

**ANALYSIS OF TRAINING OF
THE SPECIALISED USE OF THE HANDS
IN ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE TEACHING**

BY CAROLYN NICHOLLS BA (HONS), MA, MSTAT



The following document is the original thesis submitted to The University of East London in 2003

Carolyn Nicholls was awarded a distinction for her innovative work. Comments from the academic board included:

“I thought this was a very interesting and exceptionally well-written piece of creative writing. The approach is one of the best pieces of reflective writing I have seen from a Master’s student. With the CD and journal article it left me in no doubt about the high practice standards of the candidate.”

The one act opera **Gravity and Light** was performed at the 7th International Congress of Alexander Teachers in Oxford Town Hall in August 2004

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by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of

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I declare that while registered as a candidate for the MA by Work Based Learning degree, I have not been a registered candidate or enrolled participant for another award of this or any other academic or professional institution and that my dissertation is based on my sole research. The material has not been used in any other submission for an academic award.

University of East London

Abstract

Gravity and Light

ANALYSIS OF TRAINING OF THE SPECIALISED USE OF THE HANDS IN ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE TEACHING

by Carolyn Nicholls BA(Hons) MSTAT

Supervisors: Susan Ryan and Jacqui Potter
Department: School of Health and Bioscience

The Alexander Technique is taught to a diverse range of individuals for diverse reasons, yet practitioners will teach a client who presents with back pain in the same way they would teach a client who wishes to enhance a musical skill. Central to the teaching is the use of the teacher's hands on the client.

This study examines how the skill of using the hands as an Alexander Technique Teacher is taught and learned. The purpose of the study is to analyse and interpret the factors involved in acquiring this skill; the relationship of this skill to the individual's own Use, the significance of this skill in relation to teaching and learning The Alexander Technique and the significance of this skill as an aspect of teacher training.

The study examines data collected by video recording and tape-recorded interview. Participants were novice and advanced students in a learning situation with two experts, and an experienced teacher giving a lesson to a client. There is a 15-minute CD/Video edited compilation, entitled *Hands Up! How Alexander Teachers learn to Use their Hands* accompanying the study for educational purposes. Full material is stored in retrievable archive form.

An article entitled *Helena's First Lessons*, for the professional publication **The Alexander Journal** is submitted alongside the study. This is written in the form of a diary of lessons from the teacher's perspective, describing the use of the hands on a pupil and how that skill is incorporated through the course of lessons.

The Alexander profession is currently engaged in producing National Occupational Standards. The study and the accompaniments serve to inform both the Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique (STAT) and external bodies. The study identifies developmental milestones in learning and suggests how this recognition can enhance future training. This is the overall objective of the study.

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A MAP OF THE TERRITORY

This study necessitated unravelling my own Alexander history. I explored a timeline of my experiences and the stages I have gone through. It identifies significant events in my personal and professional development in respect of the Alexander Technique. The timeline serves as a map to the territory surrounding the study.

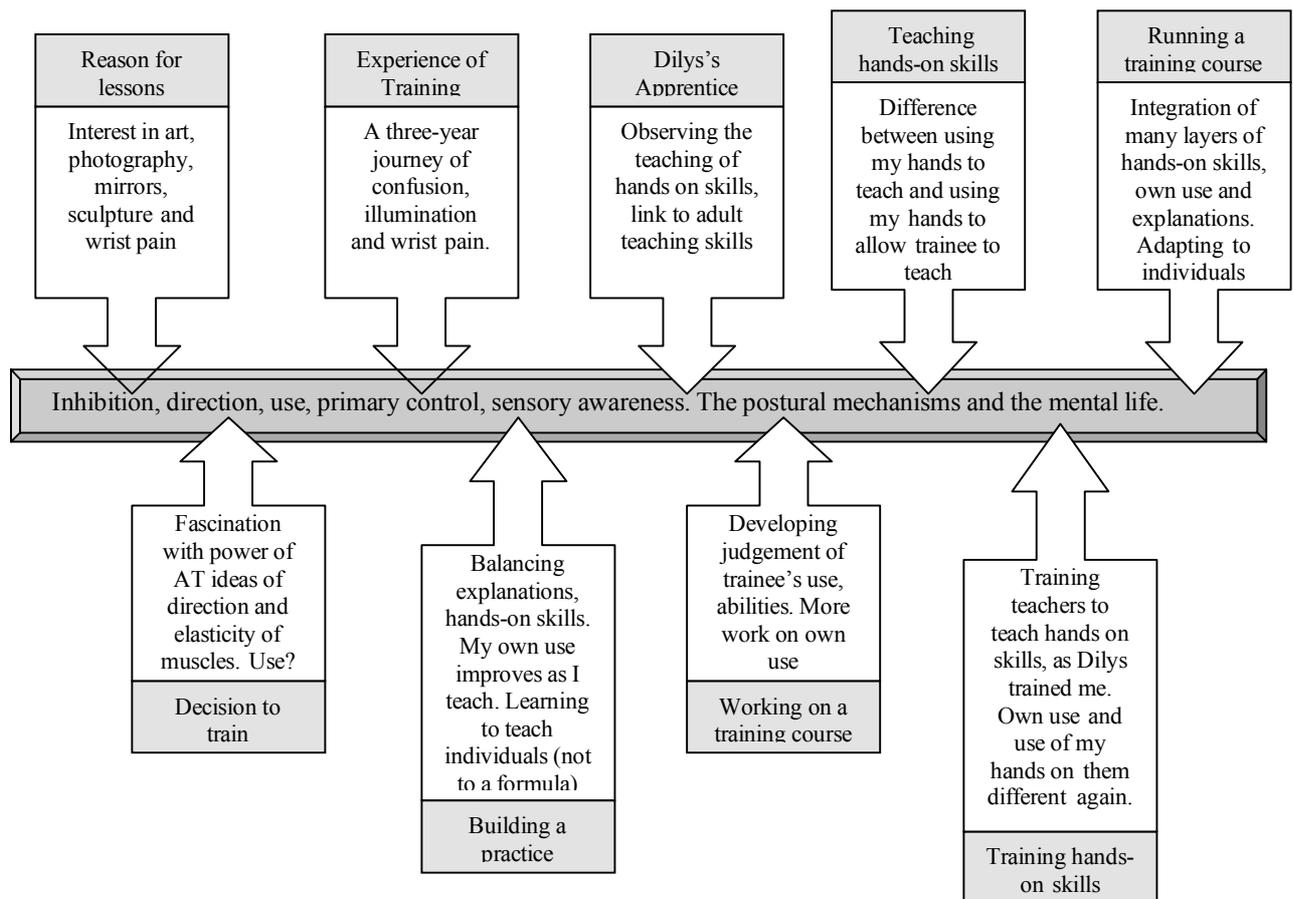


Fig. 1. My Alexander Timeline of Learning

The principle of the timeline is a concept developed through the study. It serves to both establish the perspective of the researcher and act as a map of learning milestones. Its development and use will be discussed in chapter 4 (study results). The centre bar of the diagram is the essence of the Alexander Technique. It represents the principles that one returns to again and again throughout learning teaching and researching the Alexander Technique. The boxed arrows depict significant moments, milestones of experience and learning that took me from novice to experienced practitioner, trainer and researcher. This map encompasses the whole of my Alexander experience to date. In the study I identify milestones relating to the three-year training process that can be used for curriculum development and student moderation.

Chapter 1

OVERTURE
(Introduction)

GRAVITY AND LIGHT

An Opera based on The Alexander Technique.

In one Act

Or

Analysis of training of
the specialised use of the hands
in Alexander Technique teaching

The Mirrored Chamber

The opera tells the story of Emily, a young girl who has a burning ambition to practise magic. She has heard of a powerful magician named Frederick, who had the ability to transform people with the touch of his hands. He was a mysterious figure, who had spent many years locked in a room gazing at his own reflection in mirrors. Mirrors were all around, revealing secrets that he alone could understand¹. He helped the lame to walk and the stutterer to speak². He freed the sick from their prison of pain, and helped the breathless to breathe³. He enlivened the minds of the dull and caused the philosopher to think yet more deeply⁴. He was a strange

¹ Alexander 1932 The Use of the Self. ch.3 *Evolution of a Technique*. Alexander describes a ten-year period of self-observation using mirrors.

² Alexander 1932 The Use of The Self ch.4 *The Stutterer*

³ Alexander 1995 Articles and lectures v *A Respiratory Method*

⁴ Alexander 2002 Aphorisms. 'I don't care what man you bring up, Socrates or anyone else: you will find gaps and holes in his thinking. Let me co-ordinate him and you will not find gaps and holes in his thinking'.

and powerful man, now partly wrapped in the mystery of the past; his innermost secrets known only to a few. His hands brought about the transformations he made, and Emily wondered if she too could perform his most powerful spell; transforming gravity into light.



Recitativo Secco When Australia celebrated its Bicentennial in 1987 it recognised the achievements of 200 hand picked Australians. Alexander was one. Near his birthplace in Tasmania there is a large stone with a plaque on it, which reads:

On a nearby property
was born
FREDERICK MATTHIAS ALEXANDER
20 Jan 1869 – 10 Oct 1955
FOUNDER OF THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE
DISCOVERER OF FUNDAMENTAL FACTS ABOUT
FUNCTIONAL HUMAN MOVEMENT
ONE OF THE
“200 PEOPLE WHO MADE AUSTRALIA GREAT”

Backdrop to the study

In the year 2004, the Alexander Technique will have been taught in England for 100 years. Our society is currently producing National Occupational Standards, reviewing current Continuing Professional Development (CPD) practice and raising professional standards. In 2003, training courses are still very small, ranging in number from 4 to 30 students and the practical aspect of training is largely informed by oral tradition, because there is very little written material available.

The Study

This study examines how the skills of using the hands as an Alexander Technique teacher are taught and learned (Frederick the magician's secret). The aims are to identify how these skills evolve and are nurtured in the training process, (Emily's journey) and to produce a report that reflects and informs current training methods.

The report is for the consideration of the Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique (STAT) council, in particular the Training Course Committee, (TCC) which oversees training programmes. Training programmes have been running since Alexander began to train people in 1931. What began as a single programme run by one man with few assistants has evolved over time into programmes running world wide, with affiliated societies in Australia (AUSTAT), USA (AMSTAT) Germany (DFLAT) Israel (ISTAT) Canada (CANSTAT) and France (FSTAT), with other countries beginning to form their own societies.

Questions the study seeks to address are:

- What are the parameters in which learning this skill can take place
- How is this skill acquired

- What factors are involved in teaching this skill
- What factors are involved in learning this skill

Context and Historical Background

Although the focus of the study is on the use of the hands in teaching, it is helpful to understand what the Alexander Technique is and how it is taught.

Alexander's personal history

Frederick Matthias Alexander was born in Wynyard, Tasmania in 1869. His early life was hampered by ill health, particularly respiratory problems. He was a premature baby (seven months) and in 1869 survival of premature birth was unusual. Ill health led to him being educated at home and through his tutor he came to love the theatre and acting. He became a reciter and actor with a particular passion for Shakespeare. Early on in his career he experienced severe vocal difficulties and it was in overcoming his own problems that Alexander made the discoveries that formed the foundation of his Technique.

Alexander wrote four books, in which he outlined the discovery and scope of his work. The titles of the books give some indication of the breadth of his vision. These books, in the order in which he wrote them, are:

Man's Supreme Inheritance. Conscious Guidance and Control in Relation to Human Evolution in Civilization (1910)

Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual (1923)

The Use of the Self. Its conscious direction in relation to diagnosis, functioning and the control of reaction (1932)

The Universal Constant in Living (1946)

The most comprehensive account of Alexander's discoveries can be found in The Use of the Self. His chapter 'Evolution of a Technique' describes how his practical experiences showed that '

it is impossible to separate 'mental' and 'physical' processes in any form of human activity' (Alexander 1932, 3).

When reading the precise and persistent steps he took in overcoming his problems it is useful to remember that his pioneering background would have contributed towards his determination to solve his own problems.

Alexander's four books were kept in print during the Second World War and are still in print today.

Alexander began to teach his Technique in Australia in 1894 and came to England in 1904. Members of the medical profession, clergy, physical education instructors, philosophers and scientists held his work in high esteem (Alexander, 1946).

People came to F.M. Alexander for many reasons; some connected with their health, some for help with their professional activities, others for philosophical or educational interest. Alexander taught them all in the same way and said of his own Technique:

All that I am trying to give you is a new experience (Alexander, 2000 p.61).

Summary of The Alexander Technique Principles

Summing up the life work of a man and the subsequent development of his work is a major task. The following points offer only an outline of the

Alexander Technique. The focus of the study is rather on the acquisition of specialised skills than the explanation of the Technique itself.

- The Alexander Technique is concerned with the workings of the human postural mechanisms, how they respond to gravity and the effect that the mind has on these mechanisms. It is a psycho/physical technique that recognises that any improvement in the human condition must involve the conscious co-ordination of both mind and body.
- Alexander discovered that a certain use of the head and neck, and of the head and neck in relation to the back, gives rise to good co-ordination of the whole person.
- This co-ordination, which Alexander referred to as 'Use', improves the functioning of the whole person. It is effective in bringing about change on both physical and mental levels.
- Functioning includes respiration, digestion, circulation, balance and all aspects of living.
- When considering how 'Use' might be improved, the mental processes (thought) must consciously be engaged.
- The mental processes (thought) are engaged to deal with the ubiquitous problems of responding to stimuli of all kinds in habitual ways.
- To this end the Alexander Technique recognises that sensory awareness (kinaesthetic awareness) is unreliable and this unreliability is overcome by the application of consciously directed thought.
- This thought process is aimed at both preventing habitual responses from happening automatically, which we term 'inhibition' and promoting that action that we wish to take place, which we term 'directing'.

- In this way, consideration is given to the ‘means’ and not the ‘ends’ of any procedure undertaken.

Teaching procedures

When sensory awareness is unreliable, both written and verbal explanations of the mechanics of desirable change are inadequate. The Alexander Technique is taught by a trained practitioner using their hands in subtle and powerful ways to influence the postural mechanisms of the individual they are working with. Verbal guidance, given at the same time, helps the individual actively engage in the process of change.

The Alexander Technique is considered a re-education, not a therapy. During a lesson, the teacher will guide an individual through simple movements, such as standing up or sitting down in a chair. The teacher will use their hands to directly communicate with the individual’s nervous system.

Scope of Application

People in many fields for many reasons use the Alexander Technique. Neuromuscular problems ranging from back pain, neck pain, upper limb disorder to tension problems, stress management and respiratory conditions can be helped by the Alexander Technique. Musicians, actors, performers and sports men and women use it to enhance performance and prevent injury. This is because the Alexander Technique deals with man’s fundamental relationship to gravity, and how he can learn to influence it for the good. This relationship underpins every act, including things not normally considered ‘acts’ such as breathing, or blood circulation. This scope of application also makes the Alexander Technique difficult to define in terms of ‘where it fits’ in

relation to other disciplines. Essentially the Alexander Technique offers an individual a set of tools with which to deal with themselves and their environment. Most attempts at pigeonholing the Alexander Technique are made by looking at what is created with the tools (which is enormously varied) rather than the tools themselves.

The Spiral Staircase

Emily sets out on a strange journey. She hears of a wise man that, she believes, Frederick had initiated into his practices. He lives in a large rambling house surrounded by his helpers and pupils, all of whom speak a strange language that Emily can't quite understand. Keen to learn everything she can, Emily wanders through the house, meeting different characters that give her thoughtful directions. But in her haste Emily misunderstands them and she constantly finds herself climbing a spiral staircase that she thought she had already climbed, only to realise that actually, although it appears to be the same staircase, it looks different every time she climbs it, and the view is different the higher she goes.

In time Emily realises that if she wants to learn the secrets of Frederick's spell, she must stop looking where she has been looking and embark upon a strange and delightful journey into an unknown land and that the spiral staircase will take her there if she can understand its message.

I came to the Alexander Technique from a background in the Arts and adult education. I had spent many years in creative study and was also interested in martial arts, swimming and health studies. Despite this, when I found myself trying to recover from an emergency operation, neither my skills, nor previous knowledge was of any use to me. The Alexander Technique helped

me because it addressed a fundamental element of human existence that I had not come across before.

I have always been fascinated by how such profound change can be bought about in someone with apparently such little physical effort on the part of the practitioner. My first study of the work of Dilys Carrington⁵, observing her teaching this skill to novice trainees⁶, whetted my appetite not just to know what I know, but how to record what I know, how to know it in depth and how to give other people access to it.

The stumbling block is always the limitation of verbal or written communication. This is always received via an individual's sensory mechanisms, which may be unreliable. So interpretation is not a straightforward issue. The Alexander Technique can partly be described as a non-verbal humanity. You really do have to experience it, first hand, live, from a suitably qualified practitioner, to fully appreciate what is involved. As Alexander explained:

You can't tell a person what to do because the thing you have to do is a sensation. (Alexander, 2000 p.14)

Recitativo accompagnato Going back to Lansdowne Road⁷ and watching Walter⁸ take a hands-on-group⁹ was a curious and powerful experience. I was revisiting not only my own

⁵ Dilys Carrington is an Alexander Teacher trainer. In the 1980's she made significant advances in training methods. She was partly trained by F.M. Alexander and partly by her husband Walter Carrington.

⁶ Nicholls, C. (1986/2001) Notes Towards A Method for Training Alexander Teachers, an observation of Dilys Carrington

⁷ The Constructive Teaching Centre in Lansdowne Road, Holland Park London, where I trained as an Alexander Teacher.

⁸ Walter Carrington. Head of Training

⁹ See glossary

training, but also the further training I had done in order to practise the very skill I was now researching. I was seeing myself in all these people. In each of their places I recognised something of my own experience. I watched them and I talked to them. I listened to them and to many others who were interested in what I was doing, and it came to me that it was as if I were in the middle of a play or an opera. The opera was a complex one and had many voices. Each voice could be heard. From new pupil to advanced trainer, each had a part to sing. Sometimes their words were the same, as if they sang in unison, although it was clear that there were soloists whose voices were strong. There was a chorus, which often repeated the words the soloist sang.

Reflective diary Nov 11th 2002

The reflective diary, as the preceding extract shows, was where I kept my ponderings, frustrations and observations made whilst undertaking my study. I wanted to study how Alexander Teachers learn to use their hands in the powerful and subtle way that they do. I wanted to study what the underlying principles were. I am myself an Alexander Teacher, and an Alexander Teacher Trainer. I have spent the last thirteen years teaching the skill that I am now researching. Doing so has had an odd Alice in Wonderland like quality about it. I revisited my own past as well as considered my own future. I looked in and through mirrors, both real and metaphorical, trying to distinguish image from reflected image. There came a moment, or to be more accurate, several moments, when notes surrounded me, together with videotapes I had made, transcripts of tape-recorded interviews I had done, and my own memories and thoughts. These things were like birds circling above my head, trying to land in some order or other. The trouble was, they wouldn't stay put. No sooner had I got some sense of a thread that would contain my thoughts, than I'd think 'ah, yes, but...' and one of the birds would take off again. Then

the image of an opera libretto came to me, with its story to tell, its voices and the free and easy movement of a musical line. In opera, story lines merge into each other in unpredictable ways, concepts may be repeated in different ways and given different sounds according to who sings them.

Telic and Paratelic States

Many states of mind have been identified by psychologists, amongst them telic and paratelic states. These terms were coined by Apter (2003) simply explained, when one is in a paratelic state one is more concerned with the process than the destination. It is concerned with the experience and enjoyment of an act rather than the achievement of a particular aim. A telic state however, is more orientated towards the goal, is more end-orientated. Internet site www.trans4mind.com uses the example of a person riding a bicycle. If they are in a hurry to get to work, then their destination is foremost in their mind, not the enjoyment of the ride. This is a telic state of mind. If on the other hand, they are not in a hurry, but enjoying the view and the sensation of cycling, they are in a paratelic frame of mind. A key principle of the Alexander Technique is the distinction between ends and means and the importance of inhibiting or avoiding end-gaining.

Telic states are goal-directed and future-orientated. Paratelic states are process-directed and present-orientated. In the process of learning the tools that make up the Alexander technique, both the teacher and the pupil avoid end-gaining (goal orientated states) and remained focussed on the process (what's going on now). An example of this would be if a pupil comes for lessons because they wish to improve their skill at playing a musical instrument, then clearly, their goal is to improve that skill. During the lessons they would not be playing their instrument at all, rather they would be learning to observe their balance and co-ordination. They are taught the tools to work with their own balance, breathing, co-ordination, movement and

posture. It is these tools that make up what is referred to by Alexander teachers as good Use, which will enable them to play better. By remaining focused on means, (learning to improve their Use), rather than ends, (playing better), they find, often to their surprise that their playing has improved without them practicing their instrument directly. The challenge that faces both the musical pupil and the Alexander Teacher is to remain focused on means, as musicians are mostly very concerned with results and performance because that is their 'product'.

