

CHAPTER 5

THE USE OF THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE IN THE PLAYING, PRACTISING AND TEACHING OF THE FLUTE

5.1 Introduction

I have worked with experienced Alexander teachers in South Africa, Germany and Austria, and I was able to observe Alexander teaching to instrumentalists (mostly flute and violin); this helped me to direct and observe Gudrun's and Katharina's progress. All of the processes and changes observed during the two case studies, and during my own Alexander Technique lessons, led to eventual conclusions; from these I could form vital concepts that helped me in both performing and teaching.

5.2 Balance in standing

With both of the case studies the most important problem area seemed to lie with the balance between the head and the body; and therefore with the alignment between the position of the head and the spine. Gudrun held her neck too far forward, causing both tension in her neck and pain and fatigue in her back. This in turn caused her to raise her pelvis at the back and stiffen her legs while playing; and that created yet more tension. To help her to release the unnecessary tension in the back, and to allow the consequent releases to take place, she had to become aware of the faulty, or over-stretched, position of her head. On the other hand Katharina held her neck, face and flute all at a totally awkward angle, because she had lost the feeling of the natural alignment between head and body during the process of learning to play the flute.

To attain a balanced stance, students have to learn to release the tension in the back muscles when standing. The idea is actually for students to find a distribution of weight that allows them to make the most of their postural reflexes. As an aid in

helping students to understand this, the following description should be considered (Wale 1973:339):

Normally the body is kept in the correct posture by the beautifully balanced action of opposing muscle groups, and by efficient working of the nerves which control this type of muscular activity. Such activity is, in effect, an anti-gravity reaction. It is known as postural tone and exists throughout the body. This form of work does not, however, produce fatigue in the same way as do voluntary contractions of the same muscles. If a man be asked to extend his spine, or even his knee, repeatedly, the muscles will soon tire; yet he can remain in a sitting or standing position for a very long time.

It is this postural tone that lessons in the Alexander Technique help one regain. Students have to learn a growing awareness of how to retain good posture while both preparing to play and when playing the instrument. This means that the muscles can begin their necessary contractions for correct breathing from a balanced, rested state; rather than from an already hard-working, tense state. The student who tends to lean forward while playing is a good example of this. The action of leaning forward makes the muscles in the back contract, which in turn may cause, for example, the flute tone to be thin and the higher notes to be more difficult to obtain. This is because with a forward-leaning posture there is less possibility of effective support. Whereas, if the student keeps a balanced posture, the back can be brought into the support mechanism with no resistance from the series of muscles that were distorted in order to strain the body forward (Lloyd 1986:136)

The same principle can be applied to sitting. The Alexander student will learn very early on how to find his sitting bones and thereby stimulate all the reflexes that enable the torso to maintain an erect posture while sitting. It is important that the student learns to find the middle position in sitting, where the torso is supported without becoming tired. As orchestral flutists sit while playing, it is vitally important for them to attain this relaxed balance.

Maximum freedom and energy can mostly be observed in young children, whose bodies have not yet been distorted by tension. The Primary Control (Alexander 1932:23) can also be observed in underdeveloped cultures, in the perfect balance between head and torso (Gelb 1991:54). This poise can, according to Alexander, be

regained by the adult through an understanding of this Primary Control and a re-education of the general use of the muscles controlling the balance between head and torso.

5.3 Balance in holding the flute

This statement by music therapist Phyllis Nefsky (1990:17) is a good summary of typical flute holding problems:

When playing the flute, tension can build in the neck, shoulders and back despite a relaxed approach. The flute is not centred in the middle of the body like a clarinet or a trumpet. The flutist's left arm, fighting gravity to hold the flute, compresses the left shoulder muscles in the same way the right arm strains the right shoulder. Pulling too far back with the right arm compresses the right side of the back and may cause a slight twist in the spine. In addition, the body may become more tense while playing troublesome passages, so pay attention to posture while playing the flute.

