

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & BELONGING

AmSAT Annual Convention
& General Meeting
New York, 2019

ARTICLES

JOHN HENES & INDIRA M. RAMAN on Inhibition

LARRY BALL on Wholeness

MALCOLM WILLIAMSON on Conscious Control

EVE BERNFELD on the Developing Self Course

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AmSAT *Journal* №16 FALL 2019

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All submissions are reviewed by the Editors and are subject to editing for spelling, grammar, punctuation, clarity, length, formatting, organization, facts, and house style. When possible, we will work with authors to improve the chances of acceptance for publication; however, in some instances, submissions may need to be edited and published without author approval. Submissions may be delayed in their publication or rejected for reasons such as space limitations, content, or tone.

THE COVER IMAGE is adapted from a drawing of a human Purkinje cell in Albert Kölliker's *Handbuch der Gewebelehre des Menschen* [*Manual of Human Histology* (1889)]. See figure 1 on p. 40.

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AMSAT MISSION

To establish the Alexander Technique as a basic and recognized resource for health, productivity, and well-being.

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From the Editor



I WISH A HAPPY NEW YEAR to you all. I am delighted to serve you in my third publication as Editor. We have been working diligently with the support of the AmSAT Board to realize our dream of offering a peer review option. We are now accepting submissions. We are also in process of creating author guidelines for peer-review submissions. These guidelines will adhere to the *Chicago Manual of*

Style (seventeenth edition). Please email me at AmSATJournal@AmSATonline.org or joealbertio@gmail.com with any questions, concerns, and even ideas you may have for a paper, but would like help articulating into more concrete writing projects.

This issue brings a small slice of the fantastic offerings represented at the 2019 ACGM at Columbia University in New York. Every conference is unique, but there was something different in the air this year. There was a feeling of excitement, hope, and renewal. The theme of this year's conference was "Diversity, Equity, and Belonging," and many of the workshops and lectures explored how we can move towards inclusiveness in the Alexander Technique community. The organizers did an excellent job and we are deeply grateful for all the work involved in putting everything together. You may notice that this issue represents something of a departure from previous ones in that some of the presenters also wrote reports of their presentations.

This summer we are in Boulder for the conference. If you haven't been, Boulder is a lovely college city that houses a campus of the University of Colorado. There are ample possibilities for outdoor hiking, dining, and just hanging out. Genoa and I just led a workshop at CU-Boulder and had a wonderful time (in the snow). We are looking for volunteers to write reports and take photographs during the convention. If you have an interest, please email me.

Genoa and I, along with our colleague in the German Department at the University of Oklahoma, just completed a play adaptation of Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, which we modernized and set in a background informed by surveillance capitalism. It was well received, and we are moving forward with submitting it for publication. Additionally, our interdisciplinary article on the subject of listening in performance, "The Other Side of Performance: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Listening for Voice and Speech Trainers," just passed a rigorous peer review and it will be published in the Routledge Journal, the *Voice and Speech Review* (VSR).

I want to thank the journal team members for the enormous amount of work that they do in realizing each issue. I especially want to express my gratitude to Jonathan Leathwood, who has been a superhero in layout, as well as helping with editing and organizing the work. I also want to express gratitude to our photography processor and photo editor, Sandy Gordon. I am also grateful to Travis Chastain for his photo-editing and overall support. Last but not least, I want to thank Genoa Davidson, without whom we would have no journal.

We are looking forward to seeing those of you who can make it this summer in Boulder. The town itself is worth the price of admission.

Poise,
Joe

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Taking Time to Connect

Previewing AmSAT's Annual Convention and General Meeting in Boulder, Colorado · June 25–28, 2020

by Anna Sobotka



YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED to attend AmSAT's 2020 Annual Conference and General Meeting (ACGM) from June 25 to 28 at the University of Colorado in Boulder. This mountain location will provide a peaceful setting, helping us in *Taking Time to Connect* with each other and the breathtaking environment.

Early-bird registration opens March 12th! Plan to arrive one day earlier—Wednesday, June 24—and enroll in one of the free hiking workshops, where you can direct forward and up the mountain. In addition to the hiking there will be opportunities to explore on your own.

AmSAT's Board has decided to hold the 2020 pre-ACGM workshops and lessons all on one day, Thursday, June 25th. This will be a day full of stimulating classes and private lessons: there will be opportunities to learn techniques from the Art of Running and the Art of Swimming with Malcolm Balk and Steven Shaw! The evening reception promises to be unique: to open the ACGM and help us focus on the essence of Alexander's work, the planning committee has asked John Baron and Haynes Brooke to cook up a presentation based on Alexander's popular Bedford Lecture.

The ACGM will take place Friday through Sunday, a weekend complete with movement classes, a research panel, a second-generation teachers panel, stimulating workshops, the AmSAT business meetings and Attendees Convocation, a banquet dinner, auction, and dance, and the F.M. Alexander Memorial Address by Daria Okugawa. Daria has been teaching the Alexander Technique for thirty-seven years and is the training course director at Alexander Technique Training in Chicago.

There will be many opportunities to take a private lesson or attend a small group class with incredible teachers both local and international. These teachers include Lucia Walker, Sharyn West, Malcolm Balk, Steven Shaw, Lyn Klein, John Baron, Rose Bronec, Sumi Komo, Daria Okugawa, Robert Rickover, Nada Diachenko, Sarah Barker, Luc Vanier, Brooke Lieb, Kris Sutton, Michael Frederick, Pamela Blanc, Babette Markus, Frances Marsden, Beret Arcaya, Carol Prentice, Heidi Leathwood, Maedée Duprès, Sydney Harris, Alice Olsher, Karen DeWig, George Lister, Judy Stern, Bob Britton, and Barbara Kent.

The trip from Denver International Airport (DIA) to the conference at CU-Boulder is an easy bus ride. The SkyRide bus is only \$10.50 for the scenic hour ride. The bus goes straight to campus with a ten-minute walk to the dorms. The dorms have flexible lodging with great prices that include two meals per day. Registration for the dorms opens March 12th. AmSAT has also booked a block of rooms at the Hilton Garden Inn, which is a twenty-minute walk or three-minute drive to campus.

Boulder is a vibrant city filled with a variety of restaurants,

microbreweries, unique local shops, incredible art, live music, and more. Come early or stay later to explore fun activities in the surrounding area, including hiking and bike tours as well as Denver's museums, aquarium, zoo, and the Denver Botanic Gardens with over fifty different gardens. You can take a self-guided tour or catch a concert at the legendary Red Rocks Amphitheater. To go to even further heights, you can rent a car and drive to the top of the 14,260 ft. Mount Evans, experiencing the highest paved road in the United States.

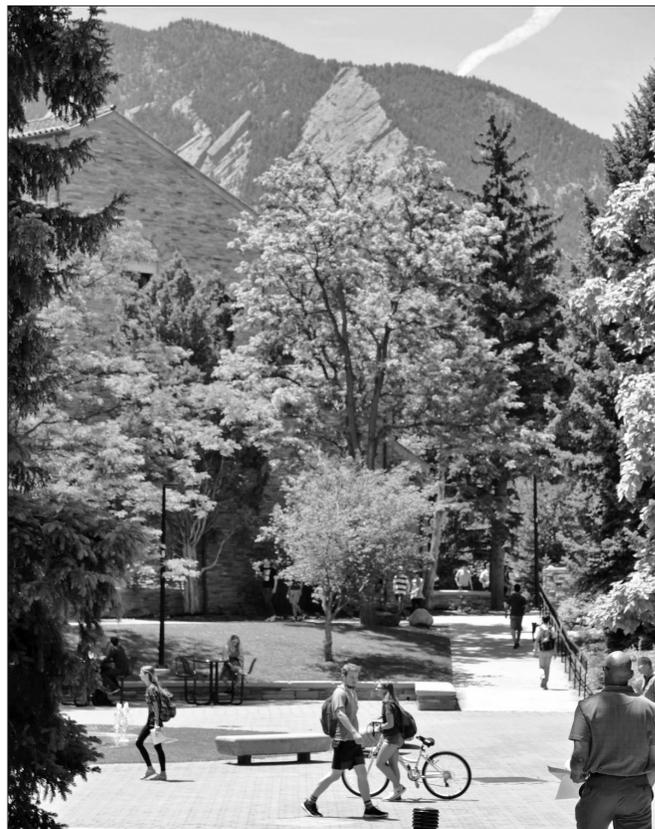
If you would like to contribute to the vibrancy of the ACGM, there are opportunities to get involved. To volunteer to help at the conference, contact Anna at anna.marie.sobotka@gmail.com.

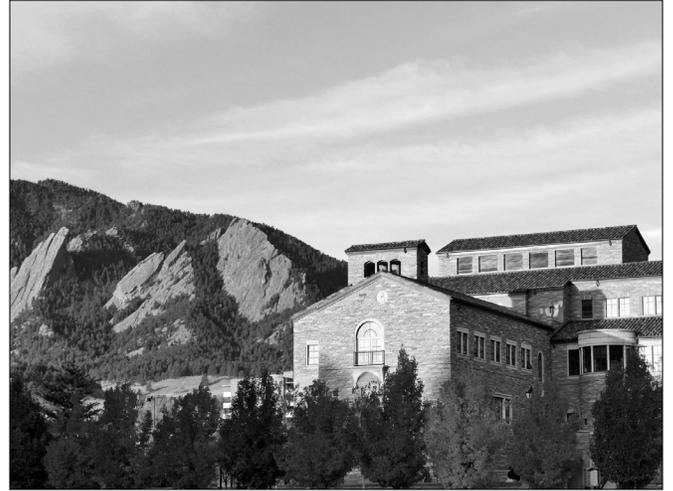
If you would like to donate an item for auction, contact Naoko Yoda at yodanaonao@gmail.com. General information can be found on the AmSAT website; you are welcome to contact Anna with your questions.

We are putting together all the pieces of the puzzle, but the final and most important piece is you. We look forward to seeing you in Boulder this summer!

2020 ACGM Planning Committee

Anna Sobotka, Chair Heidi Leathwood
Maria Santos Naoko Yoda





On the facing page

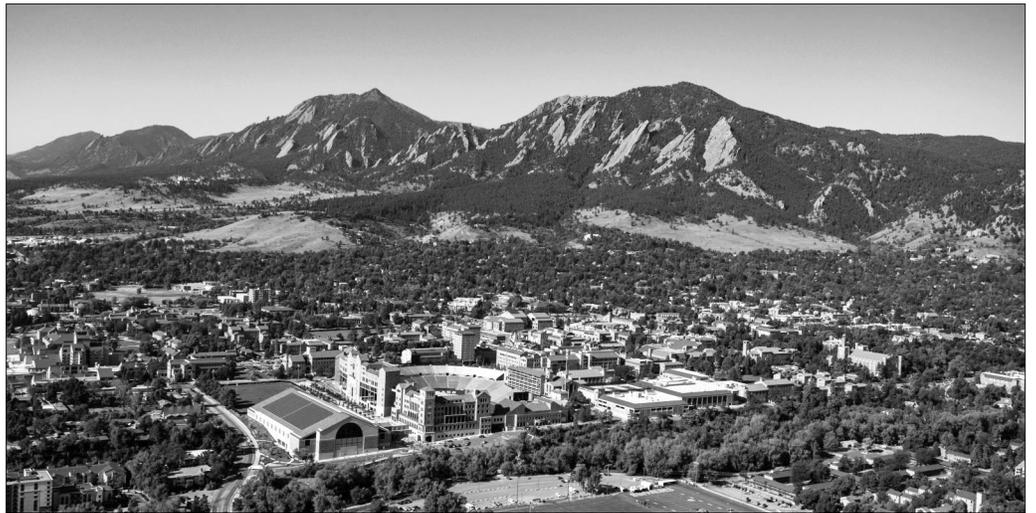
The University of Colorado at Boulder's pedestrian-friendly walkways, set in the Rocky Mountains

On this page

Above and at right Views of the CU-Boulder campus in the Rocky Mountains

Below left Hiking into the foothills

Below right Downtown Boulder, less than a mile from campus, in the evening



Growing in Confidence

Previewing the Third International Alexander Technique Teachers Convention in Limerick, Ireland
by Glenna Batson

July 26 to August 1, 2020 · Co-directors: Richard Brennan, Niall Kelly, Lisa DeAngelis, Glenna Batson

OVER THE LAST DECADE, our world community has witnessed a disturbing trend: Despite numerous professional development workshops and conventions, an alarming number of Alexander Technique teacher trainings have closed—both in the United States and the United Kingdom. Continuing education efforts do not seem to translate into making a living—neither in private practice nor in gaining viable employment within medical and educational institutions. Though many teachers are engaging with researchers in psychology, neurology, and cognitive science, we still remain isolated from the larger body of science and education. At the same time, there is a critical need for our work in meeting today's societal challenges.

Clearly, knowledge of the Technique is no longer enough, and further educational pursuits (though arguably of value) rarely ensure professional success. So, what gives? Feedback from our last two conventions points to one main obstacle in carrying our work forward: *Lack of teacher confidence*.

The 3rd International Alexander Technique Teachers Convention will take this issue head on!

In July 2020, Alexander Technique teachers from all over the world will convene in Ireland to engage in a lively exchange and develop practical strategies for teaching in today's global context. We are at a critical stage in our professional development. The main question we will address at this year's convention is: How can each teacher build on what he or she knows to become more confident and effective in teaching and presenting?

The fundamental aim is to support you in gaining a sense of confidence in teaching the Technique to a new generation. All Alexander Technique teachers and trainees are warmly invited to join us. This is a non-profit event and costs have been kept to a minimum to give as many teachers as possible a chance to attend. We will gather and share our wisdom with each other in a non-judgmental and supportive way. Through a structured sharing of hands-on practice, discussion, and reflection, our collective efforts will reveal new ideas on how to advance our work with a deeper and more empowered sense of confidence.

Some of the topics that we will discuss are:

- How can we present the Alexander Technique in a simpler and more effective way, customizing the approach for select audiences without compromising its principles?
- Despite the fact that an estimated 49% of the population in developed countries have back problems, Alexander Technique teachers do not have enough work. How can we resolve this?
- How can we make use of modern technology and social media in ways that enhance our visibility, professionalism, and skill?
- By understanding the forces impinging on our field, how can we learn to negotiate those fears and anxieties around teaching that stand in the way of making a real impact?



We have attracted teachers from a variety of different trainings from all over the world for this event so that we can offer the broadest spectrum of experience. For a whole week, experienced workshop leaders who are leaders in the field of teacher-training or post-graduate training will offer inspiration, humor, and guidance. Please note that the approach to learning will *not* be top down. You will receive structured guidance from the facilitating teachers and will immediately put these ideas into practice. We encourage active involvement from all participants and look forward to the emergence of new strategies for confidence in teaching. We ask you to bring your ideas, questions, and concerns, and actively participate in the learning circle with an open mind. By working within a community of learning, we can actively transform the way the public perceives our work.

The breakout and exchange rooms will be open all day for exchanges and discussions. You will have stimulating conversations and enlightening exchanges—you can talk until the sun comes up... and head for another exchange with another teacher before breakfast with newfound confidence!

Additional aims of the convention are for you to:

- bring your own unique teaching style to life with the guidance of experienced facilitators;
- increase your confidence in describing and presenting the Technique to private clients and when working with groups;
- directly contribute and share ideas to advance teaching this pioneering work for the benefit of humanity and for future generations.

Throughout the convention, we will be discussing global trends that have had an impact on the Technique in such areas as attention, embodiment, cognition, and other topical updates on movement, co-ordination, support, motor control, and consciousness. We will also be sharing and brainstorming on a wide selection of topics such as applying the Technique to people with a wide-variety of needs and abilities.

The morning workshops will help you have more confidence in your hands on work:

- “Fresh, Curious, Excited, and Fascinated” with Aranka Fortwängler and Hedda Mickausch
- “Only Connect” with Lyn Charlsen Klein
- “Hands on Practice without Fear or Fuss” with Glenna Batson
- “How to Touch” with Richard Brennan
- “Learning to Translate through Touch” with Trish Hemingway



Afternoon Workshops and discussion will include:

- “Performing with Ease” with Annedore Kleist
- “Improve Your Voice & Improve Your Presentation Skills” with Diane Gaary
- “The Art of the Pivot” with Lisa DeAngelis
- “Speaking in Public is a Skill” with Niall Kelly
- “Working in Your Format” with Wolfgang Weiser

Here is some of the feedback from previous convention workshops on these themes:

- It exceeded expectations – fabulous!
- It was great to have such close connection and input from such experienced teachers.
- I really valued feedback from teachers and I would love to do this annually.
- I will be back!

With the help of the workshop facilitators, you will gain clarity and confidence in teaching, as well as improve verbal and hands on skills. We also plan a week filled with fun and laughter where you’ll deepen friendships and share many memorable experiences that will last a lifetime.

On behalf of all the co-directors, Richard Brennan, Niall Kelly, Lisa DeAngelis, and Glenna Batson, we welcome you to Ireland for this memorable event. Join us for this unique opportunity to see and be seen with empowerment in all that you are and do.

For full details please visit:
www.alexanderconvention.com
 or email: info@alexander.ie

Contact glenna.batson@gmail.com for the AmSAT teaching members’ special discounted rate for the Convention pass.

AmSAT Members outside the United Kingdom may use the current rate for currency exchange at the time of payment.

On the facing page
 The University of Limerick

On this page, from top to bottom
 Richard Brennan, Niall Kelly, Lisa DeAngelis, and
 Glenna Batson

Our Community's Future: Diversity, Equity, and Belonging

by Fabio Tavares, Lisa First, Karl Snider, & Chyna Whyne

Four Keynote Addresses · ACGM, New York, July 27, 2019

I FABIO TAVARES



I'M FABIO TAVARES. My full name is Fabio Augusto Tavares Da Silva [*sounds of approval*]. I know, right? I was born and raised in Brazil, and I moved to New York when I was twenty-four. I had just turned twenty-four, and it's interesting; I feel like we all have our own journeys, but what was really interesting to me was, I have a long relationship with the Alexander Technique. I started studying it in my early twenties,

in Brazil, as an actor, and I used it for dance later on, and I met a bunch of incredible people, and I ended up moving to New York and started studying Alexander here.

Then suddenly, in my mid-thirties, I decided that I wanted to train to become a teacher. Right? It was a big decision, and so I go and check out a couple of training courses, and then I decided I was going to train at ACAT. And then I see a picture, I can't remember what, it must have been a graduation or a community or a Congress, or something, right? that was like the face of the Alexander Technique community. And I looked at that picture, and I thought to myself: "Oh gee, I don't look like them. They don't look like me." A whole bunch of really lovely people, really special people—and most of you are in here tonight—but I don't look like you, and you don't look like me. So, I was like: There's a problem right there. Right? Because I'm going to have to do something about it if I want to fit into this community. And you guys are going to have to accept me whether you want to or not. This is all that went through my head. I'm going to post a picture on Facebook and tell people this is my community. So anyway, that's how the whole conversation started because I realized I wanted to be part of this community really badly and deep down, all I wanted was to be accepted, I wanted to fit in, I wanted us to work together. And at the same time, I thought: "Somebody's got to do something, has got to do some work about that." I don't see a lot of muscles and tattoos in this community [*laughter*] unless you're all hiding it [*laughter*]. Don't underestimate, right? It was so funny because it's such a beautiful journey.

The Alexander Technique saved my life in so many ways. Some of you know what I do, or what I've done: I'm a professional actor, but not so much these days. I turned forty-four last week, but I can still do handstands, and backbends, and back-tucks, and front flips, and splits, and all that stuff, but the thing is, I came into this work out of desperation. I really needed to learn how to breathe, so I could do what I loved...better and

longer. When June Ekman told me I should consider training, I thought: "Oh my God, how can I say no to that? I got her blessing, and now I've got to go train!"

I'm now involved in a big project with Anne Bogart and Elizabeth Streb. I left STREB a couple of years ago—STREB is this company I work for [*cheering*] for ten years—and it's all about compressing your spine, as hard as you can [*laughter*] and it's all about tightening up all your muscles and letting things hit you really hard, or hitting things and people really hard [*laughter*], or letting things fall on you [*laughter*]. That's our latest piece. So, anyway, here I am up at Skidmore College a couple of weeks ago, working with a group of twenty-two, twenty-three-year-old actors and dancers and I find myself twenty years older than everybody else, dancing better than everybody else [*knowing laughter*], feeling like I could see myself doing this for another twenty or thirty years, at least. So, what can I tell you? I'm interested in extreme things [*laughter*]. I'm interested in fitness. I'm interested in being myself, Chyna's [Chyna Whyne] "walking in heels" (I've yet to take your workshop!), and I think there's a lot of room for us, for growth, to think outside our bubble. It takes a lot of courage to do, it takes a lot of vulnerability. Sorry, I have so many notes here, and I don't want to be offensive. I promise you, I don't want to be offensive.

So, I grew up in Brazil, and I realized I was gay at a very early age. So, when you realize that you are different than other people, it's a very scary place. And then it becomes very lonely, because "I'm not like you," I'm not like anybody else. I have my own thing, my own confusion, and it's scary, right? Growing up, when I first started taking competitive gymnastics—Is anybody timing me? Because I can talk *forever!*—[*laughter*]—Just five more. So, when I started taking competitive gymnastics, I started hanging out with people who were bolder than I was. There were other colors and there was some queerness—my coach was queer and her assistant was queer. I remember it being the first time that I could actually take a full, deep breath and exhale and think: "Okay, little guy, you're going to be alright." And after gymnastics, I ran away to join the circus, when I was fifteen [*laughter*], and at the circus, also, people were older, and they didn't care if I liked boys or girls. They didn't care if I was... whatever. They just... I felt celebrated as a young artist. So, after that, there was hip-hop. Hip-hop also had kids that looked different—there were different colors and sizes, and guys had long hair and girls had short hair, and that was a new thing for me. After hip-hop, came theater. I became a professional actor, and the same thing: my friends were queer, the boys and the girls, older people, artists, musicians. And then I moved to New York, and when I moved to New York, there was more of that [*laughter*]. And I was at a circus with the bearded lady; her name is Jennifer Miller [*applause*]. She has a full beard and she's a scholar at the Pratt Institute and she said, "You know, in our circus, women can have beards, guys can wear a dress and lipstick if they want," and so little by little, I started

to heal, because I was this really, really messed up thing on the inside. I turned to drugs and alcohol at a very early age, and recovery came into my life at the age of thirty. So, what I am realizing is that I am still doing some of that healing. And for me, it's very important that I know that you guys are either a little bit like me, or that you get what I'm going through, so we can connect and heal, and we can grow.

When I came into the Alexander Technique community, I didn't quite feel that. I felt a lot of love, but I didn't quite feel that we were going to connect at that level, and that was a scary thing. So, when this conversation about diversity came up, I realized that perhaps there's a role for me, that I should come up here and talk and speak from my heart and say: I'm this gay guy from Brazil, English is my second language—I went through a training course that [teaches in] English, my native language being Portuguese—and I'm in recovery from drugs and alcohol for over thirteen years. What I am realizing is, I can talk about those things today, and make them a political statement and help people [who], perhaps, are going through similar things, and use all of this experience, which is pretty messy, and very confusing, and turn it into something that perhaps can be useful. Two guys came up to me in the last few years. One of them said: "I got sober because of my Alexander Technique teacher." He said: "My Alexander Technique teacher was in AA," and he said [that] he would cry every table lesson...he would lie down and cry for the whole lesson. And he said it was because of this teacher that he went into AA. And I thought: "I'd better tell people I'm sober, too [*laughter*], because maybe I'll get more students" [*laughter*] but also, because I'm able to help people who are struggling. And this other guy, who was a late bloomer—he came out of the closet in his sixties—a new friend of mine, he went in to have some Alexander lessons, and he said: "I like my teacher, but he's straight, and I want a gay teacher." I couldn't be his teacher yet—I was still in training—so he looked up and said: "I found



this guy, who is gay, and I want to go take lessons with him." And that for him was really healing. So, I thought: "Why am I not going to talk about those things, with my students, or with our community?" It's a joy to be here, talking about who I am. I'm still healing; I'm still learning. I love this technique; I love the principles. I've been teaching this work all over the place. I teach a lot in Brazil; I work with underprivileged kids; I work with people in recovery who cannot afford to come and have a lesson. I do a donation-based thing. I post on Facebook, on Instagram, so everyone knows who I am and what I do, and I'm hoping we can carry this conversation into the next hundred years.

Thank you.

On this page Fabio Tavares offered two workshops at this year's convention: "AT for Everyone!" and "Finding Up from the Ground!"





HELLO, MY NAME is Lisa First, and I've been asked to speak about belonging this evening. It was a tough topic for me to agree to speak about, with some real struggles connected to it. I like to write, and that helped me work through some of my ideas.

I will be sharing some of my history with the Alexander Technique and my life experience in three different ways. I will discuss belonging in

American society [in general], in our Alexander Technique Society, and I will discuss belonging as a person with a disability.

Each of these things has affected my sense of belonging and life purpose. I've had multiple sclerosis for over forty years. Even though I often appear perfectly healthy, I have a progressive, degenerative disease with no cure and ongoing destruction of my brain cells and nervous system. Sounds clinical, but it's true.

The Alexander Technique has been my companion since I was seventeen, about forty-three years ago [*sounds of support and delight*]. I know, it's crazy! The Technique has led me to be a more confident and independent thinker. I learned to be more aware, to pause before doing, and to make choices whenever possible, as life permitted. Through the Alexander Technique, I learned to accept myself, and my disability. I have built private teaching practices in Boston, Massachusetts; Los Angeles, California; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and now Charlotte, North Carolina.

I've always worked with inner-city schools as a way of sharing the Alexander Technique with kids and teachers who would not otherwise encounter the work, primarily in music and dance departments. In addition to my private teaching, I have loved directing numerous dance festivals and projects, and teaching in the Soviet Union and Russia for more than two decades. I made twenty-eight trips to Russia, learned Russian in a Russian-language school, and hope to return when politics shift [*scattered laughter*]. I always felt that I belonged in Russia, despite their cultural inability to treat people with disabilities as equals. That was a paradox. One of my co-directors would always walk on the other side of the street, as if he didn't know me, when I had neurological walking problems. I did feel loved and included in Russia. In retrospect, I probably used it to escape the realities of my life in America. It was satisfying to bring fourteen international Alexander Technique teachers to Russia to share our work [*applause*]. Teaching has always offered a sense of belonging, and I'm sure many of you can agree with me on that. We learn so much from our students in return for sharing our skills.

I first encountered the Alexander Technique as a student in the dance department at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte at seventeen years old, through a visiting dance instructor, Valentina Litvinoff. She had spent two years training with Patrick Macdonald in England. She was Russian, a coincidence, and taught here in the West Village. I followed her to New York City several years later. I enjoyed her dance classes

and recall seeing Dustin Hoffman walking into a nearby theater on my way to an early Sunday morning class. In retrospect, her ideas about the Alexander Technique were rather unorthodox—not surprising, as she never completed her training [*laughter*]. Marjorie Barstow was one of my first teachers at Grand Valley College in Michigan and at Ohio State University. At Antioch College, I took group Alexander Technique classes with Barbara Conable for five dollars a class [*laughter*]. Dating myself there. I was waitlisted eight years after graduate school at the Constructive Teaching Center in London. I gave up on training in London when told there would be no guarantee that space would even open on the course. Instead, I trained at The Alexander Institute of Boston with Mara Sokolsky and Neal Katz. I graduated in 1992. Since then, I have lived in fourteen states, I've studied with a multitude of national and international teachers and taught actively in the United States and overseas. I recently moved back to North Carolina after forty years away and have loved returning to where I grew up as a child in Chapel Hill, Celo in the Appalachians, and Charlotte. Charlotte is over fifty percent minority and is growing faster than any United States city except Austin, Texas. I belong—feel I belong—back in the South. It's a nice surprise [*laughter*]. Everything has changed! I have a strong dance community in Charlotte that embraces the Alexander Technique, unlike many other places I have lived. My life is racially integrated, in classes, friendships, and more.

Recently, I went to a presentation in Charlotte by Bryan Stevenson. Mr. Stevenson is the author of the award-winning, best-selling book *Just Mercy*. Bryan Stevenson is the founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, a human rights organization in Montgomery, Alabama. Mr. Stevenson is a Harvard-trained lawyer who has dedicated his career to helping the poor, the incarcerated, and the condemned. Early in this talk, Stevenson spoke about how indifferent society is to so many of the needs in our communities—how we disfavor people and often push them aside. He spoke about how broken people can teach us about what justice really means. I began to think about different types of broken people. He was referring to how we treat the poor. American society takes people at the lowest rung and punishes them because of their brokenness. It's nothing new, right? American society has failed these people, which is why it is unjust. American society often fails those of us with pre-existing conditions and disabilities as well.

