

EXCHANGE

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PLAY BALL!

*Spring has sprung, the grass has rizz,
I know where my sore muscles is!**

For many of us, spring means the return to a more active, a more outdoor lifestyle.

ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE AND EXERCISE

Alexander Technique does not prescribe exercises, but rather addresses the way we use our whole bodies in any particular activity. With the increased demand that sports put on our bodies, an Alexandrian awareness can mean the difference between sore muscles and disabling pain or injury.

All of our lives, most of us have heard, “*Get Ready, Get Set, Go!*” Suppose instead, we think, “*Be present, Get unset, Flow.*” Without any laborious analysis, it’s easy to see how different our bodies could feel with that shift.

Consider what happens when we “*Get ready.*” We may narrow our focus, thus missing what could be important information. “*Getting set*” means that we must get unset before we move, losing valuable reaction time. Working too hard on the “*go*” is typical and likewise counterproductive. To perform any physical task, many of us overuse the muscles we perceive as “*doing*” a task, and brace supporting muscles,

Continued on next page



ATI Vision and Mission

Alexander Technique International is a worldwide organization of teachers, students and friends of the Alexander Technique created to promote and advance the work begun by F. Matthias Alexander. ATI embraces the diversity of the international Alexander Technique community and is working to promote international dialogue. Our mission is:

1. To create and sustain open means of global communication for people to discuss, apply, research and experiment with the discoveries of F.M. Alexander.
2. To encourage the use of the F.M. Alexander Technique in both human and environmental relationships.
3. To embody the principles of the F.M. Alexander Technique in ATI’s structure and means of operation.

thus fighting ourselves. We end up driving our bodies with one foot on the metaphorical accelerator and one foot on the brake. While that may provide a (false) sense of stability, we lose flexibility and the ability to move quickly without strain. We interfere with the ability of those supporting muscles to contribute appropriately, flexing or releasing as they are needed.

Any habitual misuse of our bodies will be highlighted when we increase the intensity, duration or frequency of an activity. While tennis lessons may help us with the particulars of a specific stroke, we will stress our shoulder joints if we continue to swing with the same over-tight shoulder we usually misuse (and can easily overlook because it feels familiar and therefore “right”). Similarly, if a person walks with stiff legs, running will most likely accentuate the misuse, stressing all leg joints and the entire spinal column: the runner’s body will complain.

Balance: important for more than gymnasts. The ability to make rapid, subtle adjustments in the course of larger physical activity is lost when muscles are already tight, when feet are planted. A toddler’s walk is a controlled fall, and s/he can maintain upright posture balancing a wobbly, heavy head primarily because s/he does not tighten up to prevent falls. (Tumbles are but a part of the learning process.)

When we educate ourselves to think differently about movement and the amount of effort it takes, as athletes we can increase flexibility while decreasing reaction time and wear and tear on joints and muscles. As we decrease the likelihood of injury, we increase skills and balance, and, equally if not more importantly, pleasure in the activity.

So,

Be present, Get unset, Flow! And enjoy your exercise.

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*[adapted from A. A. Milne, *Winnie- the- Pooh*]

EXCHANGE

ExChange is published three times per year by Alexander Technique International (ATI), the purpose of which is to promote and advance the F. Matthias Alexander Technique. *ExChange* is designed to disseminate information regarding the Technique to ATI members and the public.

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June 5, 2008

From the Chair

From this chair,

I once again find myself at the computer contemplating what I will write for the next edition of the *ExChange*. I look back at what I wrote for the February edition, and notice that I focused on letting go of 2007, and moving forward into 2008. I notice that I hoped for guidance from the basic principles of the Alexander Technique in serving as your Chair. And I notice that I decided these letters would come from the heart, where I am when I am sitting in the chair writing to all of you.

