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New Directions At ACAT-NY

by Ron Dennis, Board Chairman

Over the past year-and-a-half, the Board of Directors and Membership of ACAT-NY have been sensing, discussing, and implementing changes in the philosophy, structure, and operations of the Center. New directions are being projected to deal with new conditions that have emerged as the Center has developed over the past twenty years.

The first of these new conditions relates largely to money: with the doubling of our rent and halving of our space three years ago, it became clear that maintaining an independent headquarters in Manhattan would become increasingly problematic if not impossible. Yet it was equally clear that the Teacher Training Program of the Center—its “heart”—must be continued in an accessible and adequate facility.

The second condition concerns the relationship of the Center to its graduates and to other Alexander teachers as a professional organization: it has become difficult to meet the particular needs of both a teacher training program and a professional organization under the same institutional umbrella, even though the advisability of such an organization appears to be increasing (see John Ensminger's article in this issue).

Resolving the conflicts inherent in these conditions has been and will continue to be a process in which new directions must be projected in the face of old habits. With regard to the first, the Center has decided to relinquish the space it has occupied for the last ten years in the Lincoln Towers complex on Manhattan's Upper West Side. An agreement has been reached with the Hebrew Arts School, a fine facility just two blocks away, to house the Teacher Training Program and the Center office. With regard to the second, the Center is de-emphasizing its role as a professional organization—although it will remain a membership corporation—with the conviction that local, regional, and national professional groupings will emerge from the context of perceived need.

As part of this shift of emphasis, the Center has decided that it will not go on as sole publisher of *The Alexandrian: A Periodical of the Alexander Technique*. We would like for *The Alexandrian* to continue as a forum for the profession, and would be willing to share in editorial and financial responsibilities. However, we feel that further publication must be a joint effort of some type, and will await developments along this line.

Our address after October 1st, 1985 will be: American Center for the Alexander Technique, Abraham Goodman House, 129 West 67th Street, New York, N.Y. 10023. We welcome as usual your communications and personal visits.

Change involves carrying out an activity against the habit of life.

F. M. Alexander

Legal Regulation of the Alexander Technique: Current Prospects¹

by John J. Ensminger, Esq.

There has, as yet, been no legal regulation of the practice of the Alexander Technique in the United States and, I suspect, the majority of teachers would prefer that this state of affairs continue.² Unfortunately, it is somewhat unlikely. A number of factors may sooner or later precipitate social control. It need not be that anyone do anything wrong. It could come from a judge in a malpractice case, from a legislature concerned with the proliferation of new therapeutic approaches, from a state agency reacting to a poorly researched story in a newspaper. My concern is that if Alexander teachers do not organize so that they can react effectively to such situations, they are much more likely to find themselves under regulatory systems that are not only not of their own choosing, but not even designed by Alexander teachers at all.

In brief, my thesis will be that regulation is best anticipated by creation of a national organization, operating under the same tax-exempt status as a trade association.³ If charitable donations are anticipated, e.g. for the educational purposes of such an organization, a separate corporation could be formed for this purpose.⁴

I am not, for the most part, concerned with the debate, which has recently received considerable attention, as to whether American teachers certified by STAT in England should or should not be allowed to pass on membership in the English Society to further generations of American students. Insofar as the question is one of educational approaches, it does not affect my argument. If, however, we are talking about an organization which represents Alexander teachers in their relations to American society and government, then I have to argue that bifurcation can only hurt. Failure to develop unity, or at least a common denominator, will inevitably weaken the profession as a whole, if and when certain problems arise.

What could precipitate social control?