Stevenson shared a personal story about his childhood and race. He is African American and described how he and his sister were on a family trip to Florida. They stopped for the night at a hotel in South Carolina and raced excitedly to the swimming pool. All the white people immediately left the pool. Bryan asked a man what was wrong. “*You are what is wrong.*” Later in his talk, Stevenson said that the key to effectiveness is staying hopeful. Hope is not common to me as a person diagnosed with an incurable disease, but I listened carefully, hoping to hear some valuable words of advice. Each person with a disability is different. This lack of uniformity challenges society, which resists being inclusive. It makes it easy to disenfranchise us. It then downgrades us to a position of less power. If you live long enough, everyone gets a disability [*laughter*]. Sorry to break it to you! [*Laughter.*]

There is a distinction between discrimination based on race and discrimination based on disability. The trajectory of civil rights is to seek equality based on gender, people of color, and greater equity in terms of class. Equity for people with disabilities is completely distinct from the others. If the system is fair, the others have the possibility of equity. There is the idea that you have racial equality, then gender equality, and then ability equality. Not the same. Race and gender people have the potential to do what anyone else can do. We can't overcome disability as, theoretically, we can overcome race, for instance. We are not equal that way, regardless of what people think or how many people tell us that we look "really good." I can't always walk, speak, drive, see—it's always changing. My temptation over the years has often been to withdraw and to feel more comfortable not being seen unless spending time with friends, other people with disabilities, and proven allies.

Fresh out of Antioch College, I had left a job in New York City and sought to build a new life in Boston. I had just gotten a job on fashionable Newbury Street, for those of you who know Boston, and been invited to join a modern dance company in Cambridge.

I was diagnosed with retrobulbar neuritis in Concord, Massachusetts and hospitalized on my twenty-fifth birthday in 1983. When I would try to read, I only got a third of the way through a line, and then my eyes would bounce right back to the beginning of the sentence. I was deeply fatigued and had strong vertigo. I soon went blind in my left eye for several weeks and had a crash course in the [hormone] ACTH, made from beef pituitary hormones, which invited many ups and downs. Both employment offers were immediately rescinded within hours of diagnosis. After the first hospitalization, three months in duration, I found a job in Brookline working for a chiropractor. He soon fired me for fear my voice might slur when speaking with patients. This was in the eighties, just before the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed and signed into law in 1990 by President George H. Bush. These were early experiences of being marginalized, early encounters with discrimination and rejection.

My understanding of belonging is rooted in the reality of living with an unpredictable disease with no cure. There are amazing, new, and increasingly effective medicines now. Amazing! There were no drugs when I was diagnosed so long ago. That oddly rendered my illness more invisible. It took courage to start the medications. There are some members of our community who strongly discouraged me at that time. And others who supported me fully and encouraged me to follow the recommendations of the medical profession. Of course, I greatly value the help and love and mentoring that I've received in our community. It was sometimes a struggle to belong, however. My newest medicine, Ocrevus,[®] is much safer than the previous drugs, with minimal cancer risks. It is the first drug available to people with primary and secondary MS, in addition to what I have: relapsing/remitting MS.

In Minneapolis, I had an African American male therapist for twenty years. I relayed my stories to him of repeated micro-aggressions. I talked with him about the discrimination I faced as a person with a disability. I learned from him not to expect understanding from people who could not know the experience

of living with a disability. We don't know what we can't know. That was the single most freeing thing that opened the door for growth and change. He compared it to his experience as an African American man. I am forever indebted to him for empowering me and proving my ability to negotiate the complexity of life. I had to stop wanting people to understand in order to allow myself to belong as an individual. People diagnosed with MS and many other diseases know grief. As a disease gives and takes away health and functioning, grief is a recurring experience. Pain and isolation are common. With multiple sclerosis, this is an ongoing phenomenon. We take joy in living when we can but honor our sense of impermanence and loss of control at an earlier age than most.

I was raised in the South, born in Michigan to parents who grew up on dairy and sheep farms. Both of my parents eventually rebelled against their families. My mother had me when she was twenty. My father was the youngest of three brothers. His father, Glenn First, was reputedly the meanest man in three counties. Glenn died when I was only one, while my father was enrolled in agriculture at Michigan State. He immediately changed majors when his father died and went directly into social work.

My mother grew up in the town of Carsonville, in Michigan's "thumb." She played the clarinet in the marching band. She loved to read. She [had been] abused since she was three—until well after I was born—by her father. As a teenager, she accidentally discovered in the attic a Black Legion uniform. The Black Legion was a militia group and a white supremacist organization in the midwestern US during the Great Depression. Has anyone heard of that before? It's interesting, and possible to look up on the Internet. Carsonville was only minutes away from Decker, Michigan, home of Timothy McVeigh, the white supremacist who perpetuated the Oklahoma City bombing, which killed 168 people. When I last drove into Carsonville, Michigan, there was a very tall flagpole flaunting a huge Confederate flag, and a large billboard with a picture of Hitler proclaiming that he loved his people, too [*disgusted muttering*]. I know. That's what my mom came out of. My mother was sixteen when she told her parents she wanted to go to college. Her father said that if she left home, she could never return. She completed Michigan State in Lansing in two years, supporting herself by writing detective novels under a pseudonym [*sounds of awe and approval*], and later working as a journalist, during which time she interviewed Martin Luther King in the late fifties.

My parents chose to go south in the early sixties as civil rights workers. They were committed to introducing change where it was unwanted yet sorely needed. They put themselves and their three children in harm's way moving south. I was six, the oldest child. Karen, my sister, was four and Paul, my brother, was two. My parents initially worked for the Ford Foundation on voter registration. They integrated our neighborhood in a white subdivision by moving a black family in next door to our home. Howard Lee, born in Georgia, who, in 1969, became the first African American mayor elected in Chapel Hill [*applause*] and the first African American mayor elected to be mayor of any majority white city in the South. There were death threats made against me, just a little girl, and daily phone calls to try and scare my parents from what they were doing, and they only told me this later. As a child, I saw a KKK rally and a tall

cross burning. We'd run out of gas in the countryside in North Carolina. The only gas to be found was from a large group of KKK in full regalia. Our friend and next-door neighbor, Lillian Lee—that was Howard's wife—was hidden in the trunk.

People were prepared to die and be beaten at this point in history, and all kinds of people were working together to create social change. Sixty years later, America is still wrestling with justice, equality, and more. One hot summer, my parents helped shelter poor people marching from Mississippi and Alabama. They were on their way to Washington DC for the Poor People's March in 1968. The marchers were all housed in a large house in the outskirts of Chapel Hill. I was there the whole time and especially loved racing around the stairway. One night the moon was full, and I almost collided with a weary, elderly African American woman. She wore a torn red shirt and a button that said: "I Have a Dream." That was an early experience with disenfranchised people, searching for justice and belonging.

Thank you for listening to some of the rich memories that shaped my early sense of belonging and not belonging in the South. Our family later moved to Arkansas. I missed North Carolina and dropped out of school, leaving home at fourteen [laughter]. I took after my mom [laughter]. I eventually went to a conservative and loving Quaker boarding school in Ohio. My father helped to start the first graduate school of social work in Jackson, Mississippi at Jackson State University, an all-black university, for those of you who might not be familiar. He was later social worker of the year for his work with the homeless in Ohio. My mother recorded the oral history of many people in Lowndes County, Alabama whose parents has been slaves. I transcribed those tapes as a kid and the tapes now reside in the Lowndes County Historical Museum.

I just want to really thank Renee Schneider, whom I first met in Los Angeles, in a Russian class at UCLA in 1996 [for] inviting me last summer to work together on a diversity ACGM and not letting me say "no" [laughter and applause]. Renee is a force to be reckoned with... This has been a really transformative process, being part of this ACGM, and a lot of it has to do with Renee and the committee—Keesha, Rebecca, Alice, Constance, Josephine, and so many more. I want to thank Rick Carbaugh for his ongoing involvement with our process, and I especially want to thank Davian Robinson, who models boldness in moving forward without holding back in spite of his disability with a visual impairment. He is amazing! Please get to know Davian this week. He is still teaching two more classes. Davian will be performing at Alhambra Ballroom in Harlem.

Thank you.

III KARL SNIDER



THANK YOU. I am humbled and appreciative to be here. Although I continue to work on travel solutions, my disability and health challenges kept me from joining you in person.

My passion is the voice. I've made a rough estimate of working professionally with over 500 individual singers over the past thirty years, most during the four years of

their college education, many significantly longer. Adding my work with singers in opera, musical theatre, workshops, and choirs, the numbers are exponentially beyond that. I still get giddy satisfaction when students find new potential in their voices, and I still get goose bumps when hearing extraordinary beauty and authenticity in vocal performance. I am awed by the anatomy and physiology of the voice, fascinated by vocal acoustics, and attempt to stay current on pedagogical practices.

In sharing a few observations of working with the voice, and offering a bit of my story, my desire is to encourage you to include vocal work in your teaching, and to reach out to those that could use support in discovering and empowering their voices. My experience is that our work can not only help people do what they do better, but it can also be an agent for unveiling completely unexpected voices. Surprising, dangerous, thrilling voices revealing suppressed dreams and aspirations.

A childhood memory surfaced in preparing for today. I remember hiding under the sheets of my bed with my transistor radio and earphones. I had randomly found a radio station that played what I later learned was opera. I knew nothing about opera, the singers, or even the story, but I do remember being transfixed by the superhuman power and soaring melodies of the singers. The other side of this memory however was the terror of being caught. I was an extremely effeminate child growing up in a 1960s machismo household and community. I was sure that listening to whatever opera was would lead to even more fodder for public humiliation.

Although the details differ, I've found that I am not alone. There are so many internal and external powers working to silence us. Reclaiming our voice grounds our identity, relevance, and inclusion in community.

Since I first encountered the work twenty years ago, [the Alexander Technique] has become the foundation of all of my vocal work. The experience of singing is actually quite simple. Have a clear intention to communicate, imagine the quality and style of sound you desire, exhale, and speak your mind. Simple enough. What is not simple is the infinite and complex variety of interferences that disrupt the integrity of our vocal production.

Although inherent in our roots, I've found that many [Alexander Technique] teachers are intimidated by vocal work. The science can be overwhelming, let alone the attitude surrounding many vocal studios. It is in the addressing of interfering habits, however, that is the essence of our training. You will

notice pulling down at each stage of preparation for speech or song, at the intention to communicate, at the decision of style, and at the moment of vocalization.

I am sure many of you have worked with extraordinary singers in opera, musical theatre, rock and roll, and other traditional genres. It is tempting to stroke my ego and share student successes. Instead I will just say that our work is first and foremost foundational to all techniques and styles. It allows for vocal health under extreme demands. It offers the singer flexibility so critical for the collage of a career that most singers need. It also offers young singers an experiential context of poise and ease to evaluate well meaning but frequently misdirected vocal instruction from other teachers, conductors, and stage directors.

Outside of traditional vocal genres, I would like to highlight a couple [of] current areas of interest to me. The outcome of [Alexander Technique] work in each of these situations can be profound for the student and a great way to expand your vocal work explorations.

A fascinating experience is working with students for whom English is a second or one of multiple languages. It is not uncommon for life circumstances to be extremely stressful while negotiating a new language, thereby picking up some unusual habits in vocal production. Comparing the use of someone in their native tongue to that of a language learned under even modest fear can be quite revealing. I've found that [the Alexander Technique] can not only release the ease and flow of the vocal production of a second language but can also improve the quality of the mental processing of the new language. It is an area ripe for research.

An ongoing area of research is the effect of hormones on the voice, with more specific nascent research within the transgender community. Hormones affect women's voices during pregnancy, menstruation, menopause, and with certain birth control pills. There are also rare ovarian tumors that release testosterone-related androgens. Most men remember with great humility the awkward period in their lives during puberty and vocal transitioning. Hormonal treatment, as well as vocal surgery, is common among the many highly personal medical decisions available to those within the transgender community. One's voice and one's identity are intimately connected. [Alexander Technique work] can be a critical tool in finding confidence and authority in changing vocal productions.

We met our neighbor and her parents while dog-walking. The young girl was usually withdrawn, silent, and sullen. She opened up to us though as she fell in love with our buff cocker spaniel, Sasha. At age fourteen, with great personal courage and admirable support of her parents, our neighbor entered high school as a young man. He graciously shared these articulate observations after four months of testosterone.

"My voice sounding how I thought it should have (i.e., deeper, more masculine)[. It] was important to the development to my self-confidence as an adolescent and enabled my full participation in school and leadership programs. Prior to starting T and having a voice I identified with, I was apt to speak only when spoken to, which was a combination of not believing I had anything worthwhile to say and not identifying with the voice I heard coming out of my mouth. While I am still not extremely talkative, this is not due to discomfort with my voice."

Our neighbor is now a dynamic outgoing young man, He recently graduated with honors from Binghamton University [in New York] and currently is a lab manager with their Infant and Child Studies Project.

Bringing voices together builds community. Through [the Technique], Patti has overcome a lifetime of performance anxiety and found deep satisfaction as a leader for Threshold Choirs. Threshold Choirs can be found at hospices nationwide singing for those at the brink of death, their transitioning, and for support of their families.

Katie Rose arrived at Loyola Marymount University having surmounted many obstacles as the result of her severe dyslexia. [Alexander Technique] direction was critical for both of us as we struggled to find illusive working methods to eventually present a senior vocal recital in four languages. Taking advantage of the advice and expertise of my speech pathologist sister, Katie Rose transcended her dyslexia to become her graduating class valedictorian. She currently is working on her PhD at MSC Music, Mind, Brain at Goldsmiths, University of London. One of her recent projects is a study on how... participating in a guided singing community might help reduce anxiety and depression in... pregnant women as well as have a beneficial effect on the behavior and cognitive development of their babies.

The exploration of my own voice is ongoing and as with most of us, [has] taken many unexpected turns. Being effeminate as a child, and later coming out as gay held their own challenges. It was the AIDS epidemic emerging during my 20s and my own diagnosis with HIV and AIDS that became a major crossroad in my life. As many of you know too well, the staggering loss of those around us was impossible to process. Beautiful, aspirational, vibrant friends and colleagues would suffer unconscionable health crises and death within months. In the midst of my doctoral studies, I was told I was likely to die within the year, was paraded around in front of the University of Southern California medical interns as each opportunistic infection arose, and advised to not start a serious relationship. It would be another decade before protease inhibitors were to make HIV a more manageable disease. In the midst of this chaos I met my husband. In spite of our differing HIV statuses, with courage, faith, and character he chose to connect rather than run. We are now coming on thirty-one years in our relationship and four years of legal marriage. Sometimes finding your voice means staring directly at authority and fate and screaming "F— YOU!"

Two years after my HIV diagnosis I was diagnosed with a degenerative muscle condition that at best guess involves both an autoimmune element and a congenital muscular dystrophy. I currently cannot stand and use a powered wheelchair. My right arm is fully functional, although weak. I can still play piano with my left arm, but cannot lift it on my own beyond waist level. [The Alexander Technique] principles are how I get out of bed each morning, how I shower and groom, how I drive my adapted van, and essentially how I negotiate every aspect of my daily life. I have found ways to continue to teach comprehensive lessons, including sitting and standing, positions of mechanical advantage, and walking. I am grateful that through this I have been without chronic pain and attribute this to the work.

It was fate and curiosity that brought me in contact with Alexander Technique work after having taught traditional vocal

technique at the university level for over ten years. It was clear within just a couple of lessons that [the Technique] addressed areas of my personal and professional life that neither traditional education nor psychotherapy had broached. I started training almost immediately.

Training, as with many of us, was life altering. Being effeminate, non-athletic, gay, weak from a muscular disorder, and [being] HIV positive left me feeling rather betrayed by my body and in many ways afraid to connect. I have to highlight the expertise and sensitivity with which Lyn Charlsen [Klein] taught me to accept and offer the experience of touch. Over time, it felt like her hands reached into my very soul and showed me my interferences with and resistance to vulnerability. Babette Marcus had a knack for making me feel athletic through superb direction. The feeling of athleticism continues to this day in my best use, even through the inherent weakness and atrophy of my muscles. The work has healed my relationship with my body. Inherent in the concept of “relationship” however is dualism, but I continue to work toward being at one with myself, and occasionally experience just “being.” An essential part of belonging is belonging to oneself by fully embracing the journey toward identity and integration.

My health can be precarious. My body has suffered five bouts of toxic shock sepsis in the past seven years. Two of them progressed to a state of acidosis in which failing organs, especially the kidneys, can no longer remove hydrogen ions from your system. The mortality rate is upward of 73%. Hyperventilation is common as the lungs attempt to regulate the pH level in the blood. Prior to my first bout I had just completed Jessica Wolf’s yearlong course in “The Art of Breathing.” I am convinced that realizing her refined principles of breath during those critical first days in intensive care was an essential part of my survival and recovery. It took a year to recover from the last event, but I am happy to say it has been three years now, and I am back teaching and regaining some vitality and stamina.

Our convention themes of diversity and inclusion are timely and complex. My personal response to [the Alexander Technique] is deeply spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and extremely practical. My intention in teaching however trends toward pristine, without expectation to the manner in which my student will respond. I’ve learned through experience to “not know” where we are headed, but rather to trust the seemingly innocent act of freeing of one’s neck and its remarkable ability to unleash our inherent wild creative spirits.

When we reach out to unfamiliar communities, we have the perfect opportunity to learn and grow. Teach with listening hands, listening minds, and listening hearts. Out of deep tragedy, HIV survivors and their loved ones developed new forms of political activism and advocacy for our health, redefined the concept of family units, and developed by necessity the skills to survive and transcend extreme grief. The disabled community is vibrant with creative solutions to a multitude of problems, movement and otherwise. You will find no stronger examples of sheer will and fortitude. Accessibility continues to be an essential challenge for our community and an area in which AmSAT and its teaching members should make a priority for study and evaluation. The disabled community often suffers devastating isolation and invisibility of which the callous lack of awareness

and access are major aggravating factors. Unfeigned reaching into the unfamiliar is the antidote to the peril of rehashing our persistent stagnant perspectives.

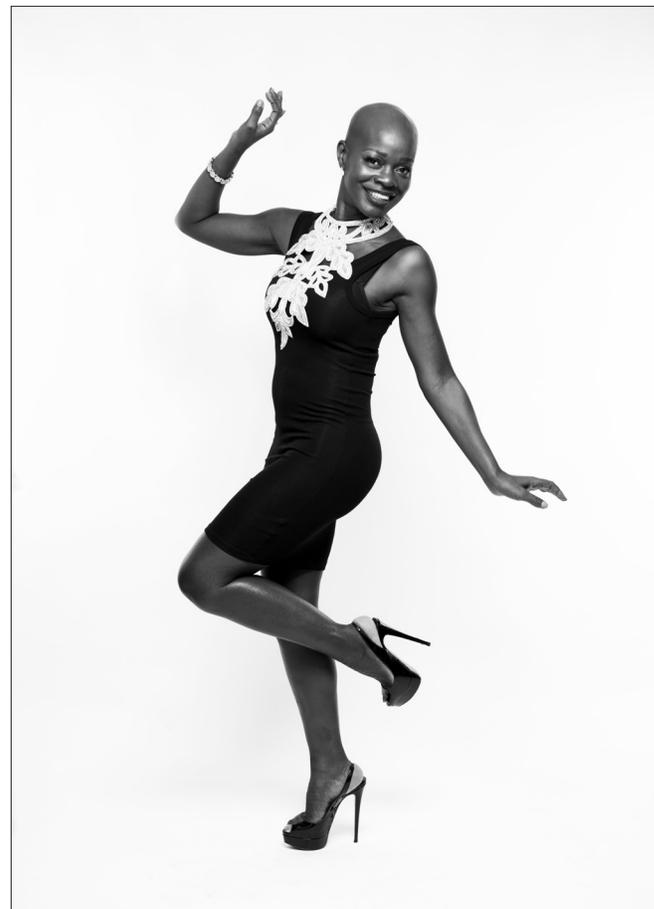
Choral conductors often place the heavier more dramatic voices of their choir in the center, and the more lyric agile voices on the outer wings. This allows the more lyric voices the freedom to express themselves, without the fatigue they would experience in the midst of the heavier voices, while the heavier voices listen outward for fine-tuning and balance. As members of AmSAT we should strive to take on the same discipline. Let’s not fall into the fallacy of a “strong core” of habitually aggressive dominating voices, but consciously listen outward to the quiet, the introverted, the inexperienced, the timid, the outsider, the habitually oppressed, the unconventional, the questioning, and above all those that speak truth to authority and power. Regardless of our identity and the timbre of our voice, we always belong to a unified whole. Our choice is whether we honor that truth, choose to interfere, or worst of all, choose apathy.

As I look out at this gathering of colleagues and friends, I see such beauty, suffering, courage, creativity, and love. I hope we come together this weekend to better learn to understand and convey our work, to share our stories with one another, to speak truth when necessary, to celebrate and expand our diversity, and to explore life’s greatest mysteries.

Blessings to all.

Thank you.

“The High-Heel Guru” Chyna Whyne



IV CHYNA WHYNE

HI. GOOD EVENING, everybody. It's such a pleasure to be here. My name is Chyna Whyne, known internationally as "the High-Heel Guru." I didn't give myself that name, I have to tell you: it's the press that gave me that name. And it's been a real honor to be a part of the Alexander Technique community—though I have to say, it's been a journey, and a very unusual journey. I'll tell you a little bit about my background. I grew up singing in the church, and it was a Pentecostal church, and I remember being in front of an audience at like three years old, and they always wanted me to sing "Amazing Grace" in the church. In Jamaica, we have this particular food, a sweet, called drops or grater cake—it's like a coconut cluster with lots of sugar and colored pink and yellow—and they would say: "Go on, go sing! Go on, go sing!" So, I used to go up and sing, and they gave me grater cake and drops for singing and I thought, "Wow! This is amazing! All I have to do is sing and I get grater cake and drops! This is fabulous!" [Laughter.]

Singing was my passion, singing was what I was born to do. And even when I was at school, my career teachers would say, "Chyna, what is it that you want to do when you leave school?" And I would say, "I want to sing!" And they would say, "No, no, no, a proper job!" [Laughter.] And I said, "I want to sing!" And they said, "No, you've got to get a proper job." And I was adamant that singing was my future. So, when I left school... I mean, I left home very, very early because I had differences with the church and the kind of ideology of Christianity. I didn't feel that a lot of it made sense to me because it was too separate. So, I left home at fifteen and then I was very, very fortunate to just stumble across some major acts like Peter Gabriel, who asked me to come and sing on his album, and that led into me working with Pete Townshend who asked me to sing a duet with him on his album, which led to doing a world tour with The Who and I met Eric Clapton and Seal and all these amazing artists. I end up touring around the world and flying around in private jets and so I was very spoiled! Wretched, actually. [Laughter.]

My life seemed like it was glamorous on the outside. Everyone looked at me and thought, "Wow, Chyna, you've just got such an amazing life!" But deep down inside, I was really quite sad. I was really quite depressed. Because my mother and father were born in Jamaica, and they went to London in the fifties. They were a part of the "Windrush" generation—I was a Windrush baby.¹ So, when my mother and father went to England, they first experienced quite a lot of racism. And the culture was completely different, obviously, and we grew up in that. I never, ever felt like I belonged in England, for some reason. I just felt like the stork dropped me in the wrong place! The culture... and it was always very cold all the time... the food... I don't know. [Laughter.] It just didn't seem quite like me! But I was there, so I dealt with it. My mother and father became victims of their environments. My father started drinking quite a lot—the pressure of raising four children—myself and my three brothers and sisters. I'm the youngest one, the baby. My father became an alcoholic and started beating my mother because he drank up the money that was supposed to go to raising the children, and you know, the story goes on. So, I grew up in quite an aggressive background and my father subsequently died an alcoholic. He ended up a

tramp, actually, on the streets. I always felt like I just didn't belong... anywhere. My father was dead, I was in this cold, English place with all these English people... what was going on?!

But the joy was my voice. That's where I got most of my passion from and most of my belonging within myself, because every time I sang, I felt okay. I felt like there was something that was giving me something. When I wasn't singing, the world just seemed a very gray and lonely place. So, being blessed to be involved with all of these amazing artists, and so forth—if anyone knows anything about the world of rock and roll, it really is sex, drugs, and rock and roll! [Laughter.] And I was very, very fortunate that I never really got involved in the drugs side of it. The rest... well... [Laughter.] There was always something inside of me that said, "Chyna, that's not you." I'm far too glamorous! If I ever did get into that, I would probably end up a bag lady and I'm just too glamorous to ever go down that road! [Laughter.] And people used to look at me and say, "Well, it's alright for you. You've got it going on." They seemed to think I just rolled out of bed like this! But, in fact, I didn't. It was always a struggle for me to find that sense of belonging within myself. So, I embarked on a journey of self-development, and that was through meditation, conscious awareness of who I am, trying to find myself, basically—praying a lot, anything that I could do to just find a center.

I got involved in the world of fashion and I was modeling a lot. Again, that world is full of casualties. Most beautiful people have very sad lives. At least, a lot of the models I was working with had very sad lives. And I didn't quite feel as though I belonged in the world of modeling because I never really saw myself as a dark-skinned, black woman and the world promoted fair-skinned, long-haired beauties and I was neither of those. By that time, I had shaved my head, because I realized that my hair wasn't my beauty. And because I was healing myself as I was going along, being dark-skinned and having no hair left me in the world of modeling as somebody who was always to the side, again—because if you look at most of the campaigns you see out there, you see fair-skinned black women with long hair. You don't see dark-skinned women who are bald-headed, okay? So, I've always, always searched for a place of belonging, and then it dawned on me, that Chyna, your belonging is inside yourself. You have to find it for yourself. There's nothing external out there for you, it's inside of you. So, this is where my real self-journey of self-development began, of healing, really.

I met Eric Clapton and he invited me to sing on his Pilgrim album in the studio for a year, and so we spent a year recording that, and then he invited me to do a world tour with him. By that time, I'd had two children, and I had [had] two massively heavy pregnancies. I looked like ten-ton Tessa! You wouldn't believe it! My nose was three times the size, even my earlobes—everything about me blew up. I was five stones [about seventy pounds] over what I am now—massive—you wouldn't even believe the pictures. And my back, my lower back, had taken a real pounding from carrying two heavy pregnancies. So, when I was on tour with Eric Clapton, of course it was all about the glamour, we were traveling around in private jets and it was all about looking good and that whole sex, drugs, and rock and roll vibe again. I was wearing high heels on stage, performing two hours a night, and it was murder. My back was absolutely destroyed. And I

was on tour for a complete year and when I finished this tour, I thought, this is it. My career in every dimension is over—singing, acting, modeling, everything is over. I went to a dentist friend of mine and he realized I was grinding my teeth at night because my back teeth were ground down, and he said to me, “Have you ever thought of having Alexander lessons?” And I said: “What on earth is that?” [Laughter.] And he said, “I think it can help you. Look, I’m going to give you a number of a teacher. You go check her out.” And I thought “OK,” because by that point, I was really desperate. I had tried chiropractic work, I tried osteopathic work, I tried physiotherapy, but the pain just kept coming back. I was going out on stage every night swallowing pain killers like Smarties [candy], just to get through the show. [The dentist] gave me the number of the most amazing woman that I’ve ever met in my life: Alice Olsher. [Applause.] Yes, and the reason I have to pick on Alice is because if it wasn’t for Alice, I wouldn’t even be here today. None of this whole entire thing that I have created would even exist. I went along to see Alice and her warmth and her beauty just surrounded me, and she put her hands on me. Now up until this time, I was used to being pulled and clunked and clicked and I was fed up! I was in pain! Why are you pulling me around like that! And it was just stressful and horrible! And her hands were just so gentle. She put her hands on me and I just suddenly felt calm. And I suddenly felt like I was present.

I had this lesson and I remember walking out feeling like I was really tall, and I was moving differently, and I thought, “Wow! This just feels different! What is this?” So, I booked another lesson and I went back the next week. She did the same thing. [Laughter.] And I was like, “What is this? You aren’t even doing anything to me!” [Laughter.] You’re just touching me really gently and I’m really liking this, and this feels so good! I said, “How many times a week can I come to this?” [Laughter.] “As much as you like.” “Can I book two lessons a week?” She said, “Yeah.” So, I booked two lessons and my lower back was easing and I thought, This is incredible! “Can I book three lessons a week?” [Laughter.] She said, “Yes.” So, I came back for three... “Can I book four lessons a week?” [Laughter.] I’m an extremist, right?

My back was getting better and better and I was thinking, this is absolutely incredible. I said to her, “What are you doing?” [Laughter.] “Are you a healer...? What?” She said, “Chyna, I’m teaching the art of inhibition.” [Pause.] Whatever. [Laughter.] It made no sense to me at this point. But I didn’t care. I was feeling better. My back was feeling good. I was like, “Cool.” And then one day, she says to me, “Chyna, I think you should train to be an Alexander teacher.” And I said, “Alice, all I want to do is get back into my heels so I can get on with my modeling and my singing career.” And she said, “Chyna, I think you’d be a good Alexander teacher.” [Laughter.] “You know what? I can get you into the Carrington school and you could be trained by Walter and Dilys Carrington. Chyna, they’re in their eighties. They’re not going to be here forever. If I were you, I’d take the training.”