It is easier to describe this body control than it is to actually attain it in practice. The analytical, critical and doubting part of the brain is working hard when we are in the act of learning something and *trying* to do it right. The "trying hard" actually interferes with the free movement of our bodies (Mather 1990:25). During the case studies it was apparent that the correcting releases in the body took place only when no effort to *do* was made, but when, instead, they were simply left to *happen* - as with the instruction to Gudrun to continue easing her head up, *letting* her body follow, and *letting* her arms float up until the flute touches her skin. This was the direction which brought her the first visible improvement.

Until recently, it was assumed by Westerners that the brain does all the thinking and that the body does all the feeling and moving. But instead we have to learn that our brain, body, nervous system, sensors, muscles and limbs act as a system, as an integrated whole (Mather 1990:25). As the holding of the flute necessitates the use of all the limbs, especially head, arms and shoulders, the first and most simple, nevertheless most important, lesson to be taught regarding the holding of the instrument starts with the teaching of the awareness of the *whole* body.

Several different methods of body-learning have already been developed by different well-known and less well-known teachers and performers. A method that was presented several times at International workshops and flute masterclasses is the so-called *Edu-K Action Balances* (Educational Kinaesthetics) developed by Paul Dennison, a Ph.D specialist in reading disorders, and his wife Gail Dennison, a dancer and artist. They teach that there are no learning or performance disabilities, only blocks, and that selected physical movements remove the blocks. For instance, the bringing up of the flute to the head can be practised in the context of a series of movements designed to help the flutist to reach the goal of being relaxed and balanced with the flute in the hands, and playing. Various bodily movements can be combined with the playing of a simple phrase (see Chapter 4.2.1); for example, turning the arms (and hence the flute) along with the head and eyes to the right, left and back as the phrase is being played. Or bending forward and then straightening up while playing (Mather:1990:27). These actions can help to release habitual tensions that some flutists hold.

5.4 Balance in breathing

It does not take long to perceive the value of naturally co-ordinated breathing as taught in Alexander Technique lessons and its relevance for flutists (and singers). Everyone operates a slightly different balance in normal everyday breathing: nevertheless, as everyone's mechanism is constructed the same, there must be a generalised, basically 'ideal' system.

During Alexander lessons the method of verbally communicating information about new ways of using the breathing muscles was used by the Alexander teachers. A verbal description is sometimes enough to stimulate the desired action in the student, although it mostly does require further amplification. If the teacher wants to create awareness of certain specific parts of the body, or awareness of muscles not accessible to touch, then only verbal descriptions can be used. This helps the student to respond to both mental direction and visualisation. There are numerous good verbal descriptions which can help to conceptualise physical actions. An example of this was used during the first case study:

Rather than think of the muscles working on the outside of your body, imagine two rods passing horizontally through your abdomen at the level of your pelvis, one from side to side, the other from the middle of the front to the back and where they cross each other, you apply downward pressure to support your sound (Lloyd 1986:131).

This kind of verbal description obviously does not work as well if the student is not quite ready to respond to that particular advice. After the releasing of muscles, as progressively learned during Alexander Technique lessons, penetrates deeper, there should be an increased response to such directions.

5.4.1 Reflex-facilitated breathing

The value of the Alexander Technique when examining breathing technique is that it aims at reducing the interferences, without compensating for them. (The problem with most research done on breathing is that it always includes people with poor postural co-ordination. Thus the picture of natural breathing is distorted from the outset.) Reflex-facilitated breathing allows the breathing mechanism to operate with as little interference as possible. Lloyd (1986:137) writes:

I learned this breathing in Alexander lessons: I experienced the guidance of my singing teacher towards this breathing and gradually taught myself to sing with this natural breathing while practising. In time I learned to allow it into rehearsals and performances. Singers and non-singers alike interfere with their natural breathing and it is a most liberating experience to re-learn the natural flow of supported sound.

She goes on to describe the following method: As the student lies on the table (as Katharina lay on the floor during Case Study 2) the air is first let out of the lungs, and then the air is allowed to be drawn into the lungs - "It is a process of allowing the air pressure within the lungs to equal the air pressure outside" (Lloyd 1986:138). The student then counts numbers, for instance 1 2 3..., not necessarily well-enunciated, until the air supply runs out. Then air is allowed to fill the lungs by "letting the ribs spring out sideways" The whole process is then repeated.

