

A photograph of three people standing in front of a building with a decorative black metal gate. On the left is a woman with curly brown hair and glasses, wearing a grey blazer over a white top. In the center is a woman with short grey hair and glasses, wearing a dark jacket and a patterned scarf. On the right is a man with short grey hair, wearing a grey blazer over a white shirt. The gate has the number '18' on it. The background shows a building with white siding and a dark roof.

direction

volume 3 number 7

Schools of Thought

50 Years on...
Carrington
Entering a New Era

**Business, Science
and Anatomy 101**

Finding Competency
Standards

**INTERNATIONAL
TRAINING SCHOOL
DIRECTORY**

Inside a Million Dollar
Training Corporation

**5 Students
Become Trainees**

Apprenticeships
In Action

direction

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Editorial ■ by Paul Cook

*What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason,
how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable,
in action how like an angel,
in apprehension how like a god,
the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals.*

From Shakespeare's Hamlet, 1602



Teacher trainers of the Alexander technique are the lamas of our community. They help ordinary people morph into the most gifted teachers of our time. Their responsibility not only to FM's body of work, but to humanity itself is extraordinary. I've been humbled and honoured to work

with these amazing people the past few months...infinite as they are in their faculty to train humans for excellence.

But why, after spending three years full time training, are graduates often completely unable to communicate the simplicity of the discovery to the average man? Are training courses so effective at transporting trainees to such states of psycho-physical evolution that their grasp of the incumbent social standard of non-self awareness is lost? Are they too removed from the average person to be able to relate to the social blindness that prevails?

Every course is different with each having their own unique direction to foster learning in the Alexander principles. This issue could only ever be a snapshot of the diversity within our community so we have attempted to bring as much as possible to the discussion.

F.M. Alexander once said:

"My experience may one day be recognized as a signpost directing the explorer to a country hitherto 'undiscovered' and one which offers unlimited opportunity for fruitful research to the patient and observant pioneer."

He was leaving the door open for each person to find his or her own way in the work. Little wonder that many strong opinions exist as to the "right" path and some people invited to contribute to this issue were unable to separate their passion for the work from their need to explain why everyone else is wrong. Every stone thrown originates from a heart of belief and dedication to a particular interpretation of the good man's words, either written or passed down. My position is not to judge, but to merely report. I can see every side and can relate to the obsession for fundamental truths to be expressed.

We work with a principle that can be applied to all human endeavour, all learning, all health and creative pursuits, it's the basis of all human movement. Some fundamentalism can be forgiven!

Alas, we've let FM down. Not one training course director I interviewed mentioned one word about teaching teachers how to work with children. It's disappointing if not devastating to realise that all our focus is still on adult education. If the children are our future, when are we going to invest our infinite potential into the future?

To hear personally from some of the visionaries who have helped us to bring this issue together, visit the website and open the "Audio Archive". I look forward to your responses to this, our newest creation.

March, 2010

Hidden Pathways ■ *by Cathy Madden*

Cathy Madden trained via an alternative pathway, moving to live near the teacher she admired, and, over time, through studying with her, becoming a teacher. Madden actually didn't know that there were other ways to learn to teach until many years into her process and she admits, "My choice of training method wasn't as conscious as some of the people you will hear from." Although she doesn't have a training school in her "home city", Madden teaches people who want to learn to teach the Alexander technique in an apprentice-style process. She teaches on training courses around the world, is an Associate Director of a Training School in Japan and deeply values the hidden pathways, acknowledging that they aren't for everyone. The following is a collection of interviews she has conducted with people who have studied in an alternative style.

In an amusement park in Virginia, patrons are invited to experience "old Europe" as they ride roller coasters, eat, listen to music, and buy gifts. The employees wear country-appropriate costuming. When they designed the park, they had to create a network of hidden pathways—no one wearing an Old England costume was allowed to walk through Old Germany—so employee orientation included an introduction to these other ways of moving around the park.

Something similar is true in becoming a teacher of the Alexander technique. There are now quite a variety of training courses—3-year trainings, trainings that involve mostly weekend or monthly workshops, and there are people who become teachers who don't travel these more visible ways of training—they find another way that suits who they are and what they want.

The intent of this article is to acknowledge these pathways to training. I contacted a small group of people who I know are training or were trained via one of these pathways and asked them 4 questions:

1. *What led you to choose the way to learn to teach the Alexander Technique that you chose?*
2. *How did you create your own program?*
3. *What do you value about your choice?*
4. *Do you have any recommendations for others?*

What led you to choose the way to learn to teach the Alexander Technique that you chose?

One of the respondents, like me, didn't know that there were other ways to train. She had a teacher who she liked working with and saw people learning to teach as part of her regular classes. She simply decided to do what she saw them doing. And, for all of those surveyed, the choice of teacher or teachers was high in their consideration.

"...it was my teacher's particular quality as a teacher that confirmed this was what I was ready to dedicate myself to."

And from someone who studied with many teachers:

"I sought out teachers who seemed to be deeply congruent in how they used the Technique. That is, teachers whose verbal and non-verbal actions were in harmony, whose descriptions, explanations and philosophy of the Technique were internally consistent and adequate to the phenomena they addressed, those who consistently exemplified the principles of the Technique."

Suitability to lifestyle was a big priority for these learners as was the learning style. Full-time study was either not possible, or not desired.

"I would not have attended a full-time school at that point in my life."

"I had considered the possibility of attending a training school in the future when my girls were older (at that time they were only 18 months and 4 years of age). This way of training allowed me to start immediately and coordinate my training with work, part-time study and family."