So, I went home, and I thought about it and I thought about it and I deliberated and I mediated on it and I thought, I’m really feeling this work. I’m really loving it. Do ya know what? I think I’m going to train. So, I went to Alice and I said, “Alice, I think I’m going to train.” And at that time, I had a bag of money because I came off the royals on the road with Eric Clapton



Chyna Whyne
at the O2
Arena in
London

and was like, yeah, pay the money, let me just do this. Well, my family and my friends thought I had lost my mind. [Laughter.] “You’re studying the what? [Laughter] What?” I said, “Don’t worry yourself, it’s all good.”

By this time, my back was getting better, so I was kind of like dabbling back into the heels a bit. And on the mornings when I was feeling particularly hype, I went to school in six-inch heel stilettos. Six-inch steel stilettos. In Lansdowne Road. [Laughter.] And everybody looked at me like, what are you doing? And I said, “Well, I’m here to learn the Alexander Technique.” [Laughter.] And they were like, “In those?” [Laughter.] And I was like, “Why not?” And you can well imagine that this woman who just walked into the school, with six-inch heels, killer stilettos...it was the first time I think anyone had seen anything like this. There were whispers going on all over the school. I knew it. And I was being looked at from the corner of the eye. Slightly shunned, but nothing too weird, but weird enough for me to feel like, Yo, these people think I’m a bit weird here. And the feeling of resistance was kind of going on. They would say, “Take your shoes off. We’re going to give you a lesson.” “I don’t want to take my shoes off.” [Laughter.] “But your feet need to be connected to the ground!” “Well, why can’t my feet be connected to the ground in high heels?” So, there was this whole thing going on, and I said, “Do you know what? I’m going to go to Walter [Carrington]. I’m going to take this to Walter.” [Laughter.] So I knocked on Walter’s door and I said, “Walter, can I have a chat?” And he says, “Come in, my dear.” I said, “Walter, there’s a controversy in the school. I want to wear my killer stilettos to school, but I feel like [pause] people are not wanting me to wear my heels to school. Can I wear my heels to school?” He said, “Chyna, my dear, as long as you free your neck...you’ll be fine.” [Laughter and applause.] I just remember going back into my teaching room and saying, “Walter says it okay! Leave me the hell alone!” [Laughter and applause.] And that was the start of my journey in mastering the art of wearing high heels.

For the next three years I basically got into the concept of how to master the art of balance and poise and coordination and movement and whatever else came up in high heels. By the time I graduated in 2002, I was in my high heels, all day and all night, strutting my stuff and thinking, Wow, I think I’m onto something! I had no back pain, [and I was] back singing, back modeling and I’m thinking, Yo, I’m onto something! If I can translate this to other people, this could be a really good thing! This could help other women in the same position I was in! So, I started setting up workshops and inviting women to

come along and it was translating! Women were coming into my workshops one way and leaving completely differently. And I kept thinking I am really onto something, but I don't want to shout too loud, because I really want to research and develop this even more before I take this to the world.

So, I kept doing the workshops, tweaking and revising and learning and listening and wrote a book: *Mastering the Art of Wearing High Heels: Ten Hot Tips*—my little best seller that's downstairs if you want to buy it! [Laughter.] I just was like, This is amazing! So, women started to get in touch with me, I did a couple of TV [spots], press, and things like that, and women just wanted to learn to walk in heels. They didn't care about anything else—they just wanted to learn to walk in heels—that was the endgame.

So, when women started to come to my workshop and I introduced the Alexander Technique, they were like, "OK, what's that?" "Well..." I never used to get into too much of an explanation because I could find that it could be quite confusing to try to explain what the Alexander Technique is, as we all know. [Laughter.] So, I would just say, "Well, this is just going to help you have beautiful posture, help you move with grace and ease and be sexy on the catwalk." So, I'd start giving them lessons and they were like, "Wow! This is really amazing!" And when they saw the difference when they were walking in their heels, they were like, "Wow! Can I have some more of this?" "Absolutely!" And they'd book another lesson! And I realized I was beginning to reach an audience that were very high in fashion and very high in the world of business and women who just loved wearing heels. And not just women who loved wearing heels, but women who just wanted to celebrate themselves. I was getting a lot of men, too—don't get me wrong. They were flocking. But the women were coming in with the heels.

I have to say that the Alexander Technique has absolutely given me such a gift, and such a wonderful opening to expose this work to the world on a level that I hadn't seen before. Now, I do have to say that I love all of my people in the Alexander Technique community, but sometimes I find it a little dusty. [Laughter and applause.] I have to say, I do find it rather dusty. And I think we can really turn this game up. [Laughter.] Yeah? I think we need to get some fire under this thing now. I think we need to get jiggy and we need to look at the situation. In my opinion, the Alexander Technique is the forerunner, it goes before everything. Because, if I have beautiful balance and poise and the art of movement and posture and all of these things, I can then take that into my yoga, I can take that into my golf, I can take that into my swimming, I can take that into my walking in heels, I can take that into everything! Because now I'm consciously aware of how I'm using myself and I'm using myself from a place of optimum.

So, I believe that the world right now is about to blow up. Fasten your seatbelts. [Applause.] And the reason I say that is because every single last one of you women who has been to any of my workshops, and particularly this week, you're going to be hitting the catwalk on Saturday night! You hear me? We're hitting the catwalk and we're going to be swaggering and the world is going to see us swagger! We need to be trending. Yeah? Alexander Technique needs to be trending. Young people need to know about Alexander Technique. I believe that if we don't step

our game up, we may be like the dinosaurs. Yeah? They will talk about us like, We used to exist at one point, and we're no longer in the mix. That's not going to be me, you know? [Laughter.] I'm in the mix! I don't know about you, but I'm in the mix! So, if we want to go on this journey all together, come follow me. [Applause.] Come put your heels on and let's get this show on the road! [Applause.] Let's get this show on the road!

Now, men, I have not left you out, because I run a program, I've developed a whole program. When the women now know how to walk in high heels, we need to educate the men how to escort us. Because oftentimes—I'm sure you've seen, and if you haven't, just observe when you walk down the road—you might see a couple and the woman's tottering around in her heels and the man's striding on ahead of her. She's trying to keep up and he's like, "Come on! Why do you put those bloody things on anyway?" And she's like, "Well, I love them!" And he just can't quite get it, but understand, men, we women love our heels like you like your fast cars. We love our heels the same way. So that will give you an idea of how we are. We want our men to be able to escort our women! So, next year, we're going to get a proper catwalk runway, and we will get the women strutting and the men escorting! [Applause.] This is just the start! There is a lady here, she's got to be seventy-five, is she here? Where's my supermodel? Is she here? She knows who she is. She went home today to get her heels to come to my workshop, and I said to her, "You inspire me. Because I hear women half your age saying 'Oh no, I don't wear heels anymore. I've given up on my heels.'" And this woman has gone home to get her heels and you should have seen my girl strut her stuff. It put a lot of us to shame. So, what I'm saying is, whether you are fifteen or eighty years old, there is still hope, because there are Alexander teachers. We all know the art of poise and balance and coordination and movement, come on now! So, you should be able to walk in high heels! That's why I am putting you all on the catwalk and we are going to take this to the world! Aren't we? [Applause.]

So, three years ago, I decided I no longer wanted to live in England, because I was tired of being cold and I was tired of eating processed foods! And I was just a bit tired of the lethargies which the culture was breeding within itself. I've always been back and forth to Jamaica, so I always had something to compare my lifestyle with. Now, for those of you that have never been to Jamaica before, it is absolute paradise on earth. That's where I live now. I realized in bringing the Alexander Technique to Jamaica... I'm the only one. I'm the only one on the entire island. I've done TV interviews in Jamaica introducing the Alexander Technique, but I realize if I start really pushing the Alexander Technique in the way that I want to, I'll implode because I'm the only one.

I've set up a little program for Alexander teachers to come down to Jamaica and come and just see what it's like. Now, first of all, what you have to realize about Jamaica is that everywhere you go, you are going to see black people. [Laughter and cheering.] Everywhere. So, if you're not used to that, it might be a little bit of a shock. [Laughter.] You might have to get used to it, and that's okay. Because that's diversity. That's learning about a different culture, that's learning how you feel and fit in. I grew up to believe that I was a minority, growing up in London, that was the conditioning that I was taught to believe. I actually

had an identity crisis growing up, to be quite honest with you. Because in England, you are not taught to celebrate your color, you're not taught to celebrate your culture. Your culture is not taught in schools, your culture is not prompted on the TV and radio. So—we, as black people, have to try and find a way to fit in, to integrate, to try and feel a part of things. So, what tends to happen is that a lot of us lose our own identity and take on other types of identity that are not actually really us. And I went through a phase where I actually used to wear a blonde weave and blue contact lenses because, honestly, I wanted to be white. I felt that I wanted to be white because being black didn't work, it didn't fit. But in actual fact, that was the farthest from the truth, because it was all my years of self-development and healing that made me finally accept who I am. Returning now to Jamaica and living amongst my people and my culture has given me the greatest sense of belonging ever. So, I can come and share that with everybody now because I know who I am, and I feel confident in who I am. And I can say, "Come and get a little bit black in Jamaica! It's a good thing! You know what I'm saying?"

I encourage you all to really come to Jamaica as Alexander teachers. We really, really, really need you. I need you in Jamaica. I have lots of opportunities that I can open up but because there's only me, I daren't do it. Because I can't implode. If I can get one Alexander teacher a month—look how many of us are in the room—if I can get one Alexander teacher a month to come to Jamaica, and I know I have a teacher there every month, I can then really start to go for it, and get the work into corporate companies, into the world of fashion, into the world of music—I could just get in everywhere. But I need your help.

When I look around this room, I can see a sliver of myself. I think there was one other black guy here? One black guy and we have a beautiful, black goddess over here, and it's a beautiful thing. I'd like to see more. I'd like to see more! [*Applause and words of agreement.*] Because this work is so valuable, you know? And it's an international thing. We need to start including different cultures into this work so we can get it more widespread. When I was learning the Alexander Technique, we had pictures of African women with pots on their heads [showing], This is the art of balance and poise! Well, they didn't have any Alexander lessons! [*Laughter.*] They knew! So, F.M. Alexander was truly a genius, because all he did was come up with a technique to help us get back to nature. He's a genius! That's why I say to everybody, there's no big explanation to this, please, just let us get rid of all the trappings of what we think it is and what we think it's not...all the jargon...we're returning to nature, that's what we're doing.

When I'm teaching women how to walk in high heels, I'm teaching you how to walk like an African woman. Because people in Africa, that's how we walk! That's how we walk! We are naturally balanced and poised. So, when you come to Jamaica and you put your hands on people, in that culture, you will be amazed to feel how people just fly up! It's incredible. And I think you will all be amazed in yourselves to know how you can integrate with a society and how you can bring your skills to Jamaica and how the people can benefit and then take it to the world, the rest of the world.

But, be warned. You might be shocked. I've had three Alexander teachers already come down to Jamaica and I think

they've all had a great experience, but it is a culture shock, because when you are not used to seeing so many black people and if you have a fear of black people, you might be in trouble!—until you get over that, and you realize that there is nothing to be afraid of.

I was speaking to a young lady who was twenty years old. She was adopted by one of the Alexander teachers here—you all know her—and she said to me, "Chyna, when I was adopted, I realized I was racist, because my [birth] parents conditioned me against black people. They conditioned me, I was homophobic, I was a racist, I was everything-ist, against everything." And when she was adopted, by parents who were open and liberal and loving and not diseased in that way, it translated to her. So now, she has a multitude of friends that are multicultural, and she's realized that is where she was coming from. I said to her, "I respect you. You know why? Because you were honest enough to even recognize that that is where you are at." We are born into societies and cultures where we are conditioned and some of our conditionings are just how they are. And when you realize that you think a certain way or you feel a certain way, it's okay! Just observe it. And once you observe it, it's your choice whether to do anything about it. You might realize, "Oh my God, I'm scared of black people—in fact, I don't actually like black people. My mom and dad use to talk about black people like they were savages." It's all ingrained in you. It's a part of who you are. But once you realize this, and if it's something about yourself that you are willing to address and look at, then it's all good, because that's a part of the change. Nobody has to judge anybody. All we want is integration. And we want healing and diversity. When you come to Jamaica, you're going to realize "One Love." I'm telling you. Because that's how we are as a culture. People come up to me [and say], "Oh my God, Jamaican people are so nice!" "Yeah..." "Jamaican people are so talented!" "Yeah..." "They're not these barbaric people we hear about on the news!" "No..."

Go to my website www.chynawhyne.com. Look for a button there, "Alexander Teachers in Jamaica," and sign up. You can put your name down there. You can come and stay with me in my house. I've actually found a beautiful house in St. Mary's where I want to have the Alexander Technique Center, Holistic Center, whatever. It's over three floors and it can house about fifteen people. It's an amazing place for a training center. It's an amazing place for a healing center; it's right by the sea. So, if anybody tonight can write me a check for \$750,000 that would be absolutely great! [*Laughter.*] I'll get the house and we'll party! Thank you very much for having me! [*Applause.*]

— All transcriptions by Genoa Davidson,
with thanks to Fabio Tavares, Lisa First,
Karl Snider, and Chyna Whyne.

NOTE

- 1 The Windrush Generation was made up of former Caribbean countries' residents who had emigrated to the United Kingdom between 1948 and 1971 in response to the post-wwII economic crisis in the island countries and labor shortages in the UK. Windrush was part of the name of the first ship that arrived in Essex in 1948. For more information, see <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-43782241>.

Bridging the Gap: Alexander Technique and Activism

by Joanna Britton & Karin Heisecke

Workshops · ACGM, New York, June 26–30, 2019

ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE TEACHERS around the world combine their practices with an incredible array of personal or professional passions, and there is no end to the potential applications of the Technique! The theme “Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging” of this year’s ACGM points to the fact that there is also enormous potential in the links between social justice and our Alexander Technique practice. However, it is not always easy to bridge the gap between the Alexander world and that of racial, social, and gender justice, and this is not a topic that I have read or heard much about in our community previously. Karin Heisecke and I, both activists and Alexander Technique teachers based in Berlin and Brussels respectively, were therefore particularly excited to be able to attend the ACGM in June. In this article, I would like to report briefly on the links between political activism and the Alexander Technique as introduced and explored in two workshops we gave during the conference.

The first workshop, “What Can the Alexander Technique Learn from Activist Traditions?” was discussion-based and attended by a small group of Alexander Technique teachers. We started with initial prompts that led to some central realizations throughout the session:

- Many teachers are already working with diverse communities, and this can be done successfully, albeit requiring patience and reflection. It would be good to find more efficient systems for knowledge- and skill-sharing
- We believe that the Alexander Technique community has much to learn from activist language and ways of thinking about inclusion, in particular for fat/body positivity, anti-racism, consent, gender and diversity, and feminist understanding of space and power.
- Many in the Alexander Technique community—as in the wider world—are unfamiliar with contemporary activist practice and its vocabulary and concepts, so further work is also needed to explain, explore, and adapt this area for Alexander Technique work.

The second workshop, “Radical Self-Care for Activists,” was practical. It was open to and attended by members of the public as well as a number of Alexander Technique teachers. The hope was to make space during the conference for outreach work—to create community with members of the public who identify themselves as activists by giving them a taste of hands-on work and also to open a discussion around self-care. These were certainly rather ambitious aims for a short workshop! Some initial reflections include:

- In the current context of polarized politics and climate crisis, activists may be particularly prone to burn-out, and the



Karin Heisecke (left) & Joanna Britton (right)

Alexander Technique can offer a much-needed practice of self-care.

- Depending on the field of activism, it could be important to develop Alexander Technique teachers’ awareness and skills around gender, body politics, and/or trauma in order to be more effective.
- Such a community could address the possibility of sharing resources and best practices on successful engagement with diverse and activist communities within the Alexander Technique world.

For Karin and me, it was a great privilege—unfortunately not a carbon-neutral one—to bridge the gap of the Atlantic and connect in person with our North American colleagues. Being in New York offered a much-needed and refreshing opportunity to start bridging the gaps between our political and Alexander selves! I left feeling hopeful that there are many who share our belief in the potential of the Alexander Technique as a tool for social change in these difficult times. On a personal level, I was particularly affected and inspired by the workshop on Mindfulness Based Racism Reduction given by Darryl Aiken-Afam, and I am excited to continue exploring how the Alexander Technique can be a tool to heal ourselves and our own community from its implicit racist and sexist biases.

Karin and I remain very excited about continuing this conversation within the European Alexander community and also at the international congress in Berlin in 2021! Hope to see some of you there!

Safe-Space Mini-Retreat for Educators

by Sandra Bain Cushman & Heather Dennee

Workshop · ACGM, New York, June 28, 2019

The Circle

IN THE CIRCLE, every person can see every other person. The Circle brings us together. The less obvious attribute of the Circle is that it has the power to divest teachers (referred to here as group coordinators) of the hierarchical position associated with their expertise. If teachers act with intention and are attentive to creating a safe space together, they may also put aside some of their own biases and personal stories. In other words, by joining the Circle we are all in it together: working, experimenting, learning, mistake-making, and teaching— and then learning more. One of the key foundations of work in the Circle is:

There are no mistakes, only variations!

Building a safe space together

- In the Circle, we aim for the experience of integration, individually and as a group.
- Our Alexander Technique aims: developing sensory appreciation, taking time, pausing, and directing attention.
- Circulation aims: daring to make mistakes, assuming goodwill, offering and accepting help, allowing Alexander Technique directions to lead us to freer awareness and movements.
- Participation: participants are free to stay inside the Circle and engage with the group, or to step outside the Circle and observe the group's work.

Consent to touch

The use of consent-to-touch cards encourages listening to ourselves and asking how we can take care of ourselves in any given moment. Sometimes in the process of learning, we've had enough hands-on and need a break to assimilate what we've learned.



Sandra Bain Cushman (left) & Heather Dennee (right)

- Every participant receives a consent-to-touch card.
- At any moment, permission to touch can be revised by flipping the card.
- The group coordinator explains what kind of “hands-on/ touch” is available: very light Technique touch guides one to release tension and move freely; hands may be placed on the head, shoulders, ribs, legs, back, and/or arms.
- Reminders are provided throughout the Retreat that anyone can give consent to touch to the teachers present in order to explore sensory appreciation of the Alexander Technique directions, or turn the card over and withhold consent without any judgements.
- Using the cards encourages listening to oneself and asking how we can take care of ourselves in any given moment; sometimes in the process of learning, we've had enough hands-on and need a break to assimilate what we've learned
- Consent to touch helps us create a safe space where participants may consider how they can best stay present to themselves and the group.

AT work and play: safe space mini-retreat content

We begin with a “fight, flight, freeze, submit” discussion, and establish the aim to cheerfully observe the stress response when it occurs. The stress response is the body's emergency response system designed to keep us safe. It includes our physical and thought responses, as well as our individual perceptions in a multitude of situations. Exploring these situations in a safe space helps us observe when our emergency response system activates and how we can experience it— noticing the reactions and interferences without judging them—and engage Alexander Technique principles and directions to pause, re-direct, and re-integrate ourselves into the group activity.

We invite the stress response as a trusted friend: we will take on games and challenges in the Circle that evoke fight, flight, freeze, and submit reactions. The nature of the challenges

guarantees this, and we are all in the same boat, including the group coordinator(s).

Examples in everyday life where the stress response might get activated include when we are running late, when we drop something in a quiet, public setting, when a teacher asks us a question and we anticipate being wrong, or when we are learning a new skill and don't want to mess it up. All of these situations can activate our stress response system, which can narrow our focus, tighten our muscles, affect our breathing, and create undue tension.

The fight, flight, freeze, submit system activates many times during the day. As a result, we may become tense, hold our breath, narrow our vision, and give into a "doom and gloom" inner dialogue. These experiences can be exhausting; yet there are ways to calmly and cheerfully observe them when they occur and use Alexander Technique directions to lead us away from such stress responses.

In the Circle, we stimulate the stress response playfully and intentionally to build our skills—individually and together—in dealing with it.

THE SAFE SPACE MINI-RETREAT

In this day's Safe Space Mini-Retreat, we showcase and make friends with our stress response in a beginning sequence called the Name Circulation Warm-up. The group coordinator introduces the game. We are invited to play by learning the names of the people surrounding us, while challenging our physical coordination by clapping in sequence as well. The goal of the game is to pass names around the Circle in various sequences, which are initially given by the coordinator and ultimately determined by group interaction.

Warm-up name circulations

Sequence 1

- First, say your name to the person on your right; the coordinator begins by passing her name to the right.
- Pass a clap at the same time, also to the person on your right.
- This continues around the Circle, each participant saying their name in sequence along with a clap, moving to the right.
- After once or twice around the sequence changes direction, with the first change initiated by the coordinator. After this, anyone is invited to change the direction of the sequence.

Sequence 2

- Say the name of the person to the right of you and then clap to that person.
- The person who received the clap then says the name of the person to the right of them, passing with a clap, and so on around the Circle. Then Sequence 2 can change direction.
- The Alexander Technique enters: The coordinator temporarily stops the sequence underway, asking for feedback or gently puts the sequence back on track if it has fallen apart. Usually this is a good moment for the coordinator to pass the

initiation of the sequence to someone else in the group. The sequence may also have changed spontaneously, and the coordinator rolls with the change. One possible change is Sequence 2 reverting to Sequence 1, OR changing to Sequence 3.

Sequence 3

- Say the name of the person to the left of you and send to the right along with the clap.
- Hopefully, this goes all the way around to the initiator again; often the pattern reverts to one of the first two sequences, which is fine.
- At this point the sequences often begin to change of their own accord; participants help each other know which one is the "current" version of the sequence. Sequence 3 may need to be introduced, or it may occur on its own. OR Sequence 4 may arise.

Sequence 4

- Sequence 4 often occurs spontaneously. Participants (and the coordinator, who is now a participant) clap across the Circle while calling the name of the person that the participant is clapping to.

During the Game

- Stress happens! Can we follow the sequence? What happens if we don't? Where does our stress response system kick in?
- Fun also happens!—and helping each other. Here is where Alexander Technique directions come in to Save the Day!
- Technique Directions happen! When the coordinator temporarily stops the action to sort things out or the group seems lost, the Technique directions are revisited.

Alexander Technique Directions

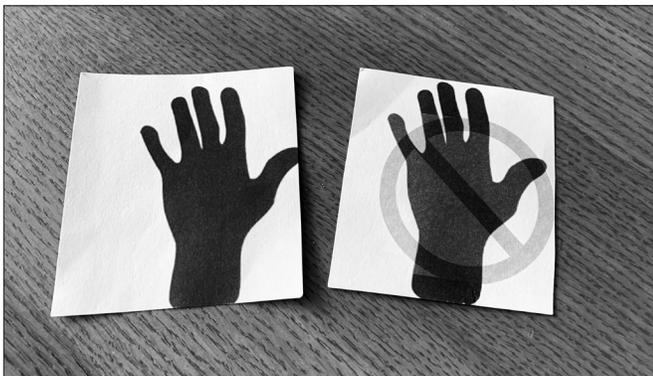
- These directions are introduced during pauses, when beginning again after the patterns get lost, or any time we need a boost.
- In this workshop, we have six or seven Alexander Technique teachers and thirteen or fourteen educators who are not Alexander Technique teachers, so during our first pause, we begin exploring free head balance, which when learned about and engaged allows all participants to make eye contact with each other. Hands-on is offered for those who have flipped to consent to touch.
- As we work with increasingly difficult patterns, we pause again and explore a sequence, allowing legs to release away from the torso so that our feet can rest easily on the ground.
- At another juncture, we add the direction of finding free movement at the hip joints and on the sit bones.
- The directions of freeing the natural breath, releasing the ribs and letting them drape on the exhale, and the whispered "ah" are introduced and engaged as helpers later in the Retreat. The Inner Giraffe also comes in, bringing with it tensegrity-



Above The room is arranged into a circle with group coordinator as a participant.

Below Granting consent to touch; at any moment this can be revised

Right Giraffe tensegrity toy



like connections and springiness in standing and walking that lead us to two other games, which are introduced with tensegrity toys. We pass these around the group and play with them while we discuss tensegrity connection and suspension.

- Leg swings with hands on each other's shoulders free us into the upcoming walking/inhibition games.

An Alexander Technique question for educators

When we are asked to do something by a teacher, and we are unsure if what we are doing is right, how do we respond? We might go with this:

- We pause.
- We notice.
- What can we see?
- What can we free?

What becomes... The yin and yang game

A variation on an old game takes on a new form and becomes the highlight of the workshop.

The "winking game" or "clapping game" is introduced to work on means-whereby sequencing, eyes free in the group (aka natural head balance), sitting and standing after pausing and re-directing, and tensegrity springiness (open system versus shortening, narrowing, and tightening into stress responses/interferences).

The Sequence

- CLAP to someone in the Circle and say their name.
- RISE from your chair.
- WALK to that person's chair.
- WAIT for the person to repeat the same sequence.
- SIT in the chair after the chair's occupant has CLAPPED, RISEN, and WALKED across the Circle to the next chair.

The game goes on awhile, and one of the high school teachers introduces an innovation that removes the necessity of repeatedly walking across the big circle:

- A—the high school teacher— claps to the person directly to her right, following the sequence to take that person's chair.
- That person claps to the person immediately to the right, then takes that chair, and so on.
- Recognizing the new pattern, we divide the 20-person group into two halves.
- Group 1 keeps the new pattern going to the right with 10 people.
- Group 2 does the same thing across the Circle in its 10-person arc.
- Everyone goes to the right, one person at a time, tempo to be determined.

What happens is that two halves of the Circle do entirely different things. Group 1 takes the full rotation, ten people moving

right by one seat, one at a time, to a tidy completion (a hundred individual movements), while Group 2 arrives at something looking a bit like a rugby scrum (like the starting play from the line of scrimmage in American football).

Group 2 "should have" continued doing the sequence to the right and the coordinator could have redirected Group 2 by stopping them when they began "deviating," but chooses instead to observe. What transpires is the Safe Space Circle doing its amazing work. Many times, a person in the group will correct someone when something isn't going right. Or the coordinator stops the group and asks for feedback and reiterates the sequence. Yet if that had happened, we wouldn't have had the amazing experience of listening and creating our own choices to free and release and move. Instead of just clapping to the person to the right, someone is also clapping to someone else in the Circle, outside the pattern, and then that person chooses to field a new "sequence-within-the-sequence," and so on.

Heather's comments on the yin and yang game and its relation to the Alexander Technique and safe space

"We [Group 2] want to include everybody, so we just make it work—responding to the person, changing the form."

"It is interesting to be in the Yin group; it isn't chaotic, really. 'Somebody is clapping to me, OK!' Some are keeping the 'correct' pattern going while another form is also going on."

"We can tell from the beginning that the 'right' form isn't happening...but goodwill means that 'right' is about inclusion, not perfection. Group Mind is not thinking 'this is a mistake or not a mistake'; rather we are thinking 'if we stop and correct it, we won't be included, something will be lost.'"

"Inclusivity is the most important principle, not 'how it is supposed to go.'"

"This takes an educator to a different place.... Educators are not here to tell us what is wrong!"

"AT in the group gives us the means-whereby to be inclusive."

"Everybody who is clapped at responds; that is where the directions and everything that leads up to this moment in the workshop allows for the chaotic/not-chaotic dichotomy to happen. Otherwise it will be 'that's wrong!'"

"The group really takes on the stuff of the workshop, rather than the particulars of the sequence. People are sticking to the principles, rather than the particulars of how it should go."

"The Circle strips you down and allows you to go to that neutral place where you make different decisions, new decisions. It becomes this beautiful thing! In the Circle we simply are naked and we have to grapple and forgive ourselves and let other people help us; these are the things that are going to help us in our lives."

"The AT teachers dissolve into the group; expertise is present, but not driving the outcome."

"I'm not humiliated or embarrassed, I see Life in Action: decisions, mistakes, learning, growing, evolving inside this little community we've created from the beginning, our own tiny civilization."

A Dialogue on Reaching and Working with More Diverse Communities

Facilitated by the Riverside Initiative for the Alexander Technique (RIAT)

ACGM, New York, Friday, June 28, 2019

What is currently successful about how we are reaching and working with more diverse communities, and why?

- One training course has a community outreach program that includes a low-cost clinic where people can sign up for lessons with third-year trainees, teachers, or faculty affiliates who are offering low-cost lessons. Training courses could also offer low-cost summer workshops by recently graduated trainees.
- One teacher is in the process of being approved for a paid position teaching the Technique at a Veteran's Administration (VA) hospital. There are a few other teachers who are working at other VA hospitals. In these settings, the Technique is being offered as one part of an integrative health program that brings the Technique to a population that wouldn't have access otherwise, helping veterans who are struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other medical issues. Another teacher comments that for this kind of program to be replicated or scalable, it would be helpful to have research and documentation to show its success. Also it would be helpful to use a more strategic approach than just word of mouth to get the Alexander Technique into more VA hospitals and similar institutions. Monika Gross says The Poise Project® works to broaden access to the Technique in this manner, offering training of teachers for work with specific populations and supporting research at the same time
- There is a discussion stressing the necessity of 1) tireless perseverance, creativity, and flexibility; 2) a willingness to make and use contacts from other fields; and 3) an ability to accept lower (or no) pay in order to get a program up and running. Teachers shared stories of how they did this at the VA hospital, inner-city schools, a public college, and more.
- One teacher mentions that the accrediting organization for music schools now requires a health component at each institution—that is, a person whom students can come to with physical issues. This new rule may become a leveraging point for Alexander Technique teachers, as music schools across the country will want to maintain their music education certification. The Alexander Technique is general enough, the teacher says, to fill this niche, and in her institution, she can refer music students to musician-friendly medical professionals, as needed.

