



*Alexander
Technique*

INTERNATIONAL

— *ExChange* —

SUMMER 2023

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A Letter from the Editor

Dear ATI ExChange Readers:

Welcome to the Summer 2023 issue of the ExChange! This is an exciting issue that will hopefully be thought provoking for you in your individual practice as well as in your understanding of ATI and perhaps even other systems and processes in which you inevitably play a role.

The ExChange archives are rich with the thoughts and ideas of ATI membership going back decades. The last thirteen years of the ExChange archives are currently easily accessible through the website. We are continuing to expand the archives and please be encouraged to dive into those archives for your own edification, as well as for teaching ideas and materials! Further, the website also houses *Just Inclusion: Resources List* as well as *New Research Page!*, which are accessible under the *Latest News* column on the right hand side of the website. These are great opportunities for finding current research and conversations to engage with as you dig into your own ideas. And as always, the ExChange is excited to support your ideas, in process, however grand or subtle they may be.

The first article is a re-print originally published in the October 2003 issue of the ExChange. The author, Carol Levin, was an Alexander Technique trainee at the time. She went on to serve ATI and the Alexander Technique community. She is retired now but continues to write poetry! I have included Carol's article in this issue, 20 years later, as part of a compelling triptych.

The triptych includes the article from 2003 entitled "The Dual Members" written by Carol Levin in addition to one article, "Still Untitled," and one draft statement, "Just Inclusion Statement," written by a group of collective authors from the ATI working group called Just Inclusion. The task of rewriting ATI's Response to Racism statement for the website came from the Board to the Just Inclusion working group. While a draft of the statement is the third part of the triptych, the article "Still Untitled" is a reflection of the process by which the group has been working.

There are several threads pulling the three pieces together. In particular, the idea of inclusion as well as continual change for ATI and the processes that govern the organization. I want to encourage you to see the three pieces as an arc of how ATI has considered "inclusion" over the last 20 years.

- *What have we learned since 2003 about inclusion?*
- *What does diversity mean for ATI and the Alexander Technique community?*
- *How have we shifted our work and working to allow for more and others in our community?*
- *What might the ATI of the future think about the actions and processes we enact and participate in now?*

I hope you enjoy these three pieces in concert and that they bring you to ask more and other questions of your own work and working.

The issue ends with an enthusiastic review of Penny O'Connor's 2021 book entitled [Alexander Technique for Actors: A Practical Course](#). MaryJean Allen, a student of Penny's, offers her insights into the stories, methods, and activities of the book and situates them into O'Connor's pedagogical practice and philosophy. It is a reminder that we are all students and teachers in our own way and that we are capable of connection, both tangible and intangible.



The Summer issue of the ExChange has been a joy to see come together. It reminds me that I am always hopeful for the ExChange to be a true forum for dialogue across time and space and that elevating the process, the means whereby, of the writing experience can be exquisitely satisfying to see in publication. Submit your ideas and let me hear from you.

Onward,



~julie

ATI ExChange Editor

exchange@alexandertechniqueinternational.org



The Dual Members

By Carol Levin

Alexander Technique trainee

Why do some Alexander teachers belong to two Alexander Technique societies? That question popped up spontaneously during an ATI board meeting. Immediately we realized it was an important and interesting question to explore. I designed the questionnaire below and sent it to some members who belong to another organization as well as ATI. I dubbed the interviewees “Dual Members.”

1. How did it come to pass that you made the decision to join ATI?
2. Will you mention what aspects you find attractive in each Society you belong to?
3. How are they different from each other?
4. Will you mention which aspects you would like to see changed or added?
5. After you joined ATI did you find membership to be what you had expected it to be? How was it different?
6. What is your “wish list” for ATI?
7. Are your dues paid up-to-date?

Please let me know if you are willing to be quoted by name or if you prefer to keep this information confidential.

I thank each person who generously completed the interview. I had a teacher once who said the definition of sociology is the study of people in groups. I view the results of this Dual Member Interview as a fascinating sociological study.

The most eye-catching responses when describing reasons to belong to ATI were along this line:

ATI stood for something that I feel strongly about—the stated intention to embrace the diversity of international Alexander teaching.

... an inclusive organization worthwhile to belong to as it seemed to be moving in a positive direction...

...[ATI's] emphasis is on a person's knowledge and skill as teacher...

Acceptance based on qualitative assessment for new members instead of quantitative...

...wanted an organization that is open and inclusive.

I noticed the word “inclusive” popping up often.

ATI is nurturing, growing, friendly, and inclusive.

Here is another reason cited for joining:



...joined ATI because negotiating in groups by Formal Consensus is more in harmony with Alexander Technique values, i.e., more focus on change and new possibilities.

I love Formal Consensus discussions by e-mail; how, in ATI one just experiments with new ideas

Formal Consensus allows members to own what happens, congenial—agreeable.