All creative arts value direct experience and process over a finish or an endpoint, nobody asks what is the purpose of a symphony, yet we do not conclude that music is valueless because it has no point.

And so, I am presenting my thesis in the form of extracts from an annotated Libretto, with accompanying programme notes. The libretto weaves through extracts from the interviews I did with the different participants, my reflective diary, and my interpretations of my study. I am reminding you, the audience, to remain in a paratelic frame of mind, to be playful, to attend to the experience and not become over-fixed on the destination.

Qualitative research methods such as ethnography allow for and respect the researcher as offering a subjective view of the research undertaken. As a practitioner/researcher I have set out my own background to demonstrate the perspective from which I have gathered and analysed my data. Sherrard (1997) in discussing subjectivity in qualitative research, suggests ways of what might be termed 'keeping track' of how all the steps along the way to producing a thesis or report are taken, so that field notes, reflective diaries, video tapes, tape-recorded interviews are referenced as being available. Lincoln & Guba (1985) discussing establishing trustworthiness in any form of naturalistic inquiry lay out a route for conformability consisting of practitioner triangulation, keeping a reflexive journal or diary and an audit trail of how

data was processed. Built into the study are measures to ensure validity and reliability using respondent and peer validation.

THE PROGRAMME

LIBRETTIST

Carolyn Nicholls (BA(Hons) MSTAT)

Born in East London in 1952, Carolyn Nicholls originally trained as an artist and photographer. A life-long interest in music and 'the way things, including the human being, tick' indirectly led her to train as an Alexander Teacher in the late 1970's. She currently divides her time between running an Alexander Teacher Training course on the South Coast of England and pursuing her fascination with creative writing and 'different things'.

Her current work *Gravity and Light*, takes its title from the two opposing but complementary forces that stimulate the human postural mechanisms. We must contend with gravity as a downward force in our lives, holding us onto the planet, and yet we have an inbuilt urge to extend upwards. This urge is both physical and for many symbolic of an inner search for understanding, enlightenment, illumination. To grow towards the light is a fundamental urge for most life forms, be they sentient creatures, or plants.

Grappling with these two forces is a rewarding journey that can lead in many directions (mostly upwards!). This piece is the culmination of a twenty-year journey that the librettist both wittingly and unwittingly undertook. It explores a crystallisation of understanding, experience and practice that extends both into the past and the future.

Chapter 2

REFLECTIONS (Literature review)

Be careful of the printed matter: you may not read it as it is written down.

(Alexander 2000 p2)

Overview

For most researchers, there is a wealth of material available to them directly relevant to their study. The task is then to sift through it to find what is most workable and useful, what is challenging and new. This was not a problem I experienced. I was underwhelmed by the available literature on practical aspects of Alexander teacher training, as it came down to my own earlier pamphlet, Nicholls (1986 revised 2001), and a few unpublished papers. This being the case I read around my topic, looking at the literature on learning, particularly adult learning and education, psychological states of mind and the way health and other practitioners developed, observed and improved skills.

Observation and response

Qualitative research has a lot to say about reflective practice. Schön (1987), describes reflection-in-action with many example scenarios. I decided to do a comparison between Alexander's description of the problems facing the golfer who cannot keep his eye on the ball¹⁰ and Schön's description of a master class in musical performance¹¹. I chose this example from Schön because of the practical nature of the tasks described. Both Alexander and Schön examine learners' difficulties, a teacher's attempts to help those

¹⁰ F.M. Alexander (1932) *The Use of the Self* Ch. 3

¹¹ Schön (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* Cp. 8

difficulties and an analysis of the method of approach of the teacher in relation to the learner's problems. It is a complex comparison but I have chosen it because it illustrates a fundamental difference of approach to learning. This difference is concerned with the perspective taken when viewing the problem.

Alexander (1932) takes the case of a golfer who wishes to improve his stroke. His teacher tells him that he is taking his eyes off the ball and that if he wishes to improve, he *must* keep his eyes on the ball. The golfer makes up his mind to carry out this instruction, but finds, in spite of all his efforts, he still takes his eyes off the ball.

Schön is describing a master class in piano given by a world-famous pianist to a young talented student. The aim of the student is the same as the golfer's, namely to improve his performance. In this case, Schön himself is the observer of the class (via a videotape), not the teacher. Schön is operating from the outside of the situation and using it to illustrate his ideas about reflection-in-action.

In observing the golfer's problems, what Alexander identifies as the crucial issue, is not the way the golfer swings his club (or fails to swing it) but the golfer's habitual response to the stimulus to hit the ball. Alexander sees the issue of hitting the ball as a 'secondary act' and that there is a far more vital act that must be considered first. This is to do with the habitual response to a stimulus (in this case the desire to hit the golf ball) being by its nature what Alexander calls 'end-gaining' (wanting to get it right, whatever 'it' is). End-gaining caused the golfer to repeat his mistake over and over again, because Alexander suggests, he relies on his sense of habitual feeling to guide him, and this is the very thing that is causing him to miss the ball. Alexander sees the problem, not as what the golfer is doing with the golf club, or his eyes, but what he is doing with himself.

The pianist, when teaching the student, takes a different approach altogether, because he starts from a different place. He listens to the student playing and he offers verbal criticisms. He demonstrates different playing techniques, he sings, he makes gestures with his hands. He plays passages and asks the student to imitate him. He offers different interpretations. Reading through the description of the master class the teacher is using a variety of devices to get improvement in his pupil. He uses demonstration/talking. He uses imagery in his language to get at qualities he is after. He also gives technical instructions about the pianist's fingers and thumb, and their action on the keyboard. At one point he says 'finger it *and* play legato'. When Schön comments on the teaching methods of the world famous pianist, he picks out the different approaches used, names them and sees them as an example of reflection-in-activity, which, from Schön's perspective is a desirable way of working that is likely to get good results, however it is applied. Schön is pointing out a process that is applicable to many subjects.

If we look at the questions of observation and response, it becomes clearer where the differences of approach lie.

Observation

Alexander's observations	Common ground	Schön's observations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The golfer has a performance problem 	There is a performance problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The pianist has a performance problem

Fig 2 Common ground of observation

Response

Alexander's response	Schön's interpretation of responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The problem lies with the golfer's postural mechanisms, not with his golf. • The solution lies with paying attention to the golfer's postural mechanisms, not directly to the performance of golf swings. • This is an indirect approach to the golf swing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The problem is one of technical ability and interpretation. • The solution lies in working alternately with technical ability and interpretation. • This is a direct approach to the playing of the piano

Fig 3 Different perspectives

The difference of approach, as depicted by the above comparison, is one of where the starting point is considered to be. This might be considered one of perspective. The golfer is asked not to focus on his activity in a different way, but to focus on his balance. It is an indirect approach to the performance problem. The pianist is offered many different ways of directly improving his performance. The golfer is asked to pay attention to the technicalities of his own relationship with gravity, his use of his postural mechanisms. Not only will this improve his golf swing, it will enable him to apply what he has learnt to any other activity. He will dig his garden with less chance of self injury. What he learns would serve to improve his playing of a musical instrument if he was also a musician. The pianist however is taught in a way that relates directly to his instrument and his craft of playing it. He could not easily transport those skills to improving his golf or his tennis if he so desired. What he learned certainly helped him improve his performance during that class, but it would not help him avoid the back pain and wrist injuries that can beset pianists.

Transformative Learning and Habit

When adults learn, be it learning to teach a new skill, or learning to cook, they bring with them a set of beliefs and experience that makes up 'them' as individuals. One of the challenges of the would-be adult educator is to 'recognise' and 'meet' their students and help them transform previous assumptions into new insights. Cranton (2000), writing about transformative learning, outlines the role of the educator emphasising the importance of helping students recognise the habits of mind that influence the way they make sense of their world. She points out that this is necessary if change is to take place. As an aspect of helping others become self-aware of limiting mind habits Cranton recognises that the educator must also be aware of their own mind habits.

Although Cranton in this instance is referring to psychological habits, her description of them being limiting and of the necessity of an educator to be aware of their own habits in order to help a student change has parallels with the Alexandrian concept of good Use (Alexander 1932). If you are going to teach someone good Use, you must first have it yourself.

Habits cut into the very roots of our being. As well as physical habits we are defined by the cultural, gender, and life-induced habits that we all have as a result of our upbringing and experience. When we see the world, we inevitably see it through the lenses of our experiences and ourselves. This will include our hopes, fears, both known and unknown from the past, formed from our relationships with others and the manner in which our lives evolved. Mezirow (2000) discussing adult education and learning strategies identifies a need for adults to learn to critically reflect on beliefs, values and ways of thinking, and that such reflections can lead to self-empowerment. He also acknowledges the influences of social, historical and cultural conditions as limiting one's life as a liberated learner.

The need to challenge habit in order to allow change was expressed by Alexander (2000) in many different ways, which could be summed up as follows.

Change involves carrying out an activity against the habit of life. (Alexander, 2000 p.9)

Models for learning

Exploring methods of learning and of incorporating learning into practice, I came across models expressed in a circular fashion. Higgs & Titchen (2001) developed a model for the creative and critical becoming of individuals, organisations and professions. The model consists of four circles weaving together, each circle representing an aspect of experience, being and learning. The four concepts are also likened to the cycle of the seasons, spring, summer, autumn and winter. At the centre of the model is a representation of a Celtic knot, used as metaphor symbolising the act of becoming. In the centre of the knot is a chrysalis, an area of creative change that is hard to define, being essentially a processing chamber where knowledge and experience are broken down and reformed in a similar way to a caterpillar breaking down its own body in order to re-build itself and re-emerge as a transformed being. This centre point is described as a dark place, an abyss.

a fertile void ...into which we must leap if we are to engage in...becoming and *the light* ...or new life and direction. (Higgs & Titchen, 2001 p.277)

The identification of the centre of the model as an abyss, a void, an uncertainty is echoed by Alexander's (2000, p.34) observation that *you can't do something you don't know, if you keep on doing what you do know*. In identifying faulty sensory awareness, and developing the concepts of approaching a task with a

means orientation and not an end orientation, and developing the skills of inhibition and direction, Alexander (1932) offers us tools that enable us to immerse ourselves in the void and to remain at the creative centre of knowing, doing, being and becoming

Bateson (1994) offered a comparative worldview. Bateson is an anthropologist and a keen observer of education and culture and of things unseen as well as seen. The holistic scope of her thinking encompasses the broad experience of humankind and a vibrant approach to education and learning. She identifies a spiral learning process that one initially moves through with only partial understanding, taken in with what she describes as *peripheral vision*. A return later to the same material or experience makes possible clarification that was not initially apparent.

Spiral learning moves through complexity with partial understanding, allowing for later returns. (Bateson, 1994 p.31)

The recognition of learning as a spiral experience is explored in chapter 4 where I link together the concept of a timeline of learning, with recognisable milestones, with a spiral pathway of learning.

Mind in Body

Currently emerging in the fields of psychology and medicine is psychoneuroimmunology, (PNI) a new science that looks at the interactions between the immune system, the nervous system, the body (responding to the nervous system) and the psyche. Quinlan (www.infinityinst.com) in an article on psychoneuroimmunology describes the work of neuropharmacologist Pert as being significant in the discovery of the presence of neuropeptides (chemical messengers) on cell walls of the immune system, thus suggesting a close relationship between emotions (mind) and health. Pert (1997) describes

the process of communication between body and mind as a 'flow of information' throughout the whole organism. She suggests;

... the body is the actual outward manifestation, in physical space, of the mind. (Pert, 1997 p.187)

Carrington (1999) in a talk to an Alexander teacher training class expressed this understanding of the body and mind as one, but a complex 'one'. He speaks of knowing that throughout the whole organism an energy is generated that neutralizes the gravitational effect, but of not knowing precisely how this is achieved.

We don't really know how it works. We do know, however, that it works....it was Alexander's practical understanding that.." the right thing does itself"...So you do have very practical reason for thinking and directing, wishing your neck to be free...(Carrington, 1999 p 84)

Carrington and Pert are both describing a complex view of the mystery of human existence. Carrington in particular is concerned with upright poise, and practical ways of working with that understanding. Pert is outlining the power of the relationship between mind and body. I think the disciplines of the Alexander Technique and PNI have much to offer each other and would be fruitful ground for joint research. PNI recognises very sophisticated pathways, the Alexander Technique offers constructive tools for exploring those pathways.

States of Mind

The Alexander Technique not only considers the division between mind and body to be artificial, it teaches a way of thinking, called directing, which has a profound effect on the link between mind and body. Alexander identified the need to pay attention to means and not ends. This awareness is echoed in

other disciplines. The concept of Mindfulness ([www. mindfulness.com](http://www.mindfulness.com)) is both an ancient and a modern one. The idea of being aware of the present moment and not judging either self or others, makes natural links with ends and means.

In paying attention to means and not ends, you give yourself a chance to respond to life differently, you create a mental space for yourself in which you can chose to experience something new. In effect, you consciously engage a certain state of mind.

In addition to identifying concepts of ends and means, Alexander went further and identified the whole area of faulty kinaesthetic sensory awareness. He realised that kinaesthetic awareness becomes unreliable so that you cannot rely on feeling to accurately inform you as to your balance and actions. In Alexander's own case, (1932) he thought he was successfully correcting his head poise, because it felt right, but he found that he had not done so. This led him to the realisation that feelings, in this sense, were unreliable. This is one aspect of his work that is still little understood outside his own field.

The Way of the Novice

As my study involves examining a learning experience, the literature on novice and experienced practitioners is relevant. The pathway from incompetence (professionally speaking) to competence consists of a journey from not knowing to knowing. Radovitch & Higgs (2001) describe such journeys as a transition of the self as an individual with an entry level of knowing growing via the practice of skills (learning/doing) to becoming a professional practitioner.

Many educators have identified four stages of learning that chart a person's progress. The first stage, described as unconscious incompetence, or not knowing what you don't know is often characterised by confidence, or blissful ignorance. The second stage is different, you become aware of what you don't

know, you are consciously incompetent. For adults who may be highly skilled in other areas this can be a very uncomfortable stage. It is however, a stage that is most vital and makes a link to Higgs & Titchen's 'fertile void'. This stage leads on to conscious competence, knowing what you do know. This stage is often characterised by success in whatever the endeavour is, plus a realisation that success is dependant on careful and conscious practice. The fourth stage, unconscious competence, is where practice has become so familiar you have forgotten how you got there. Brown (2003) discusses the four stages of learning in relation to the physical skill of Argentine Tango and says that its only when the fourth stage of unconscious competence is reached that the dancer touches the possibility of 'inner Argentine tango', an effortless mastery. Brown also suggests that people learn Argentine tango in a spiral, moving from the first stage of learning to the fourth repeatedly. He discusses the role of the teacher as one of helping the student manage the 'tension' typically experienced at transition points. When a student starts to move from unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence, they can experience this as a deterioration of skill. Offering modular training for doctors, organisers Waters, Mohanna & Deignan (2003) note that confidence drops at this stage and that practice at this level often means not succeeding in the allocated task or skill. In a culture where not succeeding is often seen as failure this is an uncomfortable place to be.

If, in a learning situation it is necessary to repeat this experience in order to climb the spiral then good management is required by both student and teacher. Brown notes that Argentine tango students often give up when their teacher can not create sufficient tension (the challenge of the new), they also give up when the tension created is greater than the student can sustain.

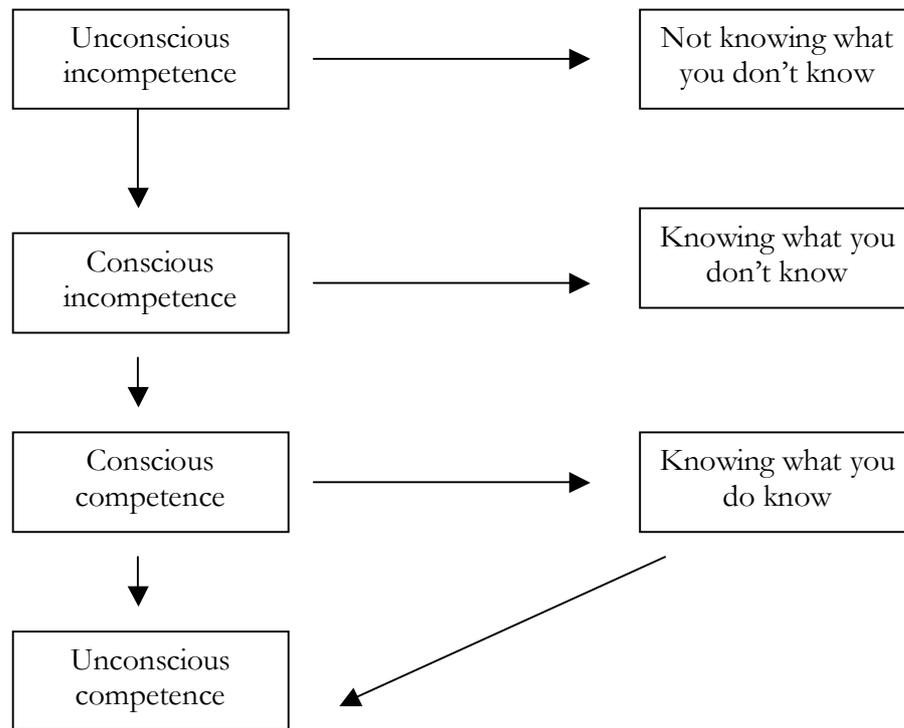


Fig 4 The four step learning path

Looking more closely at novice and expert learning, the study of Daley (1998) examined the different processes used by novice and expert nurses. Daley noted that novices tended to be contingent upon concept formulation, they spent a great deal of time absorbing information, but they also experienced fear, mostly of getting things wrong, frustration at their lack of expertise and a need for validation. Obviously this relates to the transition between not knowing and knowing. Novice learners tended to wait to be told what to learn and to ask someone else to ‘spoon-feed’ them information.

Daley identifies expert learning as being much more active and self-driven, similar to constructivist learning processes, seeking out knowledge for themselves and assimilating it in the light of previous knowledge. Experts also were keen to share knowledge, to ‘give something back’.

Literature about training Alexander Teachers

There is little written about training Alexander Teachers. A teacher must be able to give a new pupil the necessary experience. This is complex. Binkley (1993) had regular lessons with Alexander towards the end of Alexander's life. He kept a diary of his experiences and often quoted what Alexander said and did. Interested in the possibility of learning to do what Alexander did, Binkley became curious about how Alexander achieved such effects on him. Binkley questioned Alexander about this point and Alexander's reply makes it clear that he achieves his effects in Binkley by making sure that he is Using himself appropriately whilst teaching him.

Why, Mr Binkley, when I am teaching you, as I do now, I am able to convey to you what I want to convey, because as I touch you, and guide you with my hands in carrying out my instructions, I, myself, am going up! up! up! (Binkley, 1993 p.51)

Macdonald (1989) describing teaching the Alexander Technique says that a teacher must maintain a standard of good Use in order to be able to pass it on to their pupil.

Good Use may be described as maintaining a solid back and a certain upflow of the body. (Macdonald, 1989 p.69)

Both examples make it clear that the teacher is not passive, or simply telling the pupil what to do. The examples describe a process or a procedure, but not how one learns it. Taylor and Tarnowski (2000) discuss teacher training with Walter Carrington and his wife Dilys. Their conversation does much to outline the difficulties of training. Tarnowski asks if the process of having lessons is the same as the process of learning to teach someone else. In other words if someone were to receive Alexander Technique lessons intensively

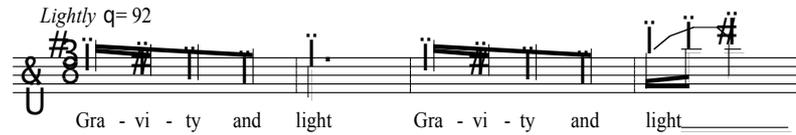
over a period of time, would it be sufficient grounding for them to teach someone else.

Tarnowski: Are there different requirements to educate somebody to become an educator of other people?
(Tarnowski, 2000 p 43)

Tarnowski's question about the link between a person having lessons for their own benefit, and a person training to teach, points the way to one of the most important things a trainee must master, and that is good Use. One aspect of training to teach the Alexander Technique involves the trainee receiving work (similar to having lessons) throughout the whole three-year course. Dilys Carrington, (ibid.) in describing her work with novice trainees points out the difficulty most people have in linking their thoughts and their actions. Walter Carrington describes the necessity for 'thinking in activity' and observes that it is an uncommon experience, and one that requires a lot of practice.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY



When an investigation comes to be made, it will be found that every single thing we are doing in the Work is exactly what is being done in nature where the conditions are right, the difference being that we are learning to do it consciously.