Here the differences in breathing mechanisms are highlighted - not everyone's ribs "spring out" automatically. Some people have more flexibility in the stomach wall and

the upper chest area, so that their mechanism works on a vertical plane. Internationally acclaimed flutist Peter-Lukas Graf teaches the student abdominal breathing (Graf 1991:6-7):

Play the first long note until the breath is exhausted; the abdominal muscles will tighten. Remain in that position without moving or breathing in (c. 2 ¼ seconds). Relax suddenly (letting go): air enters the lungs. (See Chapter 2.3.)

Nevertheless, whatever the differences, *the abdomen should not be tightened when preparing to breathe*. The tightening can be easily observed by an onlooker, although not as easily felt by the student; thus it has to be pointed out to the student the moment it occurs (Lloyd 1986:138).

During the time I was co-operating with several Alexander teachers; I often asked for advice in connection with particular problems in teaching and playing; describing some particular difficulties of my pupils or my own. Once a flute student of mine begins also taking lessons in Alexander Technique, I would suggest to the student that they ask the Alexander teacher to work on certain aspects that I had previously found helpful for me. One does learn to a certain extent to communicate to the student the directions one would direct to oneself, thinking of their body as one's own. But it is not possible to overstate the increased abilities and power of communication that a flute teacher can gain by also training as an Alexander teacher.

One's powers of observation are increased a hundredfold; one's understanding of body mechanics helps with the understanding of singing technique; one's ability to identify the muscles that are not working becomes a vital tool in one's own singing and in the students' singing; and, most important, one is given the power to actually change the posture for the better in those students that are being hindered by habitual postural imbalances (Lloyd 1986:133).

Nevertheless, there is no way that a flute teacher can properly learn to teach Alexander Technique without completing a demanding three year-course.

5.5 The Alexander concept

Alexander spent sixty years of his life developing ways of putting into practice the concepts which he had evolved through his experimentation. He emphasised that we as human beings have the choice and responsibility of controlling the ways we use our bodies. If we learn to exercise this control, the functioning of our bodies can begin to improve - and will continue to improve (Gelb 1991:33). If this control is not exercised by choice, our bodies will be influenced by poor use and will therefore be continually deteriorating in function.

Alexander actually re-educated himself. He discovered that as soon as one concentrated on attaining the desired goal, habitual patterns would dominate, unless one could, by some means, interfere with those habitual patterns. He attended very closely to new manners of body use. Alexander realised that repeatedly trying an activity utilising poor body use is both pointless and harmful, so he stopped the activity, analysed the process, and decided what was preventing the desired functioning. In the process he corrected the poor use and thus gradually made progress towards the goal of economical and meaningful body use (Gelb 1991:62-63).

In order to eliminate a negative pattern that, due to constant repetition, has become habitual, the conscious choice must be made to struggle constantly against the habits. In this process of elimination, the person will come to the realisation that attention has to be given to the use of the body as a whole.

5.5.1 Functioning as a whole

There are many influences that lead to imbalance in the use of our bodies - trauma, stress in everyday-life, mental attitudes, pressure, tiredness etc. Being in a tense state becomes a part of everyday-life and tension patterns become part of the

habitual way we use our bodies. The most important goal of the Alexander Technique is to enable the body to function as a whole. Alexander discovered that his whole body was involved in the misuse of his voice. He also realised that the disconnected use of the body both implied and caused disconnected functioning of mind, body and emotion. Body awareness is an effective tool in learning about our whole selves - physical as well as emotional (Linden 1992:26).

To achieve power and sensitivity as an individual, let alone as a musician, the inner self should be attended to, in order to develop the sensitivity, balance and harmony we need. Alexander taught that the human being functions as a psychophysical whole. His concept of balanced body use, which affects its functioning (Lloyd 1986:24), is a vital one in acquiring any technique which is to be consciously learned. A teacher could, for example, become convinced that a certain aspect of a technique is vital for every student and teach it to the extent of losing the balance of the whole. When the awareness of the functioning as a whole is strong, the individual is protected against this tendency and will be able to maintain balance (Alexander 1932:46).