One was attracted because:

Formal Consensus is less confrontational than other systems of negotiating in groups.

But people don't always think alike.

I would like to see ATI go back to Robert's Rules for decision-making.

Wish list:

Roberts Rules

I am entirely uninterested in consensus governance.

We will get around to the “don't likes” in a minute, but here are some other statements about what members do like about ATI.

The work in progress and progress is what I like the most.

ATI so far does not want to dictate who or how training is done.” “The quality of ATI publications is superior.

... it's always a pleasure to come to the AGMs to meet everybody and enjoy the high quality of business meetings and workshops.

Now here are some descriptions of what the Dual Members like about their other organization:

My other organization has better relations to the other AT societies and provides far better professional service, is more active in representing AT to the outer world, legislative bodies, etc.

The other organization has 'credibility.'

Many of my students find me through my other organization's list of teachers—as far as I am aware no one has ever come to me from the ATI list.

My other organization was our prime AT professional body with whom we trained. Is established, has produced many outstanding teachers, and has been a major influence in promoting the work and setting standards.



Sometimes comments came as a comparison between the organizations. These references began like this and went on:

I like my other organization's decision-making process and I like the ATI openness.

My other organization appears to have an us against them mentality toward non-society trained teachers and trainers.

The other organization is protectionist, trying to protect their own turf, combative.

What do I get from ATI that I couldn't get from my other organization—a sense of openness and community and an acceptance of diversity.

ATI is more experimental, more open minded.

...liked the premise and attitude of ATI, the other organization had been a nightmare for me when I was a trainee, I witnessed philosophy counter to the technique itself.

What a different atmosphere. My other organization's AGMs are pretty grim affairs, generally ATI's are a lot more fun.

I would like to see my other organization find other training models than the three year.

Each is a product of its history. The other organization is more formal and bureaucratic, so consequently less flexible. Gets quite rigid and academic at times which doesn't resolve disagreements. Is the de facto lead body in many situations and acts accordingly. ATI is freer, smaller and hasn't had to face up to some of the challenges of the older body...

Now on to the “Don't Like” answers when evaluating ATI. Actually, there was only one, and it was mentioned twice.

It's more new-agey than I thought it would be and I don't like that aspect at all.

I believe the cautionary references regarding ATI and the wishes for ATI are the nugget of this review. For instance:

The best thing ATI can do to keep moving ahead is maintain the best website for Alexander Technique which attracts people and directs them to member teachers. Equally important is development of effective promotional material and programs to be used by member teachers.

Continue to stay away from negative rhetoric or actions towards other Alexander organizations.

ATI's openness leads it to be easily led in directions which are peripheral to the work...But my other organization too goes off in different directions. People can get carried away with side issues...which take attention away from the main work.



And even in ATI there can be feelings that our way of training or doing things is better than the other society's. But broadly ATI goes in a good direction for me and will I hope continue as a healing influence...

ATI remains and develops as a multi-cultural organization, keeping a weather eye out for too much influence from any one quarter, including the great Marjorie Barstow!

And on a more cautionary note:

As organizations go, I cannot profess to having huge confidence that ATI won't go the way of all other institutions and organizations that try to endure a long time—be they Theatre Companies, Universities or Governments. It takes an individual to breathe life back in, so ATI needs that kind of leadership and there's a good chance of that happening for a while into the future. But any institution is always a challenge because, as Alexander said, "they cannot stand truth."

Very important for ATI to keep opening their arms to other organizations regardless of the other organization's attitude—relationship.

I foresee the time when the animosity between organizations will be forgotten—as a new generation arrives.

To close, I go back to what I left out at the beginning. This is sooo important. Many people said they joined ATI because they met a member of ATI who was influential by being enthusiastic and passionate. Each ATI member, at all times, serves as an international ambassador.

(If you belong to another Alexander organization as well as ATI, you are invited to respond to the questionnaire; please send your response to clewin@televar.com. Gathering these points of view is valuable in evaluating and guiding our objectives.)

Carol Levin was elected to the ATI Executive Board in 2003.

As this article was published in 2003 please do NOT use the above contact information but rather send responses to exchange@alexandertechniqueinternational.org.



STILL UNTITLED

Written from the collective mind of members of the working group, Just Inclusion

Just Inclusion, a working group in ATI, started out as a gathering of members committed to addressing issues surrounding racism and diversity in our profession. It is a remarkable group of individuals that have somehow managed to create a safe space to share ideas, feelings, and vulnerabilities. The process for developing that space and for facing the difficult questions seems to be worth examining. It might shed light on how to create these spaces in our committees and other meetings in and out of ATI, especially on Zoom.

