

ExChange

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AT 2.0 – Teaching the
Technique in the digital age

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From the editor

Eva Fenrich

Welcome to the October issue of ExChange.

We live in a digital world. Computers, laptops, mobile phones and internet tablets are everywhere. From mega cities to the most remote areas, you can observe people walking through life paying more attention to a tiny (or in some cases not so tiny) electronic gadget than to what's going on around them. On trains and planes people hunch over laptops others are frantically texting squeezing their phone as if their life would depend on it.

This looks like "job security" for AT teachers... well it would, if these people would actually know about the technique.

So how can we utilize the possibilities of the digital age to promote the Technique? This issue of ExChange shines a light on this question.

What are the chances of the web and social media for teachers and people learning the technique?

The web also provides great opportunities for new ways of teaching, for example via Skype. But how can you teach without getting your hands on the student? Would this be similar to how the Alexander brothers taught when they first got to London?

"Initially, Alexander had attempted – in words, futile words – to teach the new feeling by telling his pupils how to attain it. Visitors to his first headquarters in London could observe the two brothers, "F.M." and "A.R.," each with a single pupil and at opposite ends of the studio, shouting their disparate and desperate verbal instructions at the two victims. All patience with language had been exhausted. " [Maisel, E.: Resurrection of the Body 1969]

Do we need to reason out new means whereby we can reach and teach people in all corners of the world?

I'm certainly a big fan of the internet. Without its possibilities I would probably not be a teacher yet. Because – maybe shocking for some of you – I participated in a number of my training weekends from different continents, logging in to watch a video-streamed class and to ask questions about text from Mr. Alexander's books etc. in a chat-room.

I hope reading this issue of ExChange encourages you all, to at least have a closer look at what the web has to offer to us as teachers and students of the Work.

Eva



“New technology is common, new thinking is rare.”

- Sir Peter Blake



From This Chair

By Fiona Cranwell

I am excited by the fresh and new approach Eva has taken to creating the Exchange. She has taken to the position with great vision and commitment. Her themes are interesting and relative to today's Alexander teacher. May she enjoy developing her role.

Eva makes an obvious point in her theme for this edition. How do we make FM's principles interesting to a student today. Teaching the technique in the digital age brings a lot more challenges than faced Alexander in his time. FM observed the fast pace of life that was of his era. What would he think now? How are we coping?

Technology advances greatly by the minute, yet our human evolution seems to be stalling as attention is focused on what man has created more so than man, the self. What can this gadget do for me so that I don't have to think, do, imagine, relate, collate, figure out, feel? With so much attention outside of ourselves, turning the focus in on self, is a whole new world of discovery for most.

This is a huge challenge in our work, while also creating a need for our work. I am looking forward to reading how my experienced colleagues share the secrets of their work to help with the more modern problems of tablet neck, texters tendonitis and other repetitive physical problem. Also there are greater problems of disengaging with self and how to teach and reach through apathy, depression, ADHD, general indecision and lack of focus.

David Attenborough was reported recently to have said that humans have interrupted evolution as the natural selection process is stopped.

"Stopping natural selection is not as important, or depressing, as it might sound – because our evolution is now cultural ... We can inherit a knowledge of computers or television, electronics, aeroplanes and so on.

I don't think we are going to become extinct. We're very clever and extremely resourceful – and we will find ways of preserving ourselves, of that I'm sure. But whether our lives will be as rich as they are now is another question."

So are we, the human race, to become bodies of knowledge rather than embodied knowledge, and lose the richness of living?

Fiona Cranwell

Chair ATI

Goodbye Elisabeth Walker

By Jeremy Chance



Elisabeth Walker, the last living teacher completely educated by Alexander himself, died yesterday (Sept. 17th).

This marks another milestone in the march of Alexander's Discoveries to the final prominence I believe they will one day occupy in the history of human thought. Elisabeth, with her husband Dick, were the innovators that we can thank for plunging into (what must have been then) a really weird kind of thing to do.

You needed a special kind of courage and daring to study with FM. Back then, when Alexander was laying the groundwork for the future of his work, Elisabeth turned up in 1937 for her first lesson. 65 years later Elisabeth told me about that first lesson with FM:

She remembered that after the lesson, as she was walking down the street...

"I could only think about one thing."

"What was that?" I asked curiously...

"How can I ever get this back?!"

By that time, FM was like a magician with his hands, and Elisabeth, encouraged by her future husband Dick Walker (an accomplished amateur golfer at the time), decided to join FM's school in 1938. My guess is that I can count on one hand the number of my readers who were even born then, I know I wasn't. However, because of the war, she finally qualified as a teacher of Alexander Technique in 1947.

At the time, Elisabeth had been working as a Radiographer, at one time being paid £2 per week to work with one of the leading specialists in Upper Brook Street. She once wrote about this:

I got to know the bony structures of many well-known people, notable Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth II, the Queen Mother, Mrs Simpson (Duchess of Windsor) and my favourite actress Vivien Leigh.*

Elisabeth was an original, a hippie before the term had even been invented. With her husband Dick, on an adventure that came naturally to them both, in 1948 they took their two children to South Africa, bought a run-down lorry, then drove overland, doing some mountaineering in the Hoggar Mountains and at Mount Kenya on the way.

It was the start of 12 years of teaching Alexander Technique, along with Irene Tasker, in South Africa. Many of her students were witnesses in the notorious libel case involving Dr Jokl, including famous anthropologist and AT enthusiast Raymond Dart.

In those heady days, the political left took to Alexander's work best, and which is how she met Nelson Mandela, before his famous incarceration. He impressed Elisabeth then as someone who did not need to study Alexander Technique – he already had the use that exemplified a teacher at that time.

However, it was the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960 – Dick was at risk of being arrested – that finally convinced them both to return their five children to Putney in London. Feeling cramped, they finally decided to settle in Oxfordshire, where Elisabeth continued to live until her death yesterday.

It was there that she met and taught Nikko, Lies and Janet Tinbergen. Nikko of course would go on to give his famous 1973 Nobel Prize Oration, based on his experience of just a few lessons with Elisabeth at the time. Elisabeth regretted that it was only after his Oration that she finally convinced him AT was education, not therapy!

In later years Elisabeth became a fixture at International Congresses – starting in Sydney in 1994 – and visited America many times to teach on Michael Frederick's Sweet Briar residential. She also made a video on "Alexander's Procedures" for us in Japan, while teaching there in 2002. She continued to teach in private practise in Oxford right to the end.

When her youngest daughter Lucia Walker – also well know to the Alexander Technique community – wanted to become a teacher, Elisabeth and Dick opened their own school in Oxford in 1984. Another daughter, Julia Cowper, also later trained to be a teacher of Alexander Technique, making it a real family business.

In all, the Walker family consists of six children and several grandchildren.

Many fine teachers also passed through Elisabeth's school before it closed, and I am sure we will be privy to many inside stories as other teachers celebrate the life of this wonderful woman.

*Taken from an article I asked Elisabeth to write for "The Barlows" edition of DIRECTION Journal in 1995.

At the AGM in Toronto in October there will be a dedicated time on Monday afternoon (28th) where we will remember Elisabeth Walker, her life, her work and how she touched so many with her smile and her energy as well as her hands.

Call for Contributions: ExChange Special Issue - Remembering Elisabeth Walker

We are planning a special issue of ExChange in memory of Elisabeth Walker, to be published in December for what would have been her 99th birthday.

