

Review by Philip Tucker

*Review by Philip Tucker of **Notes Towards a Method for Training Alexander Teachers** by Carolyn Nicholls*

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What should happen on a training course? How should students wishing to become teachers of the Alexander Technique be taught? What should they be taught? There are as many answers to these questions as there are training courses - and that is right. Heads of training should teach in a way which suits them as individuals.

But are there aspects of training which should be incorporated into all courses? Perhaps those who were trained by Alexander himself and who have themselves been involved in training students on training courses can give us some clues.

Taking Time consists of six interviews with teachers taught by F.M.Alexander himself asking their views on teacher training. The six are Peggy Williams, Walter and Dilys Carrington, Marjory Barlow, Elisabeth Walker, Anthony Spawforth, and Erika Whittaker.

Notes Towards a Method for Training Alexander Teachers is a careful account by Carolyn Nicholls of her experience of closely observing Dilys Carrington teaching students at the Lansdowne Road school. The Notes, written in 1986 and substantially revised in 2001 have proved a source of inspiration for many teachers running training schools.

How much training is needed? What are the underlying themes about what should happen on a training course, according to these publications?

Training to be an Alexander teacher is not merely something to be fitted in with the other commitments of students. The need for training most weekdays for a few hours a day is a common theme with all the first generation teachers. Just doing training at weekends, suggests Peggy Williams, is endgaining. Training is about change and changing habits. Continuity of daily training is needed if a student is not to lose, in between the training sessions, much of what has been learned during training. All the teachers think you need at least three years of such teaching (the 1600 hours minimum is several times re-emphasised).

Putting hands on is: 'making sure that the person [the pupil] tends to go up' says Walter Carrington. Teach them how to put hands on, says Marjory Barlow, but not too soon in their training. Carolyn Nicholls gives a wonderful account of how precisely Dilys Carrington teaches students to learn the processes of monkey through releasing, leading on to putting hands on: enabling pupils to get in and out of chairs; lowering and raising a leg on the table and placing hands underneath a shoulder on the table. Learning hands-on skills is an essential - words are not enough. They are all agreed on that.

Marjory Barlow's words on working on oneself are echoed by others. 'Unless they've got that background of solid, solid work on themselves they are not in a position to give anything to others with their hands.'

Carolyn Nicholls wrote of Dilys Carrington's teaching the process of 'monkey': it's not doing a knees bend it's about thinking a release. The essence of learning, says Elisabeth Walker is 'taking time to think.' Walter Carrington tells us that John Dewey, the intellectual and thinker, learned a new type of thinking with Alexander: 'thinking-in-activity' and found it a thrilling new experience. So should we.

In conjunction with thinking we should read Alexander's books. 'It's all there [in Alexander's books], absolutely all there, if we know how to read,' says Marjory Barlow. Enough said!

Above all the training should be fun. No one puts it better than Elisabeth Walker: 'The head of training should enjoy teaching and enjoy and respect the students and other teachers. This attitude is then reflected back from the students. Three years experiencing psychophysical changes is a long time and it is important to maintain a cheerful and optimistic atmosphere; and within this sense of fun it is safe for the students to allow themselves to change. 'Inhibition' and 'direction' can become too serious and trying to be right can interfere with liveliness of thought and action.'

'[Going wrong] is the only thing we've got. It's our only hope. How else can you learn?' Marjory Barlow wisely asks in a splendid plea for training not to be too solemn. Hear, Hear!

These excellent publications tell us much about how students should be taught in training schools. They will prove a valuable resource for many years to come.