This article is a reflection compiled of the writings, discussions, and ideas of several members of Just Inclusion. The polyvocality of this article reflects the ways in which the group strives to cultivate a communication space wherein many, perhaps seemingly disparate, spirals of thought can co-exist, perhaps intertwine, with the knowledge that questions can be answered, concerns can be addressed, and consensus can be reached through respectful and dignified channels. Further, this article purposely leaves members of the group unnamed, not to be confusing but to invite solidarity and present the vestiges of an active group listening practise. There are most certainly points of view left behind unintentionally and those are welcomed back into the practise and discussion in hopes of continuing and deepening the dialogue, reflection, and practises.

One of the essential ingredients for cultivating the Just Inclusion community seems to be time. No matter how long it takes for someone in the group to express themselves, we all wait with an openness and receptivity, without anticipation or expectation. It sounds like the Alexander Technique! We do believe we are all at our best when we practise the AT principles deeply. And where there is the need to reach explicit agreement, the working ethos of ATI is adopted. Just Inclusion abides by Formal Consensus.

In Alexander's later years, he said it all came down to Inhibition. And in this group of seasoned teachers, there is no question of confusing inhibition with suppression. There is no need to react. There is all the time and space we need because that is why we gather; there is respect for those willing to speak—so no one rushes anyone. Here is an example from a recent meeting:

We wanted to experiment with language captions for those in the group who speak English as a secondary or even tertiary language. The captions were not yet available. We continued to consider what might work best for everyone—speak in your own language so we can hear the timbre and pace of your voice? Speak in English because everyone speaks and understands it well enough? There was a comment about how challenging it can be to switch the brain from one language to another.

None of this may surprise you. But the group easily spent 30 minutes exploring this topic. The message: we all care about each other and want to do our best to accommodate everyone. This is the essence of the group and it creates an unusually safe space.

Offering time/space respect as a consideration of our communications in meetings together plays out in our interactions on the discussion forum app called Basecamp where we continue our dialogue. Basecamp allows us to reflect back on ourselves and witness, qualify, and account for our behaviors in relation to each other. From our own observations of our comfort both in group meetings as well as Basecamp discussions, a set of guidelines has emerged:



- speak for yourself, about your needs/values/ wishes etc. for having Just Inclusion give attention to and/or support for something you want to be doing
- speak in the present tense
- use language that describes your motivation so as to avoid analysis, comparison, judgement
- withhold dis/approval, comment by word or gesture while someone is speaking

This set of guidelines is an important development for Just Inclusion because it shows that we are able to consider not only the *what* and the *why* of our actions but also (and perhaps more importantly) the *how* we are doing that which we set about to do. The process is slow and gradual, which can be difficult and sometimes tedious, but it is also deliberate and self-evaluative.

Help Needed

A post arrived in mid-February on Just Inclusion's Basecamp discussion board. It was entitled *Help Needed* and sparked a lively conversation around producing an updated and refreshed version of the *ATI's Response to Racism* statement that is published in the public area of the ATI website (a draft of the new statement is also published in this issue of the ExChange). The *Help Needed* post notified Just Inclusion of a response to a member survey that had been taken to the Board of Directors for discussion. The matter was then brought to Just Inclusion by a board member who is also an active Just Inclusion member. This is one of the ways the Just Inclusion is tasked.

A member had responded to a particular survey question and the Board asked Just Inclusion to process the member's response. The survey question and the ATI member's response were posted as a new thread in the Just Inclusion Basecamp, and were then framed for conversation by a Just Inclusion member's question and also comment posted in parenthesis:

How do we want to respond to this member's concerns? (not directly--but with a thoughtful rewrite of the website statement).

After six exchanges on the same date as the post, a google document was set up so that work could start on rewriting the statement. Within two days a suggestion was made to write an article for publication in the Summer 2023 edition of ExChange. After four days and 26 interactions, many suggestions for content to the article had been offered; as a contribution to the rewrite, resources were provided and a When2Meet poll was created.

This was done by one of the group's most active members who shared that she was in 'survival mode', ill, and maybe that gave her time to volunteer to finalise the poll, announce the meeting date. She then 'held' the beginning of the meeting, read the guidelines and sequenced our contributions. Prior to this meeting on Zoom, suggestions had been offered, points made, and agreements quickly reached on Basecamp so after the opening cycle in the meeting, we were ready to get to business. One point that nearly all the participants had indicated that they agreed with by written comment or with icons of appreciation, in advance of the meeting, illustrates the working group's current collective mind:

To express publicly that ATI accommodates, supports, and is responsive to members wishing to engage with the structural inequality in the societies AT serves.



However, instead of that business in italics, the meeting that took place is the one described wherein language and translation became the center of our discussion in order to work out the best ways for us to understand each other.

About the group and its processes:

The working group comprises 20 ‘members.’ Membership is a fluid concept for this group. Some members are more active than others wherein 12-15 participants seem to add their voice on most issues and nine seem to take part in almost all topics. Most of the members are also active in other ATI structures. The work in Just Inclusion is an end in itself, meeting its members’ commitment to address inclusivity in all things. There is a wild sort of kindness and frankness that shows up in the generous, energetic support that is given and received. A safe haven is offered for those who need such a group to grow in while simultaneously satisfying the need to be producing a medium for others to be growing in.