So where am I today, June 5, 2008, sitting in this chair? I live in Mississippi: it's hot! We're already experiencing extreme summer heat and humidity, with the occasional relief of a summer shower when the air grows heavy with moisture. The magnolias are in full bloom, and when I rush from teaching lecture class to my dance technique class, I can't help but have several beautiful whiffs of magnolia blossoms. Have you ever smelled a fully blooming magnolia tree? The fragrance is very soothing, yet powerful. I sit in this chair a week before a major publishing deadline (not ATI related) and my fourth triathlon. And I sit in the chair balancing and juggling all of the daily information and decision making for ATI. I tell you, this is quite a chair at this moment.

With all of the stimuli around me at this time, I work to stick to principle; stay in my back, see from the point of vision, and respond only when I'm ready - or perhaps *unready*. As I stay in the process, I trust that all actions and decisions will happen as needed. And as we know, sometimes this approach can frustrate others as much as ourselves, especially when it seems that an immediate decision has to be made or action needs to be taken.

But I am happy to report that ATI is making progress by following principle. Through applying the Alexander principles, the International Committee has made great strides since the 2007 AGM. Following up on the financial commitment made by the membership to donate \$5 of every membership to translate as many ATI documents as possible, Committee Chair Tommy Thompson has found translators for French, German, Japanese, Hungarian, Norwegian, Swedish and Korean. He is working to secure translators for Hebrew and Italian. With this pool of translators all essential ATI documents will be available in every member's first

Alexander Technique International

For membership information, please contact the Administrative Secretary, Linda Hein, at the address below or by email at: ati-usa@ati-net.com.

ATI general membership: \$60 per year.
Teaching membership: \$135 per year.
Trainees: \$30 per year. Membership includes a subscription to *ExChange*.
Subscription to *ExChange* alone, \$35 per year. Please send check or money order in US funds to:

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language. Essential documents include any information pertaining to membership, membership dues, and the Code of Ethics. The next step is to tackle the information and text on the ATI website.

The need for translation has existed since ATI’s inception. In 2003, Chair Peter Fuchs focused much of his efforts on the translation issue, and wrote a comprehensive report detailing what was needed to make ATI a truly *international* organization. Tommy reports that each Board on which he served has discussed the need for translation of documents and for ensuring translation services at ATI general meetings. There was a great effort toward this end at the 2005 AGM in Budapest. Exponential progress has been made since the last AGM in Ireland, and will in future definitely facilitate the participation of the non-English speaking members, and truly fulfill the Vision/Mission of ATI:

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is a worldwide organization of teachers, students and friends of the Alexander Technique, created to promote and advance the work begun by F. Matthias Alexander. *ATI embraces the diversity of the international Alexander Technique community and is working to promote international dialogue.*

I congratulate the International Committee on this tremendous progress, and I send my deepest gratitude to all of the members who are serving in the Translators Pool. This is an important step, and I see this work opening many opportunities for ATI and all of its members.

As I experience the day-to-day frustrations of managing too many projects and events, the progress of the International Committee, and the process that allowed it to emerge, inspire me.

I thank the International Committee for helping to remind me to

“stick to principle and everything will open up like a giant cauliflower.” *F.M. Alexander*

From *this* chair,

Jennifer Mizenko

Editor’s Query

Somewhere in my reading, my training, or in conversation with a colleague, I have a nagging memory of F. M. Alexander having made a comment about footprints in wet sand. Perhaps it was in reference to aborigines, though he is unlikely to have seen any native peoples in the Tasmania of his youth. It could have been about something he saw on mainland Australia, or possibly he had observed coastal Maoris on his 1895 trip to New Zealand. This hazy memory springs to mind as a result of reading Tim Brennan’s fine article on footwear design in this issue. Yet I have been unable to trace any specific reference to this anecdote. If anyone has a better memory of its source than I do, I’d appreciate hearing the details.

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This poem was written by Carol Levin at last year's AGM in response to the fact that some Alexander Technique teachers, having a tendency to form incomplete sentences, often shift the meaning of a certain word in the process of debating principles.

