

***The Alexander Technique with Cathy Madden
In the University of Washington
Professional Actor Training Program***

History and Philosophy

Professor Cathy Madden began teaching the Alexander Technique at the University of Washington as a member of the Adjunct Faculty under Jack Clay in 1987. Madden's work in integrating the Alexander Technique deeply into the Acting Process was already established in her work as Artistic Director of Washington Street Players Place in Lincoln, Nebraska and in the Performance Class she developed for The Performance School (She was a founding faculty member for this center for the study of the Alexander Technique in Seattle, Washington.)

Jack Clay recognized the integrative power of her approach to the Alexander Technique and expanded Madden's presence in the program to include a team-taught class, Singing and Alexander Technique. When Professor Steve Pearson joined the Program, one of his priorities was to extend this idea. Over the next few years, Madden moved from part-time adjunct faculty to Artist-in-Residence to Assistant Professor. Pearson began to call Madden the "glue of the program", recognizing that the innovative way that she approached teaching coordination, helped the students learn all their skills more easily, and moreover gave them an understanding of how to integrate all the elements they were learning to create a role. She works collaboratively with the entire faculty and with the directors to help the actors achieve the goals of each of the classes/productions. She also directs in the Program, continuing to research and develop the integration of the Alexander Technique into the Rehearsal Process. The current Head of the PATP, Professor Mark Jenkins, continues to support the innovation and research in the Alexander Technique and Acting that sets this program's approach to the Alexander Technique apart from other Actor Training Programs.

Professor Madden's Pedagogical Innovations

- ✚ Alexander Technique is taught in direct relationship to Acting from the first introduction.
- ✚ Integration of Alexander Technique with voice, movement, Suzuki, Acting, Combat, Singing, Rehearsal etc. both in the Alexander Technique class and in team-taught venues.
- ✚ Image rehabilitation for the electronically-raised actor.
- ✚ Adaptation of a wide range of acting tools to create Character Psycho-physical History.
- ✚ Continued research in all areas, including integrating the Alexander Technique more deeply in the Rehearsal Process.
- ✚ Madden has redeveloped Drama 455 (originally primarily an Introduction the Alexander Technique only) to provide a condensed introduction to the integration of the Alexander Technique into the acting process for undergraduate actors.
- ✚ Madden's manuscript, *Embracing the Psychophysical: The Alexander Technique in the Acting Process*, is an actor-specific introduction the Alexander Technique.

Beyond the University, Madden's pedagogical innovations are recognized as pioneering work in the field of the Alexander Technique and she is regularly invited to teach in Europe, Japan, and Australia.

Professional Actor Training Program
First Year Alexander Technique Course of Study
Discovery, Integration, and Instrument Development

Values in an Actor Specific Introduction to Alexander Technique

- ✚ Emphasis on practical application from the first exposure.
- ✚ Emphasis on the ability to apply the work during the process of acting.
- ✚ Nonjudgmental approach to discovery and replacement of previously learned but detrimental personal patterns, the student's personal psychophysical history.
- ✚ Supplemental material includes Professor Madden's manuscript for *Embracing the Psychophysical*, an actor specific introduction to the Alexander Technique.
- ✚ Emphasis on the process of using the Alexander Technique to learn other new tools in the program.
- ✚ Emphasis on the actors' responsibility/ability to use the work on their own.

Discovery and Choice in Personal Psychophysical History

- ✚ Introduction to the Alexander Technique with emphasis on the self-responsibility process outlined in F.M. Alexander's book *The Use of the Self*.
- ✚ Development of efficiency in movement patterns.
- ✚ Analysis of Personal Psychophysical History. (Madden's range of experience in teaching the Alexander Technique increases her effectiveness in this area. Her areas of experience include teaching professional dancers, singers and a wide variety of instrumentalists. She also works health care professionals, martial arts and yoga teachers, athletes, weight lifters, and people recovering from physical and/or emotional trauma. Her own continuing education has included a variety of movement forms, Brain Science, Child Development, and Anatomy. Since each of the actors in the program has their own unique history which may include any of these elements, her working knowledge of these areas is part of what creates what some students refer to as her "laser-like" ability to identify pertinent issues in training.)

Integration of the Alexander Technique into the Acting Process

- ✚ In class experiments utilize material from other class work.
- ✚ In class experiments include material from production work.
- ✚ Coaching of production work.
- ✚ Alexander Professor also teaches in Linklater, Suzuki, Voice, Singing, and Acting Classes.
- ✚ Alexander Professor Directs in the Season, using an Alexander Technique informed approach to the acting process.

Tool Development

- ✚ Image Rehabilitation for Electronically-Raised Actors
- ✚ Body Mapping, a practical orientation to anatomy tailored to the needs of actors.
- ✚ Introduction to observation and analysis of movement tools.

Introduction of specific tools to create Character Psychophysical History

While the emphasis in the first year is on the Actor's Instrument, Madden introduces tools that will be developed further in the Second Year.