F.M. Alexander (2000)

Programme Notes

Outside the rambling house.

Emily has found the house and desperately wants to explore it. She has many questions and hopes the people inside the house can enlighten her. What were Frederick's secrets? How did he transform gravity into light and could she do it too?

Emily knew that the magician had written four scrolls, in which he committed his secret studies to parchment. She had managed to get copies of the scrolls and had tried to read them. But she was frustrated. The meaning of his words evaded her. She tried to do what he had done, to carry out the same experiments that he had carried out. She had to find out more.

Core Principles

In order to teach, one must understand the core principles of the Alexander Technique. These principles are concerned with the individual's experience and conscious operation of their postural mechanisms, and the role that thinking has to play in these mechanisms. We call this complex concept Use. In the opera, the skill of acquiring good, conscious Use is represented by the passage up and down the spiral staircases that Emily climbs. Bateson's (1994) observations about spiral learning as a way of further understanding an earlier experience is relevant here. Use is what we will improve when we seek out Alexander Technique lessons for our own benefit. It is also the most important factor in learning to use your hands effectively on another person. It is also a factor involved in teaching a student how to acquire this skill. The spiral staircase that Emily climbs also relates to a timeline of developmental milestones in the Alexander Technique.

The study outlines the developmental stages in acquiring this skill and examines the links between them. It analyses individuals' experiences of these stages and compares them to the whole picture. It offers a written and visual record of a little recorded skill. It includes the work of Walter Carrington, who, now, in 2003, is aged 86 and still training people. Mr Carrington took over Alexander's own training course in 1941 and is the longest serving living link, still actively training people, which we have to the originator of this Technique.

Staging (Programme Notes)

The spiral staircase forms the stage set. As well as being symbolic of the spirals of learning, where one constantly rediscovers knowledge and yet it becomes deeper and more widely used, the spiral staircase represents the spiral nature of the musculature of the

human being described by Dart (1996) and the universal existence of spirals in nature and the universe, ranging from the crab nebulae galaxy to the cochlea of the human inner ear or the structure of DNA.

Ethnology

No amount of words will adequately describe any experience, particularly an experience such as the Alexander Technique where the words and their meaning are perceived through the very mechanism that is the subject of re-education. Representing a study such as I have made gave rise to methodological challenge. Fitzgerald (1997) describes the scope of ethnology, acknowledging its roots in anthropological research and listing several techniques that can be considered ethnographical. Amongst them is critical self-reflection, which allows researchers to draw on personal knowledge and experiences, including those directly related to their research. She says

Ethnography is multimedia research par excellence
(Fitzgerald, 1997 p52)

Giving consideration to what the study was about inevitably gave rise to the problem of how to reveal what was being studied. In order to show such a subtle and complex process as teaching an almost invisible skill, I decided that it was similar to looking in a mirror, with someone standing behind you looking over your shoulder into the same mirror.

A mirror is capable of in-depth reflections, but is also bound by its edges. At some point the mirror ends and the surface it is hanging on begins. We are accustomed to looking in mirrors and we know that what we see is a representation, not an actual event. Mirrors also figure in Alexander's own story of his discoveries, and I have used this historical fact to create the chamber of mirrors for Frederick, the magician in the opera.

A mirror may offer a view of yourself, so as a researcher you are easily incorporated into the picture of the research. It is possible to point out events to the watcher at your shoulder, and allow them to see what you are seeing. You act as both participant and interpreter. It may also offer a different view of others that you can see even if you yourself don't appear in the mirror. In this instance you have two views, one real and one reflected.

When I videoed Walter Carrington (see full details below) I found myself jammed between his enormous desk and the window of his study where he was working with three students. My view of them was therefore limited and static, but I had no wish to ask them to stop repeatedly so that I could change position. Glancing round the room I realised there was an antique oval mirror on the wall to their left which gave an excellent view of both the students and Walter. So by happy accident I was literally able to frame my subjects in a mirror. I panned the camera round so that I shot not them but their reflections. When I showed the participants the film I had made, all of them commented on how much they liked the mirror shots as it was so revealing of what was happening.

The choice of ethnography was also made because of its natural links to anthropology, and the recognition that what I was studying was similar to a little known culture, or tribe, that dwelt within its own orbit, and had its own operational methods and language. As a member of this tribe myself, I was both interpreter and participant. I was looking closely at something that I did and understood, but I was looking at it differently. Ethnography became the mirror that allowed this to be possible. I had no need to 'remove' myself from the study, as I was an integral part of it.

Vidich & Lyman (1998) describe ethnography as describing people and their ways of life, viewing it as a way of discovering the 'Other'. The description deals with the early use of ethnographical writings in explorers of the New World and their recorded encounters with 'natives'. It looks at the political

and social effects that such early studies had upon the cultures they studied. Ethnographers got very involved with their studies, so much so that some 'went native'. For myself, I am already a 'native' and so I use ethnography both to describe and speak for my tribe.

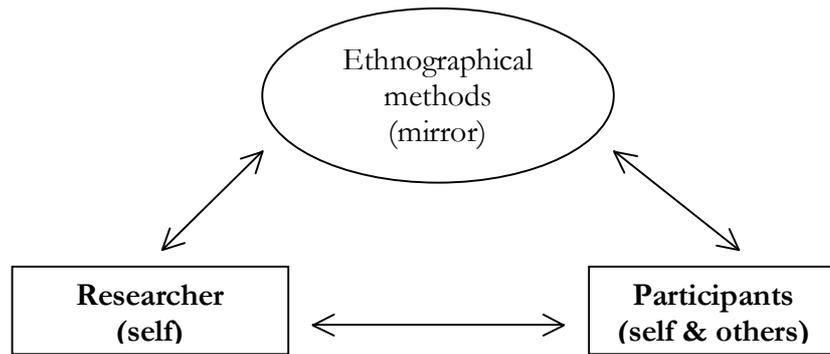


Fig.5 Ethnography as a research mirror

This diagram represents my use of ethnography. The method, perceived as a mirror, allows me to view myself and others as participants in the study and myself as the researcher of the study, In this way I can use my own and others experiences, (participant) and 'step outside' as the researcher and view things from another perspective.

Sampling Techniques

Section 1

The major part of the study consisted of a series of tape-recorded interviews and videoed observation. It is in two sections. The first deals with novice students in their first six months of the three-year training program, while the second deals with advanced students in their final six months of training. The interviews were carried out in the following order.

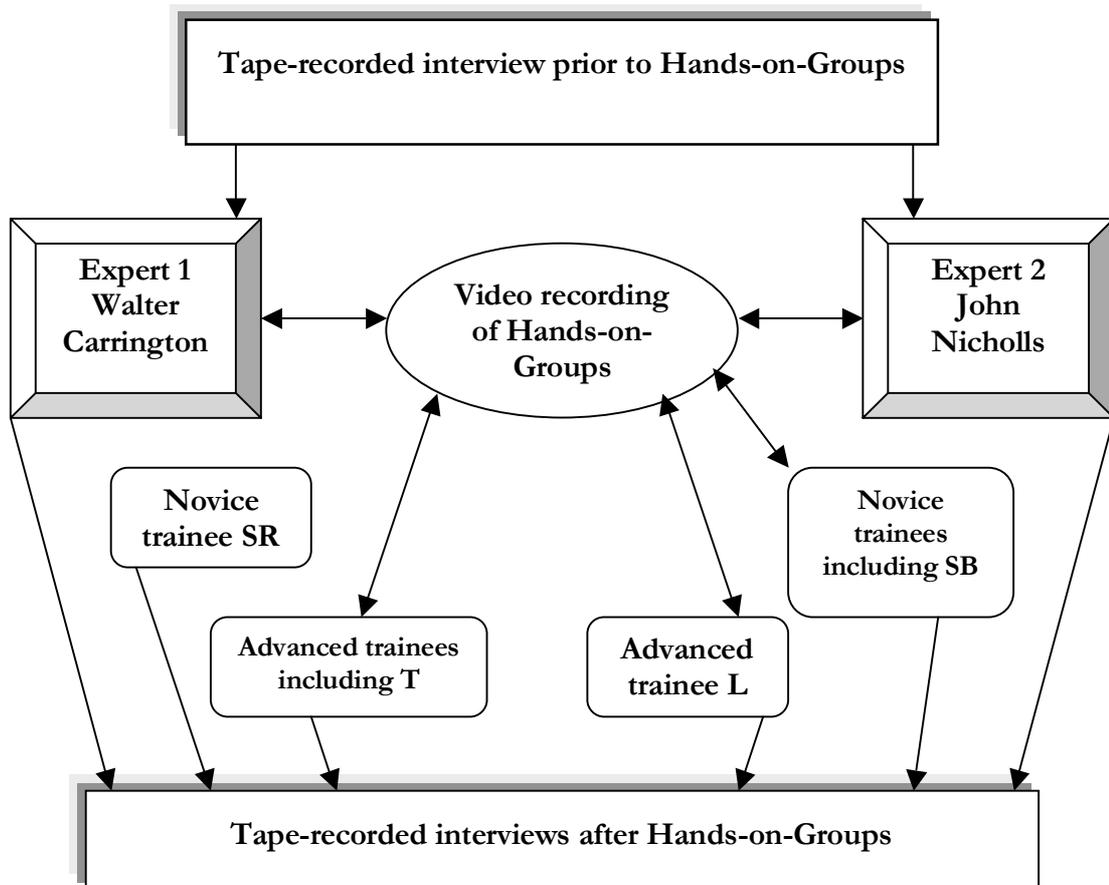


Fig.6 Core study interviews

- Tape-recorded interview with the expert prior to teaching a hands-on-group. This concerned the teaching of hands-on-skills, its place in the training of teachers, teaching novice and advanced trainees and other considerations of training procedures. These interviews were unstructured using open questions.
- Video of the hands-on-group with the expert and the trainees. This lasted approximately a half hour.
- Tape-recorded interview with one trainee after the hands-on-group. This took place immediately after the hands-on-group and the trainee was invited to say what they learned and how.

- Observation of the video records and study of the tape-recorded interviews with the trainees.
- Tape recorded interview with the expert. This offered an opportunity to discuss the hands-on-group, the trainee's perspective on it and my observations of it.
- I made field notes to help set the interviews in context. These notes consisted largely of descriptions of the practical working situation, the atmosphere in which the interviews took place. Things that were done that were not made apparent by the recorded conversations.
- I kept a reflective diary where I recorded my impressions and considered my own experience. It was this that led me to develop the themes of the spiral staircase and the timeline of learning. It also pointed the way to the opera libretto.

Section 2

All the above interviews related to the training process. In addition I was videoed whilst giving part of a lesson to a pupil. This was incorporated in the film *Hands Up!* that accompanies the study. The purpose was to put into perspective why people train.

A Small World

Owing to the uniqueness of the experts and other individuals concerned, their identity is impossible to conceal and all participants in the study agreed to be identified. They received an information sheet that set out the study and signed a consent form that clarified the ownership of any resulting data¹². Each participant retained a copy of the consent form and information sheet. Signed consent forms are achieved in retrievable storage.

¹² Information sheet and consent form. See appendix 2

As the Alexander world is a small one, it is useful to demonstrate my own position in it. It would have been impossible for me to undertake this study without interviewing people I knew well. This is both a personal and professional position. As I had been married to John Nicholls, one of the experts I wished to study, I sought ethical approval to include him from the university committee, which was granted. Knowing the two expert participants well had the advantage that I was able to ask questions from a shared knowledge base of many years standing. After the interviews I made field notes, which helped to counterbalance any concerns about my personal perspective of the individuals. I used the field notes as a sounding board when I wrote up my data.

Training Lineage

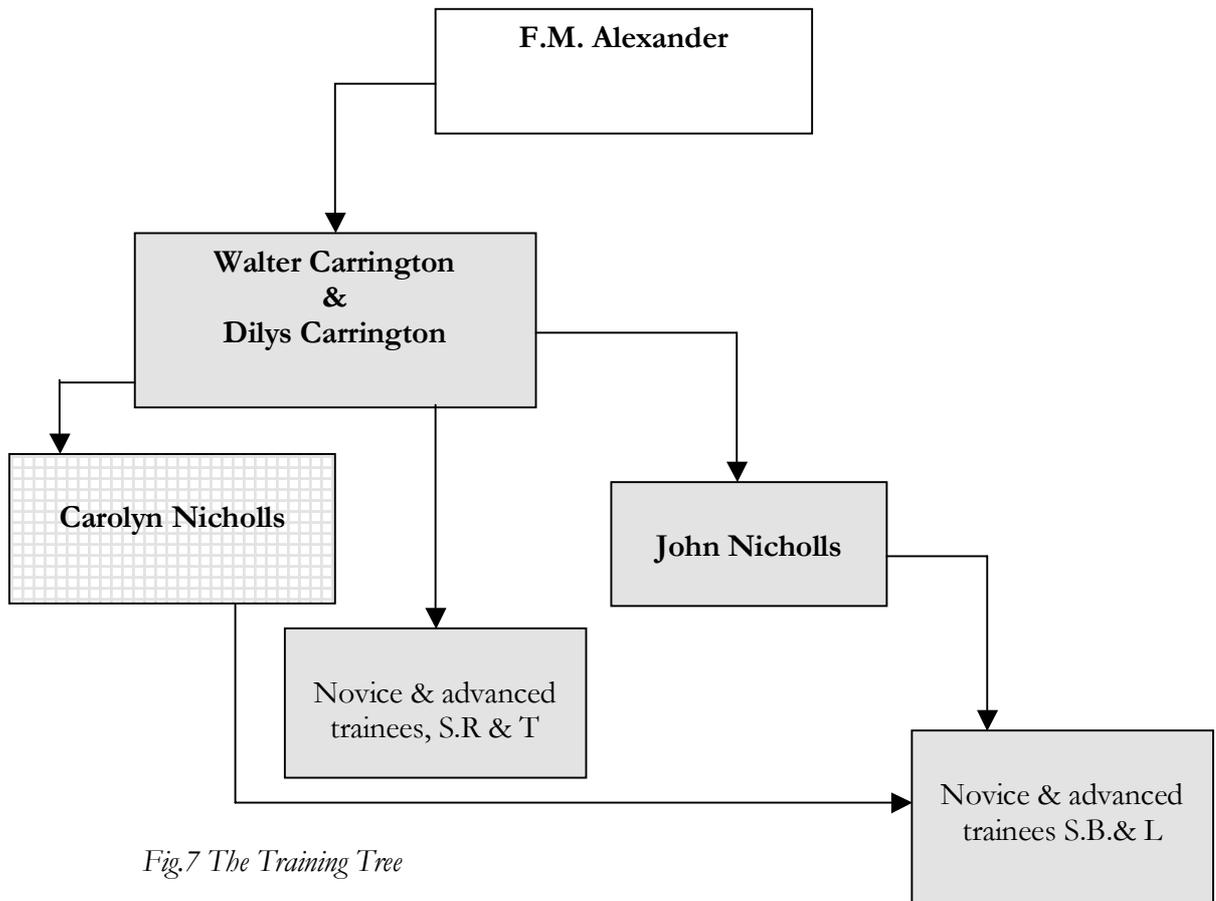


Fig.7 The Training Tree

The training tree above shows the lineage of training of the study participants. Those in gray boxes took part either in video recording, tape recordings or both. The figure makes their training relationships (and mine) apparent.

Walter Carrington (expert 1) and Dilys Carrington trained with Alexander, Alexander died before Dilys Carrington finished her training and she completed the training course that her husband continued after Alexander's death. Walter and Dilys Carrington trained John Nicholls (expert 2) and myself. Subsequently Dilys Carrington trained me to train teachers, and John Nicholls studied as a teacher a further 10 years with Walter Carrington before John Nicholls and I began our own training course in Melbourne in 1987.

Although this seems simply a question of historical fact, it is more than that. Alexander taught Walter Carrington to teach, but not how to train teachers. John Nicholls and I gained knowledge of how to train teachers from Walter and Dilys Carrington. In our turn we trained teachers whilst Walter and Dilys Carrington continue to do the same.

Practitioner triangulation

As a head of training myself, I have many years experience of training people to use their hands. I used my own experience to reflect on what I studied. I maintain a private practice and run postgraduate workshops for trained teachers. In this way I am in touch with different levels of Alexander Teaching. Much of my reflective diary contains a dual perspective of what I remember from being in the position of the person I am now interviewing, and what they explained their experience to be. Each milestone of my own timeline represents a lens through which I view others in a similar place.

At the time of the interviews, John Nicholls and I were joint heads of training, and I as part of their training therefore also taught the trainees **SB** and **L**, who took part in video and tape recordings.

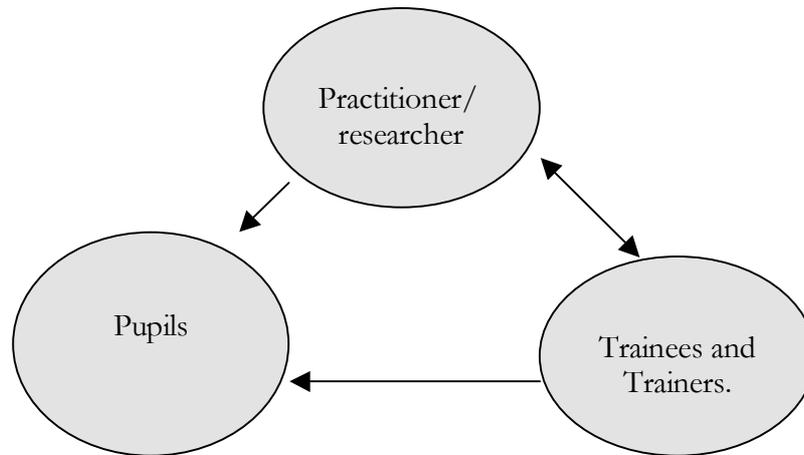


Fig. 8 Relationship of additional interviews to core study interviews

Practitioner/researcher

In the top circle the practitioner/researcher is myself. As a practitioner of the Alexander Technique, I occupy different turns of the spiral staircase according to my teaching situation. As a researcher I am watching myself and others doing the same things that I do.

Members of the public who have lessons are referred to as pupils, and are represented in the lower left hand circle. I collected information from my own pupils in my field notebooks. This was done consistently over the period of the study process. This is in line with my normal practice of note keeping about pupils, and might include what was taught, how it was responded to, what was asked, said and explained. It would also include my observations of the pupil's Use, which I would make via the medium of my hands. The study sharpened my interest in the process of using my own hands to teach. Out of these notes I crafted *Helena's First Lessons* the article that accompanies the study. This illuminates all the observations of teaching a new pupil gathered in

the notes and is presented in the form of a diary of lessons from the perspective of the practitioner.

Trainees and Trainers

From a different point on the spiral staircase, trainees of all levels are taught how to give lessons to pupils. This is part of the lower right-hand circle. The distinction here is that a trainee refers to someone undertaking the three-year teacher-training course, a pupil is someone having lessons for their own benefit. Most people are pupils before they become trainees. As part of the training process trainees receive what is often referred to as a turn. This is a short lesson, maybe 10-15 minutes where a teacher uses their hands on them in the same way as they would if they were giving a longer lesson to a pupil. At other points in the training trainees participate in a hands-on-group. This is where the skills of using the hands on another person are developed and is the central focus of my study. In this situation trainees learn to work on each other under close supervision. Trainees occupy different roles in this process. Sometimes they will be the 'pupil', sometimes they will be the 'teacher' and there is a third position where they are a participating observer. In this situation, they have one of their hands lightly touching the back of the trainee who is playing 'teacher'. In this situation, they are not using their hands on their colleagues to improve their colleagues Use, as the teacher who is in charge of the group does, but to educate their own sensory awareness to recognise the feeling of release of musculature under their hand. The teacher still uses their own hands on them, when they are in the role of 'teacher', both to make observations about their Use in this situation and at the same time to help them improve their standard of Use.

I was fortunate to be the first person that Dilys Carrington trained to do this aspect of the work. In my turn I subsequently trained other practitioners to teach hand-on-groups. This is another turn of the spiral, as I have trained the

practitioners to do this task, and, as always, have done so using my hands on them. I have done this in a variety of ways. Using role-play, I have worked with a group of two practitioners, demonstrating to them in the practical situation, the role of the trainer. In this role, where I am playing the part of the trainer, the practitioner places a hand on me, in order to monitor my Use, and then they would place a hand on the person who was playing the role of the trainee. The skill of using the hands is so subtle and powerful that in this situation, a practitioner will feel the results of my hands on the trainee via their own hands. Having demonstrated the role of trainer, I would then ask the practitioner to undertake that role, and I would use my hands on them to monitor their work, (their Use) and my hands on the trainee to monitor the results of their work (the trainee's improved Use).