5.5.2 Impaired kinaesthetic awareness

It is most important to realise that it is almost impossible to teach oneself the Alexander Technique. This is because our kinaesthetic awareness is mostly impaired, due to the need to constantly cope with the pressures from the outside world. Thus we need the guidance of a teacher to learn to perceive our activities accurately. Only when the level of kinaesthetic awareness has been improved to an acceptable level of accuracy, can the student be regarded as self-sufficient (Lloyd 1986:27). Alexander discovered that his own awareness of what his body was doing was untrustworthy. In other words it often occurred that the incorrect habit actually felt right. He observed the same problem with his students. This convinced him that this lack of accurate kinaesthetic awareness was not merely his own individual specific problem. The perception of exactly how much energy is needed for directing a specific action to correct a faulty habit, is also impaired. This is further impaired by

the common characteristic of fearing anything new - including new ways of understanding activities. Thus attempts to correct a faulty habit will initially feel all wrong, lead to misconceptions and not achieve the desired goal.

5.5.3 Learning to improve kinaesthetic awareness: Inhibition and Direction

Alexander also discovered that he could not operate his Primary Control by merely “willing” the muscles to work in a certain way. He called the reflexes of the body, which were either allowed not to act or allowed to act, “Inhibition and Direction” (Alexander 1932:45). Inhibition was used to describe the moment of conscious thought between the reception of a stimulus and the concomitant response. He distinguished between two stages in the process of learning Inhibition:

1. To recognise the habitual response to a certain stimulus; e.g. in bringing the flute to the mouth in order to start playing.
2. To learn to stop, or change or inhibit that habitual response.

Thus Inhibition is used to interrupt the unconscious flow of a habitual response in order to replace it with a better, more natural and relaxed Direction.

The best way to describe Direction in Alexander Technique is through Alexander's own direction in all activities: “free the neck to let the head go forward and up so that the back may lengthen and widen”. The activity is allowed to take place through the application of the Direction. This concept of “allowance”, or the concept of either doing or not-doing, is very important for every student of the Alexander Technique. After several sessions of instruction one actually feels light and tall, with an ease of movement (Kapell Loewy 1992:31).

5.6 Other techniques for relaxation of body and mind

There are several techniques for relaxation of body and mind. The so-called Quieting Response, developed by the American psychiatrist Charles Stroebe, is an appropriate example. He instructed the person to first smile, then to take two slow, deep breaths, and finally to say: “Keep my body out of this”. The act of physically

smiling actually helps the person to feel more contented; the slow, deep breathing relaxes the muscle tension in the body; and the brain gives the instruction to the body not to interfere in the process at hand (Lehrer 1979:138). This all sounds incredibly simple; which it certainly is, when we learn to *accurately* experience what our bodies are doing in responding to different impulses. In this respect it concurs with Alexander's concepts.

The technique called Autogenic Training is also based on a concept of self-regulation. This was developed by the German physician Johannes Schultz, who studied the effects of hypnosis. Under hypnosis people were to be taught the ability to achieve certain stages of relaxation by themselves, through the implementation of six standard exercises, or formulas. People were taught to concentrate passively on these formulas, saying them silently, while imagining the physical sensations; but they were instructed not to try to actually achieve these sensations. Like Alexander, Schultz realised that the very act of *trying* to achieve results can easily prevent the sensations occurring.

The Progressive Relaxation developed by Edmund Jacobson aims at teaching people how to "stop doing things" (Lehrer 1979:140). This is achieved by teaching them how to become aware of the constant muscle activity in their bodies throughout the day; activity of which we are normally not aware. Again, this technique runs parallel to Alexander's. Like with the Alexander Technique the effects of Progressive Relaxation go far beyond the muscular system.

Through psychological research it has been shown by Jacobson (Lehrer 1979:140) anxiety to have three components:

- 1) A physiological component (sweaty palms, etc.)
- 2) A cognitive component (worrying about things that could go wrong)
- 3) A behavioural component (doing things that one does not usually do; avoiding doing or thinking things that could provoke anxiety).