What is not working, and why?

- A comment is made that the [aforementioned] training school's community outreach program offering low-cost lessons to the public from third-year trainees and willing faculty is a form of social activism because you have to



Clockwise from top left
Three members of the Riverside Initiative for the Alexander Technique (RIAT) facilitated this discussion: Nanette Walsh, Ariel Carson, and Emily Faulkner. For more information on RIAT, see p. 60.

- be willing to get out there and get people motivated and interested in donating time. This is a great thing but can be challenging to run as part of a training course because teachers and faculty are already taxed with training responsibilities. Additionally, you can't ask that much of trainees who are paying for training, as it may also be out of their comfort range to participate. Two separate efforts would be better and easier to manage, but lack of time, funding, and willing teachers are challenges.
- A few teachers comment that they misunderstood the point of the workshop, believing it was to have the goal of recruiting people from diverse populations to training courses. Others make the point that bringing the Technique into diverse communities will hopefully encourage people from these diverse communities to become teachers. [The workshop addressed both issues—how to bring the Technique to more diverse communities and how to encourage people from diverse backgrounds to train as teachers.]
 - A teacher shares that she has offered free lessons to activists for several years and that after Michael Brown was shot in Saint Louis, she began offering free lessons to Black Lives Matter activists and later to anyone supporting the Black

Lives movement. She feels it isn't working as well as it should be because she needs to come to terms with her own white body supremacy. This leads to a discussion of how to disrupt and dismantle white supremacy through the Technique and the need for teachers to do the work to gain trust before reaching out to diverse populations—to have humility, to listen to other's views, to not assume that the teacher knows best about what a population needs. A teacher comments that we have to become neighbors, friends with people of diverse backgrounds before we try to bring the Technique to them; otherwise our efforts may not be well received. The point is made that a shift of perspective from a less dominant viewpoint would be helpful. The book *Me and White Supremacy* is suggested as a place to start.

- A teacher points out that mostly white males “are running this world,” and that is not the general makeup of who is in attendance at the workshop, or by extension, the Alexander Technique teaching community in general. He also discusses his belief in the importance of understanding the history of race relations in our country when talking about these issues.

Where do we envision going from here?

- A teacher comments that the main factor behind the lack of diversity within the Alexander Technique teaching community is one of equity, i.e., there isn't a guaranteed job at the end of the training. It's not just about providing scholarships for training; it's about having a job once you get your teaching certification.
- The teacher who will be teaching at the VA comments that giving veterans access to the Technique could lead to an interest in becoming teachers themselves.
- A discussion follows in which teachers share their experience holding workshops and giving lessons to groups or communities they are already part of; it is noted that this model feels more organic. For example, a teacher who is already active in her local LGBTQ community center offers classes and lessons there. She has used tag lines such as, “How has homophobia or transphobia affected your body?” Similarly, a teacher who is already involved in salsa dancing reached out to her salsa community to offer an Alexander Technique salsa workshop at the ACGM.

Funding remains a problem

- A comment is made that training courses should include resources for job placement and career counseling the way other academic institutions do. Part of a trainee's three-year, advanced degree, it is argued, should be how to get a job after graduation. The contrasting idea is raised that a training course is different, that the director's goal is more like that of the director of a music program where the person who teaches you the violin skills and nurtures your passion for music will not necessarily be the person who arranges your career afterwards. She makes the additional point that training schools are small institutions with limited budgets. The main job of a teaching director, she says, is to teach in the

best way that you can to people who have come to learn. The question is floated: Is the Alexander Technique a vocation or a profession?

Moving forward, how can we support each other in these efforts?

- A teacher from the European Union points out that it would be helpful if the Technique was recognized (and paid for) by the public health system, as it is in Israel, Switzerland, and the UK, but acknowledges that that would bring regulations to the field that would be restrictive, so it's a dilemma. She points out that funding for any kind of outreach program is impossible to get because the Technique is not recognized by the public health system, so it remains accessible only to those who can pay.
- A teacher comments that she believes AmSAT should take a stronger leadership role in promoting diversity in the field and asks whether we can we have more speakers like Davian Robinson and Daryll Joyce coming to our regular meetings to educate and inform us.
- A teacher comments that she'd love to see these conversations happening on a more regular basis. She wants to know that she's not alone in working through these difficult questions. She comments that she doesn't see the issue of color being raised in Alexander Technique conversations.
- A teacher recommends PBS documentaries about African American history by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
- Many teachers commented that the language we use when we discuss these issues needs to be looked at in these conversations. The appropriateness of words like “belonging” and “marginalized” was discussed in this context.
- Several comments were made asking how AmSAT's Diversity Coalition can help to further address issues discussed today. A teacher asked if a page on the AmSAT website could be devoted to this issue, so there would be a place where people can share their personal initiatives. In this way teachers can learn from each other, have more regular discussions about how the principles of the Technique can help us move through these issues of access, and how to confront our own racism, implicit biases, etc.
- A comment is made that there are efforts and organizations outside the Alexander Technique sphere that can be helpful—Undoing Racism, for example.
- A comment is made about racism within F.M. Alexander's books, such as *Man's Supreme Inheritance*. On training courses, this has to be an area of careful, thoughtful discussion so that all points of view are heard and supported so that students and teachers can learn from each other's reactions to the text.

—Transcribed by Rebecca Sandler

Being an Advocate for All Students

A Workshop with Kristin Mozeiko

by Genoa Davidson & Joe Alberti

ACGM, New York, June 29, 2019



DR. KRISTIN MOZEIKO has taught conducting, music education classes, and has directed the wind ensemble at Queens College in New York since 2002. For the last eleven years, she has also taught the Alexander Technique to musicians. Her quiet manner is belied by her eyes, which are fiercely compassionate and flash with passion as she shares her work with the group during this ACGM workshop.

This passion that Mozeiko carries for her work includes

her desire to make sure that all of her students feel seen and heard. So, when one of the students from the wind ensemble she conducts began questioning their identity and eventually asked that others start using the name Kelly instead of the student's former name and stop using the masculine name and pronouns that student was given at birth, Mozeiko paid attention. This topic became the subject of Mozeiko's research and workshop. Transgender rights are not fully guaranteed in the United States and recent actions by the current administration have added to the vulnerability of the transgender community.¹ Transgender individuals often experience discrimination and abuse. They are also more susceptible to homelessness, sexually transmitted diseases, suicidality, drug/alcohol abuse and self-harm.²

During her talk, Mozeiko shared that during one rehearsal she accidentally "misgendered" her student by using a "he" rather than a "she" pronoun. This was very upsetting for the student and for Mozeiko, who makes a tremendous effort to be supportive of her students. She realized she had not been aware of the new dialogue surrounding trans- and gender-fluid students and wanted to learn more and make changes as to how she was teaching and how she was instructing teachers in their teaching methods. She also realized that if she was making mistakes, there were probably others who, like her, could benefit from more education and conversation to learn how to better support transgender and gender nonconforming (GNC) students. Teachers and educators have a responsibility to help create a sense of inclusion and belonging for all students in their learning environments.

As a result of Mozeiko's concerns, she asked Kelly to co-author a narrative inquiry study in which Kelly could share the

experiences that related to Kelly's journey with gender from childhood to graduate school. Change can be a very positive thing—but it can also be non-linear and, at times, uncomfortable. Kelly articulately described an evolving sexual and gender identity, and a life as a music student and as a trans person living in a major city.

Kelly chose to identify as "trans, queer, and femme." For Kelly, having a label was very important for purposes of self-identity, in part because Kelly chose it, rather than having it (descriptive label) by others. Labels can be a double-edged sword depending on how they are used. Some find them limiting while others find them comforting and helpful in defining their place in the world. Personal pronouns are an important area in which teachers can be supportive to their students. Many people are choosing a pronoun that feels most aligned with their gender identity.

Prior to this lecture, we were familiar with he, she, and they. Below is a current chart of pronouns which have opened a whole world of possibility!

He	Him	His	His	Himself
She	Her	Her	Hers	Herself
Zie	Zim	Zir	Zis	Zieself
Sie	Sie	Hir	Hirs	Hirself
Ey	Em	Eir	Eirs	Eirself
Ve	Ver	Vis	Vers	Verself
Tey	Ter	Tem	Ters	Terself
E	Em	Eir	Eirs	Emself

The group that attended Mozeiko's workshop had a heartfelt discussion about how to navigate the issue of pronouns both in teaching private lessons and working in a college setting. Several teachers have included the space for a preferred pronoun or a preferred name on their intake forms. Some Alexander Technique teachers expressed concern about asking for a pronoun; they felt it was too pushy or too limiting. Mozeiko advised us to just listen and pay attention. Most of the time, the preferred pronoun would become known organically.

This led to a discussion about what "gender binary" was and what gender binary thinking entailed. Mozeiko defined gender binary as looking at the world as having only two fixed genders. Many of us see the world in this way, even if it is unconscious.

Change is necessary and not without challenge. Mozeiko left us with the following questions to meditate upon in our role as Alexander teachers and in general:

- What do I do or say when I am unsure about someone's gender identity or what pronoun to use?
- What do you ask people to wear when they come for a first lesson?
- How can we create more inclusive environments in our teaching practices and in the Alexander Technique community?
- How can we facilitate an environment of belonging?

Vocabulary³

Gender binary: dividing gender into male and female only.

Cisgender: from the Latin *cis* (“same”). A person who identifies with the gender assigned to them at birth.

Transgender: from the Latin *trans* (“across”). A person who does not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth.

Gender non-conforming: exhibiting behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits that do not correspond with the traits typically associated with one's sex: having a gender expression that does not conform to gender norms.

With thanks to Dr. Mozeiko

NOTES

- 1 The Discrimination Administration, “Anti-Transgender Actions and Anti-LGBTQ Actions.” <https://transequality.org/the-discrimination-administration>.
- 2 Institute of Medicine, *The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People: Building a Foundation for Better Understanding* (Washington: National Academies Press, 2014). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64806/>. J.B. Messman & L.A. Leslie, “Transgender College Students: Academic Resilience and Striving to Cope in the Face of Marginalized Health,” *Journal of American College Health* 67:2 (2018): 161–173. <https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/07448481.2018.1465060>.
- 3 *Merriam-Webster Online*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com>.

Alexander Technique for Salsa Dancers

by Allyna Steinberg

Community Workshop · ACGM, New York, June 30, 2019



I HOPE TO INSPIRE YOU to ask yourself, “What would be a great workshop for me to organize to carry forward the 2019 ACGM theme of fostering “Diversity, Equity, and Belonging”? Considering that I have been a member of the New York City salsa community for sixteen years and because it is one of the most racially diverse communities I know, my answer to this question was: Alexander Technique

for Salsa Dancers. In sharing my experience with this workshop, I hope to provide inspiration and ideas that you can apply to bring the Alexander Technique to a community you love as well.

At the workshop, I welcomed participants with an invitation to enjoy a salsa social and dance to music from popular artists originating from across the world like Hector Lavoe (Puerto Rican), Celia Cruz (Cuban), and Africando (featuring New York-based salsa musicians with Senegalese vocalists). Then I led explorations around oppositional force with a focus on gravity as well as what happens when our hands meet in partner dancing. These explorations were followed by another opportunity for dancing to music and time in semi-supine. The other participating Alexander Technique teacher, Heather Dennee, contributed *hands-on* and other Technique ideas throughout the workshop. The salsa-specific outcomes for participants included a sense of empowerment with newly found options to match the pressure from a dance partner, a focus on the space within themselves, and the sense of coming back to the support of the floor.

In preparing for the workshop, I focused on recruitment and content development. My recruitment efforts included a blog on my website, flyers passed out at salsa socials, and a Facebook event. In my blog, I shared my story about what the Alexander Technique has meant to my salsa dancing as well as other benefits of the Technique. For the flyer text, I drafted two versions that I ran by a few salsa dancers. The content that had wider appeal linked the benefits of the workshop directly to salsa dancing, using questions like “Want to feel lighter and more fluid while you dance?” and “Want to improve your lead or follow?” The Facebook event, which featured the flyer language and was linked to my blog, yielded more registrants when an Eventbrite link was added. Another key to success was being able to share flyers at salsa socials and share the Facebook event within a closed Facebook group that caters to the city’s salsa community.

About twelve out of thirty dancers who registered attended, reflecting the one-third show rate typical for a free event in New

York. For content development, there were two main strategies.

First, I encouraged them to incorporate a lying down practice. This would be a wonderful position in which to:

- Review new salsa steps in your mind while you’re in a released state, such as a choreography you’re learning or imagined improvisation to explore musicality
- Let go of tension before a dance performance
- Recover after a long night of dancing
- Start and/or end the day

Second, I developed a handout that looked very different than my past handouts, transformed by using an image of salsa dancers as the central focus.

The bonus benefits of organizing this workshop have been deeper connections within the salsa community socially and further explorations within my salsa dancing based on conversations with participants after the workshop. It also left the door open to do more Alexander Technique for Salsa Dancers, for which I hope to find others to collaborate with. It was truly a “virtuous cycle,” a concept Renee Schneider shared in the February AmSAT “Huddle Call” on “Diversity in the AT Community,” which I co-led with her and Lisa First.

I encourage you to take some of these ideas as well as those that you will find on the Huddle Call recording,¹ the ACGM conference article in this issue of *AmSAT Journal*, and from the world at large, and then pick an action to further foster diversity, equity, and belonging in your practice. I also invite you to share about it on the Alexander Technique Diversity Coalition Facebook page² so that we can all continue this community of learning.

NOTES

- 1 Allyna Steinberg, Renee Schneider, and Lisa First, “Diversity in the AT Community: Encouraging Growth, Dialogue, and Participation in Social Evolution,” Huddle Call: February 17, 2019. <https://youtu.be/pHcF3FGWLEk>
- 2 Alexander Technique Diversity Coalition. <https://www.facebook.com/ATDiversity>

From F.M. Alexander down the Years: Stories of Profound Influence

by Joan Frost

The F.M. Alexander Memorial Address · ACGM, New York, June 30, 2019



I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU three stories this morning. The first two are fairly brief and relate how I came to the Technique and how the Technique helped me survive some life-threatening circumstances. Then, in the spirit of the Diversity, Equity, and Belonging theme of this ACGM, I will use my remaining time to share my four-year journey working with a student with a profound

disability. At the core of these stories is a deep gratitude for F.M. Alexander and his life-giving work.

This first story will give you a sense of why the Technique has meant so much to me, personally, and what it has done to enhance my quality of life.

In the fifties, as an infant, my mother fed me a recommended baby formula—boiled condensed milk with fluoride added. Most babies start to stand between nine and twelve months, but I didn't get to my feet until I was about eighteen months old.

When I finally did stand, my legs, probably from a calcium deficiency, collapsed into knock-knees and pronated ankles. I had to wear a brace at night consisting of two shoes with a bar between that held my feet at a 180 degree turnout. I slept with this brace every night from about the age of eighteen months until I was three.

Turn-out for me is practically impossible. My pelvic structure doesn't allow it. So what happened from that bar and the forced 180 degree turnout?

Accommodation to the next level up—my lumbar spine. I became extremely sway-backed. Because of that, I had a hyper-extended rib cage. My low back was in pain most of the time and as a teenager, standing for long was excruciating.

Around the age of nine, I was playing in the living room with my sister. I was on my hands and knees and she jumped on my back. Something went in my upper back. As a result, I could bring my left arm up over my head, but my right arm had very little mobility. I had to quit piano lessons because after about twenty minutes of sitting at the bench, my right shoulder blade area became hot, then numb. This pain and numbness went on through college at UC Santa Cruz. I couldn't sit without back support and typing papers was agony.

Santa Cruz offered a dance program that included a lot of anatomy and kinesiology. The classes were tough to get into—you had to audition and only about a third of the applicants were accepted. Miraculously, I made the cut and started to learn about my body. I gave up my pre-med major for dance. My lower back pain started to diminish as I discovered the psoas muscle

and stopped gripping my butt 24/7. My upper back pain was untouched however. About every three weeks it would flare up and become consuming.

After graduation I moved to New York City to further my study of modern dance. My friend Diana Bradley, who moved from California with me, discovered the Alexander Technique and began campaigning for me to take lessons. I resisted. I could pay for five dance classes for the price of one Alexander session. But she told me my neck was way forward and that I really should check the Technique out. I didn't know my neck was forward—I couldn't feel that from the inside—but I did reach back and sure enough, she was right!

After about six months of prodding (thank you, Diana!), I called up Missy Vineyard and had a lesson. I didn't know what to make of the lesson—the closest I could relate to it was reading I had done in Zen Buddhism. But it seemed that Missy knew some things about my body that I didn't and I had the hunch that she was right. After the lesson I took a floor barre dance class and my neck was so sore, I couldn't lift my head off the floor. This surprised me—it didn't seem that Missy had done that much.

I decided to go back for more lessons. Growing up, over the years my mother had taken me to numerous doctors and chiropractors to address my back pain. Nothing had ever made any difference. With Missy, for the first time my upper back started to change. Between lessons I remember walking around with my elbows sticking out to the sides, thinking I was widening my back. I'm glad I continued to show up at Missy's to work through my various misunderstandings.

Fast forward to today, my back is strong, my lower back pain has been totally gone for many, many years and my upper back, right shoulder blade issue is 90% gone. From pain being a dominant experience of my life to now having little of it and remarkable capability, I say: "F.M., thank you, thank you!"

This second story has two parts and will help you understand why, in a way, I feel I owe my continuing presence on the planet to F.M.

On January 2, 2012, around 2 pm, I left my house in Stratford, Connecticut in my car to do an errand. It was a beautiful, cold, sunny day. I turned from Glenavon Street onto Route 110 heading north and saw a car crossing over the double yellow line heading straight for me. The car didn't veer, it just kept on coming. I couldn't believe it! There was a steep hill on my right, but I was able to swerve enough so that the oncoming car plowed into me just behind where I was sitting. The driver was sick and had blacked out. Neither one of us were seriously hurt. I credited the Alexander Technique for my minimal bodily response and my resilience in recovery. Teaching in four different locations in the tri-state area, I was driving about 250 miles a week and I figured, statistically, I was bound to have some incident. If this was it, I was getting off pretty lightly.

But that wasn't it. In October, I was driving back to Stratford from a day of teaching at my home in Tappan. I had merged onto the Tappan Zee Bridge and was going along in the right-hand lane, probably around 50 miles an hour, when I felt and heard a bang. My mind said, "I know this... Not again." I looked around and there, on my left, was an eighteen-wheeler attached to my car. Its front wheel hub was higher than my window. I kept thinking he would move away, but he didn't. I considered rolling down my window and banging on his fender with my hand, but realized there's no way he would hear me.

For those of you unfamiliar with the Tappan Zee Bridge (which has now been replaced) the seven-lane roadway was well over a hundred feet above the Hudson River and spanned about three miles across.

The truck and I continue along for another quarter of a mile or so, still at a good pace, when the driver of the truck realizes there is something wrong and starts to seriously move over into the right-hand lane. Trouble is, I'm there, so the truck starts to enter my car. The driver's side window shatters and then there's no room for me anymore in the driver's seat. I put my car into neutral, unlock my seatbelt, and climb over the gear shift into the passenger seat. I am scraping along the side of the bridge on my right with the water a hundred feet below and the truck is dragging me along on the left. My driving skills are no longer needed. The noise is intense and getting worse. The smell is bad, too. We are slowing down, though, and I know I'm still okay. Then my car starts to twist.

There's smoke and the scraping noise is deafening. I know I have entered a critical phase. I watch and pray, hoping we grind to a halt before my car flips. We do.

I rolled down my passenger side window and climbed out of the window onto the roof of my car. I stood on the roof and banged on the truck's chest-high passenger window, pointing down strongly and asking, "Do you see my car?" The driver turned and looked at me in total shock. He rolled down the window and said, "You'd better get inside, it's dangerous out there." I climbed in through his window and sat next to him while he made a call. It became clear to me his call was not to 911, so I climbed back out his window onto the roof of my car and back in through my passenger side window. I found my phone and called for help. Upon hearing my story, the policewoman who drove me the rest of the way across the bridge, asked, "What are you, some kind of stunt lady?"

I am probably here speaking to you today because I didn't panic. Talking with my son, after, about the incident, he helped me understand that if I had tried to brake, I likely would have gone under the truck.

One doesn't know how one will respond in these kinds of circumstances. Fortunately, we don't get to practice them. I credit the Alexander Technique for helping me retain my calm and presence of mind as I negotiated moment by moment the exigencies of the situation. I found a little blood on the paperwork the police woman had me fill out and discovered a tiny shard of glass from the shattered window embedded in my finger. That was it. I got a new car, and developed a wariness of driving on the right side of trucks on bridges.

Otherwise, perhaps having to do with the mind/body/universe harmonizing of the Alexander Technique, there were no significant after-effects, mental or physical.

Now, I'd like to share with you a story of Alexander teaching that in my thirty-six years of practice has been my most unusual experience.

In August 2012, I received a call from Martha Shoemaker. Martha became interested in the Alexander Technique when her husband, Ercument, a retired mathematics professor, was receiving physical therapy at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital (New York-Presbyterian/Columbia University Irving Medical Center). Ercument had suffered a brain aneurysm rupture on Thanksgiving Day 2011, had had post-operative bleeding, and had lost most of his mental and physical functioning. Martha asked one of the physical therapists, who worked with Ercument, whether she was familiar with the Alexander Technique and whether she thought it might be helpful for Ercument. Her answer was yes to both questions, so Martha set out to look for a skilled and experienced Alexander teacher. She found me.

When I walked into Martha and Ercument's home, Ercument was sitting in a wheelchair, looking out the sliding glass doors that led to the backyard. It quickly became apparent that he wasn't able to talk beyond a few simple words and that he had no short-term memory. Martha wanted me to help Ercument learn to walk.

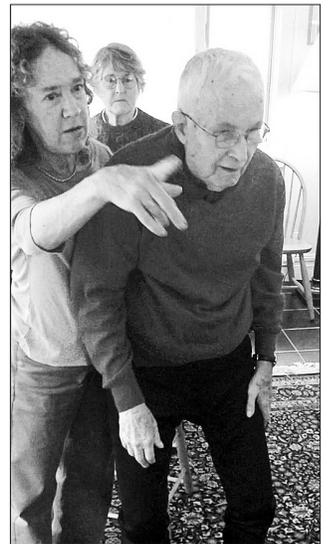
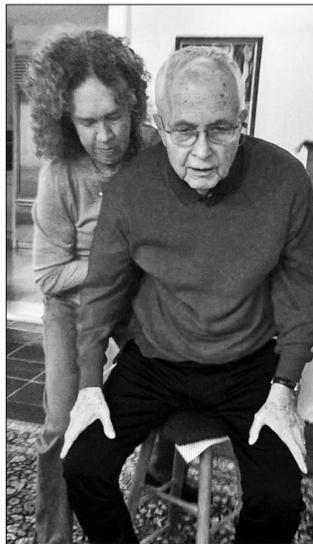
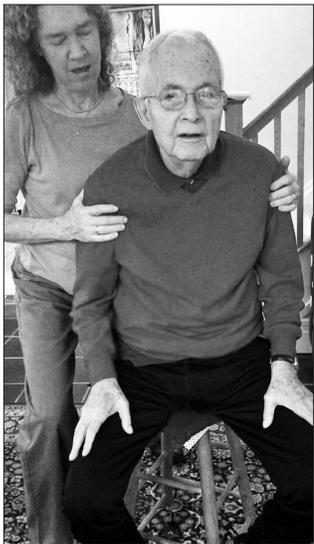
To demonstrate his mobility, the aide stood facing Ercument, placed Ercument's arms around his neck, wrapped his arms around Ercument's torso then pulled him to standing. Then they started to walk. Because Ercument's hands were still around the aide's neck and he didn't have much shoulder joint mobility, his pelvis hung back and he was far from upright. His "steps" covered maybe an inch at a time, and since his feet turned way out, with each stuttery "step," Ercument's feet got farther and farther apart. It was the aide's strength that made the forward progress possible. They were heading for some horizontal bars bolted onto the wall and when he was still several feet away, Ercument lunged for the waist-level bar and grabbed it hard. The whole process was fraught with anxiety.

Back in his wheelchair, Ercument appeared to fall asleep every few minutes. I stood behind him and tried to rotate his head side to side. Not possible. At all.

I tried to pivot Ercument forward at his hip joints. I had to put both my hands on his upper back and push with effort to move him an inch. It wasn't as if he were dead weight. It felt as if he were resisting my push. I thought maybe he was terrified he might fall. I also saw that Ercument's toes barely touched the floor.

The seat of the wheelchair was set high to facilitate lifting him in and out. I told Martha [that] Ercument needed a platform to support his feet. And that, I would need to come twice a week. She thought he seemed to like me so agreed.

On the facing page Joan's lecture included video footage of herself working with Ercument. Here we display some stills from the video. The entire video is available in the Members area of the AmSAT website.



I had to find out what Ercument's capabilities were. Partway through the first lesson, I scaled back my expectations. Ercument was passive and forgot anything I said within a second. He sat with his heels almost touching and his feet turned way out. It was not a good foot placement for standing. So I asked Ercument if he would move one of his feet away from the other. He did! This was the first successful brain/body connection I was able to witness and the only one for many months. He was able to move one foot—when he didn't forget my request—and sometimes move the other foot and often before a few more seconds passed, the first foot was back to the mid-line again.

I didn't know what I would be able to do with Ercument—he was far from being able to walk, which was Martha's main objective, but I did think I could help him calm his nervous system. Ercument seemed to be in a high state of anxiety much of the time and would often start yelling at the top of his lungs. He seemed terrified, perhaps because he had so little control of just about anything. I was glad for my Alexander non-reactive training. Ercument also had a habit of violently tensing and vertically agitating his right leg and foot. When he got particularly anxious, his leg would start going.

I want to mention here that calming a student's nervous system has become a foundational part of my work. Not everyone needs this, of course, but many seem to. This is one of the gifts Alexander gave us, influenced by his work with horses—"talk to it nicely and it will do anything."

I thought if Ercument were ever going to be able to walk in a good way, he would need to be able to stand with his torso upright. I wanted to be able to get him to standing with me standing by his side and I wanted him to do it with minimal use of his arms. He was over-dependent on the strength of his arms—they were his security. In fact, before the rupture of his aneurysm, Martha said Ercument had taken to moving around the house by grabbing one piece of furniture, then the next.

Through my years of teaching, I have come to observe that almost all of us over-work our limbs and under-work our torso. Ercument had this situation in spades. His whole body was moving towards contraction almost all the time. He tended to pull everything into his center—his head and chest down, his knees up, and his feet pulling up and towards the mid-line. I wanted to teach him about oppositions and expansion.

Having spent most of his adult life at a desk, Ercument was very bent over. Martha showed me some pictures of him in his 30s, and already he was significantly pulled down in front. In addition, it seemed now that he didn't know how to move his torso at all. For me, it was a significant challenge not to end-gain in getting Ercument more upright. I really struggled with this. When I just inhibited and directed, it really did work better, and Ercument was able to respond to the suggestion of my hands. He was able to move up with ease and he was able to feel it.

Martha almost always watched the lessons and the aide often did. When the aide saw I was trying to bring Ercument out of the chair from the side, he became very upset. That was not how it was supposed to be done. I imagine his training was centered around safety and perhaps they were told it was dangerous to get someone out of the wheelchair any other way than from the front. Fortunately for me, Martha agreed to let me do it the way I thought best.

I remember the first time I got Ercument to standing. We decided to do it from the kitchen chair with the kitchen table in front so Ercument could grab onto it just in case. Ercument just shot up. Martha was amazed.

These lessons were forty-five minutes and I was continuing to come twice a week. Forty-five minutes of work was taxing for Ercument. He often got tired and overwhelmed, and he would just close his eyes and go to sleep.

Ercument was used to being done to. I wanted to get him more engaged mentally with what we were doing. I would always tell him what we were going to do so he wouldn't be alarmed, but at some point I realized I couldn't assume that he understood me. So I would tell Ercument what we were going to do and then ask him immediately if he knew what we were going to do. Usually he would give a very small, tight shake of his head. It seemed as if he was shrinking when he did this. I thought he felt embarrassed for not knowing and I wanted him to know it was okay if he didn't know. There was no shame in it. I repeated again what we would be doing. Gradually, I realized further that wasn't enough. I wanted him to be able to say back to me what we were going to do.

About six months into the lessons, Ercument was able to say the word "pivot". Learning to pivot forward was huge and we spent a lot of time on it. At first there was no will on his part to move his torso. I wasn't interested in just pushing him. I had to teach him how to let his head lead and his body to follow. By April 2013, he was beginning to be able to pivot forward a little, especially when forward of the vertical line. But when he was quite a bit forward, he had no idea how to come back to vertical. I had to push him.