Interaction is largely in writing in Basecamp.

A matter for attention is raised in a Basecamp post under a title that reflects a presenting concern like an information request, a task from a committee on a societal event, or help needed. Conversation does, or does not, flow. The pattern that is emerging is that the more exchanges the thread contains, the more likely it is that a request for a meeting will be made by one of the participants. Not finding a suitable date and time has led to some matters not being concluded or the matter being concluded elsewhere, in a committee or sub-committee that is not the Just Inclusion forum. If a suitable meeting date gets set for the largest number of available Just Inclusion members, additional conversations might migrate to new Basecamp titles during the intervening time between the raised issue and the meeting date. It is also probable that the Basecamp conversation ceases altogether in anticipation of sharing at the meeting. In short, Just Inclusion and our tasks can begin to seep into other conversations, in other groups and processes, or get stretched out over time.

At one point this winter, a new thread with the title *Limitless Inclusion* became active in the Just Inclusion Basecamp. The title reflected the direction taken in a conversation that opened in a previous thread. The thread in which the meeting was raised and arranged was then sent only to those who had actively participated in the conversation about refreshing the *ATI’s Response to Racism* statement. This was a new departure; a subgroup had formed comprising the nine active participants desiring to contribute to the *ATI’s Response to Racism* statement. The nine participants had become specifically task oriented toward crafting a statement on behalf of Just Inclusion because they had built shared experience and grown the collective mind via attending and participating in several listening practise sessions over a period of a year. There was no direct precedent for sharing the Zoom link to only ‘some of us’—the nine instead of all who wished--but there was attendance over time, to gather and practise using the shared guidance.

In the days preceding the meeting the following was posted:

When I read the guidelines, I feel challenged and inspired. I remember doing this reflection practise in different contexts. I enjoy how the invitation to speak in the present tense, even about something that has already happened, helps bring me to the present and to a clearer awareness of my speaking. I remember how choosing not to react by agreeing, approving, or disagreeing, invites me to a greater receptivity to the experience of others.

Another member posted the following pointers about reaching this new stage in the *Limitless Inclusion*



thread:

Re 'limitless inclusion': irony at play that the link above for Saturday's meeting is 'some of us' but that brings a certain flexibility. I want to check in what I am seeing taking shape (this ... sequence)

- *the member feedbacks produced a stimulus for us to want to refresh the [public] statement;*
- *that stimulus unleashed conversations that have clarified amongst certain Just Inclusionists as an intention to make this an opportunity to respond at the level of systemic injustices in a statement yet to be crafted;*
- *that in turn stimulated agreement to Zoom into a meeting;*
- *during that meeting, the will to have another meeting converged;*
- *that meeting can make a list of projects participants would propose,*
- *'some of us's' will be spawned as projects are nominated to be taken forward;*
- *the [inclusion] principle [that] will prevail again - if you envision/propose/suggest a project it will follow that you can say: 'It will be something I'm doing'*
- *a list of projects was starting to grow by the end of our recent meeting.*

This summary attracted neither concerns nor comment. It does, however, poke at what is possible in terms of processing in groups, which also plays to how we can do the Alexander Technique as a shared experience as well. Perhaps Just Inclusion is modeling a way of working that allows for new ideas and possibilities for organization, problem solving, and action taking within ATI. Is the next stage of development of Just Inclusion to find ways of working that retain the cohesion, tolerance for diverse emphasis as well as differing depths of commitment and outlook by working in special interest groups for specific purposes? Is the solution simply to have some of us pick up a project, work it into a product, and get this back to the whole team as soon as possible? Considering means whereby as well as achievable goals/tasks to the problems before us, in the run up to a Just Inclusion meeting someone asked:

I want to know if Just Inclusion wants to publish the new statement in the Summer ExChange. Accompanied with a little something like a Q&A or fact check (e.g. "misinformation and references to the right-wing news and political movement associated with white supremacy in the US. Note the use of "defunding the police," "critical race theory," and "the association of anti-racism with being a political issue and not about human rights.")?

The quotation marks inside the comment quote above indicate what other members have said or mentioned in the Basecamp discussions. This makes another emerging pattern visible: Just Inclusion as a group adopts each other's views and speaks them from ourselves; we validate and appreciate other's thoughts by these expressions of embrace and agreement, folding them into new actions. That shows another way that the working group adopts tasks as well as reflects the very heart of the listening practise. Here is another example:

Maybe we can find out what kind of wiggle room [there is] for that edition. I absolutely love the idea AND I don't want us to rush our process.

Products of the work:

I have in mind how the following have turned from one into being the other:

- Conversations in the working group
- Resources for ATI
- Publications.