This issue of ExChange is meant to be a celebration of the life and work of Elisabeth Walker.

Please send in your articles, stories, anecdotes, pictures by November 20th to eva.fenrich@gmail.com





2013 AGM Workshop Information

There are many fantastic workshops planned for the AGM this year. Here is a sample of some of the workshops we have planned:

Neural Pathways to Imagination - Cathy Madden – Monday, 10/28

The Teacher's Touch: Plasticity and Co-ordination - Sarah Barker – Thursday, 10/31

Time and Touch: 21st Century Means-Whereby Trilogy, part 3 – Debi Adams and Bob Lada – Monday, 10/28

Achieving Reliable Sensory Appreciation – David Gorman – Wednesday, 10/30

Yoga and the Alexander Technique– Esther Cieri – Wednesday, 10/30

Alexander Technique and the Stillness of Meditation – RJ Fleck – Monday, 10/28

Learning While You Teach, Teaching While You Learn: Alexander Principles Brought to Depth While Working in Activity – Tommy Thompson – Wednesday, 10/30

The [AGM webpage](#) has been posted with full details for registration, booking of accomodation and transportation.

Looking forward to seeing many of you in Canada!

ATI Site and Workshop Planning Committees:

[Esther Cieri](#), Chair, ATI AGM Site Committee

[Susan Sinclair](#), Chair ATI AGM Workshop Planning and member, Site Committee

[Kate Lushington](#), ATI Assistant Chair and member, ATI AGM Site Committee

[RJ Fleck](#), member, ATI Communications, Workshop Planning and Site Committees



Using the web to promote and teach the Alexander Technique

A conversation with Robert Rickover

When you think about AT on the web, there is one person in particular who is a pioneer and this is Robert Rickover. I (Eva, the editor) had the joy to talk to him across the pond using exactly a tool that we were discussing – Skype.

Here's a link to our conversation as a podcast:

<http://bodylearning.buzzsprout.com/382/118899-using-the-web-to-promote-and-teach-the-alexander-technique>

Bio:



Robert Rickover graduated in 1981 from the School of Alexander Studies, London and is one of the first Alexander teachers to successfully use the web. He is creator of The Complete Guide to the Alexander Technique at alexandertechnique.com and a number of other Alexander Technique websites including BodyLearningCast.com, a site devoted to Alexander Technique podcasts and most recently AlexTechExpress.com a mobile-friendly addition to the Complete Guide. Robert also blogs and uses social media to promote the Technique, in particular Twitter and Facebook.

Alexander Technique Teacher Website Hosting: AlexTechHost.com

Complete Guide Face Book page: facebook.com/AlexanderTechniqueGuide



E: What are your thoughts about teaching the technique in the digital age?

R: About teaching it? Using the web to teach it or to promote it?

E: I'm interested in both. Maybe start with your thoughts about promoting it on the web.

R: In terms of promoting the technique - and I'm using promoting in the best sense of the word here - the web is the place to do it. It's taken over from pretty much everything else. It's the main place that people find teachers that people learn about the AT.

It's crucial for any teacher who is interested in getting students to use the web to do that and just in general to exchange information about the Technique to

provide explanations to have videos and audio recordings and using the social media aspect of it as well. It's really the place where it's all happening.

E: Do you see things more towards the social media or do you think people search more on websites? Or is it the combination of both.

R: I think it's the combination. It is really crucial to have a website to start with. I know there are some people who kind of like to jump into social media first but I think that's a mistake. If you don't have a website that people can go to and find out about you, you are expending your energy unnecessarily. I'd say the first step for anyone who wants to take the web seriously, any Alexander teacher is to get a website. Make sure that it is set up properly, that people can find it, that it's configured properly. And then if social media draws you certainly Facebook right now is "The" place where teachers are interacting and were a lot of people are going to get information about the Technique. So you want to be on facebook and probably twitter and maybe some of the other platforms.

E: So do you think people should have a website and link that to their presence on social media as well?

R: On facebook you can create a page that is about you and on that page there would be a link to your website. If someone is following your postings they would at some point be able to know where you are and contact you that way. But I have to say by and large most teachers have not done that.

Most teachers don't have websites yet.

It's a huge missed opportunity. And I don't really understand why it's true it seems very odd to me. We are lagging way behind other fields in that area.

E: That's my impression too. People seem to stay off social media and try to locally find their students rather than using what's available.

R: It's fine to find your students locally if that works for you. But even locally, even someone around the corner from you is going to want to find out something about you. And where they are going to find out about you is certainly on the web. People don't quite understand the new dynamic of connecting with people. I don't know if in Germany this is the case but certainly in the States any business of any kind has a website. My plumber has a website. My auto repair guy has one.

E: That's the same in Germany. I think it's an international trend to have a website for your business.

R: Not having a website is almost a statement that I don't want to be visible. I don't want people to know about me. Maybe if you have all the students you want or if you are working in a university setting or something where you just don't want people calling you or emailing you, you could argue it makes sense. But there are very few teachers in that category.

Most teachers who complain about not having enough students - the first thing I ask them is what's up with your website. "I don't have any". That's what I see.

E: Then there are people who have websites and still don't get students from their website. Do you think there are mistakes that people do with their website or things that people could improve about their websites?

R: Some people who have "got it" that they need a website haven't got it yet that it needs to be reasonably attractive, that it needs to conform to certain basic design standards. It needs to be easily navigable from one page to another. Here's what I see a lot: A huge number of teachers don't even tell you where they are located.

E: Yes I've seen this one.

R: It is as if you are so drawn to them, that you are going to go and have lessons even if they are half way around the world to have lessons, as if you don't care where they are it's so important to connect with them. It's a weird mental set on their part. You have to be very clear where you are. It should be right at the top of the page. If you want to appeal to the general public you should avoid any jargon. You probably should avoid pictures of Alexander. They are not going to help you - certainly not on your home page. There are a lot of common mistakes people make. Sometimes teacher's kids make a website for them because they learn how to do that in school. That's fine, except usually it's going to look like a kid did it.

People don't take the time to think through the process of how people are going to react to it. How are people going to find it. There is a huge gap there.

And as I said before most teachers don't even have a website yet.

E: So no one can actually find them except maybe on a teachers' list.

R: That's not really how it happens these days.

E: A personal business website showing where they are, what they do that's appealing to the public rather than just jargoning and showing a pic of Mr. Alexanderand maybe even having that wonderful "strangling" picture on it.

R: Well, there is an amazing amount of strangulation going on on some websites and skeletons and things like that. Stuff that might make sense to other teachers, but that's very off-putting to the general public.

The other thing is - I think it's really worth saying - I think a lot of teachers have a huge misconception about how much money they need to spend on this.

I know teachers who have spent thousands of dollars on websites. I find it hard to imagine spending that kind of money.

A few hundred dollars and you can have a beautiful site. Usually when you start spending a lot more it almost always gets worse because your web designer adds all kinds of bells and whistles that actually get into the way.

So, simple, attractive, good use of language, pictures where appropriate, no skeletons, no pictures of FM on the home page, location... a few basic things. Making sure it's properly linked. You exchange links with the appropriate sites....your professional society....

E: Probably your site as well....

R: it wouldn't hurt... the directory I have is in fact the place a lot of people originally go to. The web is all about linking.

E: There is lots of good resources out there so when people link to it, it makes their websites even more attractive.