A few months later, I thought maybe, with some coaching and help, Ercument would be able to pivot forward and transfer his sit bones to the front of the chair. I demonstrated the move in front of him (in profile) on myself. We took some time to define front of the chair and back of the chair. He seemed confused. I asked him if he could see me move when I pivoted and moved forward. He said "no." So I brought my stool close to his wheelchair and asked him to put his hand on my back to see if he could feel the movement. When I asked him if he felt his hand moving when I pivoted and moved forward, he said "no." When I explored this further with him, I realized he was saying no because he didn't feel his hand moving on my back. We were able to determine that he *did* feel his hand being moved *by* my back.

I was surprised Ercument couldn't see my movement, but this added weight to my prior observation that he zoned out during movement. Not only his own movement, but now, also, in observing it in someone else. When I thought about it, this made sense to me. I remember when I was in the middle of my training at ACAT and working in a doctor's office as a secretary. One day when it was quiet, I decided to do some sitting and standing. I observed that I was unable to follow the entire movement from standing to sitting without zoning out in the middle. And this was after a lot of Alexander work! With Ercument's brain injury, his brain just couldn't process information that quickly.

I tried many ways of conveying to Ercument the idea of expansion. When he did get to his feet, his knees would bend and he would start to collapse. If he could just send his feet down into

the floor, away from his head, he would have the opposition to help him stand and it would be easier for him. I put my hands against his and asked him to push my hands. He was able to do this quite easily for at least a short amount of time. I wanted him to translate that idea to his feet. After some time, it also occurred to me that he could push himself backward in the wheelchair and that that would be the same push idea. He was able to do this and during the week, Martha had him practice by pushing himself backwards down the hall where the floor was smooth.

Ercument was working hard in the lesson. He was such a good sport about it. I thought he got tired in his legs after standing and taking steps, but when I asked where he felt tired, he would always point to his head.

About a year into our work together, there began to be more interaction between Ercument and me. I wrote in my notes of 10/15/2013: When Ercument was walking today and then lost it, he said, "I lost all my connections." A few weeks before that, I had asked Ercument to pivot forward away from the back of the chair so I could slip the support towels in. He was able to move forward about an inch on his own. I told him when I first met him he wouldn't do that. He asked, "Wouldn't or couldn't?"

Ercument's astute question here brings up a point. On occasion when I would get frustrated, I would ask Ercument if he was going into "donkey mode." It was common with him that I would ask a question and there would be a long pause with no answer and no indication that he had heard me. Sometimes it seemed to me that he was just being stubborn and that he was tired of complying with requests. This would be understandable. He was probably doing the very best he could. Where I thought at times he wouldn't do something, the truth was, he probably couldn't.

I wanted to do some lying down work with Ercument. Getting up and down from the floor was not an option. We actually tried it once and it was a disaster. So toward the end of October 2013, Martha agreed to purchase a table. I found one advertised on Craigslist. It turns out one of our ACAT graduates was selling it, which was a nice connection.

Figure 1
Joan Frost's student,
Dr. Ercument
Ozizmir,
December 2013.
"His front length
had gotten much
better by this
time."



Figure 2
Ercument
holding Joan's
skeleton Harry,
December 2013.

I was hoping to help Ercument undo some of the extreme tension he was holding in his neck and legs. I had tried lifting one of his legs and it was nearly impossible. When on the table for the first time, as soon as I approached Ercument's right leg, but before touching it, he pulled it inward and towards his head. When I tried to bring his left leg up, he pulled it up himself and when I asked him to let me lower it, he pulled it up further. I wasn't surprised.

Eventually, he let me lower it.

Overall, the table work was helpful, but once lying down, the temptation to fall asleep was almost impossible to resist. Ercument would try to stay awake and I would try and keep him engaged by getting him to talk. I usually had a window of about two minutes before his eyes would close and sleep would take over.

Here's a picture of Ercument taken in December 2013 (figure 1). His front length had gotten much better by this time.

Here is another one of Ercument with my skeleton, Henry (figure 2).

In May 2014, Martha and Ercument went to Columbia Presbyterian Hospital to see Ercument's neurologist. The doctor said that Ercument's body had absorbed the postoperative bleeding and that he didn't need to come back for a year. Martha said the doctor didn't believe it when she told him Ercument was getting better, but then he saw it for himself. Later that year, in September, Ercument saw his cardiologist. She was amazed at how well his heart was doing and said, "Whatever you're doing, keep it up."

I wrote in my notes of 5/6/2014: *Ercument almost stood by himself twice today. I said, "Good." Martha asked him why it was good, and he said, "Because it was effortless."*

September: When I asked Ercument if he was clear about my request, he said, "As much as can be in muddy waters." His speaking was getting more descriptive and creative, and with more perspective. He also was asking after doing an exercise, "What does that accomplish?"

In January 2015, Ercument was on the table and I asked him if he could feel his legs letting go. He said he could. I asked him if he knew what kind of awareness that was and he said, "Kinesthetic awareness." Wow! He was processing more than I had imagined.

I wanted Ercument to do as many things for himself as were physically possible. As far as I knew, I was the only one of his helpers besides Martha who was asking Ercument to think and move on his own. One task early in the lesson was putting on the brakes on his wheelchair. Often he would succeed in doing one, then would get lost in trying to do the second, more difficult one. In March, I asked Ercument to put on the brakes and he said, "We do that every time, don't we?" He has some memory!

4/7/2015: When we put up the table and Ercument was sitting on it, I asked him what was next. He said "Pulling the table out from under me." I gave him a shocked look. He said, "I'm kidding." I then asked him again and he said "Dancing on the table." It was so wonderful to witness his sense of humor.

Sometimes Ercument would get frustrated in the lesson and I asked if there were too many questions. He said, emphatically, "YES!"

On November 10, 2015, the aide spontaneously picked up my phone and started videotaping. Thanks to Martha's willingness to allow me to share it, here is that recording, edited by my friend and master film editor, Pascal Akesson.

Ercument's progress was sporadic in 2016. One day he was more articulate and verbal than I had ever seen him and two days later he was really angry and frustrated and seemed withdrawn. I put him on the table and he immediately fell asleep.

Sometimes it seemed that Ercument's mind was preoccupied. I wanted to bring him into the present and help him be simple and concrete. So, I would ask, "What are you doing right now?" (I wanted him to say he was sitting.) He would answer "nothing" or "wondering what's next." "Wondering what's next"—hmm, I guess I'm responsible for that one. It seemed hard for him to be present or to hear what I was saying to him. I asked him if he worried about things and he said loudly, "Oh yeah, LOTS of things."

In March, Ercument said he's losing his patience. I wrote in my notes, "That's good progress!" But I also see how painful and frustrating it must have been for him.

From my notes of 5/24/16, Ercument said he'd like to do something he could feel proud of. I asked him if he felt discouraged and he said, "Oh yeah, very discouraged." Toward the end of that lesson, I had trouble getting him to stand and had trouble getting him up off the stool to get to the table. He had to get off the stool because it was my stool and I needed it for another house call I was making. He started to yell and I said if he had energy to yell, he had energy to stand to get to the table. He got off the stool.

A month later, after weeks of low energy, Ercument had a really good day. I needed that. Martha and I had talked at the end of the previous lesson when Ercument had seemed really down and had had no energy or will to do anything. I asked if she had any suggestions for me and she said I could slow down my speaking and keep it simpler. She thought Ercument

sometimes had trouble following me. So, I made a concerted effort to do as she suggested and it helped.

As Ercument was gaining in physical capacity, he was also gaining in consciousness and seeing the wider picture of his condition. His worry, discouragement, and frustration were taking the upper hand.

In November 2016, Martha and I decided it didn't make sense for me to continue giving Ercument lessons since the support I was able to give him in standing was no longer sufficient.

Ercument passed on February 20, 2018 from aggressive small cell carcinoma of the esophagus, which overtook him within a few weeks. Evidently he had no pain and in the weeks immediately preceding his death, he was talking the way he had been prior to the rupture of his aneurysm and was walking, with help, in quite an upright fashion.

Martha is here with us today and I want to acknowledge her in front of you all. Martha, will you please stand? Martha's patience with Ercument's process, and her support of my work with him were out of this world. Thank you, Martha.

Ercument wished he could do something he could feel proud of. Perhaps if he could have known that his story and this video were being shared for our greater Alexander community's learning, he would have felt happy and proud of his participation in that.

In conclusion, I would have thought I couldn't work with someone like Ercument because the way I approach the work is so much through the thinking. But, it seems we can work with almost anyone if we can meet them where they are and open to receive what their needs are in the moment. This may mean softening our intentions and adapting the pace of the lesson as we tune in to the person in front of us.

I had observed that Ercument performed best when he didn't have too much expected of him. There was a lesson when he stood for almost seven minutes and I was quiet. There was space for his mind to ease and to think. For many years I have been working with doing less, but here was another level of challenge for taking time and coming to quiet.

I encourage us all to accept and even seek out opportunities for the learning and growth that can come from engaging with the outer edges of our known experience.

Thank you.

2019 Annual General Meeting Review

by Holly Rocke

ACGM, New York, June 29, 2019

Results of AGM Motions

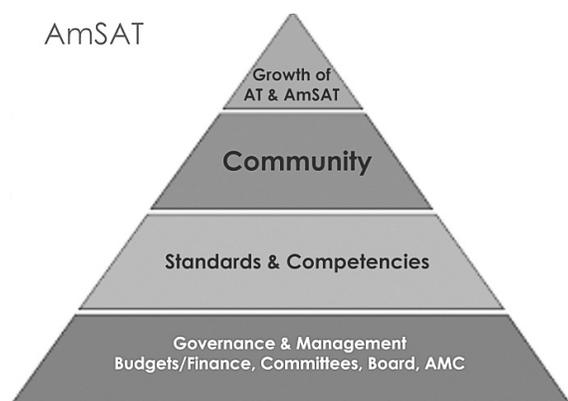
SEVEN MOTIONS were brought forward for consideration at the AGM. The first six motions passed. The seventh was referred back to a newly formed Promotions Committee. The motions can be reviewed on the Community Forum.

Election Results

The 2019–2020 Board Elections were announced: Lisa Levinson (Chair-Elect), Holly Rocke (Secretary), Lisa DeAngelis (Member-at-Large), Westley Howard (Member-at-Large), Claire Rechnitzer (Member-at-Large). Ron Dennis, Pamela Blanc, and Mary Derbyshire were elected to the Attendees' Convocation Committee. Melissa Brown was elected to serve on the Nominating Committee. Two more positions are available to be filled on Nominating.

Board Presentation on Strategic Plan

Lisa Levinson (Chair) led a presentation and question/answer session on the Strategic Plan and progress made since the 2018 AGM. There are four levels to the plan, which form a pyramid.

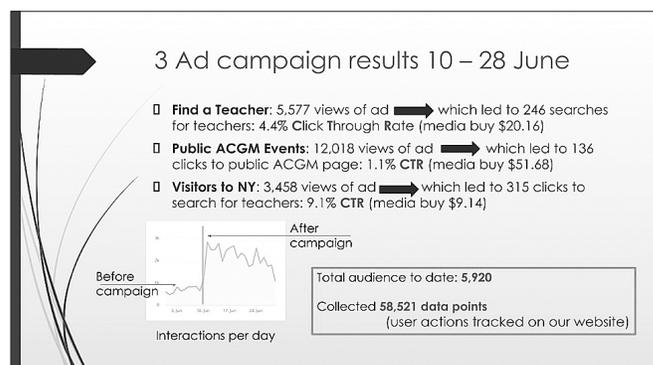


LEVEL ONE—THE FOUNDATION—GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT. Without a strong foundation, we can't effectively pursue any other goals. In the past year, we have rebalanced funds to utilize higher earnings and have improved the annual budget process. We still need to identify new revenue streams as we cannot be solely dependent on yearly dues. The Board has begun to suggest partnerships between committees to better share ideas and work. We need to recruit Nominating Committee Members as well as populate other committees to share the workload. On the Board level, we need to address board succession, committee succession, and leadership development. Concerning our Management Company (MEI), we need to develop clear priorities, procedures, and appropriate feedback and evaluation mechanisms.

LEVEL TWO—STANDARDS AND COMPETENCIES. Standards and competencies includes training courses and government relations. We need to identify a Chair for the Training Approval Committee. We need to cultivate stronger relationships between the Board and Training Courses. In terms of Government Relations, we have lobbied to support Massachusetts AT Teachers. We continue to participate in the Joint Government Relations Committee (JGRC), although we need to get a Chair for the Government Relations Committee.

LEVEL THREE—COMMUNITY. Community includes Membership, ACGM, and International Committees. We have begun programs for mentoring and business-building support. We completed our first Attendees' Convocation, which had three items for consideration. The first and third were adopted by those present in the room. Further information about the Attendees' Convocation can be found on the Community Forum. There is a need to find ways to enhance overall membership value. This year's ACGM had a broader public appeal. We need to expand involvement on the Planning Committee beyond local teachers, identify locations for ACGM of 2021, and evaluate size and format options. The Executive Committee has met with our Canadian colleagues in ATC, formerly CANSTAT, quarterly. We continue to participate in Alexander Technique Affiliated Society.

LEVEL FOUR—THE TOP TIER—GROWTH, which includes research and promotions. We issued a research grant this year. There is a need to increase available funds. We need to raise awareness and demand for AT. Three concurrent ad campaigns were run through MEI with a program called Feathr. The results were fantastic! Anecdotal responses from two teachers report at least one cold call about lessons and at least one member of the public attending an ACGM event. Statistical analysis can be seen in the following image:



Please contact a board member or the office with any questions. Thank you to all who attended the AGM!



Members of the AmsSAT Board at the ACGM in 2020

Left to right Cheryl Pleskow, Mara Sokolsky, Claire Rechnitzer, Holly Rocke, Xochi John, Lisa Levinson, Sarah Silva, Rick Carbaugh, Lisa DeAngelis, Jay Foote

Not pictured Matthew Dubroff, Westley Howard

Inhibition and Purkinje Cells of the Cerebellum

by John Henes & Indira M. Raman



JOHN HENES Inhibition is one of the most difficult concepts to teach. It is unfamiliar to most new students, it takes time and repetition to learn, it is difficult to explain in words, and for many students it is confusing. When I first started taking Alexander Technique lessons, my first teacher, Joe Armstrong,

who was very good and precise in explaining the Alexander Technique, could not, at least to my satisfaction at the time, explain the concept of inhibition to me. Recently, I found out through one of my students, Indira Raman, who is a neurobiologist and professor at Northwestern University, that there are indeed brain cells that do stop motor activity and are responsible in large part for learning new motor skills. These cells are called Purkinje cells.



INDIRA M. RAMAN I have been studying the properties of Purkinje cells for more than twenty years. I have also played piano as an amateur since childhood. One thing I learned long ago is that scientists and musicians tend to use the same words in different ways. Terms

that are literal or concrete for one group can be applied figuratively or metaphorically by the other, and musician-scientists alternate definitions depending on the domain in which we are operating. So when I first started taking Alexander Technique lessons with John Henes a few years ago, and he spoke of “letting go,” I did not ask the obvious scientist’s question, which would have been “let go of what?” Instead, I waited to learn the meaning of the phrase in the new context. And when he mentioned “inhibition,” although I was mildly entertained to hear him invoke the term that describes the primary subject of my scientific research, I took it for granted that he was not using the word in the neurophysiological sense, and I did not try to form a connection between his area of expertise and mine.

In the world of neuroscience, “inhibition” is complementary to “excitation”—these words describe the two main ways in which brain cells, called “neurons,” send signals to one another. What neurons do can be summarized fairly simply. The role of the brain is first to notice or detect aspects of the physical world—things both outside and inside the body—then to evaluate or integrate them, and finally to take action, either by moving or not moving. This cycle of detecting, integrating, and taking action can happen slowly, over minutes, days, or even years, or it can happen rapidly, in a tiny fraction of a second. The detection is done by specialized cells in our sense organs

(eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin, etc.), the integration is done by neurons (of which there are billions), and the action is done by muscle cells. The sensory cells report the presence or absence of light, sound, odors, flavors, touch, etc. by releasing chemicals, called neurotransmitters, which signal to neurons; those neurons, in turn, release neurotransmitters that signal to other neurons and eventually to the muscles. It is these chemical signals that make the muscles contract or relax so that they carry out simple reflexes like a knee-jerk, complicated motor sequences like the playing of a concerto, or considered responses like a spoken answer to a question. The chemicals come in several varieties. Some neurons release neurotransmitters that make it more likely that the next cell in the chain will send a signal—a process called “excitation.” Other neurons release neurotransmitters that suppress the signals of the next neuron. In neuroscience, this process of one neuron making other cells keep silent is what is technically called “inhibition.” When John spoke of inhibition, however, I interpreted the word generically—I figured he was just taking a break from telling me to “let go” by telling me to inhibit “holding on.”

JH I have been teaching the Alexander Technique for nearly forty years, and for most of those years I have been telling my students that there is a brain cell someplace up here, pointing to my head, that says “let go.” This was just an amusing way to get across to my students that they had to search for a way of thinking that allowed them to establish inhibition for themselves. We aren’t educated to make use of this way of thinking, and we have to get more familiar with letting go and thinking about process and somehow exercising this brain cell.

IMR It was many lessons before John invoked the brain cell imagery with me. He had been talking about habits, which I was slowly coming to understand were some of the things I was supposed to let go of. “Somewhere up there is a brain cell that will help you let go and you have to find it,” he said. I have actually spent a good chunk of my life actively finding brain cells and figuring out what they do, but rarely in my own head. The cells that I study, in rodents, chicks, and fish, are in the cerebellum. In humans, the cerebellum is in the back of the brain, tucked underneath the more familiar part that is usually illustrated as resembling a wrinkled boxing glove viewed from the side. The cerebellum, which is more wrinkled still, is often left out of popular drawings.

The cerebellum helps control movement—when people or animals have cerebellar neurons that don’t signal properly, they become uncoordinated and imbalanced. And whenever a person is learning a new motor skill, it’s the neurons in the cerebellum that receive signals about what is being sensed, and what movements are being made, and whether those motions are giving the desired result—say, whether an arpeggio is played

accurately—which usually doesn’t happen when the person is just beginning to learn something new. Those neurons in the cerebellum are also the ones that measure the difference between what is happening and what ought to happen, and they change their signals—how much and how fast they release neurotransmitter—until the movement is modified enough to be made correctly and automatically. In other words, what is colloquially referred to as “muscle memory” is actually the job of the cerebellum.

Of course, I knew that what John was trying to teach me would require motor learning and so the cerebellum was probably involved, but I also knew that several parts of the brain work together to regulate movement; in fact, neuroscientists spend a good deal of time debating which part does what, by how much, and when. I wasn’t yet even really clear about what I was trying to master, so there was no point in arguing for the primacy of the cerebellum, even to myself. Besides, the abstract knowledge of what should be going on within the brain didn’t seem particularly useful when I couldn’t actually get my brain to do it. Nevertheless, when John pointed at his temple and mentioned that there was a brain cell that I should be looking for, I pointed at the back of my head. “Well, it’s probably back here,” I replied.

The cerebellum contains several different kinds of neurons, but the main cells that cover the wrinkly surface are the Purkinje cells. They signal to neurons in the core of the cerebellum, called the cerebellar nuclei. The neurons in the cerebellar nuclei, which “listen” to Purkinje cells, have a fairly direct control over movement, with just a few intervening neurons to convey their messages: when neurons in the cerebellar nuclei send out signals, muscles usually contract.

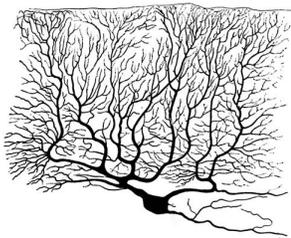


Figure 1
Image of a human Purkinje cell.¹

When looked at one at a time, Purkinje cells are visually beautiful neurons (**Figure 1**). Each has a “cell body”—the rounded central part that houses the nucleus—which is quite large compared to other neurons. At one end, the cell body stretches out into a “dendrite” (occasionally two) that is broad, flat, and gorgeously branched, so that it looks like a leafless fruit tree trained against a wall. The dendrite, which functions as a sort of antenna, contains hundreds of thousands of detectors for chemicals from other cells, through which a Purkinje cell collects the information about what is currently being sensed and what movements are about to be made. The dendrite translates the chemical signals into electrical signals. At the other end of the cell body, the Purkinje cell narrows into a long wire-like structure called an “axon,” which sends the electrical signals to the cerebellar nuclei. A tiny dollop of neurotransmitter is released

for every electrical signal that reaches the end of a Purkinje cell. The neurotransmitter suppresses the signals of the cerebellar nuclei. The role of Purkinje cells, therefore, is inhibition.

JH I often refer to this quote from Frank Pierce Jones when talking about inhibition. “It is said that a simple way to trap a monkey is to present him with a nut in a bottle. The monkey puts his paw through the bottle’s narrow mouth, grasps the nut, then cannot withdraw his paw because he will not (and hence cannot) let go of the nut. Most people are caught in monkey traps of unconscious habit. They cannot escape because they do not perceive what they are doing while they are doing it.”² I think it is a fun quote that also gives one pause to think of all the monkey traps waiting to catch us in our daily lives.

IMR Inhibition by Purkinje cells does more than just prevent movement altogether by shutting off cerebellar signals. The patterns of inhibition can be complex and sophisticated, instructing the cerebellar nuclei exactly how long to wait before telling a muscle to contract—down to a thousandth part of a second—and how to get precisely the right amount of movement and no more, without “holding on” to a particular set of contractions. Many Purkinje cells, working together, can delay one set of muscle movements so that they occur only after a different set of movements. In that way, they can produce sequences of motions that are the building blocks for complicated, coordinated motor behavior, like walking, dancing, or playing an instrument. They can make initially difficult or awkward movements become automatic, turning them into habits. But they can also pay attention to new information—sensations like pressure and pain, and maybe even the neuronal signals that we call thoughts—and inhibit our previously learned habits, teaching us more adaptive actions instead.

JH My first teacher tried many times to explain to me that inhibition was not just something physical but could also give us choices in the way we think. I had many lessons before I discovered the truth in those ideas. Many of my students have reported their observations of improvement in performance anxiety, control of temper, feeling more comfortable with themselves and other “psychological” changes besides the more evident physical changes such as posture, ease of movement, and improved breathing.

Another quote that I like has to do with the observations of John Dewey who wrote introductions to three of the four books that F.M. Alexander wrote. The greatest benefit he got from lessons, Dewey said, was the ability to stop and think before acting. Physically, he noted an improvement first in his vision and then in breathing. Before he had lessons, his ribs had been very rigid. Now they had a marked elasticity which doctors still commented on, though he was close to eighty-eight. Intellectually, Dewey said, he found it much easier, after he studied the technique, to hold a philosophical position calmly once he had taken it or to change it if new evidence came up warranting a change. He contrasted his own attitude with the rigidity of other academic thinkers who adopt a position early in their careers and then use their intellects to defend it indefinitely.³

IMR One of the most interesting aspects of current cerebellar research is that we are coming to the realization that the cerebellum does more than just change the way our limbs and trunk move. It seems to participate as well in brain functions that are classed as “cognitive”—what most people think of as “thinking.” Through the process of comparing what is intended with what actually occurs, the cerebellum appears to play a general role in predicting what will happen and adapting accordingly, by sending signals to muscles as well as other brain regions. In fact, the cerebellum is in constant conversation with many other parts of the brain, including the basal ganglia, which helps decide whether a physical action will be taken, and the cortex, which is usually credited with conscious action. Remarkably, the cerebellum is the brain region that is most frequently seen to be physically disrupted in autism spectrum disorder. Since this condition is often characterized not only by habitual, stereotyped movements, but also by rigidity of behavior, it seems likely that a healthy cerebellum may help provide flexible responses, both physical and mental.

The full effects of Alexander Technique, which I have barely begun to grasp, undoubtedly involve an extensive dialogue among many brain regions and the body. But the more that John teaches me—often wordlessly, through his gentle adjustments of my actions—the more I become convinced that, despite our different worlds of Alexander Technique and neuroscience, his “inhibition” is likely closely related to my own.

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NOTES

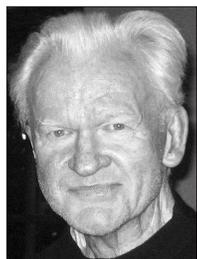
- 1 From A. Kölliker, *Handbuch der Gewebelehre des Menschen*, Band 2 (Leipzig, 1896: Engelmann); reproduced in Rudolf Nieuwenhuys, “Comparative anatomy of the cerebellum,” *Progress in Brain Research* 25 (1967): 1–93. (The image appears on p. 87.)
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John Henes and Indira M. Raman

On the Necessity of Knowing, Experiencing and Practicing Our Wholeness in Our Quest to Fundamentally Change Our Behavior through the Use of Our Selves

by Larry Ball



FOR MANY CENTURIES, we humans have known that the pursuit of our wholeness is necessary for the education, healing, and strengthening of the whole person.

Alexander taught us that the real significance of his technique lies with the fact that humans function as a whole and can only be fundamentally changed as a whole.

For me, the primary purpose of the Alexander Technique is to help educate, heal, and strengthen the whole person in our striving for our wholeness in our lives. Alexander called this the use of the self.

Walter Carrington describes Alexander's concept of wholeness in relation to Alexander's use of the self in the book entitled *Explaining the Alexander Technique*.¹ There, Carrington states:

One of the greatest handicaps in getting an understanding of the Technique is that people instinctively chop up and separate an issue, whereas FM's approach was completely the opposite. For instance he loved words that you or I might consider imprecise but that he would consider comprehensive. He thought that a virtue. He makes this clear when he decides to talk of the 'use of the self' because the 'self' was the comprehensive term that included not only mind, body, spirit, soul and anything else you like, but all the things you haven't thought of as well.²

Since our wholeness includes aspects of our self that are unknown and unseen by us, as they are part of the mystery of life, words alone are not sufficient to fully describe the concept of wholeness. However, Carrington's words give us vital knowledge of Alexander's description of self—particularly with his inclusion of “anything else you like” and “all the things you haven't thought of as well.”

Carrington was stating that our wholeness—known and unknown—is the meaning of Alexander's concept of the self; that Alexander's concept of the self is whole and not fragmented into parts. Carrington was stating that Alexander rejected partial descriptions of the self.

In his 1945 preface to the 1946 reprint of *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, Alexander expressed his concern about the “horrible” state of the world at the time. He asked a question: How could “we and all the other good people in the world” have allowed this “dreadful mess” to happen?³ He then asked what was, to him, a more critical question—one he states that humans have been asking themselves during every crisis since time began. When the horror stops, where must we begin to make a change

to prevent a recurrence? Alexander concluded that the answers given to this question have always failed to solve the problem. He states, however, that

there is an answer, a magnificently simple and effective answer... It is what man does that brings the wrong thing about, first within himself and then in his activities in the outside world, and it is only by preventing this doing that he can ever begin to make any real change.⁴

Alexander states that “before man can make the changes necessary in the outside world, he must learn to know the kind of doing he should prevent in himself and the how of preventing it. Change must begin in his own behavior.⁵

Alexander wrote that the theme of all his books is this “how” of change in human behavior. Here, he quotes John Dewey's statement concerning how to change human behavior. Dewey wrote that Alexander has “demonstrated a new scientific principle with respect to *the control of human behavior* as important as any principle that has ever been discovered in the domain of external nature.”⁶

Alexander writes that the answer to the problem of human behavior lies with “the fact ... that a human being functions as a whole and can only be fundamentally changed as a whole. It is in the light of this fact that the technique described in this book has real significance.”⁷

In *The Universal Constant in Living*, Alexander stresses the importance of gaining the knowledge and experience required for putting the concept of wholeness into practice consistently. He writes that this knowledge and experience is essential if the acceptance of the concept of wholeness is not to remain only an intellectual belief. He states that writers and speakers in the world of education and medicine have advocated the concept of wholeness as the one upon which sound methods in all fields of activity should be based. Alexander concludes, however, that few of these authorities have offered the knowledge of the means of translating the concept into experience or give a technique for applying the principle into practice.⁸

In *The Resurrection of the Body*, Alexander acknowledged that his work was not finished, that there was more to discover, and that his work needed to evolve and grow. He stated, “[My] experience may one day be recognized as a signpost directing the explorer to a country hitherto undiscovered, and one which offers unlimited opportunity for fruitful research to the patient and observant pioneer.”⁹ Thus, he encouraged explorers and pioneers to carry on that evolution and growth, a challenge that we, as teachers of his work today, have before us.

Some conclusions gathered from the above writings of Alexander and Carrington

I believe the above writings of Alexander and Carrington exemplify Alexander's universal vision of his technique and conclude that Alexander believed that this universal vision requires us to know, understand, and experience the following:

We need to practice and teach his technique from and within our evolving knowledge, experience, and practice of our wholeness.

We need to practice Alexander's technique from and within our wholeness in order to allow ourselves to fundamentally change our behavior.