In a variation on this I train a practitioner by having them assist me in taking real trainees through a hands-on-group, as opposed to role-playing the scenario. This is how I learnt to take hands-on-groups from Dilys Carrington, a process that lasted a year. I work with practitioner for a six to nine month period in this way, using both methods. Practitioners who then teach hand-on-groups are referred to in this context as trainers and are part of the right hand circle of the diagram.

Pupils

The bottom left circle depicts the position of the pupils. Trainees are learning to teach them, and pupils do on occasion make the journey to becoming trainees.

The Opera Cast

Members of the opera cast, with the exception of Frederick, are based on study participants. Some members of the cast are amalgams of individuals or

partly fictional. The range of 'voices' reflects the range and scope of the voices of the study participants. Just as the musical voices encompass most of what is possible in the human voice range, so the participants of the study offer a comprehensive selection of Alexandrian experience. Frederick, the magician is F. M. Alexander himself. I have access to him only via his books and the living memories of people who worked closely with him over a long period. I have used his voice mainly from his own writings, which are quoted throughout the Libretto and study. Alexander started out as an actor and I think this format would have intrigued him.

The character of Hardiman is based on Expert 1, Walter Carrington. Mr Carrington allowed me to make a video recording of him teaching a hands-on-group to some of his advanced trainees. He took part in tape-recorded interviews both before and after the video recordings. Clips from this video were edited into the film that accompanies the study,

Emily is partly myself. As a practitioner/researcher, I am dealing with the complexity of reflecting on my own training, my early experiences of the Alexander Technique as a pupil, my apprenticeship with Dilys Carrington teaching me the skills of passing on the aptly named 'hands-on' skills, my considerable experience of training students to use their hands in this manner, and my training of other senior teachers to teach this skill. Emily can wander at will through the rambling house; she can go back and forth along my learning timeline and compare experiences for me. She can talk to anyone she meets in the house as she wanders up and down the spiral staircase. I have portrayed her as a young girl because I started my wanderings as a young girl. But Emily can change her age and perceptions according to where she finds herself.

Alice, a woman on the spiral staircase is myself as research practitioner at the present time. Alice can talk to Emily from a different perspective. I need Alice

to maintain her age and not be mutable like Emily in order to ground the study in my current perspective.

Nicholas, a man on the spiral staircase, is based on Expert 2. This is John Nicholls, who studied with Walter Carrington and went on to run two training courses. John participated in video recordings of him teaching a hands-on-group with novice trainees in their first six months of training, and an advanced trainee shortly before she qualified. John also participated in tape-recorded interviews both before and after the video sessions. Clips from this video were included in the film that accompanies the study. Shirley-Jane and Lisa, two women ascending the spiral staircase, are based on the novice trainees. Different experts taught the trainees but I have cast them together because of their common position on an Alexander timeline. I use them to compare experiences. Both women were students in hands-on-groups that were videoed, and they also took part in tape-recorded interviews following the videoing.

Ahead of Shirley-Jane and Lisa, we find Tania and Katerina. These characters are based on the advanced trainees. As with the other women, Tania and Katerina are studying with different experts. Shirley-Jane and Katerina study with Nicholas (expert 2) and Lisa and Tania study with Hardiman (expert 1). The characters compare their experiences. Both women were students in hands-on-groups that were videoed, and they also took part in tape-recorded interviews following the videoing.

Watching the staircase we find Anna. She is based on a pupil who has had five years of lessons in the Alexander technique, but is not training to teach it. She studies for her own benefit, which has been considerable. Anna allowed me to video her having part of a lesson with me. Clips from this video were also edited into the film that accompanies the study. As someone in receipt of the 'hands-on' work, her voice is an important one.

The SATB Chorus is comprised of minor characters, often without individual names, whose voices swell the message of the song, both in variety and volume. During the course of my study, I undertook several formal interviews that were set up according to ethical guidelines, observing the rules of consent forms and information sheets. In addition to this, naturally I talked about my work to many different people, and many people asked me questions, gave me the benefit of their advice, made suggestions, criticisms and comments. These people included colleagues, pupils, trainees, and teachers with different levels of experience. They create a background chorus to the study and so I have drawn some general themes together and used them in this way.

THE CAST

Frederick	<i>Baritone</i>	A magician of great power
Emily	<i>Soprano</i>	A young girl, who wants to learn Frederick's spell.
Hardiman	<i>Bass</i>	A custodian of Frederick's spells.
Alice	<i>Mezzo</i>	A woman on the spiral staircase.
Nicholas	<i>Tenor</i>	A man on the spiral staircase.
Shirley-Jane & Lisa	<i>Altos</i>	Two woman ascending the staircase
Tania & Katerina	<i>Sopranos</i>	Two women ahead of Shirley-Jane & Lisa
Anna	<i>Alto</i>	A woman watching the staircase
<i>Chorus (SATB)</i>		People climbing their own staircases

Chapter 4

THE LIBRETTO (Study results)

Recitativo Secco When interviewing the two experts who took part in the study it was very clear that they both agreed that in order to learn to teach the Alexander Technique, people had first to understand what it is and how it applied to them personally. This understanding starts in private lessons, grows and develops throughout training and beyond. It is the spiral staircase and in the timeline diagrams it is represented by the central bar. The milestones represent the passage up the spiral staircase.



Inhibition, direction, use, primary control, sensory awareness. The postural mechanisms and the mental life.

Fig.9 The central bar of the timeline.

John Nicholls described the experience¹³ of first having Alexander lessons in a tape-recorded interview¹⁴. His description of the effect the teachers' hands bring about in a pupil is very apt. Some pupils recognise this experience directly and can describe it easily. Others recognise it but can't articulate it.

¹³ List of transcripts of tape-recorded interviews see Appendix 3

¹⁴ Interview No 2 see Appendix 3

Learning to teach, this is the experience that trainees aim to bring about in their own pupils.

Edited extract from tape-recorded interview 2.

John Nicholls Oct 2002

It's such a new experience to most people, an experience of integrated expansion throughout the whole body. An experience of co-ordinated upright support, movement and breathing; so much better than they normally do.

This experience is a common one, which I have identified as the first milestone in a shared Alexander timeline. It is the position occupied by pupils, the vast majority of whom do not go on to take the next step and train. In the article *Helena's First Lessons*, Helena describes this experience.

'I feel a bit taller,' she announces suddenly 'and I feel sort of light, and a bit like I've been drinking champagne. It's wonderful.'

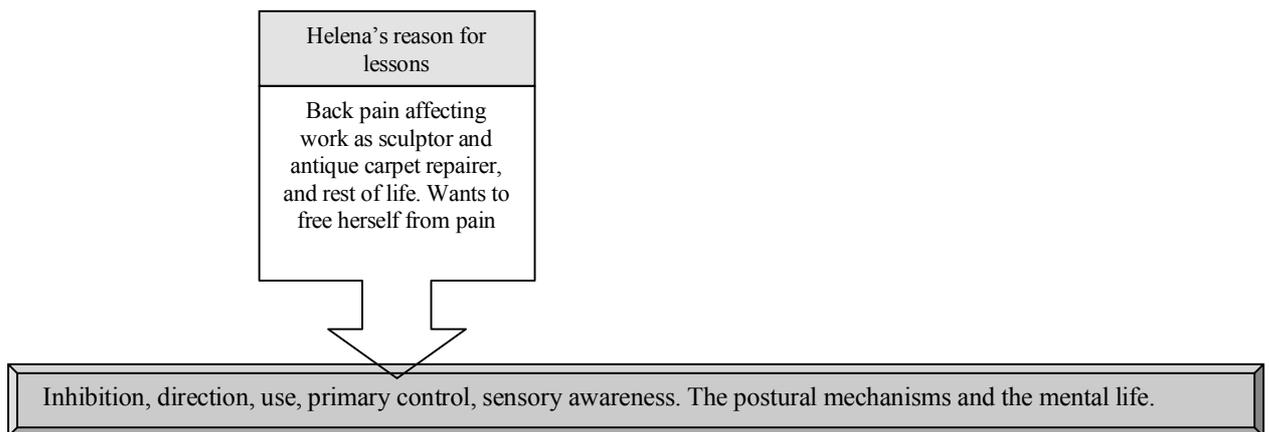


Fig. 10 The first milestone on the timeline

The center bar of the timeline represents the Alexander technique itself as a set of tools that are learnt. Helena’s timeline needs only one milestone, relating to her reason for undertaking lessons.

The decision to train as a teacher is often taken because people experience personal benefit from having lessons. Novice trainee **SR** talked of looking for two things. One was seeking a cure for thirty years of backache and the other was looking for something valuable to do with her time after bringing up her children who were now approaching independence. For **SR**, like most trainees the joint aspect of helping themselves as well as learning to help others was the motivation to train. On an Alexander Timeline, this is the second milestone

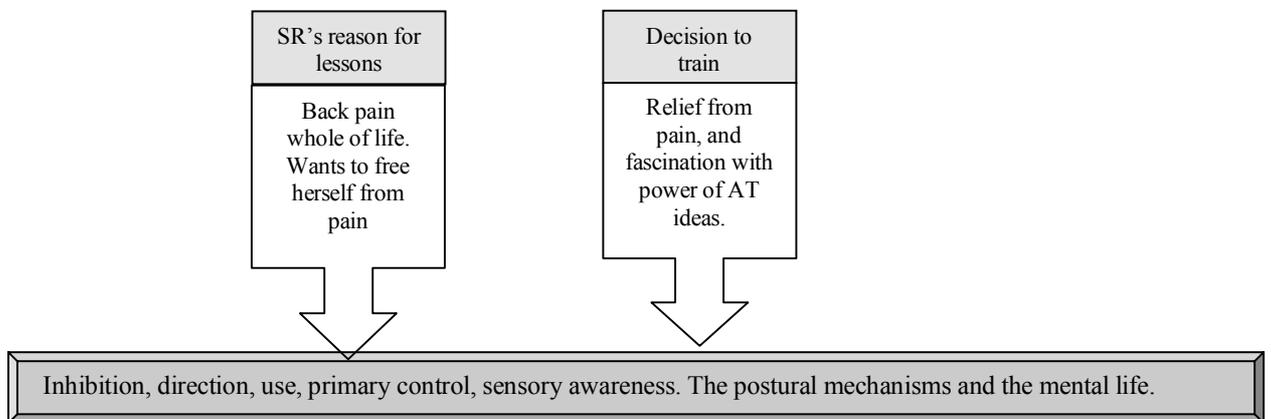


Fig. 11 The second milestone and the first turn of the spiral staircase.

Taking the decision to train is a big step and involves the trainee beginning to look again at what they thought they already knew. When they eventually start to teach, they need to reconnect with their first milestone, their reasons for

lessons and their own benefit. In this way they can begin the process of reflexive practice.

ACT ONE

Scene 1. A group of students are sitting on the steps outside the rambling house (chorus).

No. 1

Recitative and chorus

Allegro. Emily runs on, carrying the four scrolls of Frederick

& Emily

Tell me! oh tell me! oh tell me, where can I find the secret?

Tell me! oh tell me, where do I look?

I know he changed things, he changed things

I have heard much

I want to change things, to change things

Tell me the way

Chorus

How can you listen when breath is not breathing?

How can you learn when your neck is so stiff?

What would you know if you can't hear the music your mind and
your muscles could play if you wish

Stop, stop, you simply must stop

Stop, stop, first learn how to wait

Novice trainees often feel very disorientated by beginning the training. They have had experience of the Alexander Technique, and in that process will have arrived at a point of confidence. When they start training, they begin to ascend the spiral staircase in earnest and are often thrown back to the second stage of learning, where they feel completely incompetent and at a loss to know how to proceed. **SR** describes her experience.

Edited extract from tape-recorded interview 3¹⁵.

Novice trainee SR Nov 2002

I keep an open mind completely because I am fully aware that I know nothing and it's been proven that everything I thought I knew about myself..., the way I use my body is completely wrong. So I have to believe I know nothing...I keep an open mind as to where I go...and what happens.

Despite being in this uncomfortable place between conscious incompetence and conscious competence, (Brown 2003) **SR** anticipates things will change. When asked how it is to be in this 'kind of space' she says it's 'scary' but 'it's really exciting, it's a release'. **SR** was one of three novice students who took part in hands on groups

*Three students had just taken part in a hands-on-group using the movement of someone first of all standing in front of a chair with their back to it (a dining-room chair, not an easy chair) and then sitting down. This movement is also reversed, in other words the person moves from sitting in the chair to standing up. This is common practice in Alexander lessons as it is both revealing of ingrained habits and useful ground for exploring how to change those habits. Square brackets indicate an editorial insertion. Pauses and hesitations have been included. **SR** is the novice trainee; **C** is*

¹⁵ See appendix 3

Carolyn Nicholls (myself) I asked what it was like to be in the teaching role, using her hands on another student.

SR. Er, what was it like? er, I find it very difficult to explain because it's just quiet, it's just nothing, it's just, er, a time to come to yourself, really, even though you are the one, the only one that is doing anything, you are almost the one that is doing the least.

Here SR is trying to describe what is going on in herself when she is in the teaching role but she can't find the words.

C. So are you describing a meditative state?

SR. No, you are very conscious.. Er, I find it very difficult to find the right words to describe this state, I guess.

C. What were you learning in that situation?

SR. Learning about yourself, learning to leave yourself alone and (*long pause*), what leaving yourself alone can do, what it can give to others and what it can give to yourself.

Here SR looks bewildered, and beseeching. She wants me to turn off the tape so that she can explain her difficulties. She KNOWS she says, what she is after, but she has no language for it. I asked her if she knew what she was doing with her hands and she said she had no idea, just that they [her hands] were getting better. Gradually SR felt her way towards an explanation of what was going through her mind

C. What's going through your mind when you have got your hands on someone, what are you thinking about in these groups?

SR. I'm thinking about my own directions, about neck free, forward and up, back lengthened and widened, feet on the floor, er, knees free, ankles, all the joints free and nothing else, really.

Finally SR is able to explain what she has been thinking. She has indeed been thinking about her own Use in the way that will (in the long run) serve to re-educate her sensory awareness and enable her to teach.

SR's concerns are primarily with the external happenings of the hands-on-groups. She described the practical set up and what she did quite readily. When asked to say more about what was happening she floundered. As a

novice this is inevitable and in fact wholly desirable. She is in the early stages of re-training the very mechanisms she will use to teach.

Maestoso Hardiman emerges from the rambling house and invites Emily to enter

No. 2 Nothing is Magic, Magic is Nothing

Solo

Hardiman

Before you can do magic
Magic you must understand
Before you can do something
Nothing must be done
Ask yourself the question
Which way am I going?
And if you don't know
I can show the way

No 3 Aria

Cantabile: Hardiman takes Emily towards the spiral staircase. With his hands on her back he guides her upwards, towards the light.

Emily

It seems I am floating but here I am solid, my mind tells my muscles
the way they might go
His hands feel so gentle, but I sense their power, it seems that inside
me I know what to do
I try, I try, I try to be right
But I know, I know, my right to be wrong
I'm here on the staircase, with spirals inside me, my mind and my
body keep turning around

His hands lift me up and I feel myself lengthen but he doesn't lift me
its hard to know how
The spell, the spell, I know that's it's gravity
The spell, the spell, I know that it's light

♫ Chorus

And so you see ___ and so you see ___
What can you do but do nothing?
There is a way ___ there is a way ___
That nothing turns out to be something.
You breathe, you widen, your neck feels so long
You're tall and moving, no effort at all
And so you see ___ and so you see ___
What can you do but do nothing?
There is a way ___ there is a way ___
That nothing turns out to be something

Understanding the Alexander Technique, and its relevance to the individual, is necessary to understanding how to teach it. However it isn't a linear process of 'first understand this and then do this or that'. The principles of the Alexander Technique are so deeply embedded in one's own Use, that the understanding of the principles continues right throughout training, and afterwards. Both Walter Carrington and John Nicholls described the process whereby a would-be teacher must learn to maintain their own Use.

Edited extract from tape-recorded interview 2.

John Nicholls Oct 2002

J is John Nicholls, C is Carolyn Nicholls (myself). Square brackets indicate editorial insertion.

J. We use our hands as Alexander teachers, to communicate improved co-ordination to a student; It's essential that the teacher is manifesting in his or her own body, in their own Use, as high a level

as possible of that same co-ordinated Use, - that same co-ordinated integration, of postural support, movement and breathing.

That, we have found, over decades and decades, affects the quality of your touch, the quality of your contact on the student, in such a way that it enlivens your students' awareness of their own muscular co-ordination, and it seems to influence that muscular co-ordination in an expansive overall kind of way.

C. Is this a highly specialised use of the hands?

J. This is an extremely specialised use of the hands, and it relies on a high level of this same co-ordination in the teacher. Now this also means that in the hands-on groups, our trainees are building up the elements of improved use in themselves, in a very rigorous, detailed and intense way.

John describes the difference between having lessons and training to teach; in this way he echoes Walter & Dilys's discussion on teacher training with Carmen Tarnowski (see literature review)

You can have lessons for years and learn to direct yourself extremely well, but to work as a teacher, particularly working with beginners, it's a whole level beyond that - where you have to marshal the co-ordination and directive skills for yourself and your student, and this requires the discipline of practice from simple procedures that we use in the early stages of hands-on groups, to gradually building it up, so that by the time the students move into the third year, it almost becomes second nature to them to have this refined awareness and direction of their own use.

When John says that it becomes 'second nature' for students to have mastered their own Use, he is describing the area of conscious competence, step three in a four step learning path. (Brown 2003)

From the point of view of the trainer, it is obvious that a trainee must learn to maintain a reasonable standard of Use whilst beginning to develop the skills needed to teach some one else. From the point of view of the trainee, everything seems rather strange.

Scene 2. Inside the rambling house, Emily explores the spiral staircase.

Allègrezza. Emily meets Lisa, Shirley-Jane and Alice

No 4 Ensemble

Emily Where shall I go ?

What should I do, I have lost my way.

Lisa, Shirley-Jane and Alice Up! Up! Up!

Make no mistake, the way is up

Emily That's where I'm going, That's what I 'm doing, I 'm going up, I can feel it, I 'm going up up up.

Lisa & Shirley-Jane You think you are doing what you think you are doing but you are misled.

Feelings are not your guides, they will lead you astray.

Stop, stop, and think only. Only think and action will follow

Emily I want to cast the spell, but you tell me what you have already told me. Now show me the spell.

Alice Turn another spiral, learn again what you know. Look in the mirror, again, again, again. Look in the mirror, again, again, again.

Emily Free the neck,
they tell me to free
the neck. To cast the

Lisa & Shirley-Jane
You can't know a
thing by an

Alice Let gravity be
your friend, let the
spiral inside extend

spell what must I do? Why can't I know now? To cast the spell what must I do? Why can't I know now? Free the neck, but my neck is free-isn't it-isn't it free? Isn't it?	instrument that's wrong. We are here, we are here. Going up the spiral staircase within and without. The harder you try the worse it gets. We also think we know the spell but now we are not so sure.	your mind. When you have it you won't care to ask the questions. Look in the mirror, again, again, again. Feelings are not your guides, they will lead you astray. Only think and action will follow
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The other novice trainee who was interviewed, **SB**, had practised as a family GP for many years. She was used to articulating experiences and processes of many kinds.

Edited extract from tape-recorded interview 4¹⁶.

Novice trainee SB Oct 2002

*Three students had just finished a hands-on-group using the table. Students take turns to lie down on the table in a position known as semi-supine (on their backs with their knees bent and their feet resting on the table, with a small pile of books supporting the occiput). The procedure practised is known as 'taking the head'. It involves putting the hands on the head and neck of the person lying down. Square brackets indicate an editorial insertion. Pauses and hesitations have been included. **SB** is the novice trainee, **C** is Carolyn Nicholls (myself)*

SB. I had the experience of putting my hands on the back of somebody's neck [the pupil was lying on a table] and (...pause) I also learned about how I direct myself generally, my whole body, in terms of trying to make contact with my hands.

¹⁶ See appendix 3

SB has made the link between what she is doing with her hands and what she is doing with her whole body. SR had no idea at all what she was doing with her hands, yet both students are at the same stage of training. SB was aware of the input from the trainer (expert John Nicholls)

SB. I started by going into monkey¹⁷, which is what we did in the first term; we used directing your head and neck [in a monkey] position... releasing the legs and knees, which is the difficult part for me at the moment.