R: Absolutely.

I think that's great advice in terms of websites and online presence for teachers.

I've seen that you also use Skype for teaching... so you also use the web for teaching or coaching. I was wondering how you go about that.

R: I stumbled into that because I'm located in an area where there a very few teachers.

There are lots of people in my area who live very far away from any teachers.

I originally started even before Skype just using the phone talking to people. And I found that with some people I could give them some basic ideas about directing and they could apply it to themselves. They could make useful changes. Some people would have occasional lessons or would go to workshops.

With Skype it's more effective because you can see them and they can see you.

Obviously you don't have hands.

There is a big dispute now or debate in the Alexander world, whether if you are not in the same room with the student, are you actually teaching the AT? Who knows? I make it very clear to people that this is not the same as a traditional Alexander lesson but I have to say I've found that I've been able to help a lot of people and a lot of people who would have never been able to get to an Alexander teacher.

Most of my current Skype students are in South East Asia and for some bizarre reason Croatia. And there just aren't any teachers.

So I suggest if someone wants to explore it just get Skype, it's free and maybe just experiment with some people you know and see what happens.

I don't think it's for everybody I think some people are not going to be happy interacting with people at a distance like that. But for me, and I know for a growing number of other teachers, this is becoming a significant part of their practice.

E: I think that's also a way to get the technique known in areas where there aren't any teachers, where people would never get a chance to actually see a teacher.

R: That's the thing. Almost all the people that I work with there is absolutely no way they would ever have access to a real life teacher. It just would not happen. If they can get some benefits even if it is not all the benefits they would get with an in person teacher and it helps them and they tell people about it and some of the people they tell are where there are teachers then I think it's going to help everybody.

E: So if someone has Skype session with you? How should we imagine that? How do you work with people via Skype? Do you actually work with people in activities?

Usually the first lesson all I want to necessarily be able to see initially is just their head neck and torso, so they can just be sitting at a desk. It can help if they can turn at right angles to that.

After the initial session I try to get them to set things up so I can see them walking and moving and bending over and whatever activities: Sitting at a desk typing, working at a computer.

The two invaluable tools that I found is what are sometimes called "negative directions" or "Inhibitory directions". "No"- statements... There is a new variant come out, the positive variant of negative directions. Negative directions seem to work better in general and they certainly work better on Skype.

I obviously spend a lot of time talking about how you are going to deliver these directions to yourself.

You don't want to put any pressure on yourself or try to make things happen or concentrate on them.

I combine that with some work that I have developed that I call "up with gravity" which is not strictly speaking the AT

Where it's basically utilizing information about your center of gravity where it is and how to use that to move more efficiently.

E: That sounds like something you can really convey via talking.

R: I can convey it by talking and I have a website as well upwithgravity.net

Anyone can go to that website and learn the basics in about 15 minutes if they choose to. Although it does sometimes help to talk someone through it a bit,

especially the sort of latter stages of it where I combine it with negative directions. The two go together perfectly.

Those are the tools I use. But I think a teacher could use whatever skills they have. They don't have to do it the way I do it in order to be effective.

I know a lot of teachers who are using Skype who come out of very different training backgrounds than me and are having success at it.

If someone is intrigued by the possibility of using Skype I think they ought to just explore it with whoever might be available to them, that they know who is willing to spend a couple of sessions and see what happens.

E: So you would really recommend that people try it out?

R: Absolutely. I don't think that you have much to lose. I think it's important to explain that you are not doing a traditional Alexander lesson, and maybe it should not even be called an Alexander Technique lesson. This is a dispute that I think is coming up now. I tend to just refer to it as movement coaching using principles of the AT... Discoveries of F. Matthias Alexander... however you want to phrase it.

E: That sounds like a good definition to use and maybe even easier for people to understand who don't know about the technique. When you say movement coaching that might be attracting even more people.

R: I have a little webpage that I have not really developed very much: "movement coaching by phone" and I changed it recently to "movement coaching using Skype" because originally I was using the phone.

I just explain a little bit on that page what it is that I'm doing and what it is and what it isn't. But I haven't put any energy into developing that page. That's a project for down the road.

E: That sounds like a great project.

Is there anything else that you would like to share with the readers of ExChange and with our audience about the Technique and the web?

R: There is a very general point I like to make. It's something that is important to think about in terms of getting more teachers out there on the web and that's the role of organizations in the Alexander world including ATI, AMSAT... and all the rest of them.

I think in general not only have AT teachers as a group have not been good at using the web although some teachers are doing extremely well.

AT organizations have done very poorly and I think there is a reason for this, and it takes a moment to think about, that Organizations - by definition - are organizations. There is someone in charge or some group of people in charge.

There is a structure to it and the internet is NOT an organization it's almost an anti-organization. It's a network. There is no hierarchy there is nobody in charge.

Unlike an organization that tends to be a top down system the internet is pretty much all bottom up. It is totally different. It's very difficult for most organizations of any kind to wrap their mind around that and to figure out how to interact with it successfully.

Big corporations have been seriously tripped up by that. AT organizations generally don't know how to use it. Most AT organizations – the boards running them - or whatever - do understand that the web is somehow important. Their solution to how to use it is to outsource that to some expert who designs a website for them.

I'm a big believer in outsourcing for certain things - I outsourced all my web design – but you can't just outsource it without having a pretty clear idea of what it is you want that outsourced product to do and how it's going to do it.

You can't just say to someone "we need a website for our organization could you produce one" "we want it to be fancy". All that will happen then is it's going to cost a lot of money and it's not very effective.

You generally have to have people involved in it who know something of the web. The only way that is going to happen is bottom up in terms of encouraging members of the organization to get involved with the web.

Some of them may just end up getting a website and that will be fine. And some of them once they start seeing how useful a website is might say "maybe I should be on facebook too" or "I've got a student who's making videos, maybe I should get a little video of my teaching and put it on my website and on youtube" or whatever. But it has to come from the bottom up.

What organizations can do and should do is do everything in their power to encourage members to jump into the web.

I think every organization every newsletter of every organization should have an article about it. It should be a constant refrain.

A teacher training course that doesn't encourage their students to have a website by the end of their first year up and running is being remiss.

Someone graduating from a training course should have a website that's been around for a couple of years and been indexed by google. So all they have to do on the day of graduation is change a few words from "Alexander trainee" to "Alexander teacher " and they may already have people who have contacted them. It's insane that that isn't what is being done.

It needs to be systematic and consistent and constant to make it clear over and over again that you've got to be on the web if you going to be a successful teacher. Otherwise you are going to be a teacher who has a couple of student

per week and you have to have another job. You are not going to be successful at teaching.

E: I think that's a clear message to the people out there to get started if they haven't yet and get involved in the web and to the organizations to also get involved in encouraging the members to be involved in the web.

R: That is the way to go. I think organizations have a crucial role and their role is to get their members up to speed in terms of what the web is all about. And then some of those members will end up being on the board and will be able to make intelligent decisions. That's how I see it.

E: That's a good thing.

R: That would be a wonderful thing for everybody. At some point it will.

It's just taking an awfully long time and I wish that process could be speeded up. Because really the other thing I would say is that the web is constantly evolving. What's going on is that we have a really sharp digital divide in the AT world between the relatively few teachers who are very comfortable on the web who are using it creatively and the vast majority that are completely puzzled by what is going on.