Missing His Modifier

Habit has gotten a bad rap.
Habit was going along being
about his own business
routine of tendencies repeated
desirable or / unsatisfactory
one or the other
and a bunch of people
widely distributed
got the habit

of assuming Habit
was consistently interfering
interrupting everything and anything,
affirmative, practical or sound.
Like the black-hat in thrillers or the evil alien
in sci-fi Habit began to stand in for
deleterious, abandoned
by his describers.
Years of flossing his teeth
daily, beating every
deadline, polishing his house,
putting others before himself

won't get him the credit
this other cheek deserves.
Over and over again
he can't stop examining
himself in the mirror
feeling
he is going
to be bad for good.

Carol Levin

Walking shoes are a matter of on-going discussion among AT teachers and students. MBTs and Earth Shoes are only two of the many brands that have developed strong advocacy groups among our peers. Appropriately enough, at this time, our Irish colleague, Richard Brennan, has drawn our attention to the following article by his son, Tim, a product designer.

Walking Through Life with Greater Ease

Whilst having a great many Alexander Technique lessons over the last 15 years to help overcome a recurring ankle injury, I started to realise that the harmful habits I had while walking, running and standing were partly caused by the shoes I was wearing. During one of my lessons I realised that walking could be much less effort when making full use of the plantar flexion in the feet as this encourages a greater spring in every step. Immediately after one particular lesson, however, I put on my shoes to walk home and immediately experienced very clearly how my walking was being detrimentally influenced by the shoes I was wearing.

Over time, and with personal investigation, I found out that the stiff soles and heels, the excessive cushioning, along with the heavy weight and narrow fit of my shoes were restricting the freedom of movement of my foot and ankle joints when walking and standing. Moreover I realised that nearly all the shoes manufactured today are designed in a similar way!

The information I learned during my Alexander sessions became invaluable when I began studying product design at the Royal College of Art (London). For my final project I started to develop a new kind of footwear with the Alexander principles in mind and using a back-to-basics philosophy I aimed to make a shoe that was the closest thing to having bare feet. My

studies required me to reinforce an experience-based philosophy with a good scientific grounding.

During the course I learnt that the first shoe was probably invented during the Ice Age (some 5,000,000 years ago) not so much to safeguard feet from injury as I had thought, but to protect them from the extreme cold temperatures. As many years have passed on, people now over-rate this simple invention. Symbolic values associated with footwear are the overriding factor for most – the functional, simple tool has become a measuring stick of status, fashion and even self-esteem. People wrongly believe their shoes will make them run faster, jump higher, prevent injuries, make them more sexually attractive or even earn them respect from superiors and peers.

In the US alone, 75% of people suffer with foot problems of one kind or another and as a consequence most people actually spend more on foot remedies than on actual shoes themselves! Surprisingly, however, people who go barefoot in places like India and China are almost completely free from these common western ailments of the feet.

When barefoot we naturally go up onto the balls of our feet, giving us excellent efficiency in locomotion. It is very interesting to watch young children do this when they are just learning to walk. Shoes hinder this plantar flexion action in two ways:

- First, the soles are generally too stiff for very much flexion or they often flex in the wrong place. Some shoes are so rigid that they greatly restrict the joints of the foot, denying us use of the natural movements of the foot joints.

- Secondly, and less obvious to many people, a narrow fitting shoe across the ball of the foot prevents the natural weight bearing expansion of the metatarsal bones. As a consequence many people adopt a habit of walking with greatly reduced plantar flexion, and start to take a step by sinking down onto the opposite hip socket. Compared to our natural gait, this is a fundamentally different way of walking that requires a great deal more muscular effort. It also changes the path of weight carried through the body and the sequence of weight distribution between foot and ground.