Linking these is the collective mind as an undercurrent to our tasks and a process honed by the listening practise we engage in together – still also about voicing that takes place in safe space and where the listening practise, which is itself a product of participation is enough to ensure all the members of the group that they belong even if they don't actively participate. The certainty that participation by listening/voicing is created by building a brave and safe space is a remarkably valuable product. What can be seen in what is written down as well as words shared openly in person, is a cycle of production. In both *what* and *how* voicing gets unleashed, energy surges are produced. For the proposed task, a gathering occurs, which is another product made, fit for the purpose of hashing out the statement that will be printed as a product for the website. Yet another product will have been created over and above the transitory phenomenon that generates such tasks, an invaluable and complex collective mind.

This invaluable collective mind may be a surprise product but it nevertheless has rhizomatic evidence throughout the Basecamp discussions. Surely, this complex collective mind is not exclusive to the particular members attitudes, ideas, and practises. Rather, the listening practise along with the guidelines set up for Just Inclusion perhaps have fostered an environment where people can communicate with ease, allowing ideas to unfold and bloom between, among, and within the conversations that ebb and flow. Towards and away from agreement. Sometimes the tides are rough. But so far, readiness, determination, and a certain kind of willingness to getting to 'Yes' persists. It is the willingness to pick up what shows up as unjust. Again. Then again, willing to be work in progress and under review.

justinclusion@alexandertechniqueinternational.org
alexandertechniqueinternational.org/an-anti-racist-resource-list



Just Inclusion Statement

A written draft submitted as part of the evolving process of the working group Just Inclusion

As outlined in the *Still Untitled* article also published in this issue of the ExChange, the process of writing this statement is an action of a collective mind. It is important to point to the ways in which this statement continues to evolve. Namely, Just Inclusion continues to dialogue about what “progressive” means among other choices of specific words. It seems like this might be a semantic wordsmithing task but it is, as Just Inclusion has revealed, a layered and complex undertaking that involves inviting many voices and perspectives into the conversation. The dialogue is from a lens of translation and interpretation in languages beyond (American) English. In this way, Just Inclusion comes to this statement draft having walked the talk of inclusion and continues to do so. You are invited into participation as you are able and interested.

Here’s where we are now

Part One:

Alexander Technique International is a worldwide professional organization that promotes and advances the work begun by F. Matthias Alexander. Its members are teachers, students, and friends of the Alexander Technique. ATI embraces the diversity of its community and works to promote international dialogue among all Alexander Technique teachers. Most importantly, ATI also offers opportunities for members to explore inclusivity and diversity on a personal and professional level, through Just Inclusion, a working group of ATI.

To read ATI’s current Vision/Mission statement, [click here](#).

Part Two:

In reviewing the questions that arose from previous drafts, it seemed that we were still struggling with what our statement would offer. Would it carry an ideal about diversity and inclusion? Would it call-out inequities that have been experienced within ATI? Point to struggles within our various nations where ATI members live? Would that be a political move on the part of ATI? And what about the race, class, gender assumptions made by FM in his own words and ways of treating his students?

We all seem to agree that we are replacing the response to racism, previously posted on the website – this is our primary objective.

As we sat with the draft, we began to share more posts about what was and wasn’t feeling true or what stuck out as replicating the same conditions or mindset of the previous statement, which we have learned are not inclusive to the membership as a whole. We also heard that recognizing the significance of inequalities was important to us, that our listening does have an objective and is an important part of ATI’s growth – and the growth of individual understanding of how we use the work and theory of F.M. Alexander.

Working Group, Just Inclusion:

Just Inclusion is a working group of ATI, formed in response to the proposition that anti-racism, and a pro-equity regard towards all people, needs to become indivisible from any other principle informing the work of ATI. Just Inclusion is committed to enabling and contributing to growing awareness, to initiate engagement and to be seen to be taking progressive, transformative steps towards leveling access



wherever inequity arises.

It is now incumbent, particularly on white people, and the institutions the affluent among us invariably dominate, to proactively cede the space necessary for other voices to become drawn into discussing and identifying unjust relations of power and privilege, in all the ways 'this' history shows up socially. All of us can reflect on our relative access to power and more safely improve our experience and understanding of how to embrace diversity. We undertake to reflect on and share our learning.

Just Inclusion initiatives include:

- Exploring our biases and how they manifest in our ways of living, our means for teaching and how we treat each other;
- Continuing to provide resources for anti-racist and anti-discrimination education, allowing us to recognize and interrupt explicit biases that affect our teaching environment and student/teacher relationships;
- Providing training opportunities for improving listening skills within our profession, including our use of Formal Consensus, and on the teaching and training courses of our members;
- Developing our use of language so that the principles of Alexander's work are clearly presented such that they are welcoming for people of various backgrounds and needs.
- Offering plenary workshops led by historically ignored people in the Alexander Technique community, with a focus on fostering collaboration and a spirit of belonging, setting the ground for the next generation of ATI members.