C. And what kind of assistance did you get in that process?

SB. John's hands [were] on my back and on my arms, helping me to widen ... across the chest.

C. So what do his hands on you do?

SB. I think they try and remind me of my directions. The first time we did it [the procedure], I noticed that I was definitely squeezing in my chest and across my shoulders when I actually put my hands [on the pupil]

C. Did you notice that because you were told, or because you got the sensation through the contact of his hands on you?

SB. I think it was his hands on me because I was aware of it before he said anything.

*This is a very significant point. **SB** became aware of her own tightening, which Alexander called misuse, or poor use, and she knows that if she tightens her own body that this will affect the quality of her hands. By using his hands on her, John has enabled **SB** to do two things, first to recognise her own tightening and second to release it. **SB** recognises this and realises that it would not have been enough for John merely to tell her to release her tight muscles.*

At this stage of training **SB** can't sustain good use for very long. John's skill as a trainer is to keep her working long enough for the experience to be useful

¹⁷ A working attitude adopted by Alexander Teachers where the ankles, knees and hips are flexed.

and not so long that it becomes burdensome and unachievable. In the descriptions of the four steps of learning, this stage of acquiring conscious competence is characterised by the student realising that their knowledge outstrips their abilities. **SB** knows she needs to maintain her Use, but she has difficulties with bending her knees and this hinders her. Brown (2003) describing the physical skill of Argentine tango notes how important it is for the teacher to get the balance right between what the student can achieve and what they can't.

Recitativo accompagnato Interviewing trainees after they had taken part in hands on groups, I was struck by how much each individual wanted to explain to me why they thought that perhaps they were not 'getting it' as much as the other people in the group, for whatever reason. All of them waited until we had finished taping the interviews, and I had switched the recorder off, and then told me their individual story and difficulties.

Reflective diary Nov 2002

From my field notes it was clear that the students were apologetic about what they perceived as their inarticulateness when asked about their hands-on-group. I found this very interesting. Off the record they were happier to say things like 'I do know what I'm doing, but I can't quite explain it.' They would then communicate a sense of depth of awareness of process that was plainly more sense than language based. Another aspect that struck me was that the students were thrown by the apparent lack of markers of progress, ones that they could see, and so invented comparative standards for themselves. As a trainer I know it is pointless trying to dissuade trainees from this. Trainees will create some kind of judgement comparison with other trainees and decide that they are not as good as the others, and offer reasons why this is the case. Reasons ranged from 'I was bringing up children before I did this' to 'I really

do have a very bad back'. As we continued to talk, without the tape-recorder, and they felt they had given me enough reasons for their ineptitude, all of them went on to talk about their experiences in a different way, expressing and revealing a greater degree of insight than they believed they had. This discomfort, which was expressed by all the trainees to a certain degree, relates to that area of acquiring conscious competence. The journey to conscious competence is one that trainees need to master before they qualify. As the nature of progression is spiral, trainees, in common with other learners, revisit the uncomfortable place of knowing what you don't know.

Novices occupy another milestone of the Alexander timeline.

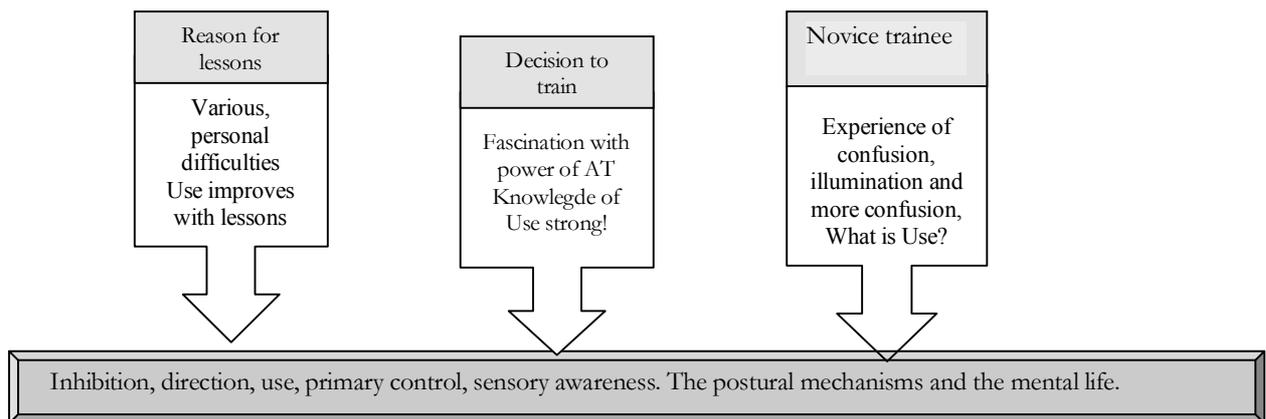


Fig.12 The Novice position on the Alexander Timeline

Each novice has their own reasons for having lessons, and at the time of deciding to train and possibly in the very first few weeks of training, they 'know' about Use and are usually fairly confident that they know what the Alexander Technique is and could describe it if asked. As they go on a little to the point where the two novice trainees were interviewed, they are much more aware of what they don't know, they have turned a spiral and are in the 'uncomfortable place' again. They are tongue tied when it comes to explanations of the Alexander Technique and dread being asked what they are

doing. They may even feel physically very awkward, which, as they are studying a technique concerned with the finer points of balance, can be very embarrassing. If they are to make the next turn into competency again they need skilled input from their trainers. Most trainees are perfectly happy to be confused and don't mind the discomfort. Occasionally this discomfort can be physical. It is not unusual for a trainee who has made the decision to train to experience a return of the original problem that brought them for lessons in the first place. This can be very disturbing. However, the emphasis on 'means' and not 'ends' is such that the training environment encourages a paratelic approach to change and trainees tend to spend most of their training time in a paratelic state of mind, rather than a telic one. This is one of the tools that make the climb up the staircase bearable.

Scene 3. The spiral staircase.

Largo. Hardiman, Nicholas and Alice discuss the trials of Emily

No 5 The spell begins

Trio

Alice Shall we teach her, is she ready, is it not too soon.

Such a power, can she wield it, will her mind be strong.

Hardiman On and on, the journey is on, round and round the journey goes round. Believing you know what is right is the fault that all true magicians must learn to undo.

Nicholas The spell already works upon her, the ingredients already at her hand. And all we can do is guide her senses, till her senses become her guide.

Tutti Emily, the time has come to learn. Listen, listen the spell is.....

As trainees progress from novice to experienced student, their use of language changes and their sense of what they are doing matures. The study observed two trainees near to qualification. One was in the penultimate term (eighth) and the other was in her final term. In my experience trainees make a quantum leap in the final term and spend more time exploring conscious

competency and beginning the long journey to unconscious competency. They have turned many twists of the staircase and been back again and again to the uncomfortable place, which is no longer quite so frightening.

Trainee **T** had just taken part in a hands-on-group. She had in fact done the same procedures that novice trainee **SR** did, but she understands them at a deeper level. She talked of wanting more freedom in her hands and setting about that by paying attention to the rest of her body and her directions. She is fully aware that if she wants to improve her hands she must not concentrate on them, and that paradoxically if she does that, she feels more through her hands.

Edited extract from tape-recorded interview 5¹⁸.

Advanced trainee T. Nov 2002.

This student had just taken part in a hands-on-session with two other students. They were doing work with the movement in and out of the chair. This student is in her eighth term. Square brackets indicate an editorial insert. T is the advanced trainee; C is Carolyn Nicholls (myself)

T. I have had a few sensations recently where I have put my hands on someone and I have started to feel their balance a lot more than I have done in the past.

T speaks of Walter Carrington having his hands on her whilst she is carrying out the various procedures. She finds this helps her stay focused and calm. It brings her, she says, 'back to herself'

C. Could you say something about Walter's hands on you?

T. Well he places his hands on [my] back.
He is also giving very very strong directions and you can feel that coming through, and you can get quite an 'up' from that.

¹⁸ See appendix 3

In the following excerpt from a tape-recorded interview with a student who was about to graduate, she is confident, clearly knows what she is doing and understands the subtle mechanisms she is working with. There is evidence of a deeper understanding than the student in term eight. I have always felt that the final term was vital for the 'coming together' of all that had been learnt. Although English is not this student's first language, I have included a significant part of her interview as her words express her understanding very clearly.

Edited extract from tape-recorded interview 6¹⁹.

Advanced trainee L. Oct 2002.

This student had just taken part in a hands-on-session with her trainer John. For part of the session she worked on him, she also worked on a novice trainee with John monitoring her work. Square brackets indicate an editorial insert L is the advanced trainee; C is Carolyn Nicholls (myself)

L. I am training now for almost three years, because this is my last term.

C. L, can you tell me what were you learning today?

L. With my teacher, John, I learned the importance of the contact of the hands and how tensing around the shoulders, bringing the shoulders together really reduces the contact [of the hands on the pupil] and what I needed to do was to widen, let myself widen and lengthen so I can get more [of] my hands [coming out] from my back and my arms from my back and then my hands can go more into the person, to direct the person in another way, or get stimulus to widen or lengthen [in them].

C. Can you say something about how you learned that, how did you know that that was what you were learning?

¹⁹ See appendix 3

L. Er, it's not so easy to explain, but most of the time I noticed when John pointed it out. He said to release my legs, and drop my shoulders, and then I noticed that yes I was doing that, [tightening the legs and lifting the shoulders] but also I was noticing [it] myself, because I go back and check every area. [To make sure] that I am widening in the shoulders, my legs are going to the ground, my neck is releasing. In that way I noticed [my use] myself as well, and I kept going around and around [my directions].

C. You said John pointed things out to you, how did he do that?

L. He had a hand on [me] when I was working on another person. He had a hand on my back, or my upper arm to remind me to release, and by his own Use he reminds me to release, and go up and release the neck, lengthen, widen. So then my Use can stimulate the pupil to release and widen and lengthen, so my teacher's hands, [John's] they tell me a lot. He is also saying to me things to release, but really his hands are reminding me how.

C. Watching you working, I notice that you spend quite a lot of time paying attention to what you are doing, and not a huge amount of time paying attention to what the pupil is doing. Can you say something about that?

L. Well, if I tense in myself it translates into my pupil. The pupil's nervous system sort of picks it up and, and tenses. If my hands are stiff and tensing, then the pupil will pick it up, but on contrary, if I release and lengthen and really let my hands be open, this stimulates the pupil to widen and lengthen. Again the nervous system of the pupil will pick it up, and that would happen.

Both advanced trainees have been practising their skills not only in supervised situations such as the hands-on-groups, but also in class time with other students. Both make it clear that they are aware of the effect of their work on the recipient. They can feel more clearly what is going on. Trainees develop their skills by building up more and more experience of good Use and what that means in a teaching situation.

Novice trainee **SB** and advanced trainee **L** both mention tightening around the shoulders. Trainee **SB** knows she is doing it but doesn't yet completely understand the implication of that in relation to the entire use of her body. It is as if, in Bateson's (1994) terms **SB** takes it in with peripheral vision. **L** on the other hand has spiralled round that particular issue many times and here

she returns to it again and is much more able to assimilate it, she has reached conscious competence. After qualification, tightening the shoulders will, at some point, become an issue for **L** to deal with again, but it will be more subtle and her ability to deal with it more practised.

The understanding that the hands are the operative aspect of a teacher's entire postural mechanism is one that comes slowly to trainees. Hands are subtle and complex organs. Walter Carrington describes the hands as transmitters and receivers. In context of the Alexander technique, the hands are transmitters and receivers of stimuli relating to Use. Walter points out that you can tell a lot about someone from the contact of your hand on them, and likewise they can tell a lot about you. Children like to hold their parents' hands and friends and lovers hold hands. The hand is a medium through which we explore the world.

Edited extract from tape-recorded interview 1.

Walter Carrington Nov 2002

*Square brackets are editorial inserts. **W** is Walter Carrington; **C** is Carolyn Nicholls (myself)*

W. What are human hands about?.... You hold, you grab, you grasp, you do things with your hands. But ...hands are also very important receptors, hands are sensory mechanisms that through touch, [gather information]

[This] is something that again has not been explored in any great detail scientifically and the starting point ... is the well known observation that small children ... like to hold Mummy's hand, ... they appear to derive pleasure and satisfaction from holding the hand.

What do they really derive from it? What does it really convey to them? What's the transaction between mother and child when hands are held?

So hands, in general, are receivers, they receive information and they are transmitters, they transmit information.

Kyberd (2003) talking about the challenge of creating a useful prosthetic hand notes that the human hand is so intimately connected to the brain that it is 'more like an extension of the person's will;

John Nicholls discusses the use of the hands in different professional situations and suggests that the quality of touch can be either positive or negative, comforting or irritating. He points out that if you are in a bad mood yourself, this is liable to communicate itself in some way through your touch.

Advanced trainees are very aware that the way they use their hands as they approach qualification is very different from the way they used them as a novice trainee. Trainees will be practising what appears to be the same procedure. For example the novice trainee **SB** was part of a hands-on-group where the students were learning to take the head of someone lying in semi-supine on a table, and so was advanced trainee **L**. Naturally advanced trainees (and teachers) are still carrying out this procedure. It will be more refined and subtle, and on the receiving end the difference between the hands of a novice and the hands of an experienced practitioner is enormous. Turning up the spiral staircase, you can look back to the level below and see yourself, **L** has noticed this.

Edited extract from tape-recorded interview 6.

Advanced trainee L. Oct 2002.

This student had just taken part in a hands-on-session with her trainer John. For part of the session she worked on him, she also worked on a novice trainee with John monitoring her work. English is not this student's first language. Square brackets indicate an editorial insert. L is the advanced trainee; C is Carolyn Nicholls (myself)

C. How do you see your [use] of your hands now in comparison to what you were like in your first six months of training?

L. Big difference, (*laughter*). They are more open, they are, more receptive, I can feel much more with my hands of what is going on in the other pupil, that I am working on, and (*pause*) should I explain, I am more aware of my hands as well, it's not just the contact, but just the awareness of what they are doing.

C. That's good. Do you feel you understand now the role of your hands in teaching?

L. Yes, I do, and also the rest of the body, I understand how my whole use affects my hands so it's not just the hands and you [have to] get whole lengthening, widening, releasing [throughout the body] to have good hands, it's not just like hands on separate part, they are all connected.

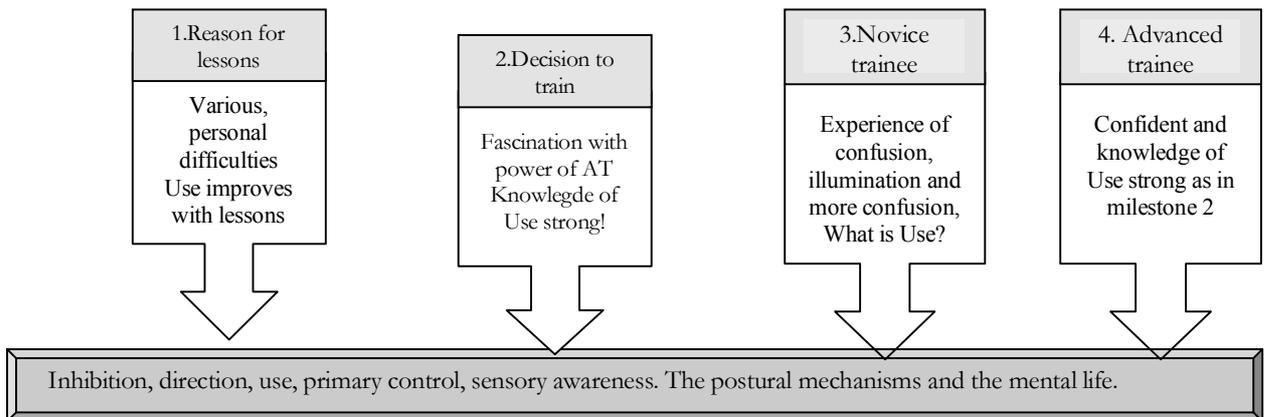


Fig. 13 Timeline of advanced trainee, ready to begin teaching

Scene 4. The spiral staircase, another turn.
Allegro. The company and chorus

No 6 Finale
tutti

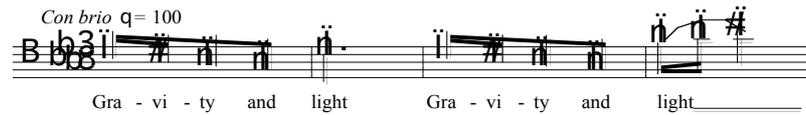
Tutti To change the world first change yourself and let your
spirit breathe
To take your time just change your mind and all things can
begin.
If you want to lift up your heart
And sing
If you want to lift up your heart and sing
How will you do it?

Emily First I say no and then I say yes
Hardiman The no still must linger on
Nicholas You can't know a song by a singer who's wrong
Chorus It is your choice, it is your choice
choose to say no
And leap, and leap, into the unknown
Only by giving up the old ways and refusing to feel if you're
right
Will you find the freedom to cast the first spell
of gravity and light
of gravity and light _____
Chorus and company
Gravity and light, gravity and light _____

THE END

Chapter 5

THE OPERA AIN'T OVER TILL THE FAT LADY SINGS



Soaking it up and spitting it out

Having amassed video and audio material, I immersed myself in the data. I watched the videos over and over again. Sometimes I played the tape-recorded interviews in-between watching the videos, sometimes I read through the transcripts of the interviews and then watched the videos again. I literally soaked myself in the data. As I did so various themes emerged. The first was the sense of a timeline. As I watched and listened to the people who had taken parting the study I obviously recognised 'where they were at', because, with the exception of Walter Carrington, I had been there myself. Comparing the transcripts of the students the theme of being in 'the uncomfortable place' being stuck for the words was apparent. This was less so with the advanced trainees, but in grappling with the acquisition of skills they frequently were at that turn of the spiral where they were once more in a place where they knew they didn't know as much as they would like to.

The main theme was the constant re-realisation of Use, the deepening of the understanding of what Use consists of and how it applies to teaching. This is why the centre bar of all the time line diagrams is about Use.

Comparing Novices and Advanced Trainees

When Daley (1998) studied how novice nurses learnt she observed how much they wanted to be spoon-fed, and that fear of being wrong led them to seek

input from senior nurses so they could be sure they 'got it right'. They needed a lot of input and were not able to self-direct their learning.

Novice Alexander trainees need much more input, both verbal and physical to 'get things going' than advanced trainees. John Nicholls mentioned that he used his own hands rather more on novice trainees than on advanced trainees, recognising that it is more difficult for novices to manifest the co-ordination necessary. Novice trainees also tend to stick to the more simple 'working on self' practices that they would pursue without a teacher monitoring them. They are generally less well co-ordinated than their senior colleagues and not able to maintain good Use for more than short periods of time. In articulating what they know they are liable to be very challenged and not able to express themselves. As they become aware of their mis-use patterns they tend to identify them as being more local 'it's my knees that are the problem' than recognising that the whole body is involved in co-ordination.

Advanced trainees do not require so much input from a trainer to maintain their own Use. In this situation the trainer may get the trainee to work on them, in this way the trainer uses his or her whole body as a sensory mechanism that can feel what the trainee is doing. Simple verbal hints from the trainer in this situation are enough to help the trainee obtain an even higher level of Use.

Novice Trainees	Advanced Trainees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need considerable verbal and physical input. • Maintain good Use for only short periods of time • Are generally not able to articulate their learning • Identify their own mis-use as being more specific than global • Practise only very simple procedures on their own • Are more reliant on trainers to 'get it' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are able to self-improve with much less input, both verbal and physical. • Maintain good Use reliably for extended periods of time. • Are generally articulate as to their learning • Understand the total pattern of Use and the role 'separate' body areas play in it. • Practise increasingly complex procedures without supervision • Develop procedures for themselves.

Fig. 14 Comparison of novice and advanced trainees

Respondent Validation

One of the things that emerged from my absorption in the data was the film *Hands Up!* Editing the videos clips into a 13-minute film put this together. I added a narration line that explained the process of training. The resulting film was shown to all the participants, including those who were in the hands-on-groups that were videoed, but did not take part in tape-recorded sessions. I showed the film to the pupil who appears at the beginning and to Walter Carrington and John Nicholls.

Feedback was that people recognised themselves and the activity they saw portrayed by the film. The pupil was very interested not only to see herself but also to see trainees learning their skill. She commented that she had not realised how involved it was and asked how I could possibly talk to her if it was necessary to have such a high level of awareness to teach. This is an issue

trainees often have to grapple with, but is the territory of the advanced trainee, not the novice.