That divide is actually getting wider every year right now. Because there is more stuff happening on the web that people just don't know about. So that's why I think organizations need to take a bottom up approach to the web if they want to be successful ultimately in helping get the word out about the AT.

I would guess that old F. Matthias himself would be tweeting every morning, he would have videos on youtube. He would certainly have a website and he would be using this as much as possible. That was his nature.

It's not like this is some break with tradition. This is just using what is available constructively and creatively. That's a key thing that organizations and individual teachers should be looking at.

Short link to this conversation: <http://bit.ly/1brAnAA>

When is a Carrot Just a Carrot?

By Amanda Patti

I recently received an offer that many would not dare turn down, that many dream of. It fell in my lap, completely unexpected one morning and left me speechless. Last year, I applied to graduate schools for admission to PhD programs to study the relationships between and within saltwater organisms. Parasitism was my primary interest.

April rolled around and I received rejection letter after rejection letter. For someone who had obtained grants, given presentations and received great grades, this came as a shock. It was the closing of one door and the opening of another. I dove off a cliff into the waters of movement - my other passion. I completely let go of who I was and who I thought I needed to be in order to be "successful," and jumped into the moment fully and without reservation.

A few months into this new aspect of myself, this new way of being, a carrot, in the form of a PhD candidacy offer, was placed and waved in front of my face. Would I be interested in returning to University? Would I be interested in becoming one in less than five rotifer experts in the US? Would I be interested in obtaining my PhD studying rotifers with guaranteed funding for four years and free tuition? Wow!

I printed off the 23 page research proposal and, it sat on my desk, unread for nearly one week. I could not bring myself to read it. Every free moment I had, I studied or read about movement. I could have read the proposal, but didn't. Was it fear preventing me from reading it? Was it lack of interest? Was it a bit of both? That week tore me apart. Was I willing to give up the notoriety, the title, the steadiness of a job as a PhD for movement? Was I willing to give up the freedom, the unknown, the joy of moving and helping others move for a PhD? Was I more focused on end-gaining, or living in the moment and allowing life to unfold as it will?

I had to ask myself - who are you? Are you the same person you were in April? What do you want out of life? Can you live without moving? Can you live without studying rotifers? Which culture do you love? Which option allows you to grow the most and offers unlimited potential? Which gives you the most joy and is the most rewarding? Which are you more passionate about? Withholding definition became my mantra. Every time I thought about either movement or "the carrot," I would sit with myself. I would ask myself the above questions. Or, I would allow myself to feel. What did I feel? What response was evoked in myself by the act of thinking of myself as a movement specialist or as a PhD/rotifer expert? Did I feel more open? Did I feel myself expand in all directions? Or, did I find myself contracting? Did I feel fear, or exhilaration? Did I choose "the carrot" or did I stay with movement?

I chose movement. I chose the path that offers unlimited potential for growth, happiness, and joy. I chose the path that is and will continue to unfold step by step. I chose the path that invites me and encourages me to live each moment as fully and as presently as possible. I do not know how things will continue to unfold. All I know is that the only choice is the choice we choose to make, or not make, as we are with who we are in this moment. There is no tomorrow. There is only the present thread of time and of being. Being within the present moment is living, truly living.

Was the carrot just a carrot, or was it something more? The carrot was just a carrot and it was something more. The carrot wasn't just an educational and job opportunity. It was far more than that. The carrot was an invitation from the Universe to be present with myself, to give myself permission to see where I have been, where I am now, who I was, and who I am in this moment. I may not have bit the carrot in the traditional sense, but I sure ate that entire carrot with many thanks for its teachings.

Bio:



Amanda Patti has been a student of the Alexander Technique for the past 15 yrs, originally studying with Debi Adams, and later with Tommy Thompson. Amanda had the wonderful fortune to spend one year immersed in Tommy's teacher training program at the Alexander Technique Center at Cambridge. She also holds a BS in Biology, has been a licensed massage therapist since 2007, and is a NeuroKinetic Therapist™. Amanda maintains a practice both in Boston, MA and on the North Shore. She strives to help people move closer to tensegrative, joyful movement by finding the source of pain or dysfunction and correcting it. In addition, Amanda is taking workshops in Restoring Breathing through Movement and is in the process of obtaining her personal training certificate. She aspires to use a combination of techniques and therapies, combined with corrective exercise and bodyweight movement, to help people find a deeper, less painful, more free, and more connected relationship with themselves, with movement, and in their lives.

Save the date: Workshops etc.

David Gorman October Workshop in Toronto

David Gorman is planning a workshop in Toronto this October before the AGM. It is titled: "Alexander for the 21st Century - Ways to Broaden, Deepen and Develop your Teaching". More details coming in a future Communique, or see learningmethods.com/lmw-ca.htm

US and International Workshops with Tommy Thompson in 2013

November

Toronto, Canada

When: November 1-3 following the ATI Annual General Meeting October 27-31

Where: Alexander Technique and Pilates Center

For Whom: Teachers and trainees

Contact person: Susan Sinclair

151 Markham Street, Toronto, Ontario M6J 2G4 Canada

Day Phone: 1-416-603-2650 Email: ssinc@sympatico.ca

Homepage: www.sinclairstudio.com



Save the date: 9 - 15 August 2015
Register your interest:
www.atcongress.com

The 10th Alexander Technique International Congress will take place in Limerick, Ireland in 2015. Presenters will include some of the most experienced Alexander Teachers from across the world.

Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing, there is a field. I'll meet you there. — Rumi



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From the blogosphere

Quite a few of our Alexander colleagues have started to blog about the Technique, so there is a lot of really cool stuff out there. In each issue of the ExChange I would like to introduce you one (or more) blogs (and the blogger behind it) and hope you have a look around on these valuable resources. If you want to suggest blogs for a feature, drop me a line at eva.fenrich@gmail.com.

This issue's featured blogger is

Jennifer Mackerras

who blogs at

<http://www.activateyou.com/blog/>



Jennifer's blog posts are inspiring, practical, down to earth, with ideas supported by quotes from Mr. Alexander's books and other sources. Her own experiences and experimentation mixed in nicely with observations from teaching and general Alexander ideas. The posts include topics like "Conquer stage fright by... changing point of view", "Performance as process, not product", "The final straw -Why have Alexander Technique lessons", "Start where you are! Why waiting for perfect conditions or timing can keep you stuck". What makes these blog posts really appealing to me is that they invite readers to experiment and apply Alexander principles without any direct sales pitch for lessons and services. So there is real value out there for everyone. Jennifer also discusses this "giving away for free" in her article on page 25.

I asked Jennifer a few questions about her background and her blog. Here is what she says:

What do you want to tell the readers of ExChange about yourself?



I'm a recorder player, a singer, and a fanatical knitter. I've been a performance coach and Alexander Technique teacher for about 5 years. I teach on acting and music programmes at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, as well as teaching privately. I've presented workshops at the Alexander Technique and Performing Arts Conference in Melbourne Australia in 2012, and the Dance and Somatic Practices Workshop in Coventry in 2013.

I can't walk past a cat without saying hello.

You are at a party and someone asks "What is the Alexander Technique?" What short answer do you give?

Ah, my elevator pitch. We could spend an entire interview discussing why I tend to talk about what I do in terms of performance coaching, instead of 'Alexander Technique.'

If it comes up, I say that the Alexander Technique is a brilliant structure that you can learn that helps you to do the things you love to do with more freedom and less effort. I'd follow it up by asking what things they love to do, and talk more specifically about their interests and passions.