(1) Medical malpractice. When I first heard about the Alexander Technique, I considered this an unlikely eventuality as it seemed to have much more of an educational than a therapeutic model. However, there are teachers who have collected payments from insurance programs such as Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Some teachers have received referrals from doctors and the clients have used the referrals to deduct their payments as physical therapy. If an injury resulted from taking Alexander classes—or appeared to result—what standard of care would the teacher be held to in a negligence action? Perhaps that of a physical therapist. A judge who had never heard of the Alexander Technique might not be inclined to investigate its particular standards. In fact, in some states he might not be able to. In New York, prior to state certification of chiropractors in 1963, chiropractors were held to the standards of medical doctors, and failing that, were by definition negligent.⁵ Only after 1963 were the courts in New York willing to apply the standards of chiropractic to chiropractors.⁶

The courts, it may be noted, have been least likely to find medical malpractice where there was an element of spirituality or religion. A case from the New Jersey Supreme Court of 1935, reversing a conviction of medical malpractice, is so short that it can be quoted almost in full:

(continued on page 3, col. 2)

Excerpts from Implications for Education in the Work of F. M. Alexander: An Experimental Project in a Public School Classroom

by Ann Mathews

"Abstract"

The position taken is first, that a child is a triune creature, a profoundly indivisible unity of the physical, emotional and mental; and second, that important physical aspects of this thinking, feeling (and learning) child, crucial to optimum development, go virtually unnoticed in the classroom, as elsewhere, for lack of a conceptual framework. Such a framework is provided in the early-twentieth-century work of F. Mathias Alexander, who deeply influenced his long-time pupil, John Dewey, among others. Alexander's insights into the principles of coordination in the human species, and into the ways in which our culture tends to flout these principles, resulting in chronic malcoordination and confusion of the proprioceptive sense, constitute a long-neglected resource for early childhood education. This paper explains Alexander's theories and describes his technique for the re-education of human coordination. It recounts my growing awareness, as a result of Alexander training, of a lacuna in my own education and my training as a classroom teacher, as well as in the education of the whole child.

The final section describes a year's project of teaching the Alexander principles in a first/second grade classroom in a suburban public school and discusses the importance of this work to education. Included are photographs taken in the classroom and transcribed excerpts from the children's discussions, as well as a brief report on similar experiments in other schools. There is a short section on Dewey and Alexander. Appended is an annotated bibliography.

"Squatting"

Of the many vertical positions that are natural and necessary to human functioning, the two most basic ones are standing and squatting. I have underlined this because it is important and most people in our culture do not know it. Alexander did not discuss the squat but Dart (1947) has written, in "The Attainment of Poise," p. 88: "The capacity to adopt the squatting posture in comfortable equilibrium is an absolute prerequisite for the poised erect posture which . . . evolved therefrom." What Dart does not spell out, though it is nonetheless true, is that the squat is indispensable for maintaining "poised, erect posture" over the decades of a life. The true squat, like the standing position, is always on the whole foot, not on the ball of the foot. We all discover and use this squat position as toddlers, and half the world could not conceive of doing without it, lifelong. But we have evolved into a way of life that does without it, and as a result, muscles shorten, joints tighten and, indirectly, the so-called bad back is created. Curious as to the age at which children of our culture abandon this birthright position, I spent some time observing the groups. The children rarely squatted, and when they did, to get something down low, it was tensely up on the balls of their feet and hunched way over to keep from falling backwards. Alternatively, they would kneel down, a good, natural position, or bend over hump-backed and stiff-legged, in the dangerous style of their parents.

So in the class time, one of the first things I did was to have a survey to see what the squatting situation was. Approximately half the children were able to do it, a few finding it simple and easy, many finding it tight but comfortable. A quarter were so tight that there was no ease in the position for them, and a quarter were so tight that they could not even get into the position without falling over backwards. This then became an item high on the agenda, and Mrs. Murray volunteered to remind the children to use the squat when they went to their low cubbies. Here I cannot resist describing a scene which brought me great delight. The class had been on a trip to Ecology Park and were going to have a writing period afterwards. Mrs. Murray said