As Alexander concluded in *Universal Constant in Living....*

...if past experiences are not to be repeated, and man[sic] is to gain a better understanding of the nature of the aims and characteristics of the peoples of other nations, as well as his own, he must have a new "means-whereby" for living in the future. There must be a reorientation of our viewpoint upon education, culture, religion, politics, economics, medicine, science, industry and, last but not least, upon class and social relations and intercourse. Such reorientation as I envision is not possible without that fundamental change in guidance and control of the self..

FM Alexander, 1943, UCL, Conclusion X111)



Alexander Technique for Actors: A Practical Course

By Penny O'Connor, Nick Hern Books 2021

Reviewed by MaryJean Allen

In 2015, before I traveled from the United States to attend the 10th Alexander Technique Congress in Limerick, Ireland, I researched each workshop presenter's biography and website to decide which workshops to attend. I was captivated by Penny O'Connor's content and delivery in her website video *What is the Alexander Technique?* so I attended her Congress workshop. The entire Congress was an extraordinary experience, and Penny's workshop was filled with many unique, imaginative experiments. Her workshop concluded with constructive rest as she guided us with her *Spatial Directions*. It was one of the most profound experiences I ever had during constructive rest. I emailed my husband, John:

Penny's workshop made me feel so present, so alive, and so huge physically. It was a great feeling just blissfully taking up space, yet in a relaxed, expressive, and flexible way.

During the summers Penny transferred her Alexander Technique practice from London to Alonnisos Island, an enchanting, beautiful Greek island in the clear turquoise Aegean Sea. Due to Penny's engaging teaching style, creative classes, peaceful private lessons, group hiking, snorkeling, Qigong, plus the gorgeous, peaceful setting of Alonnisos, I attended Penny's workshops four consecutive times, from 2016-2019. Since I was a private voice, Body Mapping, and Alexander Technique teacher, Penny's Alonnisos workshops were a restful, rejuvenating oasis and also a fabulously energizing springboard that prepared me to dive back into my very busy teaching schedule.



Penny O'Connor worked as an actor, director, playwright, and acting teacher in London for twelve years. In 1992, after training with David Gorman and Margaret Edis, she qualified as a teacher of the Alexander Technique (STAT; Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique). Since then, Penny has taught Alexander Technique full-time, privately and at several London Drama Schools. Penny taught Alexander Technique 18 years at Arts Educational School in London, teaching music theatre and Bachelor and Master of Arts Students in acting for stage and screen. Currently she teaches in London, assists in training Alexander Technique teachers at the South Bank Alexander Centre, and teaches globally on Zoom.

In January 2019, Nick Hern Books, the UK's leading specialist performing arts publisher of over 1,500 plays and theatre books commissioned Penny to write a book for actors about Alexander Technique. No



stranger to writing, Penny had written plays and was a regular theatre critic for a London-Australian magazine. Penny based her book on her 18 years of teaching the Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts theatre courses at the Arts Educational Schools in London, and on her own pathway through Alexander Technique. Although Penny's book *Alexander Technique for Actors: A Practical Course*, published by Nick Hern Books in 2021 is targeted towards actors, I enthusiastically recommend her book to everyone interested in Alexander Technique. Penny's innovative teaching as well as her thought-provoking and beneficial experiments and activities create an enjoyable and informative learning experience throughout the book.

Penny's goal as a teacher is learn how to communicate effectively to elicit responses from people, whether she teaches in person, online, or via her book. She said:

I feel as though I'm there to facilitate someone else's learning - to facilitate someone else's voyage and experiments. The book's exercises are to exercise the mind, exercise the mind and the body together, to find different ways of moving; discovering what your habits are, and how you can change them.

Penny organized her book into 11 lessons, and suggests that each lesson take one week, though each lesson can be spread over a longer time frame. Every lesson is wonderfully rich in content, and includes theory, instruction, and many activities, concluding with several assignments.

When I first purchased the book, I immediately flipped through it, and read quite a lot of the book out of order. Later, I read the book in order. Although I found both reading experiences satisfying, I felt I received many more benefits from reading the book in order. Penny is meticulous in how she "sets up" each of the exercises in the lessons. I found that reading her explanatory text, stories, and quotes prior to completing each exercise vital in order to fully experience each exercise.

Simultaneously, Penny's content and delivery never seems pedantic or pushy. In the Introduction, she states:

As far as possible I have suggested a way for you to experiment on your own: after all, it's your own journey. What you discover may not be what others will discover. It's a personal journey to discover your habits, the way you use yourself in life, and to find a way of relinquishing those that are interfering with your performance.

Each of the lessons begin with a different equipment list. Here's an example of one list:

*A3 or A4 paper
Coloured pens
A chair
A table
Space to run
Your logbook*

Penny's writing style is inviting, friendly, clear, humorous, and always encouraging and supportive of her students' learning. Throughout the book she continuously checks in with her readers, asking questions which gently yet persistently provoke deeper thinking. Further, Penny constantly refers to past lessons in the book, helping readers to deliberately build upon past knowledge during the current lesson.