Progressive Relaxation attempts to address all three of these components.

Over the centuries Eastern cultures have developed and mastered techniques that engender a degree of inner calm, and they have placed great importance on the subjective experience of tension and how to control it in both their minds and their bodies. Practitioners of Yoga, Tai Chi, Aikido, Zen Buddhism, and various Eastern forms of meditation sometimes develop remarkable control over their nervous systems (Mather 1993:42). For most Westerners, the study of, and dedication to Eastern philosophical, religious and metaphysical systems still appears unacceptable, although greater acceptance has been noted over the past few decades. For the purpose of this study, I have kept to techniques that are essentially Western.

5.7 The use of the Alexander Technique in situations of tension and interference

As music does not come only from the instruments involved, but also from within, musical growth also implies coping with problems of the self, such as stage fright and other kinds of performance problems that interfere with the ability to express emotions. To achieve power, sensitivity, balance and harmony as a musician, musical growth also involves work on the inner self. As Brian Warren (1992:11) states:

I teach musicians, actors and people from all walks of life, but what being a professional flute-player especially gives you is an understanding of how difficult it is to stand up and play in front of other people. You can be quite relaxed working in an office or at home, but once you get on stage you tend to use the body in different ways and that is precisely what Alexander found. He was an actor who developed voice problems [...] who did all kinds of things to his head and neck which interfered with his voice production. That is precisely what flute players do too.

Awareness of what we really do with our bodies in a situation of anxiety is a very important factor in the process of being a successful interpreter of music in front of an audience. Heifetz, one of the great violinists of our time, was said not to be "doing" very much when he picked up the violin to play: "he turned the head slightly and played [...] without any extras" (Warren 1992:11).

To play music is as much a spiritual and emotional endeavour as it is a physical one. Nevertheless, to focus on the physical aspect is useful, because what people do with their bodies is relatively easy to observe. The difficulties encountered by musicians are stated by Paul Linden (1992:26), specialist in body and movement awareness education, to fall into three interrelated categories. These are:

- Physical strain
- Anxiety
- Non-specific performance inability.

He agrees with Alexander in declaring that although there is really no separation between mind, body and spirit, choices of how to be and how to act are intimately connected with posture and movement.

5.7.1 Physical strain

Physical strain is said by Paul Linden (1992:26) to include several elements, such as general postural problems - caused by sitting or standing for hours while practising or playing - or physical tension caused by anxiety. Musicians incur a variety of differing physical problems; for instance, the sore pedal foot of the organist, the dull backache of the double bass player, or the tiredness in a bowing arm. A musician who is also a student of the Alexander Technique has to allow the awareness of the body and its muscles to "grow on its own"; it takes time. Once the student has the feel of the Technique in his or her normal movements, the connections and applications will emerge of their own accord. During the first twenty Alexander lessons the students should actually only think about how the Technique is affecting them in a general physical sense, not how it is specifically affecting their playing.

Linden (1992:26) describes the physical problems that musicians face as stemming from some form of separation from the self. It could be, for instance, that a musician is failing to realise that it is past fears that are the performance inhibiting factors and the cause of physical straining. He (Linden 1992:26) further states that:

- Not feeling the things that are going on in the mind and body is the root cause of performance difficulties, and finding union with the self is the basis for finding union with the instrument, the music, fellow musicians, and the audience.

The body is the concrete aspect of the self, therefore body awareness is useful in learning about the whole self. Students of any form of body awareness technique learn to say exactly *what* they feel in their bodies and *where* they feel it. This is called “physical thinking” by Linden (1992:27). This helps people to notice the sensory details of their experience by teaching them to find and develop a pattern of self-monitoring - with the focus on details of, for instance, breathing, muscle tone, posture and movement. He advises pupils to try the following: consciously tighten the abdomen, anal sphincter muscles and genitals, and then walk around, noticing how stiff and strained the legs, hips and lower back are. The movement as a whole is inhibited by the holding of tension in these body areas. If the pupil thinks only about treating the muscular activity as surface activity, then it is obvious that the deeper, inner layers of muscular activity are not being penetrated (Craig 1978:22). Holding tension in these body areas while singing or playing an instrument makes it quite impossible to perform optimally.