she would put on the board reminders of all the things they had seen, and asked for hands. Many hands shot up and she began writing, "mushrooms, dead bird, chipmunk, turtle, seed pods, toad," etc. It seemed that there were always at least five hands up and she was running out of space on the board. My own body began remembering what this felt like, specifically the reluctance to use the awkward space low down on the board, and then I saw her begin to flex at the hip, knee and ankle joints, and write lower and lower, spine still erect and aligned and relaxed, head still balancing on top, till finally she was in a full squat as she wrote the last ten suggestions at the bottom. It was beautiful—strong, efficient, elegant, appropriate, it had the dignity of a completely natural act, and yet, if one thinks about it, it is an anachronism in our culture. I think it is significant that there was not a murmur from the children. (Though perhaps equally significant, on another occasion one of the children had an urgent communication to whisper to me one day as I was putting hands on during rest. "Mrs. Mathews," she said gravely, "When you make us comfortable at rest, you squat." "Yes I do," I answered. "That's so I can be comfortable while I help you to be comfortable.")

The children who could not squat on the whole foot, or who were clearly very uncomfortable and hunching way over to keep their balance, were not happy at being asked to do this. I sympathized with their complaints and welcomed their questions about it. We had explored the limitations of movement at the various joints and they were quite right to be wondering whether this might not be another such built-in limitation. One boy said he supposed that grown-ups could "learn Alexander" better than kids. "Not so," I answered. "Children are much stretchier than grown-ups and they have only recently been doing *everything* right, so they are much better at learning this than their parents. It is hard for some of you right now and it is still a bit hard for me, too, but I promise you that the more you do it, the easier it will get." As always this proved to be the case.

"Thomas"

When I met him on the first day of school, Thomas informed me without preamble that he should be in the third grade but he could not read so he had been left back. He was taller than most of the others and when he sagged, which was most of the time, his curves were on a grand scale. He took to the reading-through-writing program like a thirsty sponge and seemed similarly fascinated with the Alexander work. One day we were discussing the kinds of feelings that might pull us down—when we were sad, disappointed, worried, hurting—some of the feelings the children were naming or describing. "And mad," said Thomas. "But . . . when you're mad you're some sad too . . . oh there's got to be another word." In this class I deliberately thought of something that was sad to me, and felt how that might once have pulled me down physically, and gave in to it. I asked the children what they saw and was told, "you got littler," "your spine curved," "your head dropped," and so forth. One child said hesitantly, "You looked a little sad." "Yes," I said, "I was thinking of something that makes me sad," after which there was a torrent of discussion about the kinds of things that had made the children sad in one way or another. At the end, Thomas again, looking puzzled, "But, Mrs. Mathews, when you showed us feeling sad and going down, I felt my spine pulled down." That took me utterly by surprise. "Did anyone else feel their spines pulled down?" Several hands went up. It is something to think about.

"Sophie"

One incident points out the value of the group in learning something like the Alexander principles. Sophie was a child whose habitual slump suggested not only the shared peer group posture, but a genuine mild depression. She was intelligent and could read well, but the single-parent home situation was stressful and she was a little overweight, listless, complaining at the slightest mishap, manipulative. Although she appeared to like the hands-on at rest and the lengthening up when she was working at the desk, she would sag down limply as soon as I withdrew my hands; she was the only child in the room who did this. The others would stay "floating up" for quite a while after I had left them. One day she was squatting to get something from her cubby and looking particularly ungraceful—up on the balls of the feet, back humped over, head pulled down to peer into the cubby, neck nowhere to be seen. I asked her to ease back onto her heels. She protested that she couldn't, her designer jeans were too tight. I asked her to try, and said my hands would support her so that she wouldn't fall over backwards. She came back successfully, but was still hunched over. I asked her to let her neck release, her spine float up, and feel the air come into her lungs. My hands were still there to give her security, but not Doing, just being there. She lengthened up and as she did, her neck released and the head eased into balance. The parts, differently assembled, had, literally, different dimensions; there was something total about the change. I exclaimed in pleasure at the sight, then asked her if she would demonstrate the two different ways of squatting to the group. She agreed, and at class time I had her hop on a table and slowly go through the shift in balance, my hands helping, just as it had happened. As she squatted there, apparently quite comfortable, designer jeans and all, I asked the children what they had observed. "Her back went from bent to straight." "She was squashed in front before and then she wasn't." "Her head moved." "Her neck got long." "She looks more comfortable." I was pleased that they had seen everything I had hoped they would see and was going to wind up the discussion when I called on one last child. "Yes, what did you see?" A pause, then, "She got beautiful." Several children nodded. I nodded and left it at that.