To add to this loss of natural poise, most shoes have some form of a heel that invariably tips the body forward. In order to stop ourselves from falling forward, a large number of changes must be made to the organisation of our precisely balanced framework. The pelvis rotates forward, contorting the organs within the pelvic bowl and abdomen. The lumbar vertebrae become more arched because muscular balance has been upset. With each compensating adjustment our structure moves away from the line of falling weight, greatly increasing the effort required to maintain an upright position and ultimately the way in which weight is rolled across the sole of the foot varies enormously between a person wearing shoes and those without. When walking without shoes, the centre of the heel touches down first, the weight is then rapidly transferred through the lateral border to the ball of the foot. The heel then leaves the ground to prepare for the 'push-off', at which point we roll on to the big toe before taking a step. However, in many cases the most wear on the bottom of shoes often occurs on the outside corner of the heel. Lop-sided wear in concentrated areas indicates a loss of natural step sequence, caused by rigid soles with square corners.

When running barefoot, however, our step sequence naturally changes to absorb the shock of ground impact. Instead of landing on the heels, it is the ball that makes first contact, thus using the arch of the foot as a shock-absorbing lever. Next the heel is rested down momentarily, before going back onto the ball and pushing off. In spite of this, the vast majority of recreational runners land heel first much too heavily than is healthy. This common mistake goes undetected because the cushioned soles of footwear mask the sensation of impact. So people unknowingly land too hard, the shoe absorbs some of the impact, but not enough to completely protect the body, and over time can often cause problems.

Millions of years of evolution are responsible for the human locomotive system's inherent capacity for excellent shock absorption and the way the soles of the feet are loaded with over 200,000 nerve endings, which provide an accurate perception of impact. The combination of these two factors enables us to move in an energy-efficient and injury-free way.

In short, it has only taken us a few hundred years to develop foot-wear that completely messes up this incredible design!

Tim Brennan
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From the Editor

In early spring there was a flurry of activity on the ATI web around the issue of the necessity or desirability of extensive anatomical knowledge as a component of teacher certification. Opinions were warmly, yet courteously, expressed, leading several members to the conclusion that a more formal examination of this topic is imminent, perhaps at some future Congress or AGM.

For many of us who teach in academic settings college is out and the season has changed to a time of longer, warmer days. Consequently we begin to focus our attention on such activities as recreational sports, walking, and light summer reading. A recent discovery of my own is the series of historical detective novels by Jacqueline Winspear set in London in the years surrounding World War One and following the changing fortunes of the title character, Maisie Dobbs. Maisie takes some time to define exactly what her profession is because she is partly a criminal investigator, partly a psychologist. Her training is rich in detail of the personality studies going on in London in the early years of last century, at a time when FM and many other innovators would have been in London. Though the author never mentions AT, some of her nascent detection techniques parallel those used by teachers who spend their days observing and considering ways in which our students use themselves, then drawing conclusions from such analyses. Often Maisie will walk alongside her “mark” or subject, mimicking his or her poise and ways of moving so that she can begin to feel some of that subject’s emotional state, before pursuing some particular line of enquiry. It is a technique we all might consider in our daily interactions with students. Besides any advantage to our work, the series of four novels might provide some historically accurate and enjoyable summer reading.

The Maisie Dobbs novels are fiction, of course. A more serious approach to AT work and its relationship to personality recently created considerable interest in the *Times* of London when Naomi Shragai published her article, “Heal your Body and Free your Mind” (18th April 2008). Naomi Shragai will deliver a version of this essay at the World Congress in Lugano in August. I presume that, eventually, this work will be published in the Congress Papers or in some more permanent format. Those attending the 2008 Congress should find this paper both thoughtful and enlightening.