The trainees who were in the group with **SB** were a few weeks further on in their training by the time they saw the film. Their comments were concerned with recognising that they had progressed. ‘Gosh were my knees really that stiff, and don’t I moan a lot’ was one comment.

The advanced trainees were more interested in observing their own Use and the effect they were having on the person they were working on. ‘I think I might have pushed a bit there. What do you think?’

All the participants commented that the film gave them a sense of progression through training, recognised it as a sequence of experiences and felt it captured a taste of the essence of their experience.

With great patience, a senior colleague, who is my direct equivalent as he runs a training course himself, kindly sat through the unedited videos as well as the finished film. He felt that it depicted the training issues clearly and invited me to come and show it to his training course.

Both John Nicholls and Walter Carrington approved the film and Walter in particular made the link of my use of mirrors, which, whilst fortuitous, really did capture the spirit of the investigation.

After showing the film to the participants, we discussed the tape interviews and the fact that I had used field notes in addition to the transcripts to give a picture of what was going on. We talked over the issue of trainees wanting to talk without it being recorded, and why this was. For most of them it was the feeling that they might say something wrong. Being recorded put them at once in ‘that uncomfortable place’. All were happy to have field notes included in data analysis.

The experts were completely comfortable with their knowledge and did not offer excuses where none were required

The Fat Lady

The study set out to address specific questions, so now it's time for the fat lady to sing and tell us what she discovered. The questions were:

- What are the parameters in which learning this skill can take place
- How is this skill acquired
- What factors are involved in teaching this skill
- What factors are involved in learning this skill

Learning parameters

Sorting through the data that I had collected through tape-recorded and video interviews, a complex picture emerged. It became apparent that there were a great many factors involved in learning to use the hands as an Alexander Teacher, learning to 'think-in-activity'. What emerged was a unique matrix of learning, consisting of the following factors.

- Students learn by direct psycho–physical input from experienced and trusted trainers.
- Students make constant re-investment into their own Use
- Conditions are set up to be 'free from care' so that undue anxiety is avoided.

- Mindful repetition is a key element of learning.

In both of the training situations that I studied, the students' focus of attention were on themselves (process or means), not on what they were doing to the person they were practising on (end). Before they start to practise on each other, even with the supervision of a trainer, they practise a variety of procedures designed to improve their Use. These procedures are continued right through their training and their teaching career. This is the way in which students constantly re-invest in their own Use

In this way, each student is trained as an individual and has no need to compare him or herself with another student. This in particular is very difficult for a student to understand. Good Use cannot be measured by any instrument other than an experienced Alexander Teacher, and is much more to do with thinking than doing. Once a student understands it, they can self-monitor and continue to improve their own Use. Use is not about strength or the perfect conformation. Many people who train to teach the Alexander technique have considerable disabilities, and yet they can make fine teachers. A simple way to describe it is to say it's about making the best use of what you've got.

How is this skill acquired?

Central to the acquisition of skill with the hands is a high standard of Use. This is improved throughout the training by the concurrent practice of various elements.

1. Students work on themselves, in such procedures as 'hands on the back of a chair', monkey and semi-supine.
2. Taking part in activities that highlight an aspect of Use under the guidance of a teacher, sometimes called games on training course because it is meant to be free from fear.
3. Receiving short 'turns' from experienced teachers
4. Taking part in hands-on-groups

Although taking part in hands on groups is a highlight for students and it is where those skills are acquired, it has to be understood by students that their Use is what they bring to the hands-on-groups. They can't suddenly do something just with their hands. Learning to use their hands well is an extension of their own Use and involves their whole body. Students who have trained because of specific problems with their hands such as repetitive strain injury (also known as upper limb disorder) find that improvement in the support musculature of the back gives a them the ability to transmit a good stimulus through their hands, even if their hands are 'weak'.

Developing good Use

To understand the elements involved in acquiring good Use, I evolved a model depicting what the training process does to bring about good Use in trainees.

The model starts with the question 'What is Use?' This question, and its understanding, are what trainees understand more and more deeply as they ascend their own spiral staircase of learning. As they pass from one level of knowing to another level of not knowing they do so in terms of their Use.

The bottom segments of the pyramid style model deal with the elements that are involved in understanding Use. They are complex elements and have to be

learned concurrently rather than sequentially. In this respect learning to teach the Alexander Technique is quite different from other learning programmes. Although there are three years to the programme, students will, for the most part, be together and share the same experiences. It is in the hand-on-groups that skills become refined appropriate to the level of the student.

The tip of the pyramid is surrounded by block arrows that each depict an aspect of training. All these aspects are required in order for the trainee to improve their Use. It is a combination of things rather than a sequence of things.

It is largely this that gives training its flavour and also its distinct identity. Eighty percent of the training is practical, experiential, students mostly receiving work from teachers, trying things out with supervision and so on. It is slow methodical work. In this way it has no obvious markers of achievement, which is why the development of the timeline could be so important.

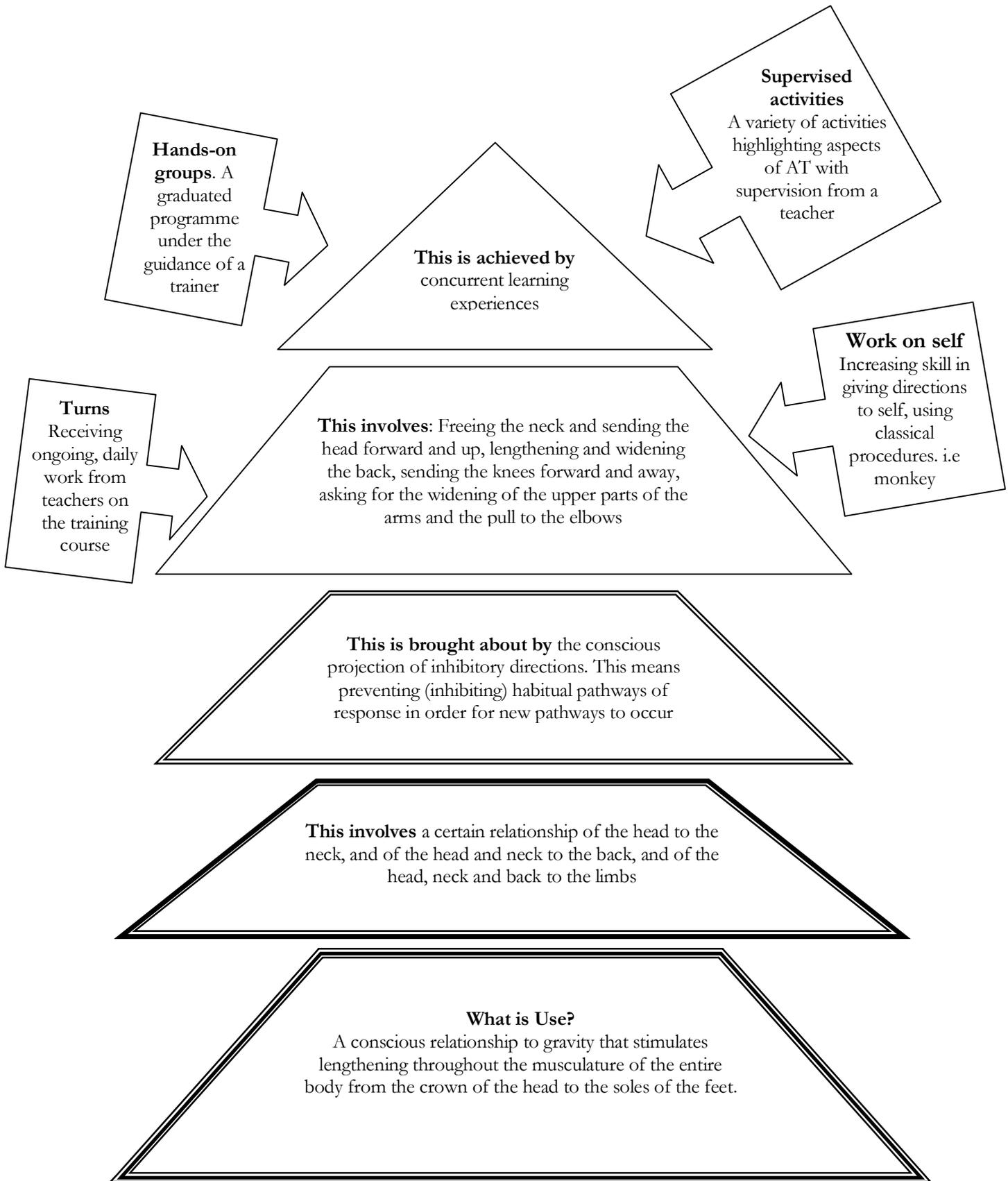


Fig.15 The building blocks of Use and its improvement.

What factors are involved in learning this skill?

Studying the interviews, videos and books lead to a series of points in respect of learning hands-on skills.

- The skills that are needed are the ones to improve one's own Use, but at a more conscious and refined level.
- These skills are the same skills that are needed to use the hands well.
- There is no different 'mode' of operation.
- The more the trainee is free in themselves, the more they feel through their hands and the more they impart direction to the person they have their hands on. This is partly what the hands acting as both transmitters and receivers mean.

As a trainee progresses from novice to advanced, the importance of the continuation of good Use as a foundation for good teaching becomes more evident. They are then able to pay more attention to the way the pupil is responding to their hands, and to react to what is going on. They are moving towards become reflective in their use of their hands, and are able to offer a pupil a good stimulus.

A teaching map

The Alexander Technique is about the individual, and there is not a particular formula for any given lesson. There is not a specific curriculum to adhere to, as there is in other subjects. There is what might be described as a body of knowledge or a set of principles and procedures to guide a would-be teacher through the maze of beginning to teach. There is however a series of steps, or considerations, that can help a trainee learn the skills they wish to acquire. They are practical steps that can take the form of an internal dialogue and can be expressed as follows.

In order to teach I need to have.	Good Use in myself
And then I can.....	Put my hands on the pupil
And I ask myself.....	Is this person going up or pulling down?
If can't feel anything in the pupil, I must free off more in myself (reformulate my good Use).	If the pupil is going up, my hands continue to take them up
When that seems to stop, I will either.....	Move my hands or free off more in myself to see if I can stimulate more release in the pupil
And then I might.....	Move my pupil or move myself (to another part of the pupil)

Fig 16 Concepts of using the hands.

When a trainee starts to operate in this way then they begin to be effective as a potential teacher. Reflective training leads to effective practice. The experience of the hands as transmitters of an upward stimulus to the pupil's nervous system becomes apparent. The awareness of the state of the pupil's postural mechanisms becomes clearer and the dialogue between the teacher's and the pupil's nervous system becomes more powerful. Transmitting and receiving information, and responding to the effect of the stimulus that is being offered is simultaneous. A teacher will be able to make such judgements as to how long a lesson should last, how a particular individual is responding and what the next step should be, according to the conditions that are present

As teachers continue to improve, other, more circular internal dialogues come into play. This can be represented as follows.

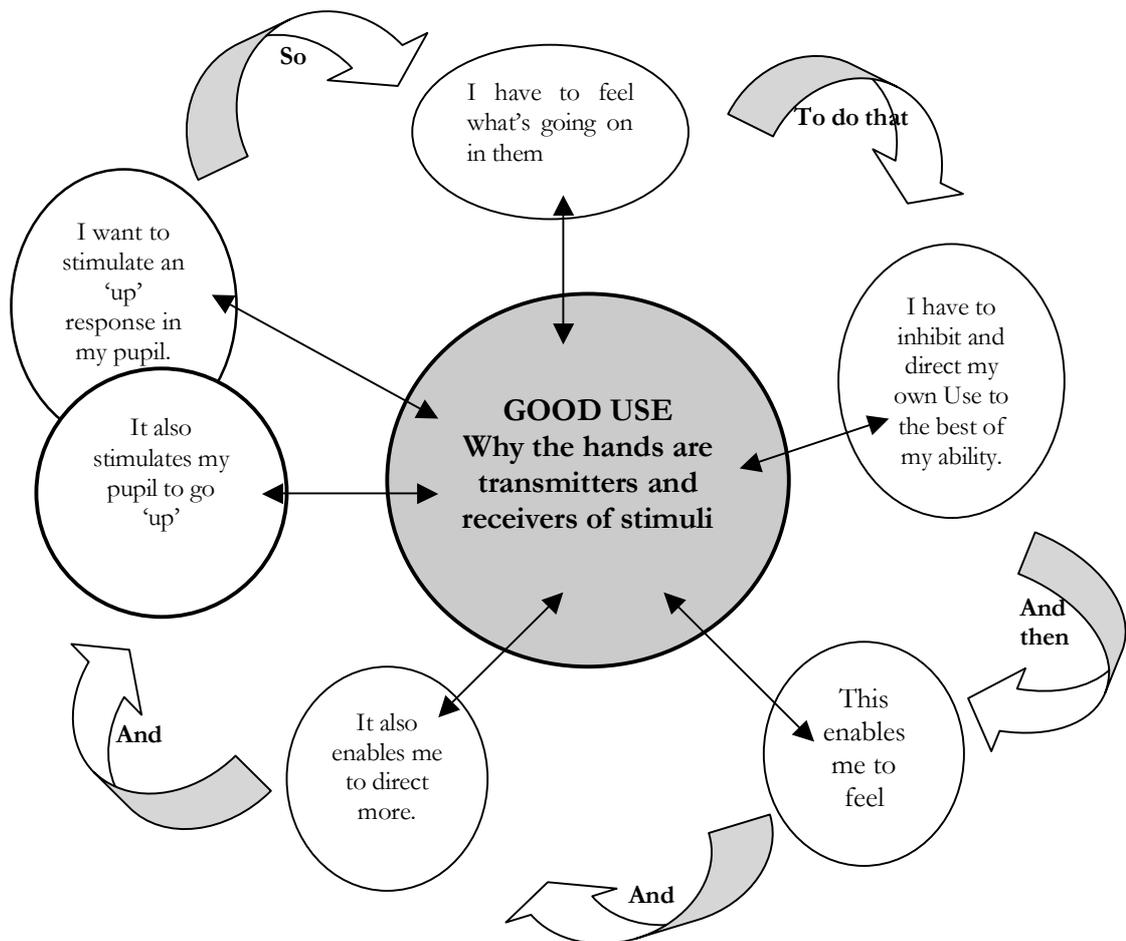


Fig.17 The cycle of good Use in relation to teaching a pupil.

Each circle represents an aspect that has to be thought about. Central to the ability to teach well is good Use, which will enable the teacher to use their hands as transmitters and receivers, as Walter described. The surrounding circles and arrows deal with what has to be done to support good Use. The cycle can be brought into awareness at any point, but usually it is best to start it on the left hand side where two circles overlap. The aim of every Alexander teacher is to take their pupil 'up' to give them an experience of lengthening in stature. This can only be brought about if the teacher is paying attention to his or her own Use. To take a pupil 'up' the teacher needs to know what is happening in the pupil, to feel what is going on. Once again, to do that, the

teacher has to look after his or her own Use. Advanced trainee **T** noticed she was feeling more with her hands, sensing other people's balance.

If a teacher is going to feel what is going on in a pupil, he has to stay means orientated, not end orientated, so he (or she) pays attention to their own Use by the tools of inhibition and direction.

This in itself enables the teacher to feel more, and moving on to the next arrow, it enables the teacher to direct more, to achieve an even better standard of co-ordination in his or her own body (better Use)

It is this direction in the teacher that stimulates the pupil to go up, and takes you back to the start point of the cycle of good Use.

What this highlights is that there isn't something 'suddenly different' that has to be done in order to teach someone, a would-be teacher still has to climb up that staircase of Use.

How is this skill taught?

The final question the study addressed was; how is this skill taught? This was perhaps the most fascinating of all the questions because of the nature of the growth of the Alexander Technique. Alexander didn't learn the Alexander Technique he discovered it. This is not the same thing. Teaching individuals is one thing, teaching them how to teach is quite another.

What factors are involved in teaching this skill?

In order to teach the skill of using the hands, another level of good Use must be reached. One of the most striking differences between the interviews I did

with the trainers and the trainees was that the trainers did not need any prompting and to a certain extent, they needed no questions. I was the one saying 'um' and 'er'. The trainees on the other hand needed coaxing, were more hesitant and less forthcoming with volunteered information. Watching both experts at work it was obvious that the input that the students valued most was the input of their trainers' hands. Clear precise verbal explanations and instructions are of course vital. But above all, again and again, students noticed that they 'got it' with the help of their trainers' hands.

Observing the two experts, Walter Carrington and John Nicholls, and their current students (in 2002) brought me full circle to my own training, and now brings me full circle to the start point (and end point) of my study.

This is another extract from my reflective diary. It was an entry I made on the day I videoed Walter Carrington teaching a hands-on-group to students in their penultimate term.

Recitativo accompagnato

Nov 11th 2002

Later on in the morning, after I had filmed the video, I joined Walter's training class in the big room where the students were gathered. Walter gave me a 'turn' and I experience an extraordinary sense of clarity. In three short well-filled minutes his hands shape me, define me and lift my body and spirit up.

Deeply familiar yet totally fresh, I go up, the way I have since my own first Alexander lesson when I was 20, and, at the same time, it is new. I am not the person I was; I am the person that I am. But the threads of Self that connect the 20-year-old single, carefree Carolyn to the 50-year-old mother of two teenagers and Head of Training Carolyn, are largely woven from my experience of the Alexander Technique.

I go from it and I return to it again and again and again. Another twist to the story, turn of the

spiral, another hill to climb, another thought to consider. A living territory, like a landscape I have walked through many times before, that changes subtly and occasionally dramatically every time I revisit it.

Walters's hands are strong and yet gentle, they are powerfully subtle. His fingers momentarily lie either side of my breast bone whilst his opposite hand does the same between my shoulder blades. Pressing but not pressing, lifting but not lifting, defining and refining my sense of my own unique structure. A gentle persistent invitation to expand, to go up, to lengthen and to widen. Never dominating, always allowing. I, out of long, well trained conscious habit, inhibit all extraneous thought and movement and allow his hands to stimulate my neuromuscular system.

I am happy.

Nothing else I have encountered has ever given me this experience, or anything remotely approaching it

Walter's back hand is on the lower part of my neck, whilst his front hand is orchestrating my ribs and diaphragm. Effortlessly, my breathing frees and opens up, my neck lengthens out of my shoulders and my back deepens the sense I have of the floor under my feet. I don't need to move, to run around, to stretch, I am doing all those things whilst standing perfectly still. I am simply standing there, going up. It is such a joyful 'all' that I find it hard to communicate its utter simplicity.

Like a candle repeatedly dipped in wax, I acquire another layer of understanding. Like an onion, another layer of mis-use is peeled away. I am learning and unlearning at the same time.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

One of the reasons for undertaking the study was to provide an insight into current training methods for the profession as a whole. As well as examining how individual people become teachers of the Alexander Technique, inevitably something of the development of the Alexander Technique has revealed itself. The scope of the Alexander Technique is wide and this itself is one reason why it is not easily fitted into any category. Today's Alexander Teacher could find themselves required to teach in widely differing environments.

Questions the study raises

A question that the study raises is where does training stop and CPD start? This may be a concern for other professions too, but for Alexander Teachers, facing increasingly complex career options, it may be something our Society has to give attention to.

What do we interface with?

With the emergence of disciplines such as psychoneuroimmunology, the Alexander Technique has a great deal to offer in respect of how the pathways between the mind and the body can be brought into greater awareness and consciousness. Future joint research in these fields could be very exciting. The use of the hands on the individual, as we practise it, is one factor that would offer fruitful ground for research.

Change in Practice

As a result of undertaking this study I have already changed one aspect of the way I teach hands-on-skills to novice trainees. It is a subtle shift of emphasis

even more towards means rather than ends. For example when teaching a novice how to lift the elbow of a student lying on the teaching table, I would, in the past, given them precise instructions as to how to place their hands in order to lift the elbow. I would have shown them, both by demonstration and explanation, the way in which to lift. The focus of their attention always was on themselves, not the person they were working on. Now however I have included a different approach. This is to keep them focused entirely on their own Use and to *let their own hands find a way to lift the elbow*. This is quite different from the way I had done it in the past.