Children find Habit as strong an adversary in the matter of change as do adults. Sophie did not sit straight and squat erect on the full foot from that moment on. But she no longer sagged listlessly down when I took my hands away and she began to take a strong interest in herself and her Use and soon there was a lot of energy invested in change. I heard from an adult pupil sometime later that she had been dining with Sophie's family and discovered that I was a mutual acquaintance. "I was curious to know what you did with twenty children at once," said my pupil, "so I started to compare notes with Sophie. No one else at the table could follow what we were talking about, but I felt that I was talking to another adult. She seems to have grasped all the principles I am struggling to master." She was also, apparently, sitting beautifully.

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Back Issues

All back issues of *The Alexandrian* are available at \$2 plus \$1 P&H each (send \$1 for complete table of contents).

As a special offer, a full set of Vols. I-IV (13 issues, including the "Frank Pierce Jones Memorial Issue") will be sent postpaid for a \$25 tax-deductible contribution to ACAT-NY, 142 West End Avenue, Apt. 1-P, NY, NY 10023.

The defendant did not prescribe drugs or material remedy. He sold a book entitled 'Eternal Wisdom and Health.' He maintained a store in Atlantic City with seats arranged in rows. He spoke of the infinite spiritual forces which illuminate the body with the principles of truth, love and light. He preached the triumph of the mind over the ills of the body and the power of the will to drive out disease. He told his patients to sit erect, feet firmly on the floor and will themselves to feel the forces which he talked of which would drive out the ills they told him of. Obviously that which he did was not the practice of medicine, because the act . . . was amended . . . so as to exempt from the provisions . . . those who administered to the sick or suffering by prayers or spiritual means without the use of drug or material remedy. The philosophy which the defendant sought to teach was the power of the mind over the ills of the body. He used neither drug or material remedy. He told those who came to him how to sit and think and gave them assurances of the cure of every ailment by such means . . .

The conviction will be set aside.⁷

(2) State law. Some states have "drugless healing" or "healing arts" statutes which are broad enough to cover the Alexander Technique. Washington State, for instance, has a law on "drugless therapeutics" and defines it as covering a number of approaches including "manual manipulation for the stimulation of physiological and psychological action to establish a normal condition of mind and body."⁸ One would not have to go far in the literature about the Alexander Technique to find language similar enough that a court in Washington could say that Alexander teachers would have to pass the exam required of "drugless healers." The District of Columbia has a similar statute covering "any system of healing that does not resort to the use of drugs, medicine, or operative surgery for the prevention, relief or cure of any disease."⁹ The fact that such statutes have not yet been applied to Alexander teachers is no guaranty they will not be.¹⁰

(3) Conflict with another profession leading to state legislation or regulation. This is an instance where the success of the profession is more likely to be a problem than any failure. Acupuncture provides an example of an approach that has encountered such difficulties. In a number of states, acupuncture has been classified as a form of minor surgery and has thus been restricted to licensed physicians.¹¹ In California acupuncture may not be performed without the prior diagnosis or referral of a licensed physician, dentist, podiatrist or chiropractor.¹² This points out another danger of slipping too close to the medical model. Even more curious have been the disputes as to whether chiropractors could practice acupuncture after having been trained to use it in chiropractic schools. They have generally lost because the statutory definition of chiropractic was not broad enough to include the idea of sticking needles into patients, whereas courts have allowed this to physicians under the notion of surgery. However, a judge dissenting in one of these cases pointed out that what the majority was really saying was that "only physicians are free to employ new methods of diagnosis and treatment without explicit legislative permission."¹³

