblystoma* is in larva stage, the limbs can move when the trunk moves but discreet reflexive movements cannot be evoked in response to external stimulation when the animal is in a normal position. However, if the animal is placed on its back, the limbs will voluntarily assume a definite posture and will respond to touch upon their surface.¹¹

Coghill regarded this finding as being very significant and interpreted it as follows: "postural response sensitizes the exteroceptive reflex mechanism."¹¹ He noted that a postural response (a problem solving behavior on the part of the whole animal) "...enables it (the limb) to respond to stimuli from the outside world before it can otherwise do so."¹¹

In reference to the Alexander Technique, it is interesting to consider that by directing his awareness to his own "use," a person generates a "postural response" within his own structure which may increase the sensitivity of his sensory systems.

The use of light touch to guide the student toward a state of decreased tension and enhanced somatic awareness in one of the most often utilized teaching methods in Alexander Technique. Gellhorn and Kiely, in their investigations of somatopsychic disciplines, found that the use of touch in body-oriented approaches apparently alters "proprioceptive afferent discharge to the reticulohypothamic activating systems through relaxation of the muscular system...the 'altered state of consciousness' induced by such methods activates the natural prohomestatic and self-regulating functions."¹⁶

Alexander's concept of the "primary control" required that the neck muscles be released from tension to the degree that the head could assume a dynamic poise, rather than a fixed position, in relationship to the spine. This release of the downward com-

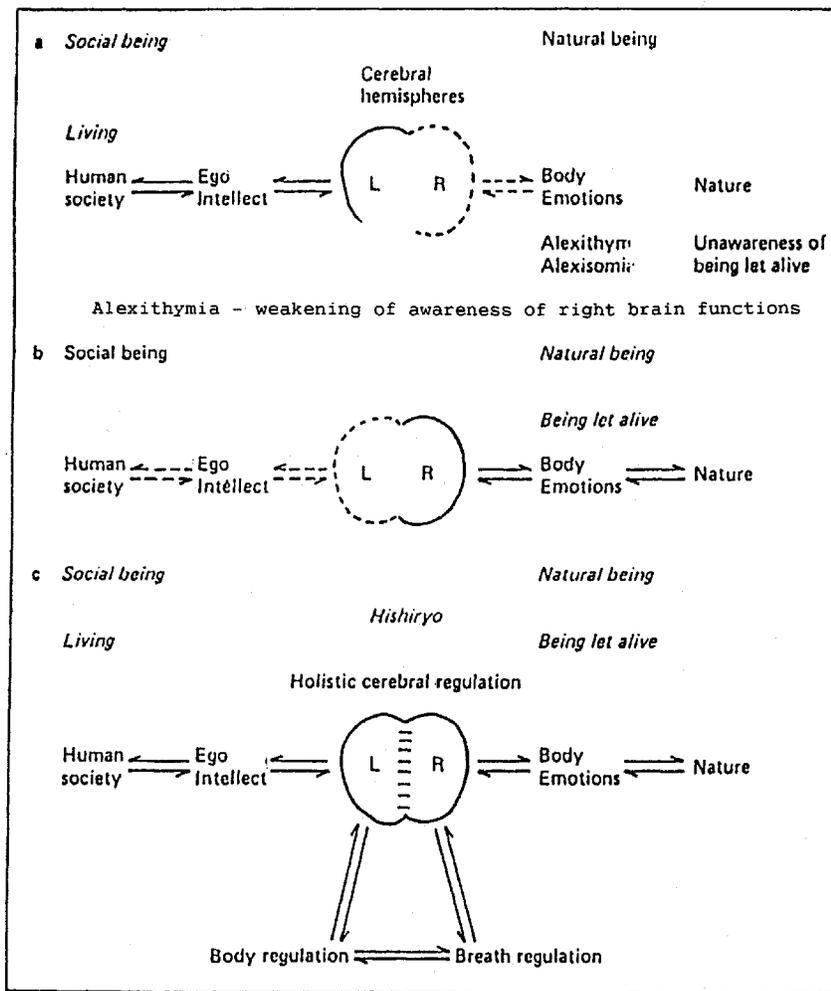
pressive forces of muscles pulling the head down on top of the spine facilitated a reflexive lengthening and widening response throughout the torso. This action enabled a homeostatic balance in erectness, a suspension of structure within an even tonus of the flexor and extensor systems.⁵

Although Fukuda rigorously explored how the movement of the head in relationship to the body could *increase* levels of muscular tension throughout the flexor and extensor systems,⁶ Alexander identified how awareness of a neutral balance of the head in relationship to the spine could elicit a *decrease* in muscle tension and balanced action of the flexor and extensor systems.⁵ In other words, Alexander's "primary control" was a prohomeostatic mechanism.

