

You told me once that you didn't think that there were many teachers who approached the Technique exclusively from a body mechanics point of view and that anyway to do so is a cop-out. Could you elaborate?

Well, we are, after all, primarily concerned with inhibition – this is the key to the Technique – and inhibition depends on conscious control, which obviously takes us beyond the realm of body mechanics. Another point to bear in mind is that everybody has deep, unconscious emotional and psychological problems, although people are often reluctant to acknowledge these things. If an Alexander teacher dealt simply in body mechanics it might be possible to get away from all that, but at the same time to do so wouldn't be very valuable. In fact, such teaching would be extremely naive.

That's very interesting. It leads me to ask whether Alexander dealt directly with people's emotional and psychological problems in the context of the training course?

The answer is: no, he definitely did not. He didn't deal with them at all. I rather think he walked away from it. It was something he didn't want to recognise or know anything about.

Because he was an unemotional man?

Well, I wouldn't say he was unemotional, but I think that he found himself out of his depth trying to tackle this kind of issue in a group situation. He could certainly deal with the emotional problems of individuals, but not those of a group. Indeed, my own experience of this whole area leads me to believe that indirect means work best: I've found that if you can keep students from getting bored and instead keep them interested and reasonably cheerful, they'll tend not to get too intense about these issues. It's the general atmosphere that one needs to keep an eye on: that's the way we've always worked anyway. It's inevitable that during training people do go through a tremendous number of emotional crises. Now I think it's important for them to realise that,

while people are concerned for them – they are considered and valued as individuals – and are willing to give them support, a great deal of the trauma must just be worked through individually. A major problem inevitably arises when people come to the Technique. They find that it's possible, with the aid of a teacher, to be lighter and freer and thus to reach a level they can't reach by themselves. That means, of course, that they'll lose it and fall back. It also means that they become aware that there's a considerable gap between their best and their worst. And when they're down they feel even more fed-up and depressed than usual because they've known what it's like to be up there. And there's not an awful lot that they can do about it.

This feeling of depression is understandable, but for many people their feelings easily connect to their previous educational experiences, say, at school or college – you know, the “I'm not very good at anything” bit – and so they tend to play on these past failures. And, as I say, there's not a lot one can do about it except to make sympathetic noises and try to help them as much as possible to work through it.

Your attitude on these matters seems to be this: it's inevitable that people will go through whatever they have to go through and the best way to deal with it is to adopt a non-judgemental attitude as far as possible. Is that a fair summary?

Yes, that's absolutely right. I think to do otherwise confuses the issue. On the other hand, I recognise that there are people who suffer from serious pathological states and they very definitely need help. But, in my opinion, they need the best professional help available. They certainly don't need things like co-counselling and amateur psychology any more than they need amateur brain surgery. In these cases psychiatrists and psychotherapists have an important contribution to make.

I know you don't endorse the practice of some training courses in allowing students to work on members of the public. Could you say why?