We need to change as a whole person to be capable of changing our behavior fundamentally, both within ourselves and in our activities in the world.

It is necessary for us to fundamentally change our behavior to be capable of undoing the misuse we engage in within ourselves and in our activities in the world.

Our knowledge, experience, and practice of our wholeness and its role in our practice and teaching of Alexander's technique must continue to evolve.

From F.M. Alexander and Walter Carrington we know that our wholeness is the foundation for educating, healing, and strengthening the whole person through the practice of the Alexander Technique.

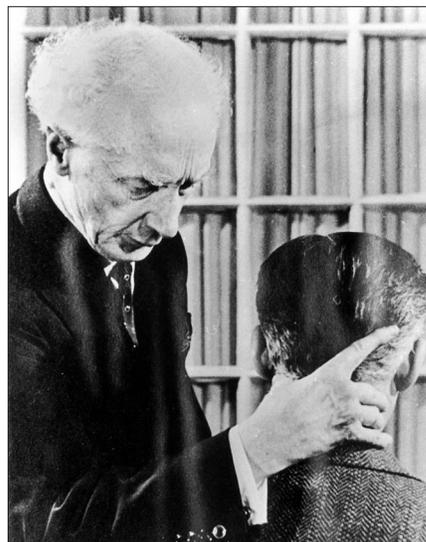
John Dewey, Aldous Huxley, Patrick Macdonald, and others recognized and understood this truth.

John Dewey wrote: "The technique of Mr. Alexander gives to the educator a standard of psycho-physical health—in what we call morality is included. It supplies the 'means whereby' this standard may be progressively and endlessly achieved, becoming a conscious possession of the one educated.... It bears the same relation to education that education itself bears to all other human activities."¹⁰

In the 1946 edition of Alexander's *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, Aldous Huxley states:

Walter Carrington
(1915–2005)

"One of the greatest handicaps in getting an understanding of the Technique is that people instinctively chop up and separate an issue, whereas FM's approach was completely the opposite."



F.M. Alexander
(1869–1955)

"It is what man does that brings the wrong thing about, first within himself and then in his activities in the outside world, and it is only by *preventing* this *doing* that he can ever begin to make any real change."

It is now possible to conceive of a totally new type of education affecting the entire range of human activity ... an education which, by teaching them the proper use of the self, would preserve children and adults from most of the diseases and evil habits that now afflict them.... I heartily recommend this latest and, in many ways, most enlightening of Mr. Alexander's books. In The Universal Constant in Living they will find, along with a mass of interesting facts, the ripest wisdom of a man who, setting out fifty years ago to discover a method for restoring his lost voice, has come, by the oldest of indirect roads, to be a quite uniquely important, because uniquely practical, philosopher, educator, and physiologist."¹¹

In the essay titled "The Education of an Amphibian," Aldous Huxley sets forth a detailed description of the benefits offered to us—physical, psychological, spiritual, essence, the transcendent within each of us, etc.—by Alexander's work.¹²

Patrick Macdonald stated: "Good health is priceless and this technique lays the best possible foundation for good health. If one is mis-using oneself it must be an advantage to be able to correct this misuse."¹³ Macdonald wrote that many of the passages in *Zen in The Art of Archery* (by Eugen Herrigel) might have been written by Alexander himself.¹⁴ He wrote that Alexander's work "provides a spiritual calm and confidence that makes living a pleasure and not an existence."¹⁵

The knowledge, experience, and practice of wholeness in Alexander's technique today

Frank Ottiwell, in giving the first Alexander Memorial Lecture in 1993 at the NASTAT (predecessor to AmSAT) annual meeting, said that he now saw that Alexander's universal vision was right and that he, and perhaps others, "had been underselling Alexander by narrowing his vision to make it somehow more acceptable." Frank then said: "I have to ask: Acceptable to whom?"¹⁶

For more than 40 years, I have witnessed the silence of our international Alexander community in the presentation and communication of Alexander's work to the world regarding the concept of wholeness as the foundation of Alexander's

technique—the very concept Alexander emphatically stated establishes the real significance of his technique for changing human behavior: A human being functions as a whole and can only be fundamentally changed as a whole.

I am defining “our international Alexander community” as all Alexander organizations, schools, and teachers engaged in the profession of presenting and communicating Alexander’s technique to the people of the world.

I am not speaking of nor raising questions about the teaching of Alexander’s work by any individual teachers of Alexander’s technique to their students. I am speaking solely of our international Alexander community.

It is my observation and experience that the concepts and curricula of Alexander’s technique communicated by our international community to the world do not include the idea of wholeness, much less wholeness as the foundation of Alexander’s technique. Consequently, its foundation is not acknowledged nor communicated to the world by our community.

Instead, our community has encouraged the people of the world to focus on the material/physical aspects of ourselves in Alexander’s technique. Thus, our community asks the world to consider only fragments of our wholeness in the study of Alexander’s technique. For example, our wholeness is far more than our mind, our body, and our emotions. Alexander knew this. Carrington, Dewey, Huxley and Macdonald knew this. Many others knew this.

All of the above raises questions for me. I invite discussion and answers to these questions.

With Frank Ottiwell’s insight as my guide, I ask:

Given that Alexander stated that our knowledge, experience, and practice of our wholeness is necessary to fundamentally change our behavior and use of our selves; and

Given that Alexander taught us that his technique offers a means whereby we can gain the knowledge and experience needed to consistently put into practice our wholeness within ourselves and our activities in the world,

Why has our international Alexander community historically acknowledged only fragments of our wholeness in our presentation and communication of Alexander’s technique to the world?

Why has our international Alexander community expressly encouraged us to know, experience, and practice Alexander’s technique using only fragments of our wholeness in our efforts to fundamentally change our behavior and our use of ourselves?

Our international Alexander community and we individual teachers

Our international Alexander community has power and authority; we hope for good. The danger of the power and authority of our international Alexander community, like any other, is the undue influence it can have on teachers, students, and the world. That influence, if ill-used, can stifle the evolution and creativity of Alexander’s technique.

We individual teachers do not have such power and authority. Better than such power and authority, however, is the fact that

we have earned the right to envision and understand Alexander’s work as we choose, so long as we do so with honesty and integrity. Alexander himself expressly encouraged us to do so.¹⁷ In this way, we individual teachers participate in maintaining the inherent freedom within Alexander’s work.

For more than forty years, I have taken Alexander’s advice about the future of his work. I have attempted to be an explorer and pioneer of the work he began: to listen, observe, discover, and remember the unlimited knowledge, understanding, and experience his work offers. There are many other teachers who have been exploring and pioneering as well.

The element that stands out most to me from my experience with the classical approach to Alexander’s work is the primary importance of sticking to principle. Alexander taught us that the foundation of the principle of his technique lies within our wholeness.

My own evolving understanding of my wholeness includes my life energies (divine, universal, psychic, instinctual, physical, and others unknown to me), heart, soul, spirit, sacred body, feeling, psyche, human values, oneness with others (Thou Art That), nature, and God. (I use the word “God” because it satisfies me. Other symbols for the unknowable mystery of life include Atman, the Great Spirit, Tao, the Invisible. There are many from many different cultures.) And there is much more of my wholeness that remains unknown to me.

My understanding of my wholeness grows and deepens as I live and evolve. We each develop our understanding of our wholeness during our lives.

John Dewey wrote, in *Experience and Nature*, that “the visible is set in the invisible; and in the end what is unseen decides what happens in the seen; The tangible rests precariously upon the untouched and un-grasped.”¹⁸

Many aspects of my wholeness are invisible, unseen, untouched, and un-grasped by me. Yet, my wholeness has created and sustained me—a visible and seen creature living on our Earth, touching and grasping, who mingles freely with every living entity.

My conscious knowledge, experience, and practice of my wholeness is the foundation of my Alexander work. This has enabled me to know and experience the deeper meaning and universal vision of Alexander’s work for the greater good of myself and our world.

When my wholeness is not consciously included in my moments of awareness, choice, action, and movement, I am left with only my material, rational self. In those moments, I may no longer see myself as a unique creature of life. Instead, I may see myself as just an example of a human physical body with nerves, bones, brain, connectors, etc.

However, when I honor and express my gifts as this unique creature, I am free to consciously choose to progressively and endlessly experience the joy offered by life itself—the choice of living as a whole person.

Through Alexander’s work I have found that “country hitherto undiscovered” and the opportunity for a greater understanding of the gifts the Alexander Technique offers and much more.

Alexander’s work has helped me live a more wondrous, joyful, and healthy life. This has led to a vast improvement and understanding of myself and my responsibility for others and our Earth.

Today, more than ever, our international Alexander community can significantly help many people in the world through the education, healing, and strengthening of the whole person.

In our dehumanizing and mechanical culture (scientific materialism, separation from nature and God, over-reliance on technology, rejection of heart, soul, and spirit in our public discourse and policies, etc.), many people are experiencing trauma and despair from the harm to their hearts, souls, and spirits suffered while living within our culture. In response, people are seeking help in dealing with the myriad problems caused by living in this culture.

The deeper and more profound experiences of Alexander's work gained from the knowledge, skills, experience, and practice of our wholeness offer the help many people are seeking while living in today's culture.

When our wholeness is expressly communicated through our touch, words, and presence during our lessons with students, the creative experience received from Alexander's work is deepened immeasurably. Through this help, people are offered an original pathway to receiving the education, healing, and strengthening they are seeking.

However, having chosen to present and communicate only the material/physical aspects of our Alexander work to the world, the deeper vision and understanding of Alexander's work continues to be little known. And because people do not know that Alexander's work offers these experiences, people are not looking to the Alexander Technique for this help.

What choices do we as individual teachers have today in dealing with this state of affairs?

In this essay I am advocating that we each, as individual members of our international Alexander community, begin to consciously and expressly include our wholeness in our presentation and teaching of Alexander's work to others—our students, our peers, and the people of the world. This would require that we consciously and expressly include our wholeness in our own exploration, study, practice, and teaching of Alexander's work.

I believe this is precisely the work that Alexander was teaching us to carry out if we are to be successful in fundamentally changing our behavior and our use of our selves.

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Conscious Control—What Exactly Is Going On?

by Malcolm Williamson

Preamble



IN THE PAST THIRTY YEARS, neuroscience has shown that there is sufficient plasticity in how our brains are “wired” for new pathways and habits to form throughout our entire lives. At the beginning of his investigations, F.M. Alexander reasoned that, if it’s possible for our biomechanisms to be thrown out of kilter by poor habitual use, then it’s reasonable to suppose

their working can also be restored by improving the way we use ourselves.¹ Alexander recalled early discussions with his father that pointed out that we know little more about how we use ourselves than does a dog or cat.² Though his subsequent discoveries were frequently prescient, he showed how Victorian notions of freewill and the power of thought³ could enable us to modify our habitual behavior patterns.⁴ The neurologist and Nobel Laureate Charles Sherrington (1857–1952) concluded:

[F]rom the human standpoint, the important thing is less that man’s will should be free than that man should think that it is free. That can indeed serve to activate and sustain his zest-for-life. This last, if he have it not, assuredly he is a biological failure and will cease to be.... The pragmatic position which, while silent as to how mind can affect matter, assumes that it does so ... in the affairs of everyday life.⁵

Introduction

This paper discusses “directing” or “giving orders” in the Alexander Technique—i.e., substituting a mostly automatic (instinctive or habitual) process of reaction for one that gives greater conscious guidance and control—and what this thinking process involves seen in the context of the New Psychology of the late Victorian and Edwardian period when Alexander was developing and teaching his technique. In particular, I review scientific and philosophical speculation of the time about the much-debated mind-body problem.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a time of prodigious social and technological changes with rapid advances in the sciences. Electromagnetic wave theory (James Clerk Maxwell, 1865) and quantum mechanics (Max Planck, 1900, and Albert Einstein, 1905) swept away the permanence and solidity of Victorian-era physics. The new field of biology-based psychology, having broken away from its parent field of philosophy in the 1880s, shifted the study of mind from metaphysical concepts of consciousness, reason, and freewill to a previously revolutionary view that human bodies were “machines”—physicochemical mechanisms—governed by physical

principles. Meanwhile, Alexander’s investigations in the 1890s would have been informed by his reading of popular science, and he retained an essentially nineteenth-century viewpoint in the tradition that culminated in the work of the American psychologist and philosophical pragmatist, William James.

The mind-body problem of the late nineteenth century centered on trying to determine the nature of *mind* and *matter*: were they two distinct principles (i.e., a spiritual mind or soul and a physical body) as Descartes had propounded in the seventeenth century and, if so, how was it that a non-material mind was able to move a corporeal body? The concept of mankind’s dual nature—a physical body, tenanted by a sensitive soul—continued in the Victorian era, as it still does today. No wonder Alexander, writing in 1929, felt it necessary to explain:

I must admit that when I began my investigation, I, in common with most people, conceived of “body” and “mind” as separate parts of the same organism.... My practical experiences, however, led me to abandon this point of view, and readers of my books will be aware that the technique described in them is based on the opposite conception, namely, that it is impossible to separate “mental” and “physical” processes in any form of human activity.⁶

Psychophysical parallelism

Back in the seventeenth century, Descartes had conjectured that the pineal gland acted as a valve controlling the passage of “animal spirits” between a soul and its body. His followers came up with an even more fanciful theory that the soul communicated with the body through repeated occasions of divine intervention and, for a time, that seemed to end the discussion. However, the introduction of a *deus ex machina* (a sudden and implausible addition to bringing about a pleasing solution) became increasingly untenable, and by the mid-1800s the theory had been modified. What scientists and philosophers came up with was the ingenious theory of *psychophysical parallelism*.

With this theory, mind and matter were still regarded as essentially two different kinds of stuff—psychic (mind) and physical (body)—that proceeded side by side in parallel. Communication was supposed by an unexplained “underlying connection” with a series of coincidences indefinitely and miraculously repeated.⁷ Further rationalizing led to a “monist” theory that there is only one principle, i.e., *matter*. Mind-stuff was simply a highly rarefied and expanded form of matter; a flickering accompaniment surrounding the brain like the halo of a saint or the faint phosphorescent glow given off by a decaying lobster!⁸ It somehow mirrored events occurring in the purely physical brain, and itself became conscious of their occurrences. Consequently, nothing happened in the mind that had not already happened in the brain.

Materialists v. vitalists

Opposing material monism was spiritual or subjective monism. The notion that there is only one principle—in this case, *mind*—has a long pedigree reaching back to Aristotle and Plato. It argues that all we can ever know is our bodily sensations. Reality, if there is such a thing out there, is an illusion created by our senses. There are many variations on this idea, but in its late nineteenth-century form there is a principle even more fundamental than mind or matter.⁹ When this elemental substance reaches a certain state of refinement, it can be entered into by a universal life-force, rather like electricity running through a metal wire. The idea of life's creative urge was favored by Herbert Spencer, Samuel Butler, William James, Henri Bergson, and (particularly significant for our discussion) the playwright George Bernard Shaw as an alternative to Darwinian evolution—a series of “accidental” survival adaptations provoked by environmental change.

By all accounts, Alexander was one of William James's “tough-minded” thinkers.¹⁰ As an actor, first and foremost in the histrionic acting tradition, Alexander was interested in inner process: what made his stage characters tick.¹¹ As far as we know, Alexander never went in for much philosophizing (though he may have become interested after meeting John Dewey in 1916); however, there are plenty of examples of his vitalist tendencies. There are numerous examples of the “theory of progressive conscious control”¹² in his early writings, such as this passage:

*My reader can rejoice that ... he must leave the subconscious plane of animal growth and development, and adopt the reasoned conscious plane of guidance and control by means of which mankind may rise to those evolutionary planes for which his latent and undeveloped potentialities fit him.*¹³

Creative evolution

The theories of nineteenth-century evolutionary biologists Darwin and Lamarck had challenged the biblical account of creation. Science was pressing the view that life could be explained by natural laws without the need for a creator's design or mind. In particular, the young science of psychology was pushing forward with this view encouraged by Pavlov's work on the conditioned reflex. Freud's theory of the unconscious further undermined the idea that man could control his impulses and desires through reason.

*The unconscious is pictured as a restless sea of instinct and impulse, a sea agitated by gusts of libido, swept by the waves of desire, threaded by the currents of urge and drive; and upon these waves and currents consciousness, with all that it contains, bobs helplessly like a cork. Consciousness is represented, in fact, as a sort of by-product of the unconscious.*¹⁴

Reacting against these theories, philosophers such as Samuel Butler and Henri Bergson argued a case for life's purposeful progression towards greater consciousness. They proposed that the urge to live, *élan vital*, was the motivating force; the essence of life was its innate creativeness. This view was most eloquently

explored by the playwright Bernard Shaw in such plays as *Man and Superman*, *Back to Methuselah*, and even *Pygmalion* (better known as the musical, *My Fair Lady*—the story of a Cockney “guttersnipe” transformed by phonetics training into a society *Mayfair lady*!).

“Creative evolution” was an optimistic and very different perspective from a psychology “without a soul.”¹⁵ At the time, almost the only way to study the nature and content of mind was through introspection¹⁶—sitting quietly and becoming acutely aware of the mind's functions: *cognition* (intelligence), *affect* (emotions), and, the now obsolete term, *conation* (i.e., *volition*, *will*, *desire*, or the way we direct our efforts towards chosen goals). As with all observation and analysis, introspection could be done well or badly, but there were added problems as what was observed was not public and “out there.” Also, the selection of what was observed and recorded depended on the predispositions, interests, and training of the individual. Observations were neither measurable nor repeatable and, in any case, as the mind was observing itself, the act of observing changed the nature of what was being observed! William James, who was preeminent in this method,¹⁷ described the process as “like trying to turn up the gas quickly enough to see how the darkness looks.”¹⁸ Wilhelm Wundt, a founding father of psychology, first tried to develop introspection into a rigorous methodology¹⁹ but soon it was abandoned in favor of what James disparagingly called “brass-instrument psychology”²⁰—i.e., study based on independent reading-off of measurements.

Ideomotor theory and the behaviorists

The “ideomotor” theory of action—that “intentional action is initiated by ideas”²¹—was taken up by Alexander from his reading of James in his Sydney years (1900–04) or first years in London as a possible theoretical underpinning to what he had discovered.²² Later, after 1925, prompted by his medically trained friends, Alexander adopted the behaviorists' model of stimulus-response to explain the Technique's underlying mechanism. The concept of *primary control* was introduced after he was made aware of Rudolf Magnus's discovery of postural and attitudinal reflexes activated in the neck region of experimental animals.²³ This account put less emphasis on the role of the conscious mind. At the time, for Alexander and his supporters, it must have seemed the perfect scientific verification for his work, though over the years it has become less convincing. Walter Carrington said in class that Alexander was exasperated by his doctor friend Mungo Douglas's persistence in reifying primary control. There is evidence that after Alexander's last book was published, he retraced his thinking somewhat from primary control to re-emphasize the will and “primary movement” (lengthening in stature).²⁴

*There really isn't a primary control as such. It becomes a something in the sphere of relativity.*²⁵

Is that why the directions are given “all together, one after the other”:²⁶ a free neck and the primary movement activated by the intention to “go up” allow the head-neck-back relationship to manifest spontaneously?²⁷

Continued speculation

Those familiar with Alexander's Technique will know the instruction to *think* the directions, *don't "do" them*. (Trying to get a result directly activates established habits including those we may wish to change.) Lengthening (extension) of the spine might be activated by some kind of ideomotor process. To avoid the idea of a homunculus (a sort of "mini-me") creeping in, personalistically inclined psychologists proposed a single self as knower, thinker, feeler, and doer—all in one blended unity.²⁸

Despite how it feels subjectively, our so-called voluntary movements are initiated indirectly and are "remote" from what we actually do. Taking the act of standing as an example, Sherrington explained that our willing sets off a causal chain of processes:

*All the items of motor behaviour are mediated by the nervous system and that system is a physico-chemical system and all the happenings in it are chains of physical events with the statistical probability which attaches to such.*²⁹

The point of note is our *total unawareness* of this "chain of physical events"³⁰ from our act of willing to our seemingly voluntary action, which is different each time:

*Patterns of reflex response shift like the pattern of a tapped kaleidoscope.... The old concept of a reflex as giving one uniform result forgot the complexity and instability of the internal mechanism. The external conditions may be alike but the internal state of the mechanism is not the same.*³¹

The boy who stoops very much

In what has proven to be a seminal passage in Alexander's writings, he gives an account of "a boy who stoops very much" and is told to "stand up straight."³²

Standing and lengthening are closely associated. Many of us as children were told to "Stand up straight!" with its associated mental image of the army drill sergeant straining to attention: neck braced, chest held high, and back pulled in. *Standing*, in the Alexander lexicon, is an "incident" activity—coincidental to other tasks such as reaching out to take a jar off a shelf. In comparison, *lengthening in stature* is fundamental: an "internal" activity intrinsic to the use of the self.³³ It is something that happens naturally if we don't interfere by "pulling ourselves down."³⁴ Alexander writes:

*Now the narrowing and arching of the back already referred to are exactly opposite to what is required by nature, and to that which is obtained in re-education, co-ordination, and readjustment, viz., widening of the back and a more normal and extended position of the spine. Moreover, if these conditions of the back be first secured, the neck and arms will no longer be stiffened, and the other faults will be eradicated.*³⁵

In attempting to carry out the instruction to stand up straight, the boy performed some random muscular bracings and postural adjustments, stiffening his neck. The argument was taken

up by John Dewey as the basis of what Jones called his "general law of habit":³⁶ "[A] man who *can* stand properly does so, and only a man who can does."³⁷ He makes the point that for someone whose habit is to stand up straight, he just does it but for someone whose habit is to stoop, no amount of instruction will provide him with the implicit knowledge—experience or sensations (feelings)—he needs in order to "know" how to do it. Furthermore, as the person who typically stands upright has no idea how *he* does it, any instruction he gives is, at best, an inspired guess!³⁸

Alexander asked his pupils to be mindful of *not* stiffening their necks (or hollowing their backs) in a military-style to "stand tall"—instead they were to allow the neck to be relaxed (or "free" as he later preferred to say) and back to widen. As might be expected, according to James's account of ideomotor action, Alexander found that his pupils couldn't do what was required without "hands-on" assistance: the experience must come first before the idea can be formed.³⁹ To address this pedagogical impasse, Alexander developed a way to bring about improved conditions and manner of use and functioning so that his pupils might gain new and reliable experiences.

Experiencing, acting, and naming

"Allow the neck to be free, so that the head can go forward and up and the back can lengthen and widen."

The teacher and pianist Nelly Ben-Or makes the point that the words that are so familiar to anyone who uses the Technique—Alexander's "phrases which ... do not always adequately express my meaning"⁴⁰—are his reflective attempts to describe what objectively happens under optimal conditions:

*He [Alexander] used the words after years of searching. We use these words and immediately associate them with what [we know], which is not what Alexander knew when he coined the phrase.... [W]e're taking the words and searching for the experience that matches.*⁴¹

This confirms what Walter Carrington said in an earlier interview,

*[T]here's no doubt that Alexander saw what was supposed to happen before he put it into words ... the experience came first and he then cast around to find adequate words to describe the experience. When he came to teach others he obviously used words, but only at the same time as he was using his hands. In that way, he wasn't inviting people to pay too much attention to the words as such. It was much more a case of using his hands and saying, "Well, this is what I mean. It's like this."*⁴²

Some teaching methods use the words in a conditioning procedure:

In the experiment which I have carried out this principle was employed [i.e., "Konorski Type 2 conditioned reflex"—"a compound of stimuli consisting of an exteroceptive and proprioceptive stimulus"]. The other novel aspect of the approach was that I used a verbal stimulus as the exteroceptive

stimulus, first in the form of a vocalized word of command, and eventually as a subvocalized command given by the subject.⁴³

Carrington said he remembered Alexander remarking on Wilfred Barlow's premise, "Well, that's nonsense!"⁴⁴ Peggy Williams said that Alexander used few words during the years she trained (1947–55), which came at the end of Alexander's life. Carrington followed the plan outlined by James (and latterly by Alexander)—movement follows from an idea of the intended goal. However, until the actual movement has been hit upon by "accident" (or by applying the Alexander Technique), we do not possess the experiential stuff (feelings) from which a reliable idea can be formed.⁴⁵ James saw the main evolutionary advantage of consciousness as a control to modify behavior. When we know what we are doing, we can save time and energy by stopping futile habits and finding better ways.⁴⁶ This act of will is *conation*—"framing and holding" our intended goal, as Alexander described it.⁴⁷ It is then a matter of applying the Technique (the conscious *means whereby* of *inhibiting* and *directing*) to ensure that we employ the most advantageous conditions for our use and functioning in reaching our goal.

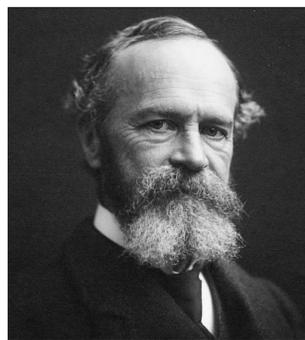
Do I ever directly raise my arm?

The "external" act of raising an arm is oriented as much towards the outside world (e.g., reaching out for an object) as it is a postural adjustment. Now, here is the mystery. It is doubtful if any so-called "voluntary movement" is carried out directly. This may seem surprising. We feel at home in our movements, but this is an illusion. In the following discussion we shall see that the act of raising my arm is "remote"⁴⁸ from what I *actually* do to instigate a causal chain of processes, as discussed earlier. Through practice and habit-forming, we identify with the feelings associated with the way we do things. As there is no everyday language to describe what we *actually* do, we just say, "I raised my arm."⁴⁹

One reason for holding the view that we do *something* that is not the act itself is found in William James's *Principles of Psychology*. He tells us of a patient who has lost sensation in one arm and is asked to close his eyes and then put the afflicted hand on top of his head. At the same time, his arm is restrained, preventing him from doing so. On opening his eyes, he was very surprised to find that the movement had not taken place!⁵⁰

The underlying argument is this: It is assumed that the person in James's example does *something* that he understands as "raise his arm" even though, in this case, his arm does not move. It suggests the question that if this *something* that the person directly does is done when he does not raise his arm, then could it equally well be done when he *does* raise it. The final stage of the argument is reached when what he directly does is taken to be causally connected to something that he has commonly—but mistakenly—taken as done directly, i.e., raised his arm.

Leaving mental rehearsal or visualizing aside, there is a subjective, qualitative difference between thinking hypothetically about doing something and actually doing it. Modern physiology explains that when we merely *think* of a movement, the motor-nerve impulses to the appropriate muscles are either not



William James (1842–1910), psychologist and philosophical pragmatist, and author of *Principles of Psychology* (1890)

generated (or they're too weak⁵¹) or are withheld (inhibited).⁵² The eminent English philosopher H.A. Prichard (1871–1947) simply maintained that he raised his arm by performing an appropriate *act of will*, but it is difficult to understand what this might be.⁵³

What is the "act of willing" (or whatever) that I *really* do when I decide to raise my arm or to give my Alexander Technique directions to lengthen upwards? What is that very small *something* that we do "usually below the sense register" that A.R. Alexander identified?⁵⁴ When I give my directions for the "primary movement" I do *something* that causes a "complex chain of processes": changes in my brain that then send nerve impulses to activate the muscles that extend my spine. A generally accepted explanation is that what I do precipitates the movement, as when I cause a stone to fall by releasing my grip; the movement is "parasitic" of an act of will. I do not move, as it were, by getting behind the appropriate muscles and contracting them. Such a direct action would necessarily require the greater part of humanity to have a remarkable knowledge of human physiology.⁵⁵ We have seen that even in making the most elementary of movements an immense complexity of neuromuscular processes is involved.

Alexander describes direction as, "the process involved in projecting messages from the brain to the mechanisms and in conducting the energy necessary to the use of these mechanisms."⁵⁶ He was not concerned with what this energy was "any more than the engineer who is using electricity as a power to a particular end is immediately interested as to what electricity is."⁵⁷ Over-optimistically, as it turns out, he predicted that we would know about the force or forces of volition and inhibition before the mystery of electricity had been answered.⁵⁸ As late as 1946, the philosopher and popular radio broadcaster C.E.M. Joad wrote:

[P]sychology still belongs very largely to the province of speculation. We cannot say that the mind works in this way or in that way; we can only wonder and propound theories about it.... This does not necessarily mean that psychology will never attain to certain and agreed knowledge. All the sciences were born into the realm of speculation; they all, in other words, started life as philosophy.⁵⁹

The Alexander brothers would not cooperate with several well-meaning attempts to have their work investigated by science.⁶⁰ Their resistance may have come from the current stage of scientific knowledge and inquiry at that time. It wasn't that the behaviorists denied the existence of mind. Rather, they

took the view that mind was too vague to be independently observed, measured, or verified. Their strategy was to see how far they could get by studying what could be observed, and, by this approach, many important discoveries were made. Study of the Technique's mechanism, however, without including the mind would be nonsense. Might the Alexanders have taken a different attitude today? Even so, we still haven't gotten to the stage where we can image the content of a thought!