This issue of ExChange is titled "AT 2.0". What are your thoughts about teaching the Technique in the "digital age"?

As Alexander Technique teachers, we have a tremendous opportunity in front of us. The 'digital age' gives us unprecedented ability to reach out and let people know about Alexander's wonderful work. Our challenge is to do so in a way that is reasoned, thoughtful, and according to principle.

The role of social media, blogs etc. for teaching/learning the Alexander Technique

By Jennifer Mackerras

When I graduated from my AT teacher training course, I had a list of marketing stuff that I wanted to get sorted as quickly as possible. It went like this:

- Write and print a brochure.
- Get a business card designed
- Oh, and get a website

And when I thought of websites, I thought of a kind of electronic version of the brochure - a few static pages with a contact form.

I was naive. We live in the internet age, and most people have a smartphone or a tablet, never mind a laptop or PC with internet access. It didn't take very long before I realised that I would need to spend a lot more of my time and energy on electronic forms of marketing. While I was researching marketing, I ran across a website called Heart of Business, run by Mark Silver. I was attracted to his concept of marketing - the three journeys of marketing. The first journey is when

someone picks up your brochure, or runs across your website, or comes along to a short taster workshop. The customer-to-be has their first contact with you. It is then your task to maintain contact - to give them materials that enable them to get to know you and trust you. This is what Mark would describe as the second journey. It is only when the customer trusts you that they'll give you their time and money.

This idea of clients needing to gain trust resonated with me. When I looked at my marketing materials, I realised that I'd put a lot of time into 'first journey' materials (not necessarily very effectively), and had nothing to help people get to know me better. That's how my blog began. I started blogging as a means of helping potential clients get to know me.

As my ideas on who I want to teach have changed, so has the focus of my blog. I now write mostly about issues related to performers, because that's the group that most interest me and the area where I mostly work. I know that I have a lot of AT teachers following my writing, but also a fair swag of musicians and performers from all over the world.

Recently one of my colleagues said that she couldn't imagine writing a blog. "You're giving away all that teaching for free - for nothing!" Well, yes and no. Do I get an immediate return on investment for each blog I write? No. But has it helped me further my business and my students' learning? Yes!

Often I will be in the middle of a lesson and start to tell a story in order to illustrate an idea or principle, only to have the student finish it for me, and remind me that I wrote about it in a recent blog post. Sometimes a student will link what is happening in a lesson with a post I wrote months earlier! I find that the students who read my blog regularly learn more easily and are able to apply the Technique better, and they have told me that they appreciate having the weekly reminder to keep up their Alexander thinking.

Blogging, posting on Facebook and interacting on Twitter have helped me in other ways, too. I have made friends with colleagues from around the world. I have chatted with singing teachers, musicians and performers from the UK and farther afield. I'm even just about to teach on a workshop organised by a singing teacher that I met on Twitter.

My advice for teachers thinking about starting out in blogging or social media

- Start slowly. If you're going to try social media, pick just one platform to start. It could be Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Linked-in... But pick the one that suits you best, and where your preferred clients are likely to hang out.
- Do your research. Look at the current AT blogs (there are loads) and analyse the ones you like. Try to work out what it is you like about them. And read up on blogging and 'permission marketing' - good places to start are Heart of Business, Ittybiz, Jon Morrow, and Copyblogger.
- If you're going to blog, don't commit to writing too frequently. Once a week or once a fortnight is a good place to start. There's nothing sadder than a newbie blogger who starts out in a rush of enthusiasm intending to blog 3 times a week, only to run out of steam and not write for months! Readers appreciate regularity.
- Write posts that are aimed at the people you enjoy teaching. Write down a list of the things that interest that group. What concerns do they have? What do they need to hear?
- Pick a good platform to host your blog. Wordpress is probably the most common and the most easy to customise to your style and branding.

And my final piece of advice? In the words of AR Alexander, go slowly and stick to principle. I can't promise that it will all open up like a cauliflower, but I can guarantee that you'll have a great time. See you on the web!

Refurbishing Image-making in Actors and Others

By Cathy Madden

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Please go to <http://www.directionjournal.com> - for further information about access to back issues of the Direction Journal and subscriptions.

“Imagination is more important than knowledge.” – Albert Einstein

For several years, a mystery had been presenting itself to me in my work with actors at the University Of Washington School Of Drama.

I am going to walk you through the “story” of this work, the questions that presented themselves to me, and the theory I have developed and continue to test. The threads of the story include Alexander Technique, acting, child development and brain research.

What I discovered has changed the way I approach teaching anyone--not only because of the new information I had, but also because the whole process was a reminder that what I define as “self” may not be what someone else may define as “self”.

The Mystery

The coordination mystery presented itself to me when the curriculum of the Professional Actor Training Program changed. One Director retired, and the new Director brought a new acting/movement study into the program – Suzuki Training. (Some of you may be familiar with Suzuki Music Training; the theatre training is completely different.)

Suzuki Theatre Training is characterised by the actors’ use of images as they perform a wide variety of physically demanding tasks. In theatre work, an image is any person, place, thing, or event that is affecting you on stage, but is not actually physically present.

An example would be when a scene in a play is supposed to be outdoors on a cold winter day. The actors use specific images—wind on their faces, fingers numb from cold, and perhaps snow on the ground—to cause them to behave as if they are cold. The ability to create and use these images is generally called imagination.

Joseph Chilton Pearce, whose work is important in this discussion, defines imagination “as the ability to create images not present to the sensory system.”¹

At the University of Washington, I co-teach in many classes, providing Alexander information as the students are learning other skills. When the Suzuki Training was introduced, Steve Pearson specifically wanted to incorporate the Alexander

Technique into the Suzuki Training because the form has often been associated with excessive tension.

My first encounter watching the Suzuki form was disturbing—I didn't like how the students were using themselves to do the work. Yet, as I looked at the movement forms themselves, there was nothing inherently wrong with the forms themselves. There was clearly, however, something to be gained by bringing the Alexander Technique's perspective on coordination into the teaching/learning of Suzuki.

My colleagues at the University of Washington (Professors Robyn Hunt and Steve Pearson) were very open to new ideas. Within a couple of years of working together, the language of instruction changed. (A detailed discussion of this process is available in Theatre Topics²). Non-anatomical instructions had changed to more anatomy-friendly language. Students weren't asked to have strength they didn't have yet, but were given means to develop the strength.

In slow motion work, the actors were no longer trying not to blink.

(Note—no one ever told them not to blink, but some of them were taking the slow motion instruction so literally that they chose not to blink because they couldn't do it in slow motion.) We transformed the value of working "hard" to working "well." People who saw the University of Washington version of Suzuki Training could see that our work was more free, more coordinated.

But something still wasn't quite working as far as I was concerned.

I taught these students in other classes, and I could see that some of them became visibly less coordinated in the Suzuki class. What was it?

First Clue

A new clue appeared. I was coaching one of the actresses who "dis-coordinated" in Suzuki. She was doing a monologue, and before she started the piece, she was moving well. But as soon as she started I saw her do what I also saw her do in the Suzuki work. I asked myself, "What is the common denominator here?" One possible common denominator was the use of images. The monologue this actress was doing was one in which she was talking to someone who wasn't actually there. I started asking questions: "Susan, what are you thinking as you start?"