The four stages of learning and learning to use ‘the uncomfortable place’

The four stages of learning are very relevant to a trainee’s progress. The first stage, unconscious incompetence, is often the point at which most trainees begin their training course. They have usually had personal experience of the Alexander Technique and have benefited. They start their training thinking they know all about it and can be very confident. It can be a difficult stage for a trainer to manage because in respect of an Alexander trainee learning to use their hands well, early over confidence leads to the build up of physical habits that are hard to break. In the second stage confidence drops as trainees become aware of their limitations and of how far they have to go. Adults who may be highly skilled in other areas find this very difficult. For Alexander trainees, this is ‘the uncomfortable place’, but it leads on to conscious competence, knowing what you do know. This stage is often characterised by success in whatever the endeavour is, plus a realisation that success is dependant on careful and conscious practice. I would liken this to a common experience of Alexander trainees who have mastered the skills of using their hands and then face the challenge of using their hands and talking to the person they are working on at the same time. For many trainees, they feel they can do one or the other, not both. They are poised at a transition between conscious competence and the next learning stage, which is unconscious

competence, where you know what you know so well that you don't need to think about it so much. You could describe this as having built up the correct habits of work that you can then depend on

The recognition that is useful for trainees to experience 'the uncomfortable place' could help trainees develop a greater sense of internal self. The knowledge that this is a necessary transitional stage from knowing what you don't know to knowing what you do know could be helpful. Being aware that this is something that could happen over and over again enables trainees to stay focussed on means and not concern themselves with ends or results. Returning to the uncomfortable place changes its nature so that it becomes a creative void, a place from which new ideas and realisations can emerge. It is the seedbed of reflective practise. The skill of both trainer and trainee in managing this 'place' is crucial. If either attempts to rush on too quickly to conscious competence, then there isn't enough fuel to feed the creative void. Maintaining an effective tension around this area produces thoughtful teachers capable of independent thought.

Refining the training in this way I expect novice trainees to gain more confidence in their ability to learn this subtle craft. For myself I feel I have climbed another spiral of the staircase of learning. For the trainees and the profession the processes have become more transparent.

Hands

The study set out to analysis the specialised use of the hands in Alexander teaching. The study demonstrates that effective use of the hands depends on effective Use of the whole person. It is the whole person that is the teaching instrument, delivered via the hands.

UPON FURTHER REFLECTION

Learning methods

Looking more closely at learning methods and their evolution towards reflective practice brings the work of Schön (1987a) into focus. Schön draws on an educational developmental history that runs back over centuries to Plato, progresses through Tolstoy, and his approach to teaching Russian peasants to read, and Dewey's concepts of thinking in activity, engaging a learners consciousness, and onwards to his observations about reflective practice and its place not just in learning, but in that most tricky of learning situations where teachers are learning how to teach.

In discoursing on reflection in action Schön observes that when students are learning an artistry, their experience is that they must plunge into the doing of it and try and educate themselves before they know what it is they are learning. They feel that their tutors can't really tell them what they are learning, but in order to learn, the students have to plunge into 'unknowing', which may make them feel vulnerable, incompetent, out of control, or that they don't know what they are doing. Schön observes that further down the learning track, students do understand their tutors or coaches and can engage in dialogue that is meaningful. How does this happen? Schön describes the process:

...the coach's demonstrations and the students' performances are messages which they send to one another. The student's performance, for example, indicating, telling the coach, "This is what I make of what you have said. This thing that I'm doing now is what I make of what you have

said." And the coach, observing that and seeing the problems, the difficulties that the student has. At its best this dialogue between coach and student becomes a dialogue of reciprocal reflection-in-action where each of them is reflecting on, and responding to, the message received from the other.

Schön's description of the subtle interweaving of cues and dialogue between coach and student throws up interesting questions for the Alexander World in the emphasis that it places on the coach's need to assess and reassess almost continuously where an individual student is comprehending and how to teach them. This implies an ability on the part of the coach to hold in mind the skills that are being aimed at, to see the pathway the student needs to follow, and also to recognise where the student might be on that pathway, or if in fact they have wandered off on to a completely different pathway. A coach then needs to offer the student signposts and indications to re-orientate them, whilst having the skill to recognise when a variation on the art of the skill that is being taught is fruitful, and when it is not.

Learning to teach the AT doesn't break down in quite the same way as learning to design a building or to play a musical instrument or create an art work, but in terms of how the skills are communicated from trainer (coach) to trainee (student) a reflective, learning-by-doing approach has a lot to recommend it. The AT is a perceptual skill that is concerned with recognising a response in a person, and this is done largely through the sense of touch. The knowledge that is imparted is not done so on a step-by-step basis.

A person seeking Alexander lessons for a breathing difficulty needs to 'know' the role the neck and head play in breathing. But they may think they need to know directly about breathing and not be interested in the neck and head because they don't 'know' about it. The 'knowing' they need to acquire is a 'knowing' of the body, an experience of difference, a revelation of unrecognised tension patterns. A trainee learning to teach such a future client

has to comprehend many different layers of 'knowing' and what they mean and imply if they are to succeed in offering such a client a new view of their problem.

One difficulty with training Alexander teachers is that when they teach, it isn't like teaching French, or music. There is no obvious start point and no obvious path to follow. The external structure of a lesson is not hard to grasp. A teacher may work with a client in standing, sitting, walking or other movements. A teacher will most likely put a client on their teaching table, in a position known as semi-supine, where their knees are bent so that their feet are flat on the table. The teacher may then proceed to take the clients' head in their hands. They may lift limbs and gently encourage the release of holding patterns the client didn't know about. Whilst doing these things, the teacher will be encouraging the client to think about them selves and their body in a new way and to become aware of their own habit patterns in relation to movement and rest. It is subtle and powerful work. At first it is not easy to understand why such apparently simple activities can have such a beneficial effect, but gradually a person realises that it isn't so simple after all, and what they thought was just about movement or relaxation is actually more complex, and is about reactions, both mental and physical and that what they are really learning is different ways of responding to the stimuli of life. Equipping a trainee with these kinds of teaching skills requires a variety and depth of approaches that, once the trainee has grasped, acts as a vocabulary on which they can then build.

Kolb's research, reviewed by Brooks (1995) describes four modes of experiential learning and acknowledges the role of an individual's preferred style of learning. These four modes are seen as identifiably separate, but interweaving with each other. Kolb suggests that individuals may have a preferred learning mode that dominates their learning cycle. Relating these four modes to how Alexander Trainees study and learn is relevant. The

modes reinforce each other and where a student appears to have a strong preference, the cycle encourages them to engage in a more rounded learning environment. In this way students who are naturally theorists are encouraged to align theory with experience and students that immerse themselves in sensation are encouraged to think, reason and reflect.

Kolb's modes of learning	Parallels with AT training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through concrete experience (i.e. doing it, being part of it) 	<p>Trainees regularly receive concrete experience through individual hands-on work from teachers as part of their training. This is in the form of short 'turns' of ten minutes work and longer lessons of half an hour. This is a very valuable part of training.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through observation and reflection (i.e. watching, cogitating on experiences both seen and felt) 	<p>When trainees take part in 'hands-on-groups' where they learn those skills for themselves, they experience three different roles in one session.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Undertaking the procedure themselves. 2. Observing another student undertaking the same procedure. 3. Being on the receiving end of the procedure. <p>These three positions allow for observation and reflection from</p>

	different perspectives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through abstract conceptualisation (i.e. thinking, planning, constructing thoughts and observations, drawing these element together) 	The study of the Alexander Technique theory is undertaken throughout the three years of training in the form of lectures, small group study of theoretical concepts and one to one tutorials. Relating it to actual experience is crucial.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through active experimentation (i.e. doing with a ‘try it out’ attitude) 	Regular active experimentation is a strong part of the training process. Students watch a demonstration of a procedure and then experiment with that procedure with supervision from a teacher. They then go on to further experiment without supervision.

Fig 18. Comparison of Klob and Alexander

Other learning theories that offer a relevant highlight for AT training are Sensory Stimulation Theory and Holistic Learning Theory. Laird (1985) commenting on Sensory Stimulation Theory notes the involvement of the senses in learning. The basis of this is that learning is enhanced when the senses are stimulated. Laird noted that in adults much of their knowledge (75%) is learned through seeing. Hearing is thought to be next most effective (approx 13%) and the other senses-touch, smell and taste-accounting for 12% of what we know. Senses are stimulated through a variety of colours and facts presented visually.

This places a huge emphasis on the visual sense and very little on the sense of touch and makes no mention of proprioception. This emphasis on visual learning is more appropriate to a fact-based knowledge, such as a language or science. In a competency based knowledge, such as AT training, the main

sense that is used is the sense of touch and proprioception. The senses interlink with each other and the AT world could benefit from more understanding of this. The observation of the importance of visual stimuli could be used as a way of further enhancing the learning-by-psychophysical experience. In a small group situation, a student watching a procedure 'reads' that procedure via their own memory and experience as well as by what they see now.

Laird also outlines a Holistic learning theory that acknowledges the individual as not just a 'learner' but as a complex being made up of intellect, emotion, body impulses, intuition and imagination, all aspects requiring activation if learning is to be effective. The effectiveness of this observation can be observed when people are learning 'physical skills that have other components (as do all skills) such as a spiritual dimension or a meditative dimension, which implies an emotional attitude. Many such 'physical' skills are learnt in an imitative manner, yoga and t'ai chi ch'uan for example taught by demonstration from the master with the pupil then attempting to copy not only the masters movement or posture, but the attitude and manner in which he or she performs the movements. Such learning is filtered through the individual's senses and is interpreted by them according to those senses.

These theories all offer something to the AT world. The following diagram positions these in relation to each other and the Alexander Technique.

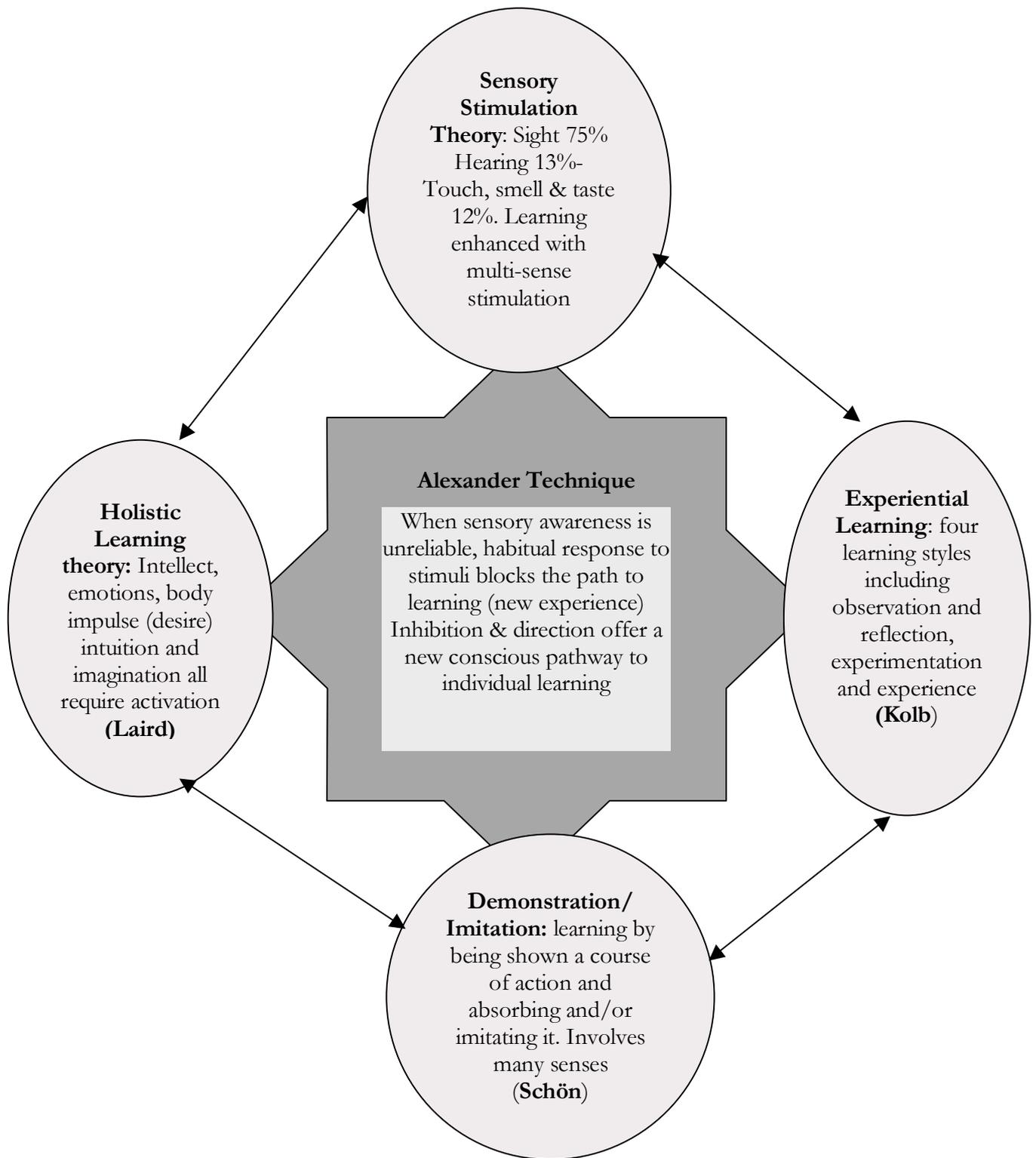


Fig 19. Learning methods, the senses and their links with the Alexander Technique

Moon (1999) discussing reflection in learning and professional development, notes that the whole topic of reflection is drawn from different disciplines, education, philosophy, psychology and that this crossing of boundaries has a sense of imprecision as to what reflection is, how it is identified and how it might be inculcated. Moon criticises Schön for a lack of precision in terminology, so that reflection–in-action and reflection-on-action are not distinct. Her work then discusses the place of reflection in learning.

...a mental process with purpose and/or outcome that is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution.

Moon (1999) ch. 12 p.152

Approaches to Alexander Teacher Training.

Alexander teacher training has not in the past related to any particular learning theories, although in the two courses I studied there was clear evidence of learning by demonstration and reflection as described by Schön, and clearly AT teachers are, by the very nature of the work, reflective practitioners and so it follows that their own training needs to be reflective in nature.

Discussing his own methods of training Alexander states:

My own method...was to give my pupils certain lessons in re-education and co-ordination on a basis of conscious guidance and control... He [the pupil] could then safely be permitted to develop his own characteristics....No pupil of mine [represents] some narrow school of expression.

Alexander (1996 p.85)

Training courses are under the control of individual directors who are responsible to STAT for standards of training.

Training procedures have evolved gradually over the last sixty years and essentially trainers have adopted a trial and error approach. It could be argued that differences in training appear to be superficial, taking the form of different emphasis on aspects of training such as the depth of study of anatomy required or the frequency of lectures. It is a requirement of training courses that 80% of the course is practical, with students receiving AT work, learning how to give AT work and how to practice AT work.

Discussing the future role of the profession, Nicholls (1998) observes that training is practical in nature and comments on the apparent lack of ‘facts’ that an Alexander Teacher could be examined on and observes that the skills accumulated in training are not easily assessed by an external body.

On an acupuncture course [for example] there are meridians to be learnt. Regardless of whether one believes in their existence, there is a body of knowledge to accumulate, which is relatively easily tested. Either you know where the liver meridian runs or you don't, either you know which soil a particular plant will flourish in [NVQ Horticulture], or you don't.

Nicholls (1998) p.3

The nature of the Alexander Technique is such that training is via continuous exposure to the practise of inhibition, direction and Use and these principles govern the nature of training. This study focused on the training of the specialised use of the hands and this skill is an extension of the individual's own Use. Training, which aims to improve an individuals Use, does not differ widely from course to course but reflects and is coloured by the individual directors' personality. It is still possible to trace every single training course back along its lineage to Alexander with very few links. In other words, I was trained by Walter Carrington who was trained by Alexander. This is still a close link to the original source. This direct connection to Alexander is obviously weakening over time and it is likely that learning theories, such as

those I have outlined, will come into more conscious use in the running of future training courses.

Unconscious competence and reflective practice

In suggestion that a practitioner reaches a stage that may be called unconscious competence I am referring, not to a lack of awareness but to a shift in awareness whereby a practitioner is able to multi-task at a very high level. These tasks for an Alexander teacher include the appropriate use of the hands, which is an outcome of their own Use. An example from the AT world would be a teacher allowing their hands to find their own way to work on a client and putting the hands in places that they seem not to have 'decided' on. In this case a client will often comment on the appropriateness of the contact in terms of that is the seat of their discomfort or that contact stimulates release in their whole body, or frees their breathing. A pupil may then ask how the teacher 'knew' where to put their hands. At this level it may appear to an outsider and even to the practitioner that decisions and actions are instinctive, possibly even inspired and intuitive. Claxton (2000) discussing the anatomy of intuition outlines several modes of intuitive practices varying from expert 'know-how' to heightened sensitivity to clues and past experience that a practitioner may use in making apparent intuitive choices. In my experience of learning practising and teaching the AT, these choices come about as the result of inhibition and direction. Concepts of the body learning 'unconscious competence' are a seductive irrelevance in this context. Whilst I have no doubt that an automatic pilot or motor memory may be part of the human psyche, I suspect that the true nature of these conditions is yet to be fully illuminated and are more complex than they appear. There is a lack of substantial literature exploring this area

Anticipated Learning Outcomes and the Learning Journey

When a learning journey is undertaken, it is likely that there is an anticipated outcome. If you simply ‘end gain’ in respect of that outcome then you are likely to repeat your habitual responses to learning. In my study I explored areas that I anticipated would prove fruitful. I also applied the concept of inhibition to my study, so that I inhibited the desire to achieve an anticipated outcome and my own habitual response to the strong stimulus of studying in an unfamiliar manner and environment. This is partly the nature of qualitative research that uncovers the unexpected and allows one to see things differently.

Inhibition enabled me to experience new thoughts and realizations, I put aside my anxiety about ‘getting it right’ and allowed myself to experience a new territory, which was challenging and different to my normal environment. This is an easy attitude to adopt at the beginning of any task, but not an easy attitude to maintain. The decision to withhold consent to the desire to respond in the habitual way is one that has to be frequently remade. The outcomes of this attitude were extraordinary and, inevitably, unexpected. They included:

- An invitation to give the F. M. Alexander Annual Memorial Lecture to members of STAT in July 2003. I consequently wrote *Candles and Onions-layers of Learning*. This lecture was published in The Alexander Journal (Issue 20 Autumn 2003 pp. 2-7). The lecture was reviewed in STAT news (both publications are submitted for assessment)
- Writing an opera libretto, *Gravity and Light*²⁰ which so fired the imagination of Alexander Teachers who heard about it during the Memorial lecture that it is was performed at the 2004 International Congress of Alexander Teachers in Oxford. The music was

²⁰ Appendix 4, main study submission

composed by Leon Coates, honorary fellow of composition at Edinburgh University. Musicians, singers, directors and conductors all became involved in this project.

- Writing a manual of practical training procedures for Alexander Technique Teacher Trainers *Ten Core Procedures for Hands-on-Groups* (submitted as appendix 5)
- Producing a professional CD of Alexander Technique Talks and procedures *The Magic of Gravity* in partnership with a company called High Energy. This will be available to the general public. See www.high-energy.co.uk
- Beginning an accreditation process with the National Open College Network (NOCN). This is a pilot stage that may lead to all STAT training courses receiving accreditation.
- Invitations to run CPD workshops for STAT on aspects of my study and my approach to hands-on-skills.
- Invitations to run CPD workshops in Denmark and Australia

Alexander Technique ‘knowledge’ and its place in the health field.

Public perception plays a role in how a profession changes and evolves. The existence of the Southampton back-pain trail (Little 2001) may have shifted the AT more towards a ‘health’ arena. This positioning is not a straightforward issue. Essentially, the AT a re-education of the individual at the level of the Self. Alexander practitioners refer to themselves as teachers, not practitioners, although this may be about to change. However people seem much more aware of the links between fitness and health, diet and health and the concept of having some responsibility for your own health is increasing. From this perspective the AT can offer an individual an influence on his or her own problems.

The two main categories of people that study the Alexander Technique are those who wish to enhance performance of some kind, such as singing, playing a musical instrument, sport, or general wellbeing; and those with many kinds of pain problems.

Alexander enjoyed excellent relations with medical practitioners of the day and was frequently sent patients that puzzled his medical colleagues²¹. When the patient came to Alexander, he or she was no longer regarded as a patient, but as a pupil who had the ability to learn. Alexander (1932) found that no matter what the problem was, the patient had, in Alexander's opinion, unreliable sensory appreciation and this was the underlying cause of their difficulties.

...the sensory direction of use is faulty, manifesting itself in bad habits in the everyday acts of walking, sitting, standing, eating, talking, playing games, thinking and reasoning.
(Alexander, 1932 p.92)

The significant words are 'thinking and reasoning'. The AT addresses thinking and reasoning in a different way from practices such as physiotherapy or osteopathy, which use a patient/therapist mode of interaction.