When possible, I have kept references to sources that could have been known to Alexander though it's unlikely he would have read them. Whether or not it is possible to time travel and put oneself in the mind of someone in the past is doubtful, but it's been fun trying. I hope that my account will inspire someone to take it up as a starting point and continue the story in terms of today's science. We need a healthy skepticism and questioning among teachers and trainees; training schools must be forward-looking and research-based in their approach, fostering links with other centers of learning to gain access to research facilities and expertise to explain the "how" of what we know works in practice. Walter Carrington said that the eminent anatomist Raymond Dart (1893–1988) told him and Dilys Carrington on many occasions, "You don't have to try and prove the Alexander Technique. It's been proved. All you've got to do is to get on and teach it."⁶¹ While this is good advice for individual teachers, the profession as a whole needs to foster links with research scientists who are able to take the subject forward. There is still plenty of work to be done to advance our understanding of the process.

NOTES

- 1 Compare F. Matthias Alexander, *The Use of the Self* (London: Gollancz, [1932], 1985), 35.
- 2 Alexander, *Use of Self*, 37.
- 3 William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, [1890], 1950), Vol. 2, 486f.
- 4 I can exercise self-control, denial, and act in defiance of my habitual nature by drawing on innate powers. I can choose to act for the good of the whole (Compare Cyril Edwin Mitchinson Joad, *Guide to Modern Thought* [London: Faber, 1933], 205). If I desire, want, to use the will to suppress an unruly desire then I can, though my ability will vary according to how tired I feel, etc., i.e., "ego depletion." Conversely, our inhibitory power is strengthened by regular practice.
- 5 Charles Sherrington, *Man on His Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), 199–200.
- 6 Alexander, *Use of Self*, 21.
- 7 Cyril Edwin Mitchinson Joad, *Mind and Matter* (London: Nisbet, 1925), 23. (I have used Joad's popular explanations of science rather than technical papers. C.E.M. Joad (1891–1953) was an English philosopher and broadcasting personality, author of numerous books explaining often complex philosophical arguments in a popular, non-specialist style.) Compare "a harmonious combination" in Sherrington, *Man on His Nature*, 184.
- 8 Joad, *Mind and Matter*, 24; *Guide to Modern Thought*, 38.
- 9 Butler wrote *Life and Habit*, 1878. In Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *The Mikado* (produced in 1885) there is a satirical reference to Butler's theory of universal memory: the character Pooh Bah boasts that he can trace his ancestry back to a "protoplasmal primordial atomic globule." A "thermophilic autotrophic bacterium" might be the up-to-date equivalent. Harold J. Morowitz, *The Emergence of Everything* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 29. For William James, the single primal stuff was "true experience." See Lloyd Morris, *William James* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), 46.
- 10 William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. Lecture 1: "The Present Dilemma in Philosophy," 1907. www.authorama.com. The Tender-Minded: rationalistic (going by absolute principles), intellectualistic, idealistic, optimistic, religious, free-willist, monistic, dogmatical. The Tough-Minded: empiricist (going on "facts"), sensationalistic, materialistic, pessimistic, irreligious, fatalistic, pluralistic, skeptical. See Lloyd Morris, *William James*, 26.
- 11 Alexander's first newspaper article in *The Mercury*, Hobart, July 9, 1894, quotes from Charles S. Hartley's *Natural Elocution* (London: F. Pitman. Melbourne and Sydney: E.A. Petherick, undated, c.1892. Courtesy of Jeroen Staring Collection). "The power of condensed energy in repose, with an accompanying clearness of enunciation which renders the suppressed whisper as impressive as the loudest explosion of agony is a mastery of the art which none but the most highly gifted and persevering can attain" (Hartley, *Natural Elocution*, 27).
- 12 F. Matthias Alexander, *Man's Supreme Inheritance* (London: Mouritz, [1918], 1996), 66.
- 13 Alexander, *MSI*, 129.
- 14 Joad, *Guide to Modern Thought*, 212.
- 15 Wilhelm Wundt quoted in Gordon W. Allport, *Becoming: Basic Considerations for a Psychology of Personality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 36.
- 16 A.G. Tansley, *The New Psychology*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1920), 9–10, 43.
- 17 F. Matthias Alexander, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* (London: Mouritz, [1923], 2004), xvi–xvii.
- 18 Charles Fernyhough, *The Voices Within: The History and Science of How We Talk to Ourselves* (London: Wellcome Collection, 2016), 21.
- 19 Fernyhough, 20.
- 20 Charles Brian Cox and Anthony Edward Dyson (eds.), *The Twentieth Century Mind 1900–1918* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 229.
- 21 Ezequiel Morsella, *The Mechanisms of Human Action* (2009) quoted in Kathleen Ballard, "Ideomotor Principle. Was Alexander Correct?" in Claire Rennie, Tanya Shoop, & Kamal Thapen (eds.), *Connected Perspectives* (London: Hite, 2015), 50.
- 22 Ideomotor theory was powerfully attacked by leading American psychologists, Edward Thorndike. See note 21, Kathleen Ballard, "Ideomotor Principle" and William McDougall, *An Outline of Psychology*, 4th ed. (London: Methuen, 1928), 290–91.
- 23 Michael Bloch, *F.M. The Life of Frederick Matthias Alexander* (London: Little, Brown, 2004), 132.
- 24 Alexander called the lengthening "the true primary movement to each and every act" (Alexander, *MSI*, 200) as distinct from Primary Control (Alexander, *Use of Self*, 28, etc.), which came later.
- 25 Letter to Frank Jones, December 1945. Alexander D. Murray, *Alexander's Way* (Urbana, IL: Alexander Technique Center Urbana, 2015), 124, n. 19.
- 26 Alexander, *Use of Self*, 68.
- 27 I wonder if this is still true when a person has been practicing the Technique for several decades. Can it work both ways—lengthening up frees the neck; freeing the neck takes you up? Walter Carrington, after almost seventy years, said that essentially you must "know where up is." Walter Carrington, *Thinking Aloud* (San Francisco:

- Mornum Time Press, 1994), 36. Macdonald explained that directions become something different with practice “from what the new pupil at first conceives them to be.” Patrick J. Macdonald, *The Alexander Technique As I See It*, ed. Ted MacNamara (London: Mouritz, 2015), 71. Over time, the “all together, one after the other” (Alexander, *Use of Self*, 42n.) sequencing implies that “allowing the neck to be free” necessarily involves “thinking up.”
- Compare, “F.M. said the most important thing was to get the hips released—coming up out of the hips and lengthening away from them. If not, you can’t get the head and neck released.” Peggy Williams, interviewed in Nanette Walsh, *Unsmudged: An Encounter with Peggy Williams* (Amherst, MA: Off the Common Books, 2018), 58.
- 28 Allport, *Becoming*, 54. (See note 15)
- 29 Sherrington, *Man on His Nature*, 189.
- 30 Sherrington, 174–75 quoted in F. Matthias Alexander, *The Universal Constant in Living* (London: Mouritz, [1942] 2000), 117–18. See also an account of raising an arm in Deane Juhan, *Job’s Body: A Handbook for Bodywork* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, 2003), 114.
- 31 Sherrington, *Man on His Nature*, 191.
- 32 Alexander, *MSI*, 170, but which may have been written as early as 1911 in his *Man’s Supreme Inheritance: Addenda*. (London: Methuen, 1911).
- 33 Alexander, *Universal Constant*, 101.
- 34 “The basic thing is up, and up is built in.” Carrington, *Thinking Aloud*, 36.
- 35 Alexander, *MSI*, 170. Compare Macdonald, *As I See It*, 70.
- 36 Frank Pierce Jones, *Freedom to Change* (London: Mouritz, 1997), 102. Originally published as *Body Awareness in Action* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).
- 37 John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: Random House The Modern Library, [1922], 1957), 29.
- 38 I have observed something similar in a master class when world-renowned trombonist Denis Wick was unable to explain to students about how to breathe. Dewey’s argument is similar to Aristotle’s paradoxical argument for a “good man” (*Nicomachean Ethics*): A man comes to have a good character because he continually performs good acts. But he cannot continually perform good acts unless he is the sort of man whose nature is to perform them; i.e. unless he has the good character from which the good acts necessarily spring (compare Joad, *Mind and Matter*, 144–45).
- 39 See, for instance, the interview with first-generation teacher, Peggy Williams in Walsh, *Unsmudged*, 158. “Alexander said you’ve got to give a person an experience—otherwise, it is like telling a blind man what the color red is. He just can’t know! [N.W.] So you can only want the conditions if a teacher has given you the experience of which those conditions are? [P.W.] Yes, exactly—not until then.”
- 40 Alexander, *CCCI*, 112.
- 41 Nelly Ben-Or in Ruth Rootberg, *Living the Alexander Technique, Volume II: Aging with Poise* (Amherst, MA: Off the Common Books, 2018), 9.
- 42 Walter Carrington and Séan Carey, *Explaining the Alexander Technique* (London: The Sheildrake Press, 1992), 117–18.
- 43 Wilfred Barlow, *Postural Homeostasis* (London: Mouritz, 2014), 79–80. Originally, Wilfred Barlow, “Postural Homeostasis” (paper read at the Annual Meeting of the British Association of Physical Medicine, April 26, 1952). See also National Library of Medicine, *Annals of Physical Medicine*, vol. 1, no. 3, July 1952. Behaviorists would say that language is a form of “word conditioning” (Joad, *Guide to Modern Thought*, 60). The word or symbol becomes associated with the object to which it refers. When I say the word “table” the image of a table comes to mind; when I see a table-like object I mentally label it as a “table.” Behaviorists held that thought is “talking” to oneself (subvocalizing) and that thinking is accompanied by minute muscular movements in the larynx. (See Joad, *Guide to Modern Thought*, 59.)
- 44 Carrington and Carey, *Explaining*, 117–18. For a discussion of this, see John Nicholls’s interview in Rootberg, *Living the Alexander Technique*, 139–41.
- 45 William James, *Principles*, vol. 2, 580.
- 46 Benjamin Libet called this “free won’t.” He proposed there is a 200-millisecond window of opportunity when we may exercise a “conscious veto” to stop ourselves carrying out an action. Benjamin Libet, *Mind Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 137.
- 47 F. Matthias Alexander, *Conscious Control* (London: Methuen, 1912), 17. See also Alexander, *MSI*, 126.
- 48 G.N.A. Vesey, “Volition” in *Philosophy* 36, no. 138 (October 1961): 360.
- 49 Compare Vesey, 363.
- 50 William James, *Principles*, vol. 2, 105.
- 51 Holt suggests that “the energy involved is too small to produce gross bodily movements.” E.B. Holt (1916), *The Freudian Wish*, 76 quoted in Tansley, *New Psychology*, 20.
- 52 A study of rats operating a robot arm (Chapin et al., 1999) suggests that neurons in the motor cortex respond to an intention to move, the actual movements being organized neurologically “downstream.” In Michael Morgan, *The Space Between Our Ears* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), 94.
- 53 Harold A. Prichard, “Acting, Willing, Desiring,” *Moral Obligations*, 186–98 in Robert A. Imlay, “Do I Ever Directly Raise My Arm?” *Philosophy* 42, no. 160 (April 1967): 119.
- 54 Macdonald, *As I See It*, 68.
- 55 Imlay, *Do I Ever*, 120–21.
- 56 Alexander, *Use of Self*, 35 n.
- 57 Alexander, *CCCI*, 91–92.
- 58 The ten-year European initiative on “intentional inhibition” taught us much about impulse control, mood management, delayed gratification, etc., focusing on what Alexander called “external” habits. UCL Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience, “*Intentional Inhibition: From Motor Suppression to Self-Control*” (symposium, University College, London, September 25, 2013). Alexander’s technique addresses the “internal” habits that create the conditions from which overt activity is emergent—that is, not preplanned but rather happening in a surprising way.
- 59 Cyril Edwin Mitchinson Joad, *Joad on How Our Minds Work* (London: John Westhouse, 1946), 10.
- 60 Thomas C. Dalton, *Becoming John Dewey* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 99, 233.
- 61 Carrington and Carey, *Explaining*, 70.

The Developing Self: Specialized Postgraduate Training for Alexander Technique Teachers Working in Education

A Four-Day Workshop with Sue Merry and Judith Kleinman

by Eve Bernfeld

New York, March 28–31, 2019 · San Diego, April 4–7, 2019



“I WISH I had learned the Alexander Technique as a child!”

“I wish my kids learned this in school!”

“I wish I had the opportunity to teach the Technique to children before they become so set in their habits of misuse!”

It is these sorts of desires that draw many Alexander Technique teachers toward working with young people.

Going back to F.M. Alexander’s great interest in education, Alexander Technique teachers have often wished to do more than “re-educate” adults. One only needs to look around to see how much children and the educational system in general could benefit from our work. Unfortunately, our Technique teacher training may not have prepared us for things like curriculum development, classroom management, or communicating what we teach to schoolteachers and parents. How can we honor the expertise of educators, while also showing them that how a child uses him or herself will affect how that child learns, how that child behaves, and how that child feels?

Fortunately for all of us, there are two teachers in England who are addressing this need—Sue Merry and Judith Kleinman. They have created “The Developing Self” course in order to share their decades of expertise working with young people and to illuminate the process for the rest of us, whether we have already been working with youth or are hoping to get started. Sue and Judith traveled to the United States in the spring of 2019 to offer their four-day course twice—first in New York and then in San Diego. I had the great pleasure of attending the New York course, and this is a record of some of the things that I learned.

I spent many months mooning over the Developing Self course. I thought, “No, I couldn’t possibly go away from my children for so long.” Sometime later, it would come back into my consciousness, “No, it’s too far away.” Then, suddenly, the stars aligned: childcare, friend to stay with, space in the class. I was on what felt like the next plane to New York City! And it took me all of four minutes in the lovely studio at Balance Arts Center to think, “Oh, thank God I came!”

The group of around twenty excited teachers and trainees from across North America immediately dove into how to apply Alexander Technique to primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Sue and Judith have long-term experience teaching these populations—Sue, at the primary level, Judith, at the secondary and tertiary (or as we might say in the states “college”) levels. I

found them both to be warm, thoughtful, caring teachers. With their blend of expertise, humor, and humility, they modeled excellent pedagogy. I spent a good portion of the workshop slapping myself on the forehead and thinking, “Oh *that’s* what I’ve been trying to do!” The variety of activities, including games, lectures, group work, partner work, individual work, *hands on*, stillness, and movement, were interwoven into a perfectly paced, varied, yet coherent, whole.

Over four days, Sue and Judith took turns leading the group. Sue began with a simplified *inhibition* and *direction* tool called the “Ready List.” She teaches this to the children (and teachers) she works with at Educare Small School in Kingston upon Thames in the United Kingdom, a school that she helped found and that incorporates the Alexander Technique into each day’s activities.

THE READY LIST

Stop
See
Breathe
Soft and Tall

Sue explained how the Ready List is used throughout the day to help the children cultivate self-regulation. Those of us on the course found ourselves, individually and in groups, returning to it countless times over the next four days.

Under Sue’s guidance, we brainstormed Technique concepts, created stories to introduce a particular concept to children, and



then invented games to reinforce the concepts from the stories. I found this process a revelation. As a drama teacher, actor, and improviser, I have a huge collection of games that I can pull out and adapt to Alexander Technique teaching. I also love to tell stories. But it had never occurred to me that I could *invent* a story to teach a concept and then *invent* a game (head slap).

Sue also shared two cornerstones of the day at Educare Small School: The Movement Circle, with which students center themselves at the start of the day, and Quiet Time after lunch, when the children take a lie-down. She revealed how children are trained to put gentle hands on their peers' shoulders. Sue also shared her hilarious story of desperately capering around the room in the early days to keep the children's attention. It was so helpful to hear that we all have those moments!

Judith taught us another version of the Ready List (though not so-named). The list consists of three simple questions we can ask ourselves at any time, in any activity:

Am I Seeing?
Am I Breathing?
Am I Balancing?

She led us through a wonderful array of games she uses at the Royal College of Music and the Junior Royal Academy of Music, where she teaches secondary and university students. One highlight was a manner-of-reaction game called "Drop the Sox." Judith explained that this is a perfect introductory game for a class, workshop, or talk, and can be adapted to any size group. A ball representing something *very important* to me is dropped, and I try to catch it. Did I make myself small? Then it's dropped again, and I'm NOT to catch it. My partner and I had much to discuss about our observations of ourselves and each other.

Judith extolled the benefits of incorporating some technology when teaching young adults. She showed us video clips she uses in class and an example of a video diary created by a student. This was my first Alexander Technique course where apps were discussed! (They were the Coach's Eye and Visible Body, if you're curious.)

One of my favorite lessons was Judith's exploration of being calm, confident, and coordinated under pressure. She really upped the "coolness factor" for working with teens by comparing the Alexander Technique to a martial art and giving us the chance to develop our "predator energy." Judith and Sue also gave us instruction on creating compelling professional development days for teachers and sharing how the work can help make their jobs less of a strain.

With great generosity, Sue and Judith opened up a portion of each day to participants to share how we have already been applying the Alexander Technique in educational settings. We heard about Alexander puppet plays, grant-supported work with student-athletes, the history of an Alexander-influenced school in Pennsylvania in the mid twentieth century, and more. This confirmed my suspicion that far from being a new or isolated phenomenon, many of us are already finding innovative ways to teach the Technique to children, families, and schoolteachers. What's lacking is neither the will nor the expertise, but rather the community—the ability to coordinate our efforts and learn

from each other. This is one of the goals of the Developing Self course—not merely to download Judith's and Sue's expertise to our brains (which is invaluable) but also to create community and grow together.

To this end, we also had the benefit of two wonderful guest lectures, the first from Dr. Theodore (Ted) Dimon of the Dimon Institute in New York. Ted spoke of his background in education and his current work at the Teachers College at Columbia University. He also brought along Tara Fenamore, a recent graduate of his training course, who is currently at work on her PhD in Education at Columbia, researching "psychophysical education," with Ted as her advisor. One thing that particularly stood out to me about Ted's talk was his pinpointing the acquisition of grapho-motor skills (i.e., writing) as a key time when children's use begins to deteriorate. I have observed this in my five-year-olds hunching over the paper as they learn to write. I despair that their (wonderful) teachers don't notice this and thus do nothing to prevent it. (I try, of course, but five-year-olds already don't want to hear things from their mother!)

Fortunately, this sticky wicket of writing wasn't all "academic," as Sue later took us through her brilliant method of attending to use while practicing grapho-motor skills. Working with a partner, we each had the opportunity to be student and teacher, as we learned to hold our pencil without strain and repeatedly draw around a large infinity symbol ("lazy 8") without losing poise, holding the breath, or stiffening the neck.

Peter Buckoke, Judith's husband, gave a second fascinating lecture. He is also an Alexander Technique teacher on the faculty at the Royal College of Music, and he gave us a fascinating history of the Alexander Technique at the Royal College. We learned how Wilfred and Marjory Barlow first became involved at the Royal College and then, years later, how Peter and his colleagues have been able to rebuild the Alexander Technique program that had atrophied in the decades following the Barlows. It is now a robust system from first-year through graduate study.

Each day on the Developing Self course was long and full, but never grueling. We took lunch and tea breaks and had an extended lie-down after lunch. We began morning and afternoon sessions with warm-up activities and ended the day with flowing movements. This *non-end-gaining* structure made a strong impression on me. It reminded me that a humane pace makes for better teaching and learning (not to mention parenting).

As I stepped out into the golden hour following the final day of the workshop, rain clouds starting to break up, I wondered: Is it an extraordinarily beautiful evening? Or has an experience of learning put me in extraordinarily good shape to experience it? Both.

Judith and Sue will be returning to the United States in March 2020 and offering The Developing Self course in Urbana, Illinois. They are also putting together a Developing Self Conference in the United Kingdom for the summer of 2020. To learn more or sign up for their newsletter, visit thedevelopingself.net.

Misha Magidov (1929–2019)

by John A. Baron



Misha Magidov with Marjory Barlow

MISHA MAGIDOV DIED IN HIS HOME in Zikhron Ya'akov, Israel, on May 28, 2019 at the age of ninety. He is survived by two children, Avi and Roni, and leaves behind many friends, students, and colleagues in the Alexander world.

Writing an obituary of a friend or a colleague is a way of bringing them back into life, meditating on past times: moments of laughter perhaps, profundity, of teaching, of learning, of kindness—how they affected us and others, inner smiles. Many in the Alexander community have their memories of Misha to recall. I present my own as a way of connecting to you via my memory of Misha.

Misha made the Alexander Technique his passion in life —*no doubt about it*. Even in writing this phrase, —*no doubt about it*, I hear it in an Israeli accent. It was, of course, a phrase he used many times when explaining countless aspects of the Technique because to Misha there really was —*no doubt about it*. He lived it, verified it through experience, was fiercely protective of its integrity, and he loved it.

I last spoke to him in September 2018. It was just after the Chicago Congress where I had several conversations about Misha with colleagues and friends, many of whom I hadn't seen for many years. After this, I decided to telephone him upon my return.

"Hey, Misha, it's John." Pause. (Having the name John doesn't always get immediate recognition). Then, "Baron." What followed were familiar sounds of recognition and emotional gusts of welcome that were just *so* Misha. It was as if an orchestra had just struck up. We then chatted for quite a while, swapping news and stories. His sense of humor was still obviously intact despite the medical challenges he was facing at the time.

I first got to know Misha through his wife Judith (who died fourteen years ago) after I'd met her in London in 1980. I remember one particular evening from this time. Having dinner at their house in Hendon with a couple of other friends, we listened to Judith recount harrowing stories of her life as a very

young girl in Belgium and then in France, where she lost both parents. After the war she moved to Israel, eventually meeting and later marrying Misha there.

As I had already studied the Alexander Technique with Dick and Elizabeth Walker, who had given me a solid foundation and interest in the Alexander work, it didn't take long for me to begin taking lessons with Misha regularly and for quite a while. On one of these occasions, my car broke down as I was on my way to my lesson. I called him from a payphone and told him I couldn't make the lesson.

"Misha, I'll pay for the lesson but I can't possibly..." He took no notice.

"Where are you?"

"I'm about three miles away."

"Where? The address?"

I told him.

"I'm coming."

And he did. Complete with toolbox and sleeves rolled up.

"I was going to have it towed."

"What you doing that for?"

And he disappeared under the hood. Twenty minutes or so later he reemerged, hands black with oil, and a smile.

"Ok, follow me back home, and we can have our lesson!"

And I did. And we did.

Misha was born in a small village in Palestine in 1929. His family often moved in those early days to help found the fledgling country. His grandfather had initially moved there in the 1890s as part of the first Zionist immigration. His father: a guard of Jewish settlements in Palestine. His mother built roads and helped to establish schools and women's labor unions.

It must have been a tough life for the Magidov family. Misha's grandfather established Yavne'el, near the Sea of Galilee, a *moshava* (Jewish community settlement pre-kibbutz), by drying up malaria-riddled swamps there. He had eleven children, of whom only five survived. The story goes that Misha's grandmother said to him, "Let's get out of this godforsaken place." He replied, "A pioneer does not leave his land."

With this background, it is easy to see how Misha fervently embraced the ideals of early twentieth-century Israel with its humanistic, socialist, "back to the land" ideals, commitment, and pioneering spirit.

One story he recounted from his early childhood illustrates some Misha characteristics. Dared by his young friends to enter a field with a scary bull in it, he thought he'd show them how it was done, and did. However, the ending gave him more than he'd bargained for. Unexpectedly (to him), the bull charged. Apparently, Misha ran as fast as he could, but unfortunately, not quite as fast as the bull. The story has a hero's ending, but not without a little medical help.

He left his home at the age of fourteen to go to Geva, a kibbutz in the Israel Valley, famous for its pioneering tradition and folk culture.



John A. Baron

The first Israeli, or rather pre-Israeli, army, was called the Palmach. Misha became a soldier in the Palmach, eventually rising to the rank of captain. Palmach values were based on pioneering socialist ideals, which Misha held dear throughout his life. He also lived for a while in Misgav Am, a kibbutz in northern Israel. For a time, he worked there driving a bus, which in the 1950s was considered a valuable service in the

new Israel. It was around this time that he came into contact with Shmuel Nelken and, through him, the Alexander Technique.

Shmuel Nelken was to become an important influence in Misha's life. He was Misha's first Alexander teacher, having qualified in London with Patrick Macdonald. Shmuel influenced several of his Israeli Alexander Technique students to follow his example and move to London to train with Patrick Macdonald. Many, including Misha, did: Noam Renen, Rivka Cohen, Nelly Ben-Or, Giora Pinkas, Zeev Tadmor, Shaike Hermelin, Yehuda Kuperman, and Shoshana Kaminitz. (Judith Magidov initially trained with Shmuel in Israel, eventually completing her studies with Misha in London.)

In true pioneering spirit, Misha arrived in London in 1961 with Judith and their two children in tow, found an apartment in West Hampstead, took in two lodgers to help with the bills, and began his quest to become an Alexander Technique teacher. During this time, he developed a deep admiration for Patrick Macdonald, both personally and professionally, an admiration that would last his entire life. Perhaps Macdonald and Misha shared qualities they both valued: straight-forwardness, plain-speaking, and a strong dislike of "blah blah and bs."

Life was financially challenging in these early days, with a wife and two kids to support, school fees to find, yet still having to meet all living expenses. One day Misha happened to rip his shirt in class, which meant having to buy a new one. The next day Macdonald brought two very wrinkled shirts into class he just happened to have "found." He brusquely threw them at Misha, muttering something or other. Later Misha discovered that the shirts were brand new. Macdonald had bought them, quickly soaked them, wrung them out, and then thrown them at Misha.

After qualifying as a teacher, he moved back to Israel with the family and opened up a practice there. He continued to develop his teaching skills, meeting regularly with peers to exchange work (a practice he continued to insist trainees and teachers alike follow). Together with the then "Israeli Group" of teachers, he helped bring Macdonald to Israel in 1967. Because Misha just loved to travel and to be closer to Macdonald, it was back to London for four more years in 1973 and after that, back to Israel. Still on the go, Judith and Misha then moved to Los Angeles in 1980. After a short while though, they decided life in the USA was not for them, and chose to return once again to Israel, but via London. It was while they were in London at that time that Misha was persuaded just to open up his own training school there. And the rest is history.

And so the North London School for the Alexander Technique got started, first in Hendon and then moving to Golders Green.

In a relatively short time, Misha had established two training classes—one morning, the other evening. And sometimes before, in between, or after classes, he would give private lessons. Not stopping there, he also taught Saturdays. I suppose one could say that was the extent of his commitment to spreading the news and teaching the work. He once told me that every morning he woke up feeling so pleased because he was a teacher of this work.

Some individuals seem to cross our paths at particular moments, their influence making complete changes in the way our life eventually turns out.

One day in a lesson:

"Why are you bothering doing all this business work? You should become an Alexander Technique teacher instead."

I probably looked to the skies thinking he was just pitching me on his training school. At that time, I'd no thought or intention of ever being an Alexander Technique teacher.

"Do you know what 'Proteczia' means? If you become an Alexander Teacher I give you Proteczia!"

Proteczia is Hebrew for special consideration—as in going to the head of the queue, or even "protection" (a nice kind of mafia deal).

A little later and on a whim, which I never really understood, I decided to give up the plans I had back then, and somehow ended up enrolling in his school.

The classes at the training school emphasized the development of skill. As soon as class began, it was straight to work. Misha would work on every trainee; then trainees would work on him. He taught in a clear, encouraging way, interweaving Technique principles while developing the art of "giving" directions. He often said this work was more of an art than a science. He liked to emphasize "flow," effortlessly and energetically guiding the pupil through various procedures so they could experience and embody the work. Like Macdonald, Misha objected to only using momentum to get the pupil out of the chair. They needed to use direction, a point he liked to hammer home whenever the opportunity arose.

When I last visited him at his school, toward the end of his teacher training career, he had approximately thirty students in the class. He eventually passed his school onto Anthony Kingsley. Many Alexander Technique teachers have qualified there and continue to do so. Several of Misha's trainees have gone on to be directors or teacher trainers: Ilana Machover, John Hunter, Dorothea Magonet, Judith Magidov, Fumie Hosoi, and myself.

Occasionally I still hear his voice when thinking "directions." He had such a distinctive way of doing so. He often used his "first person" voice. "And I say to myself, Mr. Misha, I let my neck be free. To let..." He even extended this to his students. "So, I say to myself, Mr. John, I let my..."

Misha's legacy: He will be remembered as having contributed a great deal to the practical teaching of the Alexander Technique, bringing qualities he had from his background and character into the teaching of the work. He will also be remembered by many of his friends, students, and colleagues as the unique and good-hearted character he was. Thank you for being all of that, "Mr. Misha."

Avi Magidov kindly helped in providing details of his father's life for this obituary.

Letters

Responses to Jean M.O. Fischer, “A History of Magnus in the Alexander Technique,” *AmSAT Journal* N°15 (Summer 2019): 29–35

DEAR EDITOR,

We would like to offer a scientific perspective to complement Jean Fisher’s fascinating historical account of how Magnus’s neck reflexes came to be a popular yet inappropriate explanation of how the Alexander Technique works. The neck reactions discovered by Magnus, such as the symmetric and asymmetric tonic neck reflexes, have not been of substantial scientific interest for decades and are no longer considered fundamental to motor control. Using such neck reflexes as an explanation for the Alexander Technique is viewed by scientists as highly suspect and will continue to hurt our credibility.