(4) Violation of confidentiality or other professional standards. Clients are apt to reveal things to an Alexander teacher which they regard as private. The teacher should be sensitive to the boundaries which a client wishes to place on such information. When discussing cases with other teachers, it would be best for a teacher not to use names unless approval for such communications is obtained from the client in advance.¹⁴

Any of these problems may arise piecemeal, one state at a time, and the disparity in consequences could be almost as troublesome as the failure of the judges or legislators involved to understand the real purposes of the Alexander Technique. Hogan, in *The Regulation of Psychotherapy*, argues that licensing laws can be factors in:

(1) unnecessarily restricting the supply of practitioners; (2) decreasing their geographic mobility; (3) inflating the cost of services; (4) making it difficult for paraprofessionals to perform effectively; (5) stifling innovations in the education and training of practitioners and in the organization and utilization of services; and (6) discriminating against minorities, women, the poor and the aged. In addition, licensing laws,

(continued on page 4, col. 1)

as currently conceived, tend to promote unnecessary and harmful consumer dependence, since their implicit philosophy is that the public is incapable of making use of information to decide on practitioner competence.¹⁵

While this is an argument for avoiding regulation, it is not by any means an argument for failing to take steps to guide the course of regulation, should it become inevitable. The way that is done is organizationally. How?

The best approach, it seems to me, would involve the creation of a national association, capable of performing the following functions: (1) disseminating information to the general public; (2) acting as a lobbying agent for or against pertinent legislation or regulation; (3) providing a national forum, by means of publications and conventions, for disseminating information among practitioners; (4) developing standards of training and practice; (5) analyzing and publishing research concerning the Alexander Technique; (6) keeping a national list of all Alexander teachers trained under acceptable standards; (7) conceivably developing a code of professional responsibility; (8) conceivably providing a forum for questions of peer review; and (9) perhaps keeping a national library.

Among the advantages of a trade association are: (1) there are no strictures on lobbying as there are with charitable organizations; (2) though donations to such an organization are not deductible as charitable gifts, they frequently will be as business deductions; also (3) it may be possible to avoid annual filings with the Internal Revenue Service, while gross receipts are small.

The most charged issue is likely to involve the criteria for membership in such an association. This in turn will influence the association's positions on the standards of training. Despite the fact that all training programs trace their approaches back to the founder, there has been considerable diversity in the programs developed. Some consensus will have to be reached. I suspect that there will be fewer difficulties if some quantifiable measures are developed, involving factors such as hours in training, years in the profession, etc. Difficulties are more likely to arise in obtaining tax-exempt status if the criteria too closely restrict membership to a particular interest group.¹⁶

It is my opinion that the time has come to move in this or some similar direction. The diversity of institutional approaches can only increase in the future, making uniformity ever more difficult to achieve. The prospect of outside regulation similarly increases with the popularity of the Alexander Technique. Avoiding the issue now will inevitably make the ultimate solutions more difficult and probably more painful.

FOOTNOTES

¹I wish to thank my friend and mentor, Mr. Michael Perlin, for a copy of his unpublished address, "Legal Regulation of Biofeedback Practice: The Dawn of a New Era?", which proved an invaluable source of ideas and information. Mr. Perlin is a professor at New York Law School.

²A recent search of the Westlaw computer data bank produced no citations for the phrase "Alexander Technique."

³Internal Revenue Code §501(c)(6).

⁴IRC §509(a)(3).

⁵*Brown v. Shyne*, 242 NY 176 (1926).

⁶*Taormina v. Goodman*, 406 NYS2d 350 (1978).

⁷*Board of Medical Examiners v. Maxwell*, 13 NJ Misc. 855 (1935).