Awareness, as a skill practiced in the Alexander Technique, also implies the ability to observe oneself while observing, or, in the language of systems theory, "self-transcendence."¹⁷ Self-transcendence is the "observation of one's own consciousness, in particular of one's own use of language."¹⁷ Observation of ourselves through language allows humans to examine the relationship between perception and behavior, and the relationship between thinking and doing.¹⁷

"The task of language is to recreate or represent a perceived world in our consciousness."¹⁷ The relevance of this to the Alexander Technique has to do with Alexander's definition of "use" as being a reaction to stimuli from within and without. In order for something to be a stimuli, we must perceive it. To know what we have perceived, we have to formulate our perception in language. This process of formulating perceptions into language enables us to identify stimuli by placing them within our conscious awareness. Then we can begin to understand the relationship between stimuli and out total patterns of response.

Therefor a person becomes aware of himself and his environment through use of language. Teaching methods of the Alexander Technique recognize the complimentary relationship between



Integration of social being (a) and natural being (b) in Zen meditation (c).

Figure 8, from Behavioral Medicine in Japan, 1992, Y. Ikemi

Exploring The Alexander Technique: Its Central Hypothesis and Teaching Modalities, Part II

awareness and communication. The human ability to self-describe and “self-transcend” through the use of language gives humans the flexibility to change points of view, to view situations in a new light, and to problem solve. “In this way, awareness and understanding become creative, induce movement and change of position, and thereby make individuals change and evolve.”¹⁷ Although the preceding quote was made in reference to human beings regarded through the paradigm of an open system, it has a striking resonance with Alexander’s idea of “use of the self” as something which could be “brought under conscious control and redirected to enlarge the individual’s potential for creative development.”¹⁷ The primary teaching method for bringing “use” under “conscious control” in the Alexander Technique is through language, by encouraging the student to express in lucid and specific language both his sensory perceptions and his thoughts about organizing his own coordination.¹⁸

Research conducted in Japan on the health benefits of Zen meditation gives further insight into the significance of somatopsychic awareness as well as Alexander’s second skill area, that which he named “inhibition.” Figure 8 shows a diagram representing different states of brain activity found by researchers.¹⁶

Scientists noted a condition named “alexithymia,” a general weakening of awareness towards the right side of the brain in many subjects. They speculated that since modern industrial societies have so emphasized left-brain functions, many people suffer from “alexithymia” and have difficulty in the awareness of and expression of bodily feelings and the natural aspects of being.¹⁶ These findings further support the significance, in the Alexander Technique, of expressing somatic experiences in language as a way of integrating brain function between the right (somatic) and left (language area) cerebral hemispheres.

The lower part of Figure 8 (part c) illustrates cerebral activity during the practice of “hishiryō,” a state of conscious passive concentration, translated as “think about non-thinking.”¹⁶ A form of this Zen practice, named SRM (self-regulation method) is being experimentally applied as a form of occupational health training for workers in Japan. Researchers stated that the practice of “hishiryō,” as a part of SRM, was useful in creating a state of “optimal preparedness for incoming stimuli.”¹⁶ This idea of passive, non-reactive concentration as being an optimal state in which to receive stimulus, closely parallels Alexander’s idea of “inhibition” as a useful skill in the practice of the Alexander Technique.

Alexander’s use of the word “inhibition” is not to be confused with Freud’s definition of the same word. Alexander based his idea of “inhibition” on the inhibitory aspect which is a normal function of the healthy nervous system. From Jones, in reference to inhibition as a function of the nervous system, “Inhibition maintains the integrity of the responding organism so that a particular response can be carried out economically without involving inappropriate activity in unrelated parts.”¹⁷ And, “...inhibition is the central function of a nervous system which, when it functions well, is able to exclude maladaptive conflict without suppressing spontaneity.”¹³