Like many other AT teacher / academics, my own late spring has been stimulated by supplementary work in summer stock theatre. Besides all of the new opportunities to study actors and their “use,” there is the added joy of repeatedly absorbing lines from the plays, in my case specifically Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Listening to that sonorous

language night after night, the major themes of the play seep into my mind, such that I find myself applying AT principles to the Friar's lines:

*Two such opposed kings encamp them still,
In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will;
And where the worser is predominant,
Full soon the cancer death eats up the plant (2, 3).*

When I substitute “inhibition / pause” for “grace” and “end-gaining” for “rude will” I have a handy mnemonic for answering that all too common question, “Just exactly what is the Alexander Technique?” Not everyone will agree with my interpretation – for many “grace” will have a particular religious meaning — but it works for me in the pandemonium of back-stage, and provides an easy transition into discussion with actors and “techies” about AT and its place in theatre training.

This issue of *ExChange* is my second as editor. Once again, I am indebted to my able student assistant, the ever-patient Derek Cash. Let me end by strongly encouraging readers to consider sending me submissions for future issues. I look forward to hearing from you, and to meeting many of you in Lugano.

Eric Binnie, editor
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The Alexander Technique as a Path to Harmony between Horse and Rider

When you ride, you are engaging in a holistic partnership with your horse. If you're feeling tense, how can your horse be soft and supple? If you're sitting crookedly on your horse, how can he move in a straight path? If you feel out of harmony with yourself, how can you expect harmony with your horse?

You can learn to release tension and over-efforting, to sit into length and depth, and to nurture a sense of inner harmony—all of which will help you to be more successful in creating harmony with your horse.

Many riders learn how to achieve this through lessons in the Alexander Technique, whose principles are fundamentally the same as those of classical equitation. Both focus on achieving integrated and supple movement, without the use of force, through the delicate exploration of balance and an easy liveliness in activity.

As you develop this postural and movement awareness in the Alexander Technique, you can also work on un-doing patterns that interfere with the best use of yourself, including emotional and mental patterns. For instance, do you ever come to your riding in a rushed or harried emotional state, or distracted by negative self-talk? You may not even notice these emotional or mental habits, but, if you have them, they are getting in the way of your best riding self.

Many riders force themselves into a “correct position,” which creates excessive tension, which in turn hinders their ability to feel. For example, “chest up, shoulders back” results in narrowing rather than lengthening the back and causes the muscles to be held in a position of contraction. When muscles are tight, the sensory nerves that are sending information from the body to the brain can be blocked from their full capacity. That is, tight muscles lead to less sensory awareness. In riding, more sensory awareness leads to a better “feel.” Muscles are needed, but they are needed in an active and toned state, not in a state that is tight or overly held.

The cycle of excess tension and over-effort can be broken by learning the skills from the Alexander Technique which concentrate first

on *un-learning bad habits* and then on gaining better control of balance and activity through clarity of intention rather than pushing, trying too hard, and holding oneself in the “right position.” As if it was “Dressage for Humans,” the Alexander Technique teaches better coordination of this relationship of head/neck/back for the rider, rather than forcing the rider’s body into an ideal shape. Alexander Technique lessons or workshops have an important hands-on aspect, in which the student is guided by the teacher into a better, freer coordination. Just like you teach dressage to your horse mostly by kinesthetic cues, an Alexander teacher uses her hands as a primary way of teaching. While we cannot recreate that experience in an article, we can explore a few fundamental ideas and principles, with which you are already familiar, regarding your horse.

The balance of the head/neck/back relationship is one that riders understand is very important for their horse. Inexperienced riders often become preoccupied with obtaining a specific position of the horse’s head and neck. This excludes the vital role played by the back and doesn’t recognize the need to work with the horse as a whole.

Excellent riders encourage elasticity through the horse’s back, which depends on a release through the neck and an engagement of the hindquarters. When the activity from the hindquarters can travel through his back, neck and head to his mouth, into the rider’s hands, then the horse is truly engaged and balanced. How do these riders achieve this?