Next, it's important to note that Penny deliberately wrote her book in "the spoken register" as though she was talking to someone, since that is the register she was used to writing as a playwright. Penny has also taken some courses in Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) so she is very aware of how she uses and repeats her words to facilitate learning.

Here's a wonderful example of all of the above taken from Lesson Eight:

How's your semiflexion? Are your teeth cleaner this week? Haha! Is it feeling a little more natural to counterbalance head and bum? Remember, young children use it all the time. They never pick up things by bending over from the waist. How were the experiments in speaking whilst lying in semi-supine? If you've been practicing some text work, how useful were the experiments in allowing the words to come to you? Share with your study partner or reflect in your logbook. You are almost certainly becoming more and more familiar with allowing yourself to balance, rather than holding yourself up.

What I have always appreciated about Penny's teaching is her ability to use language and activities in imaginative ways to help her students embody Alexander Technique concepts. I was happy to discover that Penny's writing style plus each lesson's activities and assignments provided a very similar beneficial and satisfying learning experience.

Regarding Penny's unique experiments and activities, she learned that if you teach something with something unusual attached to it, the brain will remember it more. For example, although Penny taught her acting class the Alexander Technique principle of Inhibition, if she asked her students what they remembered of her lessons, they were likely to reply:

- Stepping into Cardboard Boxes
- Dressing Up
- The Travelator

I also remember Penny's activities via their whimsical titles. Each of the above activities are covered in depth in the book, along with many, many more. In fact, I was so impressed with the actual number of activities in the eleven lessons that I counted all of them. They are called "exercises" in the book, and there are 133!

Here is just one example of Penny's many exercises. It is from Lesson Two, and is entitled "Looking for the Blue and the New":

Have a look around you. What do you see? After the last exercises you are probably very familiar with the room you are in. Stop reading for a moment and take notice of everything blue in the room. Without doing anything, your brain has now highlighted that colour and you will see blue things. The landscape of the room hasn't changed, the blue things were always there, but your perception has changed. I am leading your perceptions, whereas before you perceived the room through your own filter, the way you habitually look at the room. Stop reading again for a moment and look round for five things you hadn't noticed before. Now your attention will be one of actively searching. I bet you found at least one thing you hadn't consciously noticed before, even if you didn't get to five.

Each of the eleven lessons conclude with several assignments. And just like each lesson, each of the



assignments are rich with content. Here's an example of only three of the nine assignments following Lesson Seven:

- *Lie in semi-supine. Play with speaking some text as you lie there. Does the head move from side to side or is it pulled back into the headrest? Or can it just rest there as you speak? Lie still again and stay with your spatial awareness, non-doing practice. At the end, have another go: Is it different? If you can sense tightening as a prep for speaking, is it possible to inhibit? Give yourself permission not to speak, to think perhaps of raising an arm instead and then speak . . . The floor and the headrest will give you instant feedback.*
- *Practise semiflexion as you clean your teeth.*
- *And keep your spatial awareness going!*

Throughout the book is a large amount of Body Mapping, utilizing Jenny Quick's lovely illustrations. Penny also includes numerous stories about her students' experiences, many quotes from her students, several poems, and QR links to videos and recordings.

Penny continuously checks in with her readers, and asks questions, which deepens learning and evokes further exploration. For example, in Lesson Five:

How is the walking? Did you dare to play with copying someone's walk on the street? Review this for yourself, and feel free to share your discoveries with your group or partner. Which way of thinking helped you in exploring your walking pattern – the travelator, the head leading, the crawling or the cross patterning in the mirror, the 'walking backwards' thought, spatial thinking, taking in the outside word – or simply inhibiting one habit? These experiments are ongoing, of course. Whichever way you found helpful, use it!

I found that Penny's probing questions throughout the book stimulated deeper discoveries about Alexander Technique and about learning in general. Also, just as I had experienced in person with Penny, I found reading her book to be a wonderful experience of being gently yet persistently guided, simultaneously allowing room for my own experience.

I have only two criticisms of the book. First, I feel the cover could look more inviting. Next, the lovely illustrations by Jenny Quick look good in the print version of the book, but several of them are too light and difficult to see in the Kindle version.

I highly recommend Penny's book to everyone interested in Alexander Technique. I am grateful to all of my Alexander Technique teachers, and when I told Penny how glad I was that I had taken her workshop at the Congress in Limerick which led to my taking her workshops in Alonnisos, she said to me:

They say we meet the teachers we need when we need them. I think of myself as just part of a collective of wonderful teaching going on in Alexander Technique throughout the world.