- ✚ Adapted Michael Chekhov Psychological Gesture, and Eurhythmy Exercises
- ✚ Adapted Eric Morris Exercises
- ✚ Adapted Neutral and Character Mask Work

Professional Actor Training Program

Second Year Alexander Technique Course of Study

Continued Instrument Development, Integration, and Character Psychophysical History

Advanced Work Continued from First Year

- ✚ Discovery and Choice in Personal Psychophysical History to continue to improve coordination.
- ✚ Integration of Alexander Technique in the Acting Process
- ✚ Image Rehabilitation
- ✚ Tool Development
- ✚ Self-responsibility in using the Alexander Technique
- ✚ Use of Alexander Technique in Rehearsal, and in Creation of One Person Show

Character Psychophysical History

Madden's research in the acting process involves using the tools she uses to improve the actor's instrument (i.e. personal coordination/psychophysical history) to help actors develop characters. Since our personal psychophysical history determines our behavior, her working hypothesis is that if an actor can find a condensed way to create the psychophysical history of a character, then their onstage behavior will be more alive and believable. Her work in this area is pioneering and unique in both acting training and the field of the Alexander Technique. Tools include:

- ✚ Adaptations of Eric Morris Tools including: Sensory work; Trio Warm-up; the Use of his instrument development tools (I like....I love....I am afraid of...Look how far I have come... etc.) for character development and to create a link between the actor's psychophysical history and the character's psychophysical history.) This also includes adding some physical movement component to these exercises so that movement is associated with the imagined ideas/beliefs.
- ✚ Use of Mirror Exercises pioneered by Kelly Yeaton as a means to create a condensed history of a relationship. When two actors move together while asking about significant events of their relationship, they develop a shared (albeit abstract) physical relationship to their imagined past.
- ✚ Imaginative Mask Technique is a tool developed by Madden that allows an actor to create a psychophysical relationship to aspects of a character's life that are not immediately available to him/her.
- ✚ Adaptations of Michael Chekhov's Psychological Gesture to integrate ideas of the character with behavior of the character.
- ✚ In her continuing research, Madden has developed many character-specific or show-specific means to develop Psychophysical History.

Professional Actor Training Program

Third Year Alexander Technique Course of Study

Taking Ownership of the Process

Advanced Work Continued from First and Second Year

- ✚ Discovery and Choice in Personal Psychophysical History to continue to improve coordination.
- ✚ Integration of Alexander Technique in the Acting Process
- ✚ Image Rehabilitation
- ✚ Tool Development
- ✚ Self-responsibility in using the Alexander Technique
- ✚ Use of Alexander Technique in Rehearsal, and in Creation of One Person Show
- ✚ Character Psychophysical History

Showcase Mentor

Madden is Mentor to the 3rd years in their Fundraising and Organization of their showcase auditions in Seattle, Los Angeles, and New York. In this role, she directly and indirectly teaches

them how to integrate the Alexander Technique into the business aspects of pursuing their careers as artists. They learn to respond to the stress of the business with coordination rather than tension.

Drama 455
The Undergraduate Program

Madden's actor-specific introduction to the Alexander Technique is a much sought-for upper level undergraduate course. In the course, the students learn the basics of the Alexander Technique and apply it to their work for a term. In addition, Madden has developed a condensed way for them to experience how to integrate the Alexander Technique into acting by sequentially teaching Alexander Technique informed acting exercises that over several weeks develop into a short play with characters by the end of the class. Madden's manuscript *Embracing the Psychophysical: The Alexander Technique in the Acting Process* is the text for the course.

Madden has also supervised a number of Independent Study Credits for Undergraduates, and has Mentored some undergraduate projects and auditions. She also taught (in an overload) Tragedy in Performance with Classics Professor Ruby Blondell. Madden's emphasis throughout their training has been on their own responsibility and ability in the process, her presence helps them to empower themselves in this vital moment of their careers.

Overview of the Alexander Technique

The Alexander Technique is a psychophysical change process using conscious thought to restore coordination and/or prevent mis-coordination in human functioning. What F.M. Alexander (1869-1955) observed empirically, and what has been subsequently verified scientifically, is that the relationship between head and spine in movement is a key factor in vertebrate coordination. Whenever a vertebrate goes out of optimal coordination, the system compensates with an excessive work in the relationship between head and spine. Frank Pierce Jones, a Tufts researcher who studied the Alexander Technique, says in his book *Freedom to Change*:

F. Mathias Alexander discovered a method (a "means-whereby") for expanding consciousness to take in inhibition as well as excitation ("not-doing" as well as "doing") and thus obtain a better integration of the reflex and voluntary elements in a response pattern.

The goal of the Alexander Technique is to teach people to restore an optimal relationship between head and spine, and, when necessary, replace faulty concepts that cause the mis-coordination, what Alexander called "mistaken beliefs", with more accurate, constructive concepts. The results of this process include greater flexibility and grace in movement and speech, clarity of thought, and for many, absence of physical pain and stress patterns. Again from Jones:

The Alexander Technique opens a window onto the little-known area between stimulus and response and gives you the self-knowledge you need in order to change the pattern of your response—or, if you choose, not to make it at all.