⁸Wash. Rev. Code Ann. §18.36.010.

⁹D.C. Code §2-1301(6).

¹⁰An analysis of such statutes can be found in Hogan, *The Regulation of Psychotherapists*, vol. 2 (1979). Perhaps 20 states have statutes which, if interpreted sufficiently broadly, could encompass the Alexander Technique. I should perhaps note at this point that I do not regard most anti-quackery statutes as being a threat to Alexander teachers.

¹¹Cf. 17 ALR 4th 964 for a synopsis of cases.

¹²Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code §2155.

¹³Dissent of Justice McCormick of the Supreme Court of Iowa, in *State v. Van Wyk*, 320 NW 2d 599, at 607 (1982).

¹⁴Confidentiality is perhaps the most easily described ethical violation. Others might be: making excessive claims, inappropriate referrals to practitioners of questionable therapeutic approaches, making false or misleading statements as to training or experience. The Constitution of STAT lists one of the objects of the Society as being "to establish and maintain standards and codes of professional conduct and integrity...."

¹⁵Hogan, note 11 above, at vol. 1, pp. 238-9.

¹⁶*National Muffler Dealers Ass'n v. US*, 440 US 472 (1979). ACAT, for instance, could only safely lobby within the confines of §501(h) of the IRC.

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Can Symptoms Have A Value?

by John Naylor

Robert Rickover's comments on back pain (review of *The Book of the Back*, Alexandrian Vol. IV, No. 2) suggest a possible area of enquiry into causes of back pain when the more obvious causes of "misuse" have been eliminated.

Wilfred Barlow in *The Alexander Principle*¹ describes the relationship between anxiety and muscle tension but what I think he does not make very clear is the extent to which anxiety in its various forms can exist below the threshold of conscious awareness and the fact that whoever is at the mercy of it may well not "feel" anxious. Indeed, Karen Horney went so far as to say that "anxiety may be the determining factor in our lives without our being aware of it."²

Both my own personal experience and as an Alexander Teacher suggests that some students may be in danger of misusing the Technique to attempt to eliminate symptoms that may be the only means that the total "Self" has of making one aware that certain aspects of our relation to our life-situation need to change.

The development of various schools of depth psychology may serve to remind us that, though we may increase our conscious powers of choice, as far as our total "Self" goes, our conscious awareness is probably the tip of an iceberg (or volcano) and that the insights of present-day depth psychology could be a useful complement to Alexander work. The insights into the dynamics of unconscious motivation that such a writer as Karen Horney offers may enable us to increase our insight into WHY we may continue to develop (or be subject to) misuse patterns. In some situations, both approaches may be necessary. [See also Robin Skynner, "The Process of Growth," in *More Talk of Alexander*, ed. Wilfred Barlow (London: Victor Gollancz, 1978), pp. 135-37. — Ed.]

Footnotes

¹(London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), pp. 97-99.

²Karen Horney, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1937), p. 46.

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Editorial Note

This fourth anniversary issue of *The Alexandrian* features an almost-startling juxtaposition of themes, from the stern realm of the law in John Ensminger's essay, to the ingenuous world of childhood in the excerpts from Ann Mathews' Master's thesis (reviewed by Walter Carrington last issue). As Alexander Murray has remarked in these pages (Vol. 1, No. 4), "Those familiar with the Alexander Technique will be aware of the diversity of interests which it brings together."

As this phase of *The Alexandrian's* life closes, I wish to thank again everybody who has contributed to its success—authors, subscribers, correspondents, office help—and especially the Members and Board of Directors of ACAT-NY for the necessary financial and moral support of the venture.

Also, a special vote of thanks to our astute typesetter, Mr. Ras Brancato, and our unflappable printer, Mr. Richard Filos, for generous service beyond the usual bounds of a business relationship.

Best wishes to all Alexandrians everywhere.

—Ron Dennis, Editor