

Freedom in Thought and Action.

The teaching career of F.M.Alexander covered the first half of the twentieth century during which time he published four books telling the story of the development of his technique and his career in London and the United States. Although there has appeared a plethora of related books by others, including teachers trained and qualified by him, very little has been added to his own exposition of his work.

His personal history and background have been dealt with in several well – researched books: one on his early life and work in Australia, another (by his niece) placing him in an extended Alexander family history and more recently, by a distinguished biographer who had access to all available sources at the time of writing.

The evolution of Alexander’s practical teaching and theoretical writings, and the influences of his friendship with John Dewey (which lasted for 35 years) and other intellectually stimulating personalities are eloquently described in the writings of Frank Pierce Jones who met and worked closely with Alexander in the final decade of his life. Jones was unique in the history of the technique in devoting the last twenty years of his life to scientific research in an effort to establish the validity of the Alexander Technique and establishing the validity of its effects.

Since Jones’ time, technology has advanced exponentially. The computer, the space program, miniaturisation of electronic equipment and the effect of non-intrusive research on thought processes have opened the possibility of connecting thought and action in hitherto unimagined ways.

“Freedom in Thought and Action” was written by two teachers of the Alexander Technique, Tasha Miller and David Langstroth who have spent many years linking the most recent relevant research with their practical teaching (the first step in validating Alexander’s principles). They produced the results of their work, making use of a tool unknown to Alexander and limited in its uses at the time of Jones, in the form of an e-book, which of course restricts its availability to the generation of computer users. As a relative newcomer to this form of communication, I was delighted when, in 2008 they published a paperback edition.

The introduction by a Welsh doctor Anne Hughes, writing from her own (and her family’s) experience of studying with Tasha Miller, is a personal endorsement of the technique. She has made a study of Alexander’s four books at a time when some members of the Alexander teaching community are doubting the value of this. It is encouraging to read her positive evaluation of them which she considers “were essential for full insight and comprehension of the Technique.”

The first half of the book is a thoughtful explication of the key principles and concepts of Alexander's teaching. The first five chapters deal with: The Psycho-physical Self, The Use of the Self, The Primary Control, Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual (inhibition, direction and conscious choice) and Feeling (sensory appreciation with a delightful Peanuts cartoon which is worth a thousand words) .

Subsequent chapters deal with the application of the technique to Performance and the answers to many commonly asked questions, including "So, Who Was F.M. Alexander". The concluding chapter, The Big Picture, sums up the authors' thoughts on the importance of Alexander's contribution to the potential well-being of the individual and society. The last word is Alexander's own plea for the utilisation of his technique in the education of the young.

I recommend this book to all serious students of the Alexander Technique. In it they will find the essence of Alexander's teaching, some of it in his own words, but when the authors speak in their own voices they demonstrate a sensitive understanding of their own ongoing process.

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