An experienced rider may not be conscious that her own neck is released and her head is balancing easily on her “poll” (the atlanto-occipital joint), or that her own back is resilient and lively, and her legs are draping down along the sides of the horse. But this is exactly what is

happening—or her horse would not be able to respond harmoniously.

The experienced rider does this “naturally” or habitually. A good habit—that all riders can learn with mindfulness, intention and practice.

To begin to acquire these good habits, let’s take a look at how the horse and human are similarly structured as vertebrates. This will help with awareness and clarity of intention. We share with our horses a large, heavy, head (with the mind inside as command central) on the top of a long neck, which is part of the spine. We share a wide torso, with mobile ribs and limbs that swing off a shoulder girdle and pelvic structure. We share strong hind/lower limbs and mobile fore/upper limbs.

As well as this structure, we share the functional aspect that the head/neck joint influences the rest of our movement. When the head/neck joint is free (poll for the horse, atlanto-occipital for us) the neck and back muscles are able to function at their optimal tone. When the head/neck joint is free, it positively influences the mobility of the limbs.

When the horse’s poll is free, the neck and back have a chance to move with more ease and liveliness, and the rider feels this ease and activity in her hands through the reins. The opposite of a free poll is a contracted head/neck relationship that travels down the back. The rider feels resistance through the reins and in the horse’s back.

When the rider’s atlanto-occipital joint is free, the neck and back have the chance to be mobile and easy, and the horse feels this as a comfortable weight to carry. The opposite of a free atlanto-occipital joint is the head compressed onto the neck and spine, and the horse feels a

stiffness or heaviness that is more difficult to carry. When you are riding, bring awareness to your head/neck relationship, release whatever tension you can, and have the clear intention to allow the neck muscles to be long, yet free, and your head to float easily on top of your spine.

How many times have you felt your horse soften in the poll and noticed that he begins to swing his limbs more easily? If you haven't noticed this, begin to bring attention to these concepts—you will be amazed at how these simple movement principles become clear.

Another functional aspect we share with our horses is the principle of moving “through the back.” A dressage horse is trained to bring his back up to meet the rider. The back muscles should be strong but supple and swinging. If the horse is truly moving through the back, his limbs will be swinging more freely and he will be able to carry the rider with ease as well as perform the advanced dressage activities. The opposite of moving through the back is a tight, less fluid spine, which often goes with a slightly concave shape, and feels to the rider as stiffness and/or crookedness.

Riders are often trained to “sit up straight” at the expense of a supple, swinging back of our own. While it is certainly important to sit into your greatest spinal length, it is equally important to experience your own back as wide and not compressed in the lower/mid back region. If you try too hard to “sit up straight” in the “right position” you may be making it impossible for your horse to carry you with ease. If you can be mindful about allowing mobility and length at the same time, you will be

resilient rather than rigid, and you will feel that you are “moving through the back” as you follow the movement of the horse.

Riders talk about the “way the horse goes,” which includes the whole of how a horse is to ride—that is, the use of himself. A good dressage horse moves through the back, with a supple poll and easy swinging limbs, and also has an attentive, alert, yet calm, demeanor. He listens to his rider and responds with willingness. His overall balance and coordination enable him able to work effectively and with ease—harmoniously.

As riders, we can learn to become aware of the use of ourselves. We can explore our own “way of going.” We share with our horses the fight-or-flight startle and fear reflex. When we are afraid, we go into a pattern of contraction—ready to fight or run, tense and with limbs pulled in, ready to explode into action.

Using your awareness about your own “way of going,” you may realize that you feel nervous every time you pass a certain corner of the arena, because your horse has spooked there once before. You haven’t realized that your whole body is communicating tension and danger to your horse, as your body subtly (or not so subtly) contracts inward. If you counteract this reaction with an un-doing of the contraction and a clear intention to release into length, width, and depth, you will find that your horse will settle along with you.