5.7.3 Non-specific performance inability

Again, parallels with the Alexander Technique are readily evident.

Performance difficulties can be viewed as good opportunities for learning. By identifying performance problems and discussing what they reveal, musicians become able to reach their highest potential. Musical enjoyment is

5.7.2 Anxiety

In musical performance certain tensions can, however, also play a positive role. The player must be able to create enough energy and spark. But when too much stress and misguided energy is involved, a lesser performance is usually the result (Kapell Loewy 1992:31). Involved in this is the fear of being judged, with the consequence of negative self-criticism. Both students and performers “have to be aware of their intrinsic worth, regardless of their current evidence of ability and must realise that in a deeply self-confident way in order to perform well” (Kapell Loewy 1992:31). A most important point to always be kept in mind by any performer is that slow, careful practice with a positive attitude is the best way to counter the above-mentioned kind of self-criticism. Amongst many other authorities it was Isidore Phillip, the great piano teacher who wrote that: “Too much stress cannot be laid upon the usefulness, the necessity of slow work” (Kapell Loewy 1992:31). The great performers seem to agree on this. Heifetz was said to be a great master at working the fingers slowly on the strings, without bowing, for up to eight hours a day (Warren 1992:11).

As already mentioned, there are several techniques for relaxation of body and mind. As Westerners often suffer from excessive trying - too much of the "do it yourself" factor. We have to learn to reach the point of balance between tension and relaxation. The harmful tensions caused by too much concern about our ego, along with its obsessions, fears, rigidity and resentments, must not be allowed to arise (Mather 1993:43). Once we can let go of these egoistic fears, the minimum necessary tension replaces the old excessive tension to give us new energy and life. Alexander's basic teaching of body awareness does help the student to let go of these mental anxieties. His basic commands to: "Let my neck be free, let my body go forward and up, let my torso lengthen and widen, let my legs release away from my torso, and let my shoulders widen out to the side" (Alexander 1941:47) will lead to a lessening of mental tension and anxiety.

5.7.3 Non-specific performance inability

Performance difficulties can be viewed as good opportunities for learning. By focusing on performance problems and discovering what weaknesses they reveal, musicians become able to reach their highest potential through replacing the revealed weaknesses with strengths (Linden 1992:26).

Jacobson (Lehrer 1979:151) states that the major behavioral effect of anxiety is that it makes us avoid doing things; for instance, when we avoid thinking of the concert that will occur in a few weeks time. This may perhaps cause a student to spend more time on the easier passages that he can play well, while avoiding work on the more difficult passages. Psychologically, it is better *not* to stay away from a threatening situation, for the anxiety that accompanies it eventually becomes far greater. A behaviorally successful technique for circumventing this type of anxiety is to perform very frequently. Although it can also be good for an artist to give himself time to think and rethink his technique and understanding of music, it is done at the risk of increasing performance anxiety as the deadline approaches (Lehrer 1979:151).

A certain amount of anxiety will always be with us. Nevertheless, it need not always be a source of fear. None of the various techniques of thinking, different kinds of meditation, nor other techniques for treating the physiological components of anxiety and stress are going to enable musicians to totally eliminate them. As a musician, one has to learn to live with an amount of tension, while ensuring, through kinesthetic monitoring, that it remains within bounds. Over-tense muscles become exhausted after years of undue wear and tear, leading to the situation where a musician's technical and expressive skills can become prematurely exhausted. However, through learning the Alexander Technique, whatever the problems a specific person has to cope with, the powers of mental direction are developed. It may be a long and painstaking path from an over-tense human being to one with a more natural, long-term healthy approach to coping with the difficulties of being a performing artist, but the journey is well worth the effort.

In the author's own experience, the flute teacher that took more of the presence of an Alexander teacher was most useful, because the music teacher could be observed while the student was playing a specific passage. The Alexander teacher would comment on any unusual tension noticed while the student was playing, and the passage would be repeated with the Alexander teacher during the next lesson. The area of the student's body that needed to be released would be pointed out, and the student would try to enact this independently, maintaining awareness while playing. In this way, the flute teacher and the Alexander teacher could solve tension problems as they arose.