Alexander Technique for Actors: A Practical Course

By Penny O'Connor

Paperback and eBook version: 304 pages

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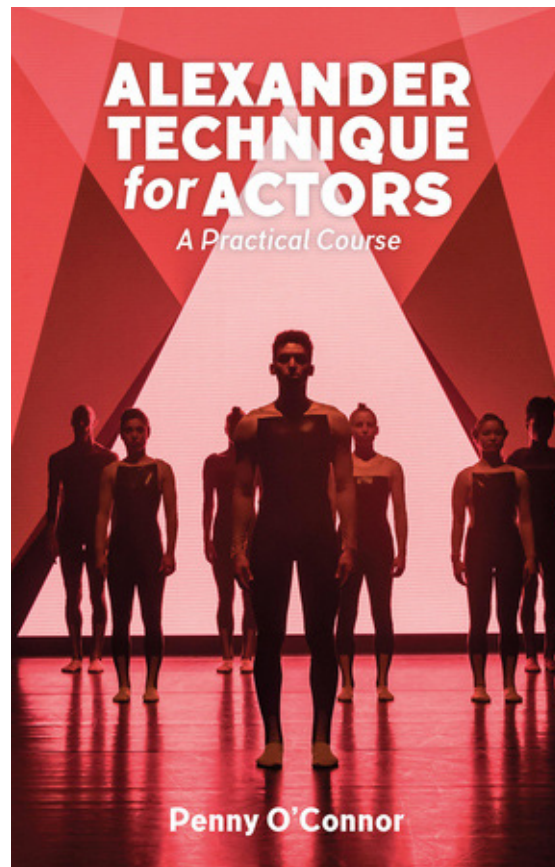
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Illustrations by Jenny Quick

Downloadable Resource Pack link:

<https://www.nickhernbooks.co.uk/alexander-technique>



Please note although Penny's book is available directly from the publisher, the paperback versions of books are temporarily available only within the UK.

<https://www.nickhernbooks.co.uk/alexander-technique>

Amazon United States link for paperback and Kindle version:

<https://www.amazon.com/Alexander-Technique-Actors-Practical-Course/dp/1848427581>

Penny O'Connor's website:

<https://www.alexanderpen.co.uk/>

MaryJean Allen is a grateful graduate of Robin Gilmore's training school Chesapeake Bay Alexander Studies. MaryJean was co-editor of the ExChange along with her AT training sister and dear friend Kathy Privatt, producing six issues from 2011-2013. Trained and licensed by Barbara Conable to teach the six-hour course "What Every Musician Needs to Know About the Body," MaryJean is co-author of the Body Mapping textbook for singers, *What Every Singer Needs to Know About the Body*, 4th edition, Plural Publishing, 2020. Now retired from teaching full-time private voice lessons, MaryJean enjoys teaching Alexander Technique and Body Mapping workshops, throwing on her pottery wheel, glazing, and firing her functional pottery in her kiln, swimming, hiking, and traveling with her husband, John.



Alexander Technique International Artists! Call for Submissions

The ExChange would love to publish the work of Artists as scholarly and practice driven evidence of AT at work. Are you a photographer? Media artists? Do you have digital images of your paintings, sculptures, chalk drawings, etchings, or explorations wherein the process of creation is rooted in your practice of the Alexander Technique? The ExChange is here for you!

We are taking rolling submissions of artwork for publication as our coverart as well as significant contributions for inclusion in the ExChange journal.

Submission Requirements:

- Artwork must be original (you are the maker)
- Please submit all artwork in Jpeg or pdf format.
- Include a clarifying statement about your work (less than 500 words) in a word document
- Include a biography of yourself (about 100 words) in a word document
- Attach all items to one email with your name in the subject line and address that email to: exchange@alexandertechniqueinternational.org



ExChange: Call for Submissions

ExChange, the journal of Alexander Technique International, is calling for submissions of scholarly articles, book reviews, and creative essays.

The past nearly three years of experiences with a global pandemic have given us pause to consider our work: to reflect, reimagine, revel, and make revelations about ourselves as AT practitioners, teachers, and ambassadors. What are you learning about yourself? What are you learning about or from your work? What challenges, grounding, or buoyancy has AT provided as you move through our current world?

Have an idea that you want to send to Julie? Fill out this brief [ATI ExChange Idea Form](#) to get started.

For publication in the Summer issue please submit by February 15. For publication in the Winter issue please submit by September 15. We are accepting rolling submissions.

Submission Requirements:

- Please organize your work in a Microsoft Word document and PDF
- Title your submission with your last name and an abbreviated title (include full title in the document itself)
- Photos included need to be in jpeg format
- Send your work as attachments to the email: exchange@alexandertechniqueinternational.org

Tips for Submission:

- Submissions should be less than 6,000 words (concessions can be made on a case-by-case basis)
- Some submissions may roll over to a later issue if they need more time for processing
- Submitting early is always welcome!
- Direct questions to Julie Mulvihill, Editor of the ExChange: exchange@alexandertechniqueinternational.org