Alexander, in defining inhibition as a skill, described it as interposing a pause, or delay, in the stimulus-response chain. Inhibition, as a skill, meant delaying the in-

stantaneous response to a stimulus so that a reasoned response could be chosen and carried out in a way that was best suited to total well-being.⁷ From this definition, it can be understood how the skill of “inhibition” is complementary to constructive “use.” Bringing inhibition to a conscious level brings the whole person to a less excited state, similar to the passive concentration described previously in the Zen practice of “hishiryō.” From that moment of interjected calm and enhanced integration of self with environment, it is possible to select a novel and possibly improved manner of “use” in response to the stimulus. “Once a response has been selected or learned, it can be repeated without loss of choice as long as the process remains conscious. If it drops below the level of consciousness, a ‘set’ will be established linking the stimulus to the response, which will then occur automatically whether it is appropriate or not...the result is a habit which operates unconsciously (like an innate reflex) and which is resistant to change.”⁷ This behavioral “set,” described by Jones, signals an end point in the development of an individual’s “use” unless inhibition is consciously applied so that a freshly chosen response can emerge. The practice of inhibition allows the individual to act, as Coghill put it, as their own “self-vitalizing agent.”¹¹

“Conscious Constructive Thinking” (CCT) is the skill which allows a “continual emphasis on the means we employ to achieve our aims. The goal of the Technique may be defined as ensuring that our means are always *rationally* and *physiologically* the best for our purposes.”³

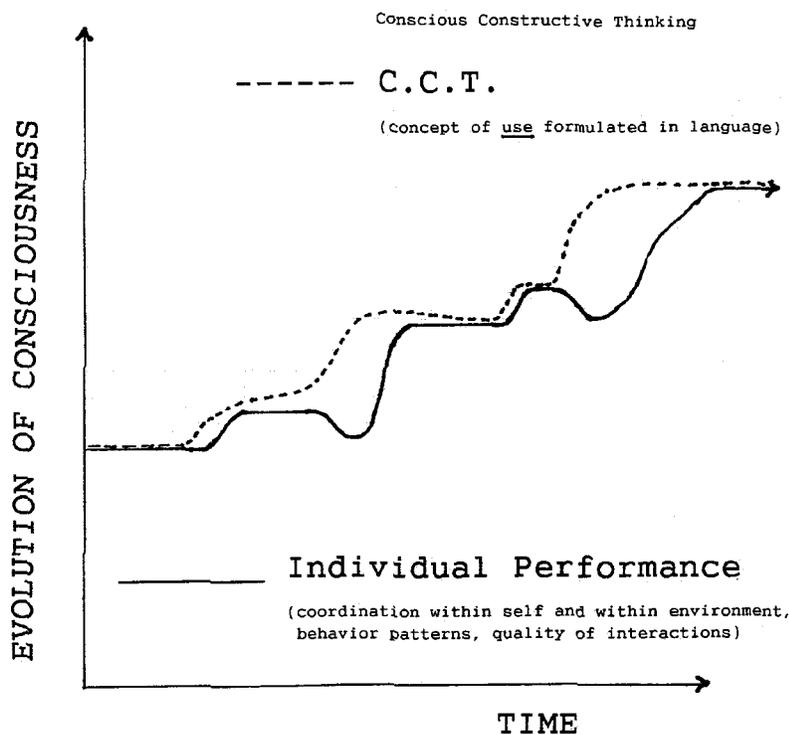


Figure 9 diagrams the concept of Conscious Constructive Thinking, borrowing some ideas from sociologist O. W. Markley, who hypothesized that a “phase” relationship exists between dominant images and sociocultural development.¹⁹

The “phase” metaphor from Markley is applicable to the way in which Conscious Constructive Thinking “leads” the performance of an individual practicing the Alexander Technique because CCT focuses the attention of an individual on the *means* through which changes can happen, rather than on results. It is an accepted risk, in the practice of the Alexander Technique, that the process of change is unpredictable, and that the long term benefits cannot be assessed in terms of immediate results.²² Just as in the process of cultural change, periods of disorganization sometimes result when new leading images are first followed but overall conditions improve as the manifested changes begin to

Figure 9.

Exploring The Alexander Technique: Its Central Hypothesis and Teaching Modalities, Part II

form a new order which becomes more and more congruent with the initial and catalytic ideas.¹⁹

In studies done on learning in multiple-degrees-of-freedom activities, it has been demonstrated that while “knowledge of results” (KR) training guides a subject rapidly toward a goal, it may actually impede motor learning by making subjects overly dependent on results.²⁰ “Knowledge of Performance” (KP) differs from KR in that it provides information about the movement itself, describing the “kinematic parameters” which are important to successful completion of the task. Newell, et. al., found information regarding movement dynamics (KP) more relevant information to the task learner than mere movement outcome (KR) information.²¹

The skill of Conscious Constructive Thinking in the Alexander Technique embodies both information about how movement is produced by utilizing the primary pattern of the head-neck-torso relationship, and information in the form of attention focusing cues (sometimes referred to as “directions” in Alexander training.