When an Alexander teacher who is willing to assist some flute players can be found, this can only add to the quality of the instruction. Although there is normally only limited time for this sort of co-operation it is, nevertheless, a better way to ensure that the student becomes aware of the tension areas and learns to release them, than leaving it to the student's own powers of observation to detect the tensions, and their own will-power to change the tension habits.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Not all teachers can afford to take a complete Alexander Technique course. They may not have the time nor the desire; they may not be suitable candidates, nor in the right age group to be enlisted for the exacting training to be an Alexander teacher. The only practical alternative method is for music teachers to work in conjunction with Alexander teachers, communicating to them the difficulties and problems encountered in the music students. Once a music student gets started on taking Alexander lessons, the music teacher can suggest to the student that the Alexander teacher be asked to teach the “whispered aah” or the “Monkey”. The student can then benefit by incorporating this into the practical music lessons and, most importantly, into the practising sessions. Ultimately, it can be learnt what it feels like to release tension in certain parts of the body before and while playing.

In the author’s own experience, the flute teaching that took place in the presence of an Alexander teacher was most useful, because the muscle use could be observed while the student was playing a specific passage. The Alexander teacher would first comment on any unusual tension noticed while the student was playing; then the passage would be repeated with the Alexander teacher placing her hands on the area of the student’s body that needed to be released while playing. Subsequently, the student would try to enact this independently, maintaining the release while playing. In this way, the flute teacher and the Alexander teacher could deal with tension problems as they arose.

When an Alexander teacher who is willing to attend some flute lessons can be found, this can only add to the quality of the teaching. Although there is normally only limited time for this sort of co-operation it is, nevertheless, a quicker way to ensure that the student becomes aware of the tension areas and learns to release them, than leaving it to the student’s own powers of observation to detect the tensions, and their own will-power to change the tension habits.

Regular lessons in the Alexander Technique help the flute player in the following ways (Lloyd 1986:130):

1 Muscles that are too tense to give feedback to the brain begin to release their tension and begin to respond to mental direction.

2 Directing mental instructions to certain muscles in the breath support system is the first step towards gaining control over these muscles.

3 Energy can then follow thought, and the muscle begins to play a role in producing improved flute tone.

4 Increased body awareness and power of mental direction benefit the flutist in every aspect of acquiring flute playing skills and is put to constructive use at every stage of the process.

5 Undoing the tension helps the flutist become aware of the natural reflexes of the body and this enables him to make as much use as possible of the natural flow of energy before deciding how much *doing* is necessary in the breath support system.

6 Awareness can be used constructively to examine the reasons for changing habitual tensions, instead of the common situation of living with recurring faults. To undo the tension facilitates the solving of recurring playing faults and makes the recognition of them a more positive process.

7 The student becomes aware of how much support is necessary to create the required flow of breath for the quality of tone desired.

The practice of applying the techniques in order to reap these benefits grows with each lesson. As outlined in the author's own experience of trying to combine the Alexander Technique with flute playing (see Chapter 3), it is necessary to put what the flute teacher explains together with the newly acquired insight in muscle use gained from the Alexander lessons.

The flute teacher and the Alexander teacher become aware of the student's development in the process of studying the Alexander Technique, and can help the student to put this to constructive use. There is no point in asking a student to be flexible in the lower back until the flexibility comes to those muscles by the student himself learning awareness of their existence and of the tension in them. Once there are signs that the student can exercise some mental control in this area for example, the teacher can issue advice about how and when to use these muscles.

It is not possible to overstate the increased powers of communication that a teacher can gain by going to Alexander sessions; and especially by training as an Alexander teacher. The results of the training are very satisfying. One's powers of observation are very much increased; one's deeper understanding of body mechanics helps with the understanding of the blowing technique of the flute; and one's ability to identify the muscles that are not working properly or optimally becomes a vital tool in both one's own playing and in the students' playing.

The most important fact is that one becomes able to actually change the posture for the better in those students whose performance and, especially, flute tone are being hindered by habitual postural imbalance.

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