When you begin to bring awareness to your own patterns of anxiousness or frustration, it is amazing how often you find yourself more contracted than necessary. As you practice releasing these patterns, and

opening into a resilient and responsive state of being, you will be well on the way to creating a more harmonious relationship with your horse.

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Constance Clare-Newman is an Alexander Technique teacher with an extensive background in Dressage.

Deliberation and the *Moment of Pause*

Earlier this spring a dozen faculty members at my college took part in a survey sponsored by a Teagle Grant in association with the Phi Beta Kappa fraternity. The purpose was to explore ways in which the process of deliberation took place at all in college level courses, and could be observed to have taken place. I volunteered for this study, along with professors from the Biology, Psychology, Modern Languages, Visual Arts/ Photography, Religion, Music, Art History, and Politics Departments. I suspect that the organizers of the survey were thinking more along the lines of the types of dialogue or debate typically found in seminar courses on logic or philosophy, but I saw no reason that it could not be used to explore the AT principle of “inhibition” or “the moment of pause” before movement, in my introductory level class “Stage Movement and the Alexander Technique.”

Two other faculty members of the group observed different sessions of my class, entered fully into the spirit of activities, and reported that the process of deliberation had been noticeable. I also attended sample classes led by two other faculty members, and observed very different, but valuable, examples of mental adjustment in process. Perhaps the most interesting outcome for me was the summary of student responses to questions asked about the process of deliberation in an anonymous survey conducted at the end of my course. The responses are ranked from the most positive to the most negative (perhaps simply the most bored with filling out surveys). Though I blush to hear my own words somewhat mangled in the mouths of my students, I take no responsibility for the accuracy or otherwise of their responses, though I do believe their answers to be truthful.

Deliberations Survey: 16 respondents in a class of 18 — 2 students absent that day.

(Dr. Binnie's course: *Stage Movement and the Alexander Technique*)

Q: 1 a) Do you feel that deliberation occurs in this class?

A: Most Certainly.

Definitely, yes.

Yes (seven times).

Yes, all the time.

Yes. It is noticeable when we are working in pairs.

Deliberation is apparent in Alexander.

It occurs between the observer and the performer.

Yes. We observed deliberation just this morning. It is easy to see at times if one has been taught correctly how to spot it.

Yes. I know that we practice and observe deliberation in this class.

Minimally, it occurs.

Q: 1 b) If deliberation occurs, how and when does it occur?

A: When we do different exercises I can observe when someone is focusing on their next task. It can be something as simple as standing up.

It occurs often just before movement begins, when a person is preparing themselves for the action. It includes glancing down, slightly twitching, or a countless number of other small signals.

It occurs whenever we do anything like picking up things, sitting down, standing up, typing on the computer, singing, walking, whenever I am about to do something or even when I am just sitting, I think about what I am doing and what I am about to do. Then I make adjustments.

There are times before one makes a move that you can see or feel that one reassesses habitual movement and changes to the most efficient movement. It is intuitive.

When we do observation exercises in pairs; walking, sitting down in a chair, getting up and down the stairs.

When one person is moving, the other observes, and then they come together and talk about the observations and how different movements made the other person feel.

Deliberation occurs when something in the body is changing. You can observe people and note when they practice deliberation. Many people blink more when deliberating.

Whenever you move in a different way from what you are used to, your body reacts, however subtly, and it is evident to observers.

The moment before you move or start an action you have to inhibit an habitual response and to choose the response that puts less stress on your body.

When moving through space it is required of us to keep an awareness of our bodies and whenever we sense a flaw in the way we carry ourselves, stop and correct any poor usage. This is known as “the moment of pause.”

Deliberation occurs when you are about to do something. That second before you do the action you are deliberating on how to do it.

When doing an unfamiliar action or trying to do a simple action while using the right technique, acting.

All the time, sometimes without even being fully awake.

Whenever we change centers of balance or deliberately decide upon a conscious reaction to stimuli.

It occurs when instructed to do something non-intuitive, but it does not occur as much as we are instructed to look for it.