Once again, I communicated my question to Robyn Hunt with whom I was co-teaching the class. We started changing the language of instruction—reminding the students that even though they were looking ahead in the far distance, that image was part of a larger environment that included near and middle distance vision as well.

We also reminded them that images involved all of the senses. The overall quality of the work continued to improve, but some unusual and "squished" physical patterns persisted.

More Clues

Several new threads of information come into the story here. I took the actors outdoors so that they could have the experiment of doing the Suzuki form with real objects in the distance (The Cascade Mountain Range) and a real, all-around environment—no image-making/imagination required. The funny physical patterns disappeared.

The other information came through the teachers at the school my daughters attended—The Seattle Waldorf School. The teachers at the school had a strong wish that the students watch little or no TV. They explained that when young children watch television, play videogames, or use computers they are short-circuiting the development of the image-making capacity in the brain. The problem with television is that children get used to not using their imaginative thinking at all, and they don't exercise that part of the brain that creates images...Creating pictures is not just entertaining, but the foundation of our higher thoughts...³ One of the teachers had an experiment with the parents. He showed us a television cartoon that depicted Roman mythological heroes.

Then he told us a story that used the same characters. He asked us, what did you see as I told you the story? The parents all "saw" the cartoon figures in our heads rather than a heroic figure. In addition, television watching takes time from other children's activities – moving, handling objects, playing. According to Jean Piaget, a respected researcher in child development, "Development moves from the concrete to the abstract." What I now knew was that: The actors had much better coordination when they used real rather than imaginary objects.

AND

Image-making is an ability that can be disrupted developmentally. I began to ask them some new questions. What I found out amazed me. The following is what happened with one actress.

As I watched her work, I saw that she was in one of the strange, compact, less-than-optimally coordinated shapes. She was looking into the far distance. I asked her what she was seeing. "A tree." "Can you describe it to me?" "It's about this high." (She held her hands in the shape of a small television screen or computers.) Suddenly, I understood more about what was probably happening to Susan in her monologue that I mentioned earlier. This is the piece that I missed. The image she had been using in her monologue looked small to me but I didn't understand its significance. Over and over again, I found that the students who had difficulty maintaining their coordination in activities involving the imagination, described their images as two dimensional and small. Some of them even seemed to think of themselves two-dimensionally. I began to ask, as casually as possible, about TV, videogames, and computers. There did seem to be a correlation between coordination and the amount of electronic input the student had had, particularly at an early age.

Child development researchers have been questioning the appropriateness of television for young children for a long time.^{4,5,6,7} Most of their focus has been on the thinking process, but they do note changes in movement patterns. Susan Johnson, again, in describing her own child, says that “after watching TV, his play was erratic, his movements impulsive and uncoordinated.”⁸ I began to wonder if what I was seeing in the acting students were the results of the changes that mind/brain/child development researchers were concerned about.

I got some confirmation of that as I continued to read and realized that one of the concerns of these researches was that students were unable to connect images.^{9,10,11} I realised how often actors would come to me with an acting issue they couldn’t solve because they couldn’t string images together. For example, an actor would come in and say

I think the character_____.

The script says_____about the character.

The director says_____.

The actor could describe each of these things separately. I could see that the ideas could easily be strung together, but the actor couldn’t do it. If I strung them together for them, they could use the new idea but they couldn’t formulate it. While it is true that I have more experience in acting coaching than they do, the lack of ability to string things together showed up more and more each year. I also heard other faculty members wondering what was happening with our students in this area.

With our questions and observations in mind, my colleagues and I continued experimenting with ways to teach three-dimensional coordination. In the Suzuki-based class (one that we simply call Training) alterations have been made to existing exercises and new exercises have developed. In one exercise, the change was simply to ask the students to literally watch their limbs as they move them; in this way, they see the dimensionality as they move. Other changes have been as simple as having students stand at many angles to each other rather than in straight lines so that the dimensionality of the playing space is emphasised. Robyn Hunt, with whom I co-teach, has also invented more exercises that involve spiral movements that also emphasise dimension. Essentially, anywhere that we can, we are including/acknowledging the dimensionality of our world.

Larger Implications

My work with the theatre students allowed me to discover this phenomenon. I was able to observe them and ask questions over a period of years. What they revealed to me has helped me to understand some of my other students. I had encountered, and increasingly encounter, people who seem to diminish their physical selves themselves when they think of their coordination. It led me to looking more at current child development theories and research as well as the

developing science of how our psychophysical self creates and recreates itself. I read articles about people teaching the sciences who were disturbed by their students' abilities to spit out facts and figures but be unable to manipulate that information creatively. They also attribute this to early childhood exposure to electronic media. I also have a deeper understanding of Marshall McLuhan's work, "The Medium is the Message."¹² For me, it has been another reminder that what I conceive of as self may be radically different from what my students conceive of as self. I know that when I say whole body or whole self to a student, I don't know what size or dimension that whole body/whole self is to them. I don't take it for granted that they think of a three-dimensional arm. If their "fixed belief" about themselves does not include dimension, I may need to discuss it with them. My concern with the actors began with a limitation on both their imaginations and their physical expressions of that imagination. When I work with non-performers, I am finding that sometimes the cause of their physical aches and pains may be traceable to thinking of themselves non-dimensionally.

It isn't the only possibility, but it is one that I now include in my analysis of "the conditions of use present" in my student. I also wholeheartedly join the number of people questioning the suitability of electronic media for young children.

I am including now an extended quote from Joseph Chilton Pearce's work, *Evolution's End*. It is provocative, and I hope raises more questions for each of us as possessors of psychophysical selves.

"Television floods the infant-child brain with images at the very time his or her brain is supposed to learn to make images from within... Storytelling feeds into the infant-child as stimulus that brings about the response of image making that involves every aspect of our triune system (brain).

Television feeds both stimulus and response into that infant-child brain and therein lies the danger. Television floods the brain with a counterfeit of the response that the brain is supposed to learn to make to the stimuli of words or music.

As a result, much structural coupling between mind and environment is eliminated; few metaphoric images develop; few higher cortical areas of the brain develop...

Failing to develop imagery means having no imagination. This is far more serious than not being able to daydream. It means children who can't "see" what the mathematical symbol or the semantic words mean; nor the chemical formulae; nor the concept of civilisation as we know it...They can sense only what is immediately bombarding their physical system and are restless and ill-at-ease without such bombardment.

Being sensory deprived, they initiate stimulus through constant movement or intensely verbal interaction with each other...¹³"

It has been our experience with the actors that it is possible to “rehabilitate” at least some of this lost ability by using the Alexander Technique in combination with acting exercises that ask for dimension. It can’t be the same ability because how the brain functions in childhood learning is different from adult learning. It is still early days in the experiment, but I have witnessed changes in how actors are able to use images as we psychophysically address their use of imagination. In my general teaching practice, relearning dimension has helped people move more efficiently in their lives.

1 Pearce *Evolution’s End: Claiming the Potential of Our Intelligence* Harper: San Francisco (1992) p. 62.

2 Madden. *The Language of Teaching Coordination: Suzuki Training Meets the Alexander Technique*. *Theatre Topics* 12.1 (2001) 49-61.

3 Johnson *Strangers in our home: TV and our children’s minds* *The Peridot Journal* vol. 11 no. 2 (Fall 1999) p. 20.

4 Healy *Endangered Minds: Why Children Don’t Think and What We Can Do About It* Touchstone: New York (1990).

5 Healy *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children’s Minds – and What We Can Do About It* Touchstone: New York (1998).