Some teacher to student quotations from sessions with master Alexander Technique teacher Marjorie Barstow best explain how CCT is taught to students:

“Whatever you move, and you may move anything you wish, move it after you have started with your head leading... Your thinking is what counts... We’re not aiming at a position but at a sense of movement... When you ease up, it is a very subtle movement. You only go a tiny bit. This is the difference between extension and use... Your whole body follows your head as it eases delicately upward... When you get something going really well you have a tendency to hold it. If you feel yourself tensing, stop what you are doing and think... You confuse yourself by trying to feel what you are thinking... The head is the controlling factor in balance.”¹⁸

The preceding quotes illustrate the meaning of CCT involves giving the student information on what he is doing (knowledge of performance), attention focusing cues to help the student understand how to relate the general principle of “primary control” to specific movement tasks, and transitional information about what to change to bring about modifications. Information given in the form of knowledge of results does not appear in the teacher-student pedagogy of the Technique.

In a study on the effects of different forms of information feedback in the learning of a multiple-degree-of-freedom activity (the overhand throw), researchers discovered that the most powerful learning aides were attention focusing cues and transitional information. Knowledge of results and knowledge of performance feedback were not sufficient to improve throwing form after subjects attained an initial skill level.²³

Physician Wilfred Barlow, who researched and taught the Alexander Technique throughout his professional career, gave an excellent description of how the practice of the three skill sets of the Alexander Technique (awareness, inhibition, and conscious constructive thinking) all contribute to exert, as Alexander stated:

“...an influence for good upon general functioning which is not only continuous, but also grows stronger as time goes on, that is, a constant influence tending always to raise

the standard of functioning and improve the manner of action.”¹⁸

From Barlow:

“It is with this type of thinking that the Alexander student concerns himself within his training group. A state of bodily stillness is sought in which there is a personal organization of the “use” perception. This personal organization (directing) may involve a very slight muscular activity, and adjustment that is both at rest and during action. Muscular activity, as we have seen, is never still; it may be fined down and fined down, but the gradation between stillness and activity is only one of degree. Slight oscillation is always present, even in the resting state. Under conditions of directive thinking, the student becomes increasingly aware of the muscular matrix of his decision, and of the part he can play in attending to the small shifts of muscle tension that accompany both his emotions and his insights... We have usually taken it for granted that we can only use our minds in two deliberate ways—context thinking (i. e., with words, sentences, music, images, etc.), and behavior control. But between content thinking and overt behavior there is another sphere of personal life, a vast world of existence to be managed by awareness and attention (although “managed” is too forceful a term for the attentive living that is implied).”²⁴

Conclusions

Alexander’s central hypothesis of “use” as influenced by the “primary control” and as influencing the overall function of an individual embodies several extremely important and innovative ideas which warrant further exploration and experimentation:

What is the relationship between development of the nervous system and the emergence of behavior in humans, and how long into the human life-span is this relationship dynamic?

Does the influence of the primary pattern (i. e., the “...total pattern of the head and trunk dominating the partial pattern of the limbs...”),¹¹ which orga-

nizes the very first reflexive and conscious movements in vertebrate animals, exert a continuing effect over the integration and functioning of human animals throughout their life-span? What is the relationship between development of the nervous system and the emergence of behavior in humans, and how long into the human life-span is this relationship dynamic?

Is there a prohomeostatic influence exerted by Alexander’s “primary control,” a consciously chosen head-neck relationship, which allows reflexive lengthening of the spine?⁵

Do consciously selected head-neck relationships create “postural Demands” in the entire musculoskeletal system which increase peripheral afferent sensitivity¹¹ and create predictable tonic relationships between flexor and extensor systems?⁶

Alexander’s writings on his discoveries and the basis for his teaching practices are strongly prescient of the ideas found in general systems theory developed during the latter part of the twentieth century.²⁵ It is now believed that the implications of sys-

Exploring The Alexander Technique: Its Central Hypothesis and Teaching Modalities, Part II

tems theory apply to all levels of science relevant to the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease.²⁵