While deliberation does occur before movement, it does not seem terribly significant. For example, while you do have to think in order to stand up from a chair, it does not seem as though that requires much deliberation.

Q: What skills are you learning in this course that you feel will be applicable to other situations in your life now and in the future?

A: I think this class has made me much more aware of the way my body moves and more aware of my surroundings.

Working with others in group presentations, constructive criticism (giving and taking), trying to move properly without strain, listening skills.

I am learning how to adjust my body in different situations in order to relieve stress. I am also learning how to be more efficient with my body while singing or sitting down, getting up. I am able to save energy by becoming more efficient with my body.

Because it is a movement class, I feel that many of the skills will be (and already are) applicable to my daily life. Alexander presents a technique to make a person more aware of his/her body and associated movements.

How to walk in a more efficient way, how to pick up things. Basically, I learned how to protect my lower back.

I am learning to slow down and relax which is quite helpful to my immune system. Stress can have a bad effect on one's health.

I have learned to let my body be free and natural. This could be used in all aspects of life because all bodies are continuously working.

“Freeing the neck” – it allows for better poise and more comfort in general.

Ways of movement to limit the stress placed on my body, as well as ways to release stress already present and built up in previous years. Being able to know your body position in space as well as how to place less stress on it is something that will be vital in future years, especially as technology requires us to move less and less.

Poise, which is a complement to good posture, combined with the moment of pause, enable both a greater ease of motion and an ability to stop and consider one's motions before continuing.

I have learned how to elongate my spine and free my neck. This allows my body to move easier and more freely. When I am relaxed my movements cause less strain.

Learning proper balance and poise as well as proper awareness of the stage and audience.

To be good to your body, embrace opportunities and take advantage of healthier methods to move your body about.

It will be a key to my future in the theatre. For the present, it helps me speak louder.

I feel that what I am learning will probably help to prevent major back and neck pain later in my life, as long as I make sure to adhere to the Alexander Technique.

Not many.

This summary has now been collated with those of my colleagues in the study group and sent on to the external organizers in support of an application for a follow-up study with supporting grant. With the exception of one rather “cool” student, who seems to have felt that to dignifying movement studies with the philosophical trappings of “deliberation” was somewhat fanciful, I found that integrating this study into my course was not disruptive in any way. In fact, it seems to have benefited most of the students, in that it kept reminding them of basic principles. Several of the students were taking courses from other faculty members in the study group, so they were quite used to being asked to take cognizance of deliberation in process, and found comparisons between this mental activity in one course and another enlightening.

For me, the constant reminder kept recalling one of the seminal moments in my own understanding, when I was able to visit the late Erika Whittaker in her Edinburgh home shortly before she died. Even at her advanced age, and having just recovered from a fall, her magisterial poise was the epitome of “good use.” When discussing her memories of the early days in F. M’s. training course, she kept returning to the crucial importance of “saying ‘No’ to the first impulse,” or the “moment of pause.” She was a little troubled by all the accretions that had been added to AT basics in recent years, and kept encouraging me to remember the importance of the pause in my own teaching and personal use.

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Colleagues, Teacher Trainees, and Friends

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With best wishes from your Congress Team: Michael D. Frederick, Jule Gartzke, Rosa Luisa Rossi, and Judy Stern.

Board of Directors: Michael D. Frederick, Rivka Cohen, Doris Dietschy, Jean M.O. Fischer, Michael Fortwängler, Ora and Shmuel Nelken, Frank Ottiwell, Lucia Walker.

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

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

Our mission is:

1. To create and sustain open means of global communication for people to discuss, apply, research and experiment with the discoveries of F.M. Alexander.
2. To encourage the use of the F.M. Alexander Technique in both human and environmental relationships.
3. To embody the principles of the F.M. Alexander Technique in ATI's structure and means of operation.

About the Alexander Technique

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

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

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

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

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