There is no doubt that pupils receive therapeutic benefits from having lessons in the Alexander Technique, Fisher (1997) investigating the effects of the AT on certain measures of respiratory function concluded:

²¹ Use of the Self (1932) Ch.V *For many years medical men have been sending their patient to me.*

This study found a statistically significant improvement in scores of MIP²² of 15.5% after a series of 6-9 lessons in the AT, using planned comparisons. (Fisher,1997 p.53)

The AT is a useful tool for back pain management and this is currently the subject of a four year randomised controlled trial²³ funded jointly by the Medical Research Council and the National Health Service (Little, 2001). As this study is in progress, no results are available, but the scale of it indicates the serious consideration given to the subject. At the midway point of this trial compliance rates were significantly high.

The AT has a lot to offer Health Sciences, particularly in Health education. It is in this area that I anticipate seeing a growth in the use of the AT. The existence of the back pain trial, the fact that AT is already offered in some back-pain clinics²⁴ and consistent referrals from doctors and osteopaths all point the way towards this position.

Drawing the strands together

The work of Schön (1987b) and the areas of reflective practise in action, drawing partly as he does on the work of Dewey, offers the best road forward for AT training. Dewey wrote the introduction to three of Alexander's books²⁵ and commented that Alexander's work was concerned with education (Alexander 1996 *ibid*). Schön has picked up some of these threads further expanded on them. Education, learning, teaching and teaching those who wish to teach; or therapy, or receiving treatment, all have to be filtered

²² Maximal inspiratory pressure

²³ The Alexander Technique, Exercise and Massage trial (ATEAM)

²⁴ Kingston-upon-Thames Health authority back pain clinic

²⁵ Dewey wrote the introductions to, and letters of support for *Man's Supreme Inheritance* (1910), *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* (1920) and *The Use of the Self* (1932)

through the individual's senses by both the giver and the receiver. It is the complexity of what filtering through the senses implies that Alexander's work approaches and informs my own study of examining how the skills of teaching may be achieved. In the end, we come back again to the beginning.

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

T. S. Elliot

GLOSSARY

<p>Alexander Technique (The) A technique promoting psycho-physical integration, improving breathing, balance and co-ordination by means of manual guidance and verbal instruction from a specialist.</p>
<p>Allègrezza²⁶ A musical term signifying mirth or cheerfulness</p>
<p>Allegro a musical instruction indicating that the speed is quick, lively, bright. I have used it to depict excitement and agitation.</p>
<p>Cantabile A musical term meaning ‘in a singing style’. I have used it to give a reflective quality to arias as well as chorus.</p>
<p>Direction or directions. A process of mentally projecting orders or directions from the mind to the body. A thought process that elicits a physical response.</p>
<p>F.M. Frederick Matthias Alexander, always referred to as F.M.</p>
<p>Hands on the back of a chair A training procedure where the hands are placed on the straight rail of a dining style chair, with the fingers and thumbs either side of the rail. The fingers are held straight and the wrists and elbows are flexed. It is a position that encourages release of the flexor musculature of the arms and chest. It is a specialised activity.</p>
<p>hands-on-groups Small groups of training course students studying the skills of using the hands on another person.</p>
<p>Inhibition. A process of withholding consent to respond habitually to a given stimulus. A way of stopping (inhibiting) unnecessary muscular or</p>

²⁶ Musical definitions taken from The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music

<p>mental effort. Used to prevent old patterns of tension/response from dominating the individual.</p>
<p>Largo A musical term meaning 'Broad' or dignified in style</p>
<p>Maestoso A musical term meaning majestic, or majestically.</p>
<p>Monkey A body attitude in which the ankles, knees and hips are flexed, usually with the upper body inclined forward. Because of the external appearance of this position it earned the nickname of monkey in Alexander circles. When done well, it encourages elasticity of muscle tone throughout the body. It is used by Alexander Teachers as a basic working attitude.</p>
<p>Primary Control Alexander's observation that there exists a certain relationship of the head to the neck, and of the head and neck to the back. This relating of parts can work well or not. When working well, it acts as a controlling influence on the whole body. It is why, in order to improve, for example, the use of an arm, one would first pay attention to the state of the neck, head and back. In his earlier explanations of his Technique, Alexander used the term 'primary movement' and said that the primary movement of the human being was up. He subsequently decided the term 'primary control' offered a clearer explanation of his meaning.</p>
<p><i>Recitativo accompagnato</i> A device used in later operas, this is sung in a narrative or speech like style and used to carry a story line. It has an orchestral accompaniment, not just a harpsichord. I have used the concept here for quotations from my research diary. I have used this technique in the programme notes as well as the Libretto</p>
<p><i>Recitativo Secco.</i> Used mostly in early operas up to Mozart's time, recitative is sung in a narrative style, by a character accompanied only by a harpsichord. Used to carry the story line along, it tends to be less emotional and less personal than the arias, where characters express their deeper feelings about</p>

<p>events and actions. I have used the concept here for notes outside of the opera story. I have used this technique in the programme notes as well as the Libretto</p>
<p>Semi-supine Both a position and a procedure. Semi-supine involves lying on one's back with the knees bent so that the feet are flat. The head is supported by a pile of books placed under the occiput. Pupils lie in this position on a special table and teachers work on them as part of an Alexander lesson. The procedure is also practised outside of lessons and is one way a pupil learns to work on their own Use.</p>
<p>STAT The Society of Teachers of The Alexander Technique. Largest professional body in the world, based in the UK, established in 1955</p>
<p>Taking the head One way a teacher puts their hands on a pupil's head. Usually with the pupil lying in semi-supine. A specialised teaching activity.</p>
<p>Use An Alexandrian concept pertaining to the relationship of the individual to gravity. In this context I have use a capital letter to differentiate from the ordinary usage of the word use.</p>
<p>SATB Soprano, alto, tenor and bass. The range of voices found in an opera chorus.</p>

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Carolyn Nicholls 2004

Alexander and The Alexander Technique

Alexander's History

Frederick Matthias Alexander was born in Wynyard, Tasmania in 1869. The son of a blacksmith and farmer, his early life was plagued by ill health, particularly respiratory problems. His attraction to the theatre and acting led him to become a reciter and actor with a particular passion for Shakespeare. He experienced vocal difficulties early on in his career and it was in overcoming his own problems that Alexander made the discoveries that formed the foundation of his technique.

Alexander wrote four books, in which he outlined the discovery and scope of his work. The titles of the books give some indication of the breadth of his technique. These books, in the order in which he wrote them, are:

Man's Supreme Inheritance. Conscious Guidance and Control in Relation to Human Evolution in Civilization. (1910)

Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual. (1923)

The Use of the Self. Its conscious direction in relation to diagnosis, functioning and the control of reaction (1932)

The Universal Constant in Living (1946)

The most comprehensive account of Alexander's discoveries can be found in The Use of the Self. His chapter 'Evolution of a Technique' describes how his practical experiences showed that 'it is impossible to separate 'mental' and 'physical' processes in any form of human activity' (Alexander 1932, 3).

When reading the precise and persistent steps he took in overcoming his problems it is useful to remember that his pioneering background would have contributed towards his determination to solve his own problems. In 1988 when Australia celebrated its bicentennial, Alexander was acknowledged as the pioneer he was and a plaque now rests on Table Mountain in Tasmania, near to Alexander's birthplace. It reads.

On a nearby property was born
Frederick Matthias Alexander 1869-1955
Founder of The Alexander Technique.
Discoverer of fundamental principles of human movement
one of the two hundred people that made Australia Great

Summary of The Alexander Technique Principles

Summing up the life work of a man and the subsequent development of his work is a major task. The following points offer only an outline of the Alexander Technique.

The Alexander Technique is concerned with the workings of the human postural mechanisms, how they respond to gravity and the effect that the mind has on these mechanisms. It is a psycho/physical technique that recognises that any change in the human condition must involve the conscious co-ordination of both mind and body.

Alexander discovered that a certain use of the head and neck, and of the head and neck in relation to the back, gives rise to a co-ordination of the whole person.

This co-ordination, which Alexander referred to as 'Use', improves the functioning of the whole person. It is effective in bringing about change on both physical and mental levels.

Functioning includes respiration, digestion, circulation, balance and all aspects of living.

When considering how 'Use' might be improved, the mental processes (thought) must consciously be engaged.

The mental processes (thought) are engaged to deal with the ubiquitous problems of responding to stimuli (desire to change) in habitual ways.

To this end the Alexander Technique recognises that sensory awareness (kinaesthetic awareness) is itself unreliable and this unreliability is overcome by the application of consciously directed thought.

This thought process is aimed at both preventing habitual responses from happening automatically, which we term 'inhibition' and promoting that action that we wish to take place, which we term 'directing'.

Teaching procedures

When sensory awareness is unreliable, both written and verbal explanations of the mechanics of desirable change are inadequate. The Alexander Technique is taught by a trained practitioner using their hands in a subtle and powerful way to influence the postural mechanisms of the individual they are working with. Verbal guidance, given at the same time, helps the individual engage in the process of change.

Scope of Application

The Alexander technique is widely used by people in many fields for many reasons. Musicians, actors, performers and sports men and women use it to enhance performance and prevent injury. A wide variety of neuromuscular

problems ranging from back pain, neck pain, upper limb disorder to tension problems, stress management and respiratory conditions can be helped by the Alexander Technique.

APPENDIX 2

The Analysis of the Specialised Use of the Hands in Alexander Teacher Training

MA in Alexander Teacher Training
By Work-Based learning

HANDS UP!

How Alexander Teachers learn to use their hands

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Narration of CD

(does not include commentary from participants in the film)

If you went for an Alexander lesson, perhaps because you had back problems, or because you were a singer and had heard that this technique could help you improve your performance, you would be taught in a way you might not expect. The teacher would use their hands on you, but not in a manipulative way. Alexander teachers' use their hands in a highly specialised and unique fashion.

The teacher's hands influence the pupils' postural mechanisms, bringing about improvement in their balance and co-ordination. This has a significant effect on all their movements and their basic relationship with gravity. Alexander called this 'Use'.

Use is something that people learn to recognise and improve with the Alexander technique.

Each pupil is different, and as a teacher becomes more experienced, they become more skilled in the subtle and powerful use of their hands on their pupils. This study looks at how that skill is initially acquired.

An Alexander Teacher is essentially a reflective practitioner, adapting what they do with their hands, and what they say to their pupils, to meet the changing, evolving process of each lesson.

The first clip shows an experienced Alexander Teacher giving part of a lesson to a pupil.

Comments from Anna

Training to teach the Alexander Technique is a three-year full time commitment. The training course consists of many elements that contribute towards the development of the skills needed to work on someone else.

The next clip shows **Walter Carrington taking some of his advanced students through training procedures. Walter has been training students for over 50 years.**

Walter taking about 'hands on the back of the chair'

But how does someone get from working on their own Use, to being able to teach someone else, and to respond to what they find under their hands. The skill of using the hands effectively is the core of the training programme. Students often work together practically, in small groups.

John with second term students

These are students in their second term of training with John Nicholls and the focus of their work is primarily on what they are doing with themselves, not what they are doing to the person they have their hands on. So they are paying a great deal of attention to their own use, which is being monitored and improved by the contact of their trainers hands on them.

Comments from Group.

Learning to use their hands, students come across the same kinds of problems they would have experienced when they were first having lessons in the Alexander Technique themselves. Particularly problems with sensory awareness, not really knowing if what you are doing is what you think you are doing.

They are taught to take the same calm thoughtful approach to the work of the hands on groups as they did to their own lessons. They work primarily with the concepts of inhibition and direction.

Comments from John working with Larissa

Here, John is getting a student to put their hands on him so that he can give them feedback from a different perspective.

The students rely on accurate feedback from a trained person like John, which helps them re-educate their own sensory awareness and develop a methodical approach to their own Use whilst putting their hands on another person.

As the longest practising trainer, Walter Carrington has the last word

Walter talking about the teaching situation

That's all folks!

Appendix 3 Libretto

GRAVITY AND LIGHT

An Opera based on The Alexander Technique.



The Mirrored Chamber

The opera tells the story of Emily, a young girl who has a burning ambition to practise magic. She has heard of a powerful magician named Frederick, who had the ability to transform people with the touch of his hands. He was a mysterious figure, who had spent many years locked in a room gazing at his own reflection in mirrors. Mirrors were all around, revealing secrets that he alone could understand. He helped the lame to walk and the stutterer to speak. He freed the sick from their prison of pain, and helped the breathless to breathe. He enlivened the minds of the dull and caused the philosopher to think yet more deeply. He was a strange and powerful man, now partly wrapped in the mystery of the past; his innermost secrets known only to a few. His hands brought about the transformations he made, and Emily wondered if she too could perform his most powerful spell; transforming gravity into light.

The Spiral Staircase

Emily sets out on a strange journey. She hears of a wise man that, she believes, Frederick had initiated into his practices. He lives in a large rambling house surrounded by his helpers and pupils, all of whom speak a strange language that Emily can't quite understand. Keen to learn everything she can, Emily wanders through the house, meeting different characters that give her

thoughtful directions. But in her haste Emily misunderstands them and she constantly finds herself climbing a spiral staircase that she thought she had already climbed, only to realise that actually, although it appears to be the same staircase, it looks different every time she climbs it, and the view is different the higher she goes.

In time Emily realises that if she wants to learn the secrets of Fredericks' spell, she must stop looking where she has been looking and embark upon a strange and delightful journey into an unknown land and that the spiral staircase will take her there if she can understand its message.

THE PROGRAMME

LIBRETTIST

Carolyn Nicholls (BA(Hons) MSTAT)

Born in East London in 1952, Carolyn Nicholls originally trained as an artist and photographer. A life-long interest in music and 'the way things, including the human being, tick' indirectly led her to train as an Alexander Teacher in the late 1970's. She currently divides her time between running an Alexander Teacher Training course on the South Coast of England and pursuing her fascination with creative writing and 'different things'.

Her current work *Gravity and Light*, takes its title from the two opposing but complementary forces that stimulate the human postural mechanisms. We must contend with gravity as a downward force in our lives, holding us onto the planet, and yet we have an inbuilt urge to extend upwards. This urge is both physical and for many symbolic of an inner search for understanding, enlightenment, illumination. To grow towards the light is a fundamental urge for all most life forms, be they sentient creatures, or plants.

Grappling with these two forces is a rewarding journey that can lead in many directions (mostly upwards!). This piece is the culmination of a twenty-year

journey that the librettist both wittingly and unwittingly undertook. It explores a crystallisation of understanding, experience and practice that extends both into the past and the future.

Programme Notes

Outside the rambling house.

Emily has found the house and desperately wants to explore it. She has many questions and hopes the people inside the house can enlighten her. What were Frederick's secrets? How did he transform gravity into light and could she do it too?

Emily knew that the magician had written four scrolls, in which he committed his secret studies to parchment. She had managed to get copies of the scrolls and had tried to read them. But she was frustrated. The meaning of his words evaded her. She tried to do what he had done, to carry out the same experiments that he had carried out. She had to find out more.

Staging (Programme Notes)

The spiral staircase forms the stage set. As well as being symbolic of the spirals of learning, where one constantly rediscovers knowledge and yet it becomes deeper and more widely used, the spiral staircase represents the spiral nature of the musculature of the human being and the universal existence of spirals in nature and the universe, ranging from the crab nebulae galaxy to the cochlea of the human inner ear or the structure of DNA.

THE CAST

Frederick	<i>Baritone</i>	A magician of great power (a silent character)
Emily	<i>Soprano</i>	A young girl, who wants to learn Frederick's spell.
Hardiman	<i>Bass</i>	A custodian of Frederick's spells.
Alice	<i>Mezzo</i>	A woman on the spiral staircase.
Nicholas	<i>Tenor</i>	A man on the spiral staircase.
Shirley-Jane & Lisa	<i>Altos</i>	Two woman ascending the staircase
Tania & Katerina	<i>Sopranos</i>	Two women ahead of Shirley-Jane & Lisa
Anna	<i>Alto</i>	A woman watching the staircase
<i>Chorus (SATB)</i>		People climbing their own staircases

ACT ONE

Scene 1. A group of students are sitting on the steps outside the rambling house (chorus).

No. 1

Recitative and chorus

Allegro. Emily runs on, carrying the four scrolls of Frederick

Emily. Tell me! oh tell me! oh tell me, where can I find the secret?
Tell me! oh tell me, where do I look?
I know he changed things, he changed things
I have heard much
I want to change things, to change things
Tell me the way

Chorus How can you listen when breath is not breathing?
How can you learn when your neck is so stiff?
What would you know if you can't hear the music your mind and your
muscles could play if you wish
Stop, stop, you simply must stop
Stop, stop, first learn how to wait

Maestoso *Hardiman emerges from the rambling house and invites Emily to enter*

No. 2 Nothing is Magic, Magic is Nothing

Solo

Hardiman. Before you can do magic
Magic you must understand
Before you can do something
Nothing must be done

Ask yourself the question
Which way am I going?
And if you don't know
I can show the way

No 3 Aria *Cantabile Hardiman takes Emily towards the spiral staircase. With his hands on her back he guides her upwards, towards the light.*

Emily. It seems I am floating but here I am solid, my mind tells my muscles
the way they might go
His hands feel so gentle, but I sense their power, it seems that inside me I
know what to do
I try, I try, I try to be right
But I know, I know, my right to be wrong
I'm here on the staircase, with spirals inside me, my mind and my body keep
turning around
His hands lift me up and I feel myself lengthen but he doesn't lift me its hard
to know how
The spell, the spell, I know that's it's gravity
The spell, the spell, I know that it's light

♪ Chorus And so you see____ and so you see____
What can you do but do nothing?
There is a way____ there is a way____
That nothing turns out to be something.
You breathe, you widen, your neck feels so long
You're tall and moving, no effort at all
And so you see____ and so you see____
What can you do but do nothing?
There is a way____ there is a way____
That nothing turns out to be something

Scene 2. Inside the rambling house, Emily explores the spiral staircase.
Allègrezza. Emily meets Lisa, Shirley-Jane and Alice

No 4 Ensemble

Emily. Where should I go?

What should I do,- I have lost my way.

Lisa, Shirley-Jane and Alice. Up! Up! Up!

Make no mistake, the way is up

Emily. That's what I am doing, that's where I am going, I am going up, I
can feel it, I am going up up up.

Lisa & Shirley-Jane. You think you are doing what you think you are doing
But you are misled.

Feelings are not your guides, they will lead you astray.

Stop, stop, and think only. Only think and action will follow

Emily. I want to cast the spell, but you tell me what you have already told
me. Now show me the spell.

Alice. Turn another spiral, learn again what you know. Look in the mirror,
again, again, again. Look in the mirror, again, again, again.

TUTTI ENSEMBLE

Emily.	Lisa & Shirley- Jane.	Alice .
Free the neck, they tell me to free the neck. To cast the spell what must I do? Why can't I know now? To cast the spell what must I do? Why can't I know	Jane. You can't know a thing by an instrument that's wrong. We are here, we are here. Going up the spiral staircase within and without. The harder you try the worse it	Let gravity be your friend, let the spiral inside extend your mind. When you have it you won't care to ask the questions. Look in the mirror, again, again.

now? gets. We also think Feelings are not
Free the neck, but we know the spell your guide. Only
my neck is free-isn't but now we are not think and action will
it-isn't it free? Isn't so sure. follow
it?

Scene 3. The Spiral Staircase.

Largo. Hardiman, Nicholas and Alice discuss the trials of Emily

No 5 The Spell Begins

Trio

Alice. Shall we teach her, is she ready, is it not too soon?

Such a power, can she wield it, will her mind be strong?

Hardiman. On and on, the journey is on, round and round the
journey goes round. Believing you know what is right is the fault that all
true magicians must learn to undo.

Nicholas. The spell already works upon her, the ingredients already at
her hand. And all we can do is guide her senses, till her senses become
her guide.

Tutti. Emily, the time has come to learn. Listen, listen the spell
is.....

Scene 4.

The spiral staircase, another turn.

Allegro. **The company and chorus**

No 6 Finale

tutti

Tutti. To change the world first change yourself and let your spirit
breathe

To take your time just change your mind and all things can begin.

If you want to lift up your heart

And sing

If you want to lift up your heart and sing

How will you do it?

Emily. First I say no and then I say yes

Hardiman. The no still must linger on

Nicholas. You can't know a song by a singer who's wrong

Chorus. It is your choice, it is your choice

choose to say no

And leap, and leap, into the unknown

Only by giving up the old ways and refusing to feel if you're right

Will you find the freedom to cast the first spell

of gravity and light

of gravity and light_____

Chorus and company

Gravity, gravity, gravity and light, gravity and light_____

THE END