It is interesting to note the similarities between Alexander's idea of "use" as representing a "total pattern of response" which influenced the whole functioning of a person⁴ and the following concepts from systems theory: "A system, by definition, consists of an organized set of parts (the subsystem level) that *interact* with each other in such a way as to generate *unique properties* (emergents) expressed at the level of the whole (the systems level) as the system interacts with its environment (the suprasystem level). In other words, systems generate unique behaviors that emerge out of a complex set of subsystem/system/suprasystem interactions."²⁵

Alexander's teaching practices also resonate with principles from systems theory. Alexander emphasized the importance of working with the whole coordination of the individual engaged in a practical activity during the teaching of his technique. Systems theory acknowledges that "treatments may achieve certain *emergent effects only when they are allowed to combine in particular ways in particular individuals within particular contexts*. The strategy of pulling components apart, reductionistically producing a state of disunity, will by definition remove the systematic nature of the components that occurs when the components are allowed to unite and interact over time."²⁵

System theory also acknowledges that systems are "self-regulatory." When all parts of the system are "appropriately" connected (Alexander would say that the appropriate connection was through the "primary control"), the system can become self-regulatory. The nature of self-regulation that emerges when parts are united depends on how the information conveyed in the feedback between parts is interpreted by the parts in the system.²⁵ The essential role of information processing in self-regulation is a theme throughout Alexander's writings, where he stresses the importance of "awareness" and correct "sensory appreciation" in developing a constructive manner of "use."⁴

Lastly, systems theory is being applied to health science today to create more effective therapeutic systems between patients and clients. In practice, when a systems therapist asks a patient a question which "directs the patient's attention inward (toward bodily sensations, feelings, and/or thoughts) or outward (toward behavior, social interactions, the setting, and so forth), this will set up a feedback loop that will change the state of the patient's internal regulation and the patient/therapist regulation system as well. The systems therapist begins with the hypothesis that self-attention always has potential self-regulatory consequences."²⁵

Alexander also believed that "self-attention always has potential self-regulatory consequences," but he also believed that people could learn, through an educational method, how to attain increasingly refined levels of "self-regulation" which could improve their overall functioning. Alexander believed that the true objective of lessons was to launch a student upon a course of self-discovery which would enable him to enjoy increased awareness, enhanced confidence in his ability to exert a constructive influence over his life, the ability to assimilate new ideas, and to adapt rapidly

when confronted with the unfamiliar.⁴

The popularity of the Alexander Technique in solving a diverse set of occupational problems for performing artists recommends it for application to other groups challenged by workplace demands or desiring of higher functional capabilities. ☺

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Alexander Technique International (ATI) is a worldwide organization of teachers, students, and friends of the Alexander Technique created to promote and advance the work begun by F. Mathias Alexander.

ATI embraces the diversity of the international Alexander community and works to promote international dialogue.

About the Alexander Technique

Experience of the Technique has led to praise from George Bernard Shaw, Aldous Huxley, Prof. John Dewey, Sir Charles Sherrington, Julian Bream, John Cleese, Robertson Davies, and many others. It is taught at the Julliard School of Performing Arts in New York, and the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, the Stratford Shakespearean Festival and the Shaw Festivals in Canada, Boston University, Brandeis University, and many other centers.

Olympic-level athletes have similarly used the Technique to improve their performance, as have leading golfers and business people. Medical studies have shown the Technique to be as effective in lowering blood pressure as the normally prescribed beta blocking drugs. Other studies have shown significant improvement in respiratory function.

The common factor in all of these aspects of life is that how we are using ourselves—the way we do things—affects the result we get. The Alexander Technique is a means of improving that use. It has been called a “pre-technique” which people can apply to furthering their own special skills and activities. It is also essentially a preventative technique with which we can learn to improve and maintain our health.

The individual is the focus of the Alexander Technique. We are all unique, with different bodies, different experiences, and different problems. We go about the process of change in different ways and at different rates. For these reasons, what happens in an Alexander Technique lesson depends very much on the needs of the student at the time. In the basic sense, though, you will learn an attitude of not trying to gain your ends at any cost, and, at the same time, how to prevent your harmful habits that cause unnecessary stress and restrict your capabilities. Obviously, since what you are changing are patterns built up over many years, a permanent change will not be brought about overnight. However, the person who learns to stop and take time, to think constructively about how he uses himself in everyday life, will find that this simple procedure can have far-reaching results.

Further information about the Alexander Technique can perhaps best be gained from a teacher near you (see list at right for teacher listings through the nearest ATI office), as your changing experiences through lessons are the only real way to understand the nature of the work and what change is possible.



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