"The lengthy process is not for everyone, but it fitted my lifestyle, and allowed me to move at a pace that suited me. I imagine that, if I had been younger and ready for an extended educational experience, a 3-year training course might have been the right thing, but for someone like me, with lots of irons in the fire including another career (in technical writing), the flexible process that I went through was just perfect."

"After nearly 25 consecutive years of structured education, I wasn't particularly looking to do anything else that felt like 'school', and given what I knew about the Alexander technique, I was particularly wary of jumping into a program designed around completing such-and-such a learning objective by such-and-such a date... I also knew that I had enough



© Montana von Fliss

Cathy Madden walking students through a principle.

motivation and self-discipline to keep studying the Alexander technique outside of a formal school, even if it took a long time and the route felt circuitous.”

How did you create your own program?

For several people in the survey group, it was simply a case of taking as many classes, lessons, and workshops with their teacher(s) as they could. As they progressed in their training, they scheduled time for supervised teaching and began to assist in larger classes/workshops. They also took anatomy courses, studied books, attended Alexander Congresses, Annual General Meetings, and studied with other teachers as well. These people all lived near their primary teacher.

Two of the survey group travelled to get the training they wanted. Both studied with multiple teachers and had to think of things a little differently because they were in a “distance learning” situation.

“Interesting question...the idea that I had ‘created’ my own programme...I don’t think it is conventional, it is more osmotic. Initially I attended group lessons once a month and private lessons locally, keeping a journal. I started reading books that my teachers suggested and that interested

me. I knew from my research into Alexander training schools and from my teachers that there was training in anatomy and physiology. I was part way through a Bachelor of Arts at university so I was able to take 2 subjects in anatomy and physiology as part of my degree. I was also fortunate to attend a yearly residential at the training school that gave me access to other teachers—both Australian and international—and gave me opportunities for interaction with other trainees. The more recent part of my training, which focuses on teaching as an activity, has arisen through discussion with my current mentor. As she is overseas we are using YouTube and journaling to facilitate feedback on teaching.”

From the other teacher who chose to travel to teachers:

“I had to use various accelerated learning strategies to make the most of limited time with my teachers. I had to make some big decisions, with no obvious precedents, about how to use limited resources to get the training I wanted.”

What do you value about your choice?

Everyone echoed in some way the sentiment that every step they took in training was initiated personally. In their words:

“The advantage to training in an apprenticeship system is that it encouraged me to repeatedly affirm my desire to continue.”

“My experience with the AT seemed to indicate that my learning would progress at its own pace, driven by my own interests, so trying to make it fit a pre-ordained plan and a pre-determined timetable seemed misguided.”

“My learning is very self-directed—I have been able to use whatever arises in a lesson or outside a lesson as impetus for investigation.”

“All of my teachers were available to mentor me through this process, but fundamentally the decisions, risks and rewards were mine. I am now a confident teacher of groups and individuals in contexts from corporate boardrooms to surgery rehabilitation to belly-dancing workshops.”

Finance and logistics were important factors for everyone:

“It gives the chance for students to finance their study as they go along if it is not possible for them to commit to a full-time situation.”

“I eagerly participated in everything that I could fit into my schedule and could afford.”

“I value that I don’t have to put the rest of my life on hold or go into debt to study the Alexander technique. After not earning much money in grad school, I want to work full-time. In my academic discipline, taking 3 years off would be the kiss of death for a future career, so a 3-year school was an unattractive option for that reason as well. I’m glad I don’t have to choose between making a living and studying the Alexander technique.”

And, from one participant who is still training:

“Having my teachers at a distance often means that I ponder questions longer rather than racing off an email, often coming up with my own solutions.”

Not surprisingly, all participants expressed the value they found in the teachers they chose to study with. I say “not surprisingly”

because this pathway to training often begins with the discovery of a teacher or teachers—their teaching styles and philosophies resonate with a student’s wants and needs. That resonance leads to the desire to train specifically with that teacher.

“At some point in this active learning process, I decided that I would like to teach the Alexander technique. Nothing really changed then.”

Recommendations for those considering this pathway for training

“Training by apprenticeship requires curiosity, an attitude and willingness to experiment and take responsibility for your own progress in learning. Our universal educational model is that someone else tells us, step by step, what to learn next and how to learn it, then decides if we have learned it or not. This is an opposite model to the alternative system so it would take some self-evaluation to decide which model would be a good match.”

“If you want to take a path such as this then you’ll need to believe very strongly that the Alexander technique is worth learning well. You will perhaps be aided by a strange combination of self-assurance, self-discipline, and a deep willingness to reason... occasionally you may leap from the known to the unknown.”

Notes and Acknowledgements

I, unknowingly, took a hidden pathway to training and am very grateful for the way that I learned. In the Alexander world, it turned out to be an extremely controversial choice, although that controversy never practically affected my teaching career in a detrimental way. I believe that it is a less controversial choice now, though it is still unusual.

I want to thank the people who are quoted in the article— Diego de Acosta, Brendan Bond, Kellie Derkenne, Suzanne Girardot, and Carol Levin. For simplicity's sake in choice of verb tense I wrote as if all have completed their training although two of them are still training.

About the Writer

Cathy Madden began studying with Marjorie Barstow in 1975. She was a founding member of The Performance School in Seattle and teaches for the University of Washington’s Professional Actor Training Program. Cathy assisted Marjorie Barstow for many years in Lincoln and internationally and now travels regularly throughout England, Germany, Switzerland and Australia. She is Associate Director for ATA, an Alexander training school in Tokyo and Kyoto, and former chair of Alexander Technique International(ATI). She is also Director of the Alexander Technique Training and Performance Studio, and Artistic Director of Lucia Neare’s Theatrical Wonders.

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