Because of their near absence in healthy adults, it is unlikely that these neck reflexes are relevant to normal posture and coordination. Magnus’s neck reflexes aren’t present or occur only very slightly after infancy in the absence of brain damage. If you are a neurotypical adult, when you turn your head left you don’t sway rapidly rightward, nor does your left elbow flex and right elbow extend, as occurs for instance with cerebral palsy. In fact, turning a healthy adult’s head fully left (by 90°) changes limb position by only a couple of degrees at most.¹ Magnus studied brain-damaged animals precisely because this damage causes the neck reflexes to be prominent and reliably manifest.

What then is the role of neck reflexes in healthy adults? As Jean describes, Magnus and others² tried to show that neck reflexes inform everyday activities, for example by looking at how a baseball catcher’s arms are positioned when he looks right. However, such studies have been unconvincing because the effect—if present at all—is unreliable. There are many possible explanations as to why the Magnus reactions exist in infants. Maybe neck reactions serve to subtly inform or train coordination. Alternatively, these neck reflexes may just be an artifact of immature or damaged brains. In any event, it is important to understand that neck reflexes are not considered the powerful determinants of coordination they were once thought to be.

Another problem with applying Magnus’s neck reflexes to the Alexander Technique is that they depend explicitly on the position of the head. In other words, the changes in limb position Magnus observed resulted from overtly rotating the head through a large range of angles; this differs markedly from the subtle hand contact that Alexander teachers typically employ to alter “use” and which may result in a slight change in tone.

For Magnus’s neck reflexes to be valid as an explanation for the Technique, we would need a clear description of how large head rotations explain phenomena observed in the Technique. For example, one proposal might be that the Technique rotates the head downward causing a Magnus-like extension of the legs. However, the Magnus reactions don’t require a “skilled” rotation of the head—only a large one. If Magnus reflexes did underpin Alexander Technique phenomena then anyone could merely rotate the head to a particular angle. Another possibility is that the Technique somehow increases the Magnus neck reflexes, so

that head position causes greater changes in limb position. This also does not hold water—we don’t rotate the head and look for large increased elbow flexion, knee extension, or exaggerated sway. In fact, such exaggerated neck reflexes are known to be *destabilizing* and to *interfere* with coordination and balance, as can be seen in people with cerebral palsy or experimentally increased neck reactions.³ To our knowledge, no credible explanation has been put forth as to how Magnus’s neck reflexes relate to the Technique, other than a vague notion that the neck is influential in both. Instead, we can see from Jean’s historical account how neck reflexes were over-generalized and misapplied to the Alexander Technique.

Another source of erroneous neck reflex-based explanations is from T.D.M. Roberts’s book *Understanding Balance*. Figure 6.23⁴ shows a grid of animals with different head-neck angles and head orientations with respect to gravity. The aim of this diagram is to show how the combination of neck and labyrinth reflexes can explain a range of postural behavior. Unfortunately, what isn’t clear from the diagram is that this was merely a conceptual scheme and wasn’t backed up by any experimental

Neck	Labyrinth		
	Head up	Head normal	Head down
Neck dorsiflexed			
Neck normal			
Neck ventrified			

Figure 6.23 from T.D.M. Roberts’s *Understanding Balance*: “Summary diagram of the interactions between neck reflexes and labyrinth reflexes.” The letter writers explain that “this was merely a conceptual scheme ... [not] backed up by any experimental study.”

study. Moreover, the idea that such a combination of reflexes explains overall postural behavior has long been disproven. Finally, while reflexes—especially the stretch reflex—were once considered the fundamental building block of motor behavior, these reflexes are now understood to only play a very limited and stereotyped role in motor control and are unlikely to be relevant for the Alexander Technique. A motor control scientist relying on such reflex explanations for posture and movement control would be like a particle physicist continuing to rely on the 1913 Bohr model of the atom.

Neuroscience and motor control have advanced immeasurably since Magnus's time, and much of that research is both exciting and relevant to the Alexander Technique. Recent research has led scientists to reframe postural control as a motor skill,⁵ a view that is much more relevant to the Technique than reflex models. Just as importantly, researchers are actively studying the Alexander Technique itself, both for clinical effects (see research by Little, Stallibrass, and MacPherson) and underlying mechanisms (see research by Tim Cacciatore, Rajal Cohen, Ian Loram). This research has shown that the Technique causes measurable and repeatable effects. We believe that a modern scientific framework, based on published, peer-reviewed scientific studies, already exists that gives a much deeper insight into Alexander Technique phenomena and mechanisms.

Outdated science is highly intertwined in our history and a significant barrier to our profession's credibility. As a result, we have endeavored to provide current and plausible theoretical frameworks based on published scientific studies on the Alexander Technique and related fields.⁶ If the Alexander Technique community is open to rethinking its historic explanations of the Technique, they will find a growing body of evidence that not only helps explain the Alexander Technique but which grounds our practice in compelling, current science.

Respectfully,

Dr. Tim Cacciatore, PhD
 Dr. Rajal Cohen, PhD, M. AmSAT
 Dr. Patrick Johnson, PhD
 Andrew McCann, M. AmSAT

NOTES

- 1 S.M. Bruijn et al., "Are Effects of the Symmetric and Asymmetric Tonic Neck Reflexes Still Visible in Healthy Adults?" *Neuroscience Letters* 556 (2013): 89–92.
- 2 T. Fukuda, "Studies on Human Dynamic Postures from the Viewpoint of Postural Reflexes," *Acta Oto-Laryngologica* 161 (1961): 1–52.
- 3 V.S. Gurfinkel et al., "The Influence of Head Rotation on Human Upright Posture during Balanced Bilateral Vibration," *NeuroReport* 7, no. 1 (1995): 137–140.
- 4 Tristan D.M. Roberts, *Understanding Balance* (Boca Raton: Chapman & Hall, 1995), 129. Figure 6.23: Summary diagram of the interactions between neck reflexes and labyrinth reflexes.
- 5 Y. Ivanenko and V.S. Gurfinkel, "Human Postural Control," *Frontiers in Neuroscience* 12 (2018): 171.
- 6 <https://www.alexandertechniquescience.com>

A MODEST PROPOSAL

Jean M.O. Fischer's "A History of Magnus in the Alexander Technique" (*AmSAT Journal* N°15, Summer 2019) is a most welcome contribution to our literature, not only because it definitively treats its subject but also because it once again opens up the question of the proper understanding of "primary control" (PC) in our work. Actually, it is only the second piece in twenty years to do so, the last—notwithstanding Ted Dimon's fulsome explanatory series (*AmSat Journal* N°s3–6)*—being my "Primary Control and the Crisis in Alexander Technique Theory" (*AmSAT News* 45 [Summer 1999]). In that article, which provoked much controversy, I challenged the common notion in the Technique that PC is a physiological mechanism, just as Fischer challenges that of PC being identical to, or at least derived from, Magnus's *Zentralapparat* (Central Apparatus). In particular, Fischer points out that in taking Magnus's work with reflexes as a more-or-less sufficient explanation of the Technique, some well-respected Alexandrians have been less than correct in so doing. Fischer cites T.D.M. Roberts, a foremost authority on the physiology of posture and movement: "The relation between reflexes and voluntary behavior is seriously misunderstood and the postural scheme put forward by Magnus and relied on here [in a paper of Frank Pierce Jones reviewed by Roberts] is now known to be invalid."

The point here is that there is still no real consensus among us as to what PC is, or should be, in our work—an odd situation indeed for a treasured idea and associated practice that has been heralded, from Alexander forward, as a main conceptual foundation—yea, a virtual Holy Grail—of human psycho-physical coordination. Perhaps the most important aspect of true professionalism is an agreement among its practitioners on basic concepts, but, given the generally uncritical acceptance of Alexander's authority coupled with a widespread distrust of "theory" in the Alexander world, such a concord is unlikely on the basic concept of Primary Control. But it would help if those who speak and write on it would stop assuming that its meaning is self-evident among us, and make their own understanding of it explicit at the outset, so that those of us who are perhaps of lesser lights may have a better notion of the assumption(s) underlying the expressed views—reflex or skill, process or thing, for example.

Honoring full disclosure with respect to the present communication, my own statement on it is this: Primary Control is a specific coordinative process—skill—of bodily management, characterized by optimal structural dimension ("length") and minimal muscular tension ("release") in activity, that is acquired through direct experience—teaching—and conscious intention, and that is exercised consistently, if not unflinchingly, in real time.

Ron Dennis
 Atlanta, Georgia

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The series contributed by Ted Dimon appeared in the following issues of *AmSAT Journal*: N°3 (Spring 2013), p.21; N°4 (Fall 2013), p.16; N°5 (Spring 2014), p. 38; and N°6 (Fall 2014), p. 15.

Alexander in Secondary and Tertiary Education

by Judith Kleinman, reviewed by Eve Bernfeld

Alexander in Secondary and Tertiary Education: A Workbook and Practical Guide to Teaching the Alexander Technique in Secondary Schools and Tertiary Institutions, by Judith Kleinman. The Developing Self, 2018 (www.thedevelopingself.net).

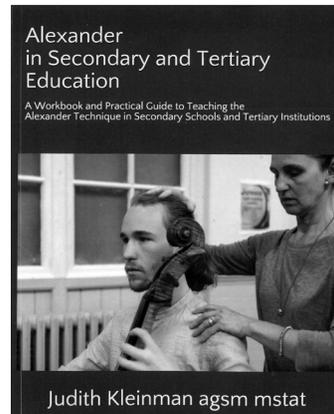
I WAS ONLY TWENTY-FOUR when I was first offered a job working with teenagers—choreographing a high school production of *Grease*. “Hell, NO!” I thought—I *loathed* high school. But I was at loose ends, and it was working alongside a teacher and director I respected, so I gave it a shot—and was gobsmacked when I actually liked it. I liked it so much, I got a master’s degree and started teaching high school drama.

I think many people, perhaps remembering how challenging it was to be a teenager, similarly balk at the idea of working with young adults. And this is a shame because they can be terrific to work with—beginning to think deeply and critically, while still possessing an appreciation of fun and silliness. Fortunately, Judith Kleinman proves an excellent guide to this adventure in her book on teaching the Alexander Technique to high school and college students. Having first encountered the Technique as a teenager at Music College, Judith now has decades of experience teaching students at the Royal College of Music and the Junior Royal Academy of Music.

Judith examines what Alexander work offers to youth. I agree that it is crucial to be specific about this, not only to get ourselves into classrooms, but also to get buy-in from the students. Many young people have as much pressure and stress as their parents, with the additional challenge of a hurricane of hormones. In her book, Judith says, “I sometimes say to young people Alexander is a practical embodied philosophy, like a martial art that helps you to be the authentic you.”

One might consider starting *Alexander in Secondary and Tertiary Education* by reading through the appendices, which

Judith Kleinman (right), author of *Alexander in Secondary and Tertiary Education*, is pictured here with Sue Merry, author of the companion title *Alexander in Primary Education*.



are a treasure trove of bullet point suggestions and questions to pose to students. Then comes a whole section of curricula for teaching secondary or university classes and for leading a professional development day for teachers. It is concrete, concise, and totally adaptable.

Do not neglect the rest of the book, however. While I found the sequence to meander a bit, there is gold in

every chapter. From general pedagogical reminders to include visual, aural, and kinesthetic information in each lesson to specific suggestions on keeping feedback positive and *hands-on* work simple—touching joints rather than soft tissue.

One of my favorite elements of the book is the way it is peppered with excellent questions with which to encourage student thinking and discussion. In my teaching, I have struggled with asking the kind of “hot” questions that lead to dynamic conversations. Judith’s questions are designed to engage:

“Most animals fix and get smaller when they are frightened. Do you?”

“How would you like to stand? Are you available for rebalancing and/or turning?”

Judith’s book is the companion to Sue Merry’s book entitled *Alexander in Primary Education*,¹ and both books are companions to their course entitled “The Developing Self: Specialized Postgraduate Training for Alexander Teachers Working in Education.”² I was delighted to encounter all three together. However, Judith’s book is still an essential stand-alone guide to anyone wishing to work with teenagers and young adults (or experienced teachers looking for new inspiration and material). And she also cautions us not to forget one of Alexander’s most important principles and perhaps, one of hers too: “It is useful to remember, while teaching, to look after our own use first and to stay in touch with the most important sense of all, our sense of humor!”

NOTES

- 1 Sue Merry, *Alexander in Primary Education: A Workbook and Practical Guide to Teaching the Alexander Technique in Primary Schools* (The Developing Self, 2018). Ruth Rootberg’s review is in *AmSAT Journal* N°14 (Fall 2018): 47.
- 2 See Eve Bernfeld’s report on pp. 52–53.

Contributors

JOE ALBERTI, PhD (Alexander Technique Center of Albuquerque, 2017) trained with Karen DeWig. He is an assistant professor of voice and acting at the University of Oklahoma. Joe is also a Designated Linklater Voice Teacher, a Certified Colaiani Speech Practitioner, and the author of two books.

LARRY BALL (Alexander Training Institute of San Francisco, 1979) lives and teaches in San Rafael, California. He taught at ATI-SF from 1981 to 2004, assisting Frank Ottiwell. He also studied with Patrick Macdonald and Walter and Dilys Carrington. For ten years he studied extensively with Marjorie Barstow in San Francisco and Lincoln, Nebraska. Marjorie and Frank Ottiwell are his mentors. He continues to teach (and explore, study/write, and practice) Alexander's work. Mr. Ball obtained his juris doctorate from the University of California at Berkeley.

JOHN A. BARON (North London School for Alexander Technique, 1985) has been a full-time teacher of the Alexander Technique for thirty-five years. He has taught in England, Italy, Germany and the US and also worked with a wide range of organizations including: San Francisco Ballet, San Francisco Opera, Fireman's Fund Insurance Co, Cal State University Hayward, the Esalen Institute, the Sundance Institute, the annual Malibu AT Retreat and Google Inc. John has been co-director of the Alexander Educational Center in Berkeley, CA, for over twenty-five years and gives private lessons from his studio in Sausalito.

Over the last four decades, GLENNA BATSON (SCD, PT, MA, ISATT, STAT) has drawn from multiple forms of dance, human movement science and somatic education as catalysts for teaching and mentoring, research, and artistic growth. Since qualifying as an Alexander Technique teacher (1989), she has advocated for the Technique by helping articulate the unique principles across disciplines. A former dancer (MA, dance education, 1978), Glenna also holds a Masters and Doctorate in physical therapy (1983/2006). Since moving to Ireland in 2017, she has been actively teaching, as well as advising and facilitating dance-for-health initiatives and art-science collaborations.

Glenna is professor emeritus of physical therapy at Winston-Salem State University (USA). She has received recognition for her clinical research in bringing complementary medicine approaches to performing artists and adults with disabilities. In 2007, she conducted the first clinical study of the Alexander Technique on balance in the elderly (with teacher Sarah Barker). Other research focus includes mental practice of motor imagery (ideokinesis) post-stroke, the Feldenkrais Method® post-stroke, and improvisational dance in people living with Parkinson's disease.

EVE BERNFELD (Oregon Center for the Alexander Technique, Rebecca Robbins, director, 2011) holds a Master's Degree in Theatre Education from Emerson College and taught drama for a dozen years before changing her focus to the Alexander Technique. She lives in Portland, Oregon, teaches at Lewis &

Clark College and her studio In Balance Alexander Technique, and she attempts to be a good role model of self-regulation to her three five-year-olds.

JOANNA BRITTON (Centre de Formation Technique Alexander [Paris], 2016) previously studied languages and music in the United Kingdom. She is currently based in Brussels where she works as a teacher and translator. She is also active as a musician, singer and community organizer in Yiddish culture, as well as feminist and anti-racist collectives.

SANDRA BAIN CUSHMAN (Virginia School for Alexander Technique, 1990) discovered the Alexander Technique at Cornell University in 1977 and began her training ten years later. In 1988, Frank Sheldon, Director of Training at the Virginia School for Alexander Technique, took his trainees to a Guitar Craft course at Claymont Court, w.v. From that time forward Sandra's practice of the Technique has been informed by the principles and practices of Robert Fripp's Guitar Craft, later Guitar Circles North America, South America and Europe. Sandra "has developed a field for creative action in Orchestral Maneuvers" (R.F.), and Orchestral Maneuvers' newest initiative "Safe Space Together." Work in the Circle allows us to explore the Alexander Technique in an inclusive, egalitarian, and challenging way...and it's fun! Sandra left her private practice in September of 2019 to focus on Orchestral Maneuvers projects worldwide. She also teaches for the Meriwether Lewis Institute and the Contemplative Sciences Center at the University of Virginia.

GENOA DAVIDSON (Alexander Technique Center of Albuquerque, 2018). In addition to teaching the Alexander Technique, Genoa is an actor, acting coach, and writer. She and her partner, Joe Alberti, have just written and produced their first full-length play, a modern adaptation of Kafka's *The Trial*. Genoa is currently certifying as a Colaiani Speech Practitioner and will complete Jessica Wolf's *Art of Breathing* in July. With Dr. Alberti, she is currently working on a new play about the lives of John and Abigail Adams.

HEATHER DENNEE (Alexander Technique Training Center, Charlotte, 2014) is a member of AmSAT and a Reiki Master. As an accomplished collegiate soccer player and nationally licensed soccer coach, Heather has developed and facilitated individualized and team soccer programs in her area that incorporate the Alexander Technique. She helps kids to be the boss of their own bodies, to self-regulate, focus, perform with ease, enjoy freedom of movement, coordination and to stay injury free. Continuing her work with children, Heather is currently bringing mindfulness programs to elementary public schools, creating classroom environments that are more calming and comfortable for their students so they may excel as lifelong learners. Using mindfulness to gain greater body awareness, coordination, freedom of movement, and strengthening the relationship between mind and body can have a profound and positive effect. She looks forward to bringing out each and every

authentic self and reducing chronic pain, stress, and enhancing performance and freedom of movement.

LISA FIRST (Alexander Institute of Boston, 1992) currently lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, where she teaches private and group lessons in the Alexander Technique. Lisa teaches nationally and abroad. She also has an MA in Dance and Movement Studies from Wesleyan University, Middletown, Ohio, and a BA in Dance and Visual Arts from Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio. She has been the Founder and Executive Director of Link Vostok East/West International Dance Exchange since 1993.

JOAN FROST (American Center for the Alexander Technique, 1983) has been training teachers at ACAT since 1984. She was Director of Teacher Certification at ACAT from 2001 to 2008. Joan maintains a private teaching practice in Manhattan, in Rockland and Westchester Counties, and in Stratford, Connecticut.

KARIN HEISECKE (Schule für F.M. Alexander-Technik Berlin, 2017) combines her practice as teacher of the Alexander Technique with her work as political and philanthropic advisor. Karin has been involved in social justice activism, with a focus on women's human rights, for over twenty years.

JOHN HENES is a member of STAT and AmSAT and was certified through STAT in 1979 after graduating from Goddard Binkley's Teachers Training Course in Chicago, Illinois. His primary teachers were Joe Armstrong and Goddard. John also took lessons from Frank Pierce Jones, Walter Carrington, and Joan and Alex Murray. John has been teaching the Alexander Technique at the Bienen School of Music, Northwestern University since 1980.

INDIRA M. RAMAN is a Professor in the Department of Neurobiology at Northwestern University, where she holds the Bill and Gayle Cook Chair in Biological Sciences. She completed her PhD in Neuroscience at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and did her postdoctoral training at the Vollum Institute for Advanced Biomedical Research and at Harvard Medical School. Her research is in the areas of ion channel biophysics, synaptic transmission, and cerebellar physiology.

THE RIVERSIDE INITIATIVE FOR THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE (RIAT), founded by Nanette Walsh, is a place for community, growth, and learning. It is dedicated to the practice and teaching of the Alexander Technique, and committed to the cultivation of greater resilience, health, and well-being in the world at large. We offer: intense personal study through a three-year AmSAT-certified Teacher Training Program (TCP), private lessons, supervised small group study, opportunities for daily, weekly, or monthly periods of intensive study and workshops, and for opportunities to be a student in supervised instructional settings and clinics. Whether you are a new student or a qualified teacher, the Riverside Initiative offers individually oriented learning based on well-established methods while maintaining a commitment to diversity, creativity, and community outreach.

HOLLY ROCKE (Alexander Technique Urbana, 2006) serves as the Secretary for AmSAT. Holly is a Professor of Theatre at Eureka College in Illinois.

ANNA SOBOTKA (Alexander Technique Denver, 2019) trained with Heidi Leathwood, Maedée Duprès, and Nada Diachenko. Anna has her own business teaching violin, viola, piano, and the Alexander Technique. She loves living in Colorado, hiking, mountain biking, fly-fishing, rock climbing, running, and slacklining (tightrope walking).

ALLYNA STEINBERG (Balance Arts Center, 2017) co-founded the Alexander Technique Diversity Coalition in 2017 and completed her teacher training with Ann Rodiger in 2017. She has a master's degree in public health and over twenty years of experience supporting communities to improve their health. Allyna teaches the Alexander Technique at New York City's Health Department's Worksite Wellness program as well as privately in New York City and New York's Hudson Valley.

Allyna's website is AlexanderTechniqueForLiving.com.

FABIO TAVARES (American Center for the Alexander Technique, 2014) was born and raised in Brazil where he started off as a competitive gymnast before running away to join the circus at the age of fifteen to become a professional acrobat. Mr. Tavares has pursued a lifelong career as a physical actor, dancer and movement educator, and since moving to NYC in 1999 he has had the honor of working and studying with an amazing group of artists and teachers. Mr. Tavares also toured the globe performing and teaching for the high-impact Dance Company STREB EXTREME ACTION for over fourteen years and has since done some regular post-graduate work with Caren Bayer. He's also been a certified Klein Technique™ teacher and a Zero Balancing practitioner since 2009. Mr. Tavares was an adjunct teacher at PACE University 2014–2017 and has done some extensive teaching (both in groups and privately) in Brazil, Portugal, and NYC.

MALCOLM WILLIAMSON (Constructive Teaching Center, 1984) studied viola at the Royal College of Music and was subsequently a member of several orchestras, including the London Festival Ballet (English National Ballet), the National Orchestra of Iceland, and the Scottish National Orchestra. He trained as an Alexander Technique teacher with Walter and Dilys Carrington, and began teaching the Technique at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, in 1985. He served on STAT's governing council for twelve years in various roles including Treasurer, Chairman, and Editor of *Statnews*. Malcolm has campaigned widely for the Alexander Technique as a foundation for music training and has been involved with several research projects. He is interested in the history of the technique, as shown by his current article, which explores ideas of metaphysical forces—instinct, élan vital, and willpower—as drivers of human behavior in a pre-Freud and Watson psychology.

Photograph Credits

Full preview article on pp. 8–9

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6	Anna Sobotka by Kelsey Vicary-Razb
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Announcements

MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS

Diversity matters to us!

At the 2019 ACGM the AmSAT community backed the launch of a scholarship initiative to help people of color train to become Alexander Technique teachers. Diversity enriches our professional perspective, continuing the evolution of the Technique and expanding the AT into new communities. The Judith Leibowitz Scholarship Fund Committee is hard at work fundraising, developing an application process, and connecting with AmSAT training course directors across the country. Please support our mission by donating and by asking people in your life to donate. Check out our progress at judithleibowitzscholarship.org.

Alexander Technique and yoga retreat in Assisi, Italy: 17–23 June

Join David Moore and Rossella Buono for our summer retreat in Assisi. Get full details at www.alexanderschool.edu.au/assisi or contact info@alexanderschool.edu.au.

Post-graduate study at ATI-LA 2020–2021

Alexander Technique teachers wishing to further their education may attend and participate in the ATI-LA Teacher Training course one day per week for six weeks, one full term, or anything in between. Faculty includes Director and Head of Training, Lyn Charlsen Klein, and Co-Directors Pamela Blanc, Michael Frederick, Sydney Harris, Babette Markus and Frances Marsden. For more information visit www.atinstituteLA.com or contact Sydney Harris at sharris@ATInstituteLA.com.

Immersion Program at ATI-LA 2020–2021

We invite serious students, including those contemplating entering teacher training, to immerse themselves and develop a deeper understanding of Alexander Technique principles. Study with the trainees, engage in the activities of this stimulating course that is noted for its welcoming, lively learning environment. Faculty: Director and Head of Training, Lyn Charlsen Klein; Co-Directors Pamela Blanc, Michael Frederick, Sydney Harris, Babette Markus and Frances Marsden. Please contact Sydney Harris at sharris@ATInstituteLA.com. For more information visit www.ATInstituteLA.com.

FALL UP! with Alexander

Come to the Catskill Mountains in New York State for a Residential Retreat for Post-graduate Learning taught by Joan Frost while enjoying the brilliant fall maples! Friday evening, September 25th through Sunday afternoon, September 27th. Limited to five participants. \$475 includes Friday and Saturday night lodging, all meals—local and organic—eight hours of class, and time for unwinding in the beautiful vicinity of Colgate Lake, a short walk away. Good towards AmSAT Continuing Education requirements. Contact joan@joanfrost.com or (203) 386-9282.

The Second International “Science of Alexander Technique” Webinar, with Dr. Tim Cacciatore and Dr. Patrick Johnson

A seven-week intensive webinar series about science and the Alexander Technique, a framework of up-to-date concepts for thinking about and communicating your work. Lectures, discussions, activities, readings, and video stream access. Special rates for groups and schools. Thursdays, March 5th to April 23rd, 2020. www.AlexanderTechniqueScience.com/webinar-spring-2020/ or contact tim.cacciatore@gmail.com.

Last year’s webinar sold out, so sign up early!

Summer@Eastman announces “Alexander Technique for Musicians,” a five-day institute for college students and adults at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY, July 6–10, 2020. Join AmSAT-certified instructor Katie Fittipaldi to explore how the principles of AT can enhance your practice and performance, prevent injuries and pain, and help you overcome performance anxiety. Each student will receive three private lessons tailored to individual needs. Course limited to six students.

Visit <http://summer.esm.rochester.edu/course/alexander-technique-for-musicians/> for details.

Tuscany Alexander Technique Retreat! July 20–25

Imagine yourself this Summer in beautiful Tuscany, Italy. Experiencing the opportunity for both learning and leisure time at the beautiful Villa Ducci. The Villa Ducci is located in a panoramic position with magnificent views overlooking the medieval town San Gimignano, less than 1.2 miles from the city center.

Immerse yourself in the study of the Alexander Technique, breath-centered Yoga, and the practical teachings of Ayurveda for everyday living. These three disciplines teach you how to create a healthy lifestyle by seeing how your habit patterns interfere with your posture and movement, your breath, the food choices you make, and lifestyle habits you have that are no longer serving you.

Each day will include:

Morning Yoga Class with breath and meditation practices.

Daily small-group Alexander Technique classes.

Individual private Alexander Technique lessons.

Ayurvedic talks on self-care, food as medicine, and working with the five sense therapies.

Discussions on how to bring self-care practices into your daily living.

In addition, there will be an opportunity to sign-up for an **Italian cooking class**, and a **visit to a local winery**. Time to explore the beautiful town of San Gimignano and the local area. Plus lounging by the poolside, making new friends and enjoying some quiet time.

Join **Michael Frederick, Carol Prentice, John Nicholls, Paolo Frigoli** and **John Baron** for five days of learning, exploring, fun and the magic of Italy!

Come study scientific principles underlying Alexander Technique in beautiful northern Idaho

We are investigating the role of thinking in postural tone and postural alignment. We also partner with The Poise Project to pursue clinical investigations of Alexander Technique for pain, Parkinson's disease, and caregiver burden. We offer MS and PhD degrees in psychology/ human factors and neuroscience. Financial support is available. Applications are due in Jan/Feb. For information, contact Rajal Cohen, Ph.D, rcohen@uidaho.edu, or visit www.rajalcohen.com.

ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM AMSAT

To place an announcement in *AmSAT Journal*

- A maximum of eighty (80) words is free to members. Additional words are 30 cents each.
- Send text to AmSATJournal@AmSATonline.org.
- Announcements must be renewed for repeat insertion.
- The deadline for ads and announcements for *AmSAT Journal* N°17 is March 15, 2020: after this deadline, feel free to inquire, as we can often accommodate late submissions. Be sure to plan lead time for announcements since members will receive the next issue approximately ten weeks after this deadline and often longer.
- AmSAT does not recommend or endorse particular products or services and reserves the right to refuse any announcement that does not meet its approval.

To place an advertisement in *AmSAT Journal*

For greater visibility, you may wish to purchase an advertisement. For more information, please contact: AmSATJournal@AmSATonline.org.

To place an announcement on the AmSAT website

To place an announcement on the website, go to www.AmSATonline.org/members log in, and click on Announcements to find submission guidelines. For more information, please email: IM@AmSATonline.org.

Join the *AmSAT Journal* team

If you are interested in helping with layout, proofreading, or production management, write us at: AmSATJournal@AmSATonline.org.



N°14 | FALL 2018
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