6 Johnson *op. cit.*

7 Pearce *op.cit.*

8 Johnson *op. cit.* p. 8.

9 Healy *op.cit.*

10 *ibid.*

11 Pearce *op.cit.*

12 McLuhan *The Medium is the Massage* Gingko Press: California (2004).

13 Pearce *op.cit.* pp. 164-167.



Cathy Madden is Principal Lecturer for the University of Washington’s School of Drama, and Director of the Alexander Technique Training and Performance Studio in Seattle. She is an Associate Director for ATA (Tokyo, Kyoto), a former chair of Alexander Technique International, and teaches workshops for performers, and Alexander Technique teachers in Australia, England, Germany, and Switzerland and the United States. She has been a Congress Teacher for the International Congress of Alexander Technique Teachers, and a featured speaker for the Congress in Freiburg in 1999. She is a former Chair of Alexander Technique International, an ATI Sponsor, and is the current chair of the Vision/Mission committee.

Interview with Imogen Ragone – AT teacher, blogger, web designer

What do you want to tell the readers of ExChange about yourself



Well, I came to the Alexander Technique initially to help with chronic neck pain and tension, and decided to train as a teacher in 2003. I did my training in Charlottesville, Virginia with Daria Okugawa and completed the course in 2006. I've been teaching the Alexander Technique in Wilmington, Delaware for seven years.

Over the last few years I have become increasingly passionate about using the web to promote the Alexander Technique. The web is basically a free resource, and I feel that we, as community, should really make the most of it. I blog regularly, and am active on Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites. I've found this to be a tremendously worthwhile endeavor. It has not only proved itself to be a very useful marketing strategy (both for promoting my own practice and the Alexander Technique in general), but has also been very personally rewarding. I am able to keep up to date with all the latest news on the Technique, and have enjoyed making connections with other Alexander Technique teachers, students and enthusiasts around the world.

You are at a party and someone asks "What is the Alexander Technique?" What short answer do you give?

Don't you hate that question?! My short answer might be something like, "Oh the Alexander Technique is fantastic! It's a thoughtful way of learning to release tension and improve your coordination so everything you do becomes easier and more comfortable. I initially used it to solve chronic neck problems, and loved it so much I became a teacher."

If I know something of the person's background, I often tailor the definition to address that.

This issue of ExChange is titled "AT 2.0". What are your thoughts about teaching the Technique in the "digital age"?

Hmm, I think teaching in the "digital age" does not particularly impact the way we actually teach the Technique itself, but rather it has changed dramatically the ways we can market ourselves (and the Technique in general) and how we interact with potential clients. Whether you like it or not more and more of this is being done online. It's my belief that if we don't embrace this we will be losing out, both personally and as a profession. We need to be active on the web - at

the very least have a website, and use email to respond to students and prospective students (this is expected nowadays). If you can add social media, blogging, video or podcasts, for instance, into the mix in any way whatsoever, that will boost your impact or presence. The more Alexander Technique teachers that have an online presence helps us all collectively - it's not just about your own practice. Every Alexander Technique website, every post, tweet, status update, Facebook page about the Alexander Technique boosts its visibility online, and that indirectly helps all teachers.

Where do you see the role of social media, blogs, websites for learning and teaching the AT?

Social media, blogs and websites, while all functioning differently, can all play a huge role in educating about the Technique - both to prospective students and also to students. I think the word "educational" is crucial when we think of using all these platforms. Nothing turns people off like a constant sales pitch. Instead we can use websites, and in particular social media, and blogs to educate people about what we do - educating about different aspects of the Technique, giving "tips" based on the Technique, posting articles and blogs on different subjects relating to the Technique and sharing what we love about it. Then when we post something about an upcoming class, people might be interested.

Social media and blogs (as well as email newsletters, video, podcasts, etc.) all provide a way of connecting with current students, as well as prospective ones. They can provide more background and information about principles you are teaching in your lessons and classes, helping students keep the work more alive between lessons, and enhancing their understanding of the work. In the same way, it can help past students keep connected with the work and keep learning on their own, or until they decide to book another lesson!

What got you motivated to write a blog?

Well, I finally took the plunge after taking a course in social media marketing which really emphasized the importance of blogging as the cornerstone of your online presence. It not only helps people learn a lot more about you and the Technique, it is also a way or organically increasing your ranking by the search engines - especially if you post blogs regularly. I regularly blogged once a week for quite a while. Now my blog is established I usually blog every other week, though sometimes, I admit, not quite as often as that.

Who is the target audience for your blog?

My main target audience is people who have never heard of the Technique or who only have a vague notion about it. I have quite a few blogs aimed at people who use a computer (who doesn't?), and am also an advocate for Constructive Rest as something anyone can do and benefit from - so there a few blogs on that too. I love to emphasize the self-help aspect of the Technique. Many of my blog posts explain key principles of the Technique in everyday language, or relate my

own experiences using the Technique in different situations. I hope to write about something that may intrigue people, so they want to find out more.

That said, my blog posts are typically also helpful and interesting to current students. Many Alexander Technique teachers read my blog too, and they often share the posts with their online audience, for which I am very grateful. The more we share each other's work, the better for all of us.

Do you have any tips for people who want to start blogging?

Well, I think first and foremost I recommend using WordPress as a blogging platform. In my opinion it really is the best blogging platform out there. Do think carefully ahead of time about who your intended audience is. Is it for your own students, for other teachers, or for potential students who know little or nothing about the Technique? Is it for a particular niche market – e.g. musicians, singers, actors, computer users, public speakers, or people with back pain? It's important to know who you are writing for, and also to remember that it's a blog, not a sales pitch. Keep blog posts short, but post regularly (I'd recommend at least once a week in the beginning until you get more established). If you have something longer you want to write, see if you can break it up into sections and create a series.

I have loads more tips I could share on how to make your blog more effective, which I have posted on AlexanderTechniqueBlogs.com - a website I run supporting Alexander Technique bloggers all over the world. Just check out the Blogger Resources pages. I also give tips and ideas for what to write about, which might be helpful to anyone getting started with a blog.

Other than that, my biggest tip is to promote your blog. Don't just write it and hope that people will read it. Share it on all the social media sites, invite people to subscribe to your blog via email (WordPress has automated ways for you to do this). If you have an email list, use your blogs as fodder for your newsletters.

You design websites for AT teachers – how did you get involved in website design?

Within a month of graduating from my training course I moved with my family to Wilmington, Delaware. I was at a loss, initially, how to start my own practice from scratch in an area where I didn't know anyone. With time on my hands I took two online courses in web design and created my own website. This was the real beginning of me having presence as an Alexander Technique teacher in the area. The vast majority of my students have visited my website, and most of my initial inquiries come through email.

I enjoyed the creative process of designing my own website so much that when Robert Rickover (well known for his web presence in the Alexander community)

suggested I consider designing websites for other Alexander Technique teachers I jumped at the chance! I've more recently taken further courses on designing websites using the WordPress platform, and using blogging and social media effectively. To date I have created websites for over 70 Alexander teachers (and a few other folk) from a wide variety of backgrounds in North America, Europe and Australia.

From your perspective, what are the biggest mistakes some AT teachers make in terms of their website?

