

Below is an article I wrote for the Innovations Academy newsletter in March 2012

The Alexander Technique by Alice Olsher

I feel there are great benefits of the work that would help someone to be able to focus more efficiently for these reasons and in these ways:

I, the teacher, with my hands give the student the experience of calm, clear focus. The hands of the teacher transmit this balance and co-ordination. We work on balance in a very deep sense through the whole system which means it alters the chemistry of the system too.

Tight and shortened muscles give off a chemical experience to the system which gets in the way of the thinking. The person becomes preoccupied. The tension causes the release of Cortisol which creates the lack of clarity and memory. If a person is in survival they are out of balance. If they are out of balance they are in survival.

The Alexander work changes the chemistry in a positive way. It restores balance by undoing the tightening and shortening, which allows the natural balance to come through. This balance opens up the breathing and improves coordination and focus.

Here is a direct quote from my good friend and colleague John Nicholls who teaches in New York.

Private Lessons

What happens in a lesson?

“The role of the Alexander teacher is to use gentle guidance with her/his hands to help unravel distortions and encourage the natural responses that underlie posture, balance, breathing and movement to work freely again. In this way a balance can be found between the necessary degree of muscle tone required to support the body against the downward pull of gravity, and the necessary degree of *relaxation-in-activity* to allow unrestricted movement, breathing, circulation and digestion.

Along with manual guidance, the Alexander teacher also uses verbal instruction to help students become conscious of their own patterns of interference, and teaches them to project simple messages from the brain to the body that will help the natural mechanisms of poise to function more freely. It is for this reason that we call our work re-education and describe ourselves as teachers.

As the student learns to allow natural poise and balance to emerge, he or she will usually notice the change as one of lightness, ease and greater freedom of movement. Removing habitual tension patterns that interfere with free poise and balance is a practice which the student can, after a time, undertake in daily life for her/himself.

Lessons are individual and usually last 30–45 minutes. The number of lessons that may be required varies from one person to another and is best discussed directly with a teacher.”

The change in breathing that comes about, as he says, also helps kids with Asthma. I helped a student the other day in this way.

It is really the experience that makes the difference to the system.

Below is an interview that I did with a parent that was at Innovations last year who had lessons with me.

Interview.

Alice. "What was your experience of the Alexander lessons?"

D. "I didn't know what to expect from the Alexander Technique when I first started, but I was looking for a way to quiet my mind and center my body. Over the course of about 30 lessons, I feel with each lesson I had a better connection with my body and mind and also I began to feel very centered (physically and mentally.) "

Alice "What attracted you to come for the first lesson?"

D. "I came for the first lesson because it was free and also I was experiencing a disconnection between my mind and my body due to a great loss in my life and extreme demands placed on me from family members."

A. "What attracted you to come back?"

D. "I came back because I felt lighter. I couldn't explain how or why but I felt just a little bit lighter. I had such a heavy previous couple of years that I didn't even know what it felt like to not carry sadness, guilt, anger, hurt and loss around wherever I went. After my lessons, I felt a little bit of all that drop off each time I left your house."

A. "How many lessons did you have?"

D. "I believe I had about 30, maybe 29."

A. "What did you notice that was easier?"

D. "What became easier was the concept of the technique and also my body started to align itself better and better each time I came back. Also I felt like I understood how to do the technique at home as more time went by."

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A. "What was different?"

D. "The difference for me was I became very conscious of how my body was aligned, the patterns I was used to doing that were not good for me, and mentally I was able to stop myself from reacting right away to a situation when before I would usually jump right in whether I was needed or not."

A. "How did you understand it? How do you understand it now?"

D. "I still do not have a great grasp of the whole technique but there is definitely something that works about it. It is a very slow process to see the results but gradually you have these "A-HA" moments where you simply understand the connection."

D. "Alice, I really feel that you were the biggest part of the technique. Your energy was very gentle and never overpowering. It always seemed to be just the right amount at the right time. As far as benefitting parents, the technique allows you to stop your mind and body and focus on what is right in front of you. For me, it allowed me to stop and center myself before responding and that is one of the most helpful things I have ever learned! "

I hope this interview, my opening paragraph and the quote from my friend and colleague will give a picture of what The Alexander Technique can do how it works and how it would be useful to parents and students at Innovations Academy or in any school setting.

Alexander believed we should start at a very early age to allow the growth to continue in a positive way.

With this calm clear focus and the organized musculature which facilitates that focus, we can all learn what we want to learn to use in our lives

Alice Olsher is a teacher of The Alexander Technique and a parent of two students at IA. She has been teaching for 22 years having worked in schools with musicians and people from all different professions. She has worked training teachers as well and also has been very grateful to use this work for her own calm clear focus in parenting her children.

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