It is in this miniscule moment of time, the "area between stimulus and response," that true honesty and creativity can emerge. As long as our responses are mitigated by habitual, unconsciously driven mis-coordination, both what we think and what we express fall short of what is possible.

The causes of mis-coordination include but are not limited to:

- imitation of family patterns
- imitation of teacher/mentor patterns
- mistaken ideas of anatomy and physiology
- learned patterns (i.e. from sports, music or other training) that are misapplied to another activity
- attempts to use muscular contraction for tasks that do not require muscular contraction
- mistaken concepts of thinking

- compensation for injury (possibly compensation that is no longer necessary)
- trauma
- emotional armoring
- learned misuses, what F.M. Alexander calls “cultivated habits”
- “electronically-raised” concepts of thinking/moving

John Dewey, a long-time student and advocate for F. M. Alexander’s work, championed it as the scientific method applied to human behavior:

After studying over a period years Mr. Alexander’s method in actual operation, I would stake myself upon the fact that he has applied to our ideas and beliefs about ourselves and about our acts exactly the same method of experimentation and of production of new sensory observations, as tests and means of developing thought, that have been the source of all progress in the physical sciences....

The sequence of teaching and learning the Alexander Technique involves analysis of movement and thought in relationship to the goal followed by synthesis of a constructive conscious plan for change and accomplishment of the desired end.

The Alexander Technique Teaching Process

What we recognize as good coordination in human movement and behavior is recognizable as fluidity in movement, appropriate muscle tone for the activity, and clarity of thought and intention. This combination of qualities generates behavior illustrative of what A.R. Alexander (F.M.’s brother) describes as “the hallmarks of the Alexander Technique are creativity, spontaneity, and adaptability to change”. Ichiro Suzuki, one of the Seattle Mariners, provides a model of what that kind of coordination looks like in baseball.

The teacher of the Alexander Technique needs to be able to create the conditions in which these qualities can emerge from each student. The first tool is the teacher’s own coordination. One of the unique factors in teaching this work is that the teacher herself must be using the Alexander Technique in order to effectively teach it. The teacher’s own coordination functions in several ways:

- 1) it provides a clear model of coordination for the student to imitate (possibly related to recent discoveries of *mirror* neurons);
- 2) a psychophysically clear coordination enhances the teachers “creativity, spontaneity, and adaptability to change” in the teaching process;
- 3) the teacher’s ability to observe, to listen, and to analyze functions better with good coordination
- 4) a clear coordination enables the teacher to skillfully use her hands in teaching to guide the student’s change process.

The tactile communication in the Alexander Technique is a primary way in which the teacher can help the student understand directly that thought and movement cannot be separated. With the skillful use of our hands as an extension of our verbal communication, we teach the students how to make this association themselves.

Most importantly, the teacher's use of her hands and her movement, i.e. her nonverbal communication, illustrates most profoundly the absolute unity of mind, body, spirit, intention.

Since our coordination is our birthright, the teacher is not giving coordination to students via the tactile communication, but is first helping the students recognize their own capability. As the student recognizes the systemic movement that will restore optimal coordination, the teacher's whole self, via a united verbal/nonverbal communication, subtly guides and encourages the student's psychophysical reorganization. The research of Nobel Laureate A. Szent-Gyorgyi, James Oschman and others appears to be providing scientific verification of the efficacy of this process. (For more information, *Energy Medicine in Therapeutics and Human Performance*, by James Oschman published by Butterworth-Heinemann in 2003.)

A skilled Alexander Technique teacher can consistently demonstrate this aspect of teaching. Developing the ability to communicate tactilely, as well as developing the required skills for observation and analysis of coordination, takes years of practice and training. One aspect of my international work is teaching these observation and analysis skills to other Alexander Technique teachers.

Training as an Alexander Technique Teacher

Training as an Alexander Technique Teacher involves years of classes and study with either a master teacher of the work, or at one of the many training centers. Professor Madden was a student of Marjorie Barstow for 5 years before she began teaching and continued to study with her and assist her for nearly 20 years beyond the day she started to teach. She currently train teachers in Seattle in much the way that I learned to teach with Marjorie Barstow. She is also an Associate Director of ATA in Japan, training teachers in Tokyo and Kyoto and is a regular Master Teacher at training schools in Europe and Australia.

For more information

Alexander Technique International's website has some excellent descriptions of the Alexander Technique. The web address is www.ati-net.com.

Alexander, F.M. *The Use of the Self: Its Conscious Direction in Relation to Diagnosis*,

Functioning and Control of Reaction. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1932. Long Beach, California: Centerline Press, 1984.

Chapter One of this book is an excellent discussion of the discovery and the process of the Alexander Technique.

Jones, Frank Pierce. *Freedom to Change: The Development and Science of the Alexander Technique*. New York: Schocken Books, 1976. London: Mouritz, 1997.

While this is a slightly out-dated resource, Jones gives a well-balanced discussion of the technique, its history, and some of the early science that supports