By far the biggest mistake I see is not listing your location prominently on your website. If people (and, maybe more importantly, the search engines) don't know where you are, they are unlikely to contact you for a lesson - after all you could be the other side of the world. Make sure your location is easy to find right on the home page.

Another big mistake is to use Alexander Technique "jargon" on your website. Only if you are specifically targeting people already familiar with the Technique would this make sense. The majority of Alexander Technique teachers are marketing to people who pretty much know nothing about our work, so please avoid using terms like "Primary Control" or "Inhibition" - more than likely these will mean nothing to your visitors, or even worse they will create an incorrect negative impression. Instead find simple, jargon-free language to convey the essence of what you would like to say in terms that people can relate to, for instance you might use the word "coordination" instead of "use."

There are many more things I could say on this subject, but it might be best to refer your readers to my "Tips for an Effective Website" which you can find at www.alexandertechniquewebsites.net/tips. Your readers might also be interested in the website evaluations, which I conducted in conjunction with Robert Rickover earlier this year. The evaluations were based on the tips, and can be found at: www.alexandertechniquewebsites.net/website-assessments.

What are the most important features of a teacher's website to "work" as source of information and to get new pupils into the teaching room?

Ooh, that's a hard one, but is probably, to some extent anyway, covered by the tips referred to in the previous question.

I think it's really important for your website to be inviting, yet simple and user-friendly. Also, and this is very basic, make it very easy and clear that you are inviting people to contact you and give them that information. It's amazing how many sites make it difficult to find the contact information. I like to see a clear statement on the home page of who, what, where - e.g. Imogen Ragone offers Alexander Technique lessons in Wilmington, Delaware. Too often it's not really clear what is on offer.

What do you see as the most important online resources for AT teachers?

Robert Rickover's site, The Complete Guide to the Alexander Technique (www.AlexanderTechnique.com) is an invaluable resource, as are his podcasts at www.BodyLearningCast.com. Both sites have pages devoted just to resources for AT teachers.

I'd also recommend anyone on Facebook (and it's a really good idea to be on Facebook!) to join some of the great online Alexander Technique communities there. If you're blogging, of course I recommend my own Facebook group, www.facebook.com/groups/AlexanderTechniqueBlogs. Other groups for networking with other AT teachers, include: www.facebook.com/groups/AlexTechWorldwide, www.facebook.com/groups/AlexanderTechniqueGlobal and www.facebook.com/groups/consortiumfortheAlexanderTechnique. These can all be a great source of information and inspiration, and are places to ask questions and get support from other AT teachers.

Is there anything else you would like to share with the readers of ExChange?

Well, only to encourage your readers to take the plunge into the online world if they're not there already. I see having a website as the most basic, and necessary piece of the online world. Not having a website is pretty much like not having a phone - very few people are going to find you without one. If you have no interest in doing anything technical there are plenty of services out there (including my own!) that can do it for you.

To finish up, I'd love for your readers to connect with me online! They can find me at:

www.imogenragone.com (my Alexander Technique website)

www.imogenragone.com/blog (my blog)

www.AlexanderTechniqueWebsites.net (my web design website)

www.AlexanderTechniqueBlogs.com (listings of Alexander Technique blogs by many different teachers, plus related information)

www.facebook.com/IntelligentBody (my Facebook page for the Alexander Technique)

@ImogenRagone (my Twitter handle)

This is an example of the practical and applicable posts Imogen writes at www.imogenragone.com/blog:

(Ed.: fitting with the topic of this issue I'm sharing with you one of her blog posts for computer users)

Alexander Technique Help for Computer Users – Part 1: Awareness

Posted on [February 19, 2012](#) by [Imogen Ragone](#)



Many of us, me included, have a love-hate relationship with technology – our computers, laptops, iPads, tablets and cell phones. We love everything they do for us: that seamless interface that connects us, almost instantaneously, with the world. We use them to get information, to interact with other people, for entertainment; we can produce complex documents, conduct research and solve problems, create images, presentations, videos and much more. What we don't love, often, is how we feel after using this technology. Excess tension, poor posture, headaches, neck aches and back aches are all too common after hours spent at the computer, not to mention the prevalence of carpal tunnel syndrome and other repetitive strain injuries.



I would contend, however, that it isn't actually working at the computer that is necessarily the cause of all these problems. Rather, it is the *way* we work – it is the *way* we sit, or hunch our shoulders, or the *way* we grip the mouse for instance. While a sedentary life-style is known not to be the healthiest choice, *how* we sit at the computer can make a huge difference in how we feel.

This subject dear to my heart, as I spend a lot of time working at the computer myself. I not only teach the [Alexander Technique](#), I also [design websites](#), mainly for other Alexander teachers, actively use the web and social media to educate people about this wonderful Technique, and much more. Indeed the Technique has given me the ability to work at the computer more mindfully, productively, with healthier posture and less tension.

While not a replacement for in-person Alexander Technique instruction, in this series of blog posts, I will be providing pointers to help your experience at the computer be more comfortable.

We can begin by cultivating a broader *awareness* while we use the computer. We are usually so immersed in our work (or game, or video, or Facebook...) that we forget about our body (until it starts to hurt, perhaps) and the space around us. We are totally sucked into the world on the screen in front of us. As a first step to mitigating this, broaden your awareness to include the room around you. If you have a window – look out! Look around and be aware of what’s behind you and to either side of you, at what’s beyond the computer in front of you. Can you maintain awareness of this, even for a few moments, as you return to the screen?

But how can we *remember* to be aware when the pull of the screen is so strong? It takes practice! It can be useful to set yourself a reminder or alert every so often. I find this [mindfulness bell](#) less jarring than many alarms.

What do you find are the biggest challenges to working at the computer? Did you try the awareness exercise? Did anything change? Was it difficult? Please let me know in the comments below.

We want YOU



**to write an article
for the February issue of ExChange
“Taking the Work to work – AT in business
world”**

Whether you work with businesses or individuals in their work environment, or whether in addition to teaching (or studying) the Work you have your own experiences of applying the AT in an office, on a construction site, in a kitchen, orchestra pit, factory or any other workplace this is for you:

The title of the February issue of ExChange is going to be **“Taking the Work to work – AT in the business world”**.

I’m sure you all have a wealth of experience and ideas to share about this topic.

As usual contributions (articles, workshop reviews, announcements, poems, pictures, etc.) not directly aimed at the main topic are also welcome.

Please email your article to Eva Fenrich:

eva.fenrich@gmail.com

Deadline for submissions: February 5, 2014

Email your article in a MS word or plain text format. (Not PDF)

If you use pictures or graphics in your article, please attach each picture or graphic to your email.

Please include a brief biography, and attach a clear photo of yourself.

Thank you!

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Yearly Fees from Jan - December

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ATI Administrative Secretary

1692 Massachusetts Ave

3rd floor

Cambridge, MA 02138, USA

+1 888-668-8996 (toll free from USA & Canada)

+1 617-497-5151

Fax +1 617-497-2615

Email: alexandertechnique@verizon.net

ATI Vision and Mission

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

To create and sustain open means of global communication for people to discuss, apply, research and experiment with the discoveries of F.M. Alexander.

To encourage the use of the F.M. Alexander Technique in both human and environmental relationships.

To embody the principles of the F.M. Alexander Technique in ATI's structure and means of operation.

To provide a means for recognizing Alexander Technique Teacher competence and providing certification for those teachers who qualify.

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www.ati-net.com

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