

Plowing Ahead

Sense perceptions cause sense deceptions.

Rene Descartes

My passion for acting returned, never to desert me again, once I had understood how to suspend [my] knowledge [of what was to come, so that I could experience] the character's expectations. I was finally able to use my imagination to achieve the innocence and faith needed to find new life in rehearsals and to be spontaneously alive on stage when executing the actions from one moment to the next, caught up by the surprises that move in on me. [Now] every performance becomes a challenge, a new adventure of playing as if for the first time instead of a repetition of the night before. I can honestly claim that I am more alive on stage at the end of a year's run than I was at the beginning. The effort does not exhaust me—it exhilarates me! If you want to soar, try it: Surprise yourself.

Uta Hagan¹

Sensory Expectation In Learning and Teaching

An actor loses his voice. In a mirror he notices that what he feels he does differs from what he sees. He is about to speak. He sees that he tilts his head back and tenses his neck. But has no sense that he does so. He mis-senses how he moves. He cannot correct himself. The heart of his vocal problem is not with his speaking habit but with sensory self-perception. To change how he speaks, the actor discovers he needs to renew his manner of self-sensing, his kinesthesia

If we raise an arm, move a leg, or if we make any other movements of the body or limbs, we are guided chiefly by our [self-sensing] ...This applies to the testing of the texture of a piece of cloth between one's fingers, or the gauging of size, weight or distance,...in fact to the employment of the 'physical' mechanisms in the processes of hearing, seeing, walking, talking, and in all the other activities of life. (Alexander, CCCI:14)

The processes of sensation, perception and thought are intertwined. As thinking takes place, specific thoughts are perceived as though they originated from without. However, consciousness of one's self, of one's thoughts "is first and foremost a body-ego." (Freud, *E&I*:13-17)

We assume the sensation of our body, our kinesthesia, to accurately represent what is happening within. Yet this self-sensing is merely a summation. Nevertheless, kinesthesia—our ongoing interpretation of signals from sensory cells in muscles and joints—is the fundament of self-knowledge, creating and sustaining the “as I live and breath,” pulsing, balancing, flowing self.²

Sensory Expectation, Sensory Experience

We interpret reality in terms of the information we get from our sensory cells. But kinesthesia is indirect. Experience is not a simple perception but a translation of neural signals. *Right, back* and *left* systems collaborate to produce sensation, action, and interpretation. We condense this into one *sense* of muscle effort. This ongoing kinesthesia of efforting, however, is not the efforting itself but an interpretation prone to error.

As we repeat a routine activity, reinforced by pleasure or pain, success or failure, we evolve an array of sensory expectations that influence the experiencing of that activity. Some expectations concern what we want to accomplish. Other expectations concern how a particular activity is accomplished, how we expect it to feel.

We are eager to reap rewards. We rivet attention on goals. When we decide to sit, we expect to sit. When we touch the chair, we consider the mission accomplished. Yet, in spite of achieving our goal, we are not aware of how we got there—and are only vaguely aware of how sitting feels. Each time we sit, we activate a particular repetitive neuromuscular pattern and an array of sensory expectations. Just as surely as we end up seated, we engage this habitual pattern—and experience the expected sensation—in getting there.

Afference, Efference, Reafference

Neural information flows up from muscle to brain (afference). This conveys muscle length, tension, activity, position, stress. Neural information flows down from brain to muscle as we issue motor commands (efference). These efferent *back* system cerebellar commands initiate muscle activity. This activity generates new afferent signals that return to brain and affect how we sense the ongoing experience (reafference). There is continuous interaction among

- (i) afferent sensory information (coming from muscle),
- (ii) efferent motor commands, and
- (iii) cortical interpretation of re-afferent return signals from muscles affected by motor commands.

Ideally, this sequence results in a new afference (modified

sensation) and modified motor command based on present need. But actually what happens is that a particular *back* action

- (a) triggers an array of particular motor commands,
- (b) becomes associated with a particular *right* sensory experience, and
- (c) engenders an habitual *left* expectation, a preformed kinesthesia.

This evolving afferent/efferent spiral is the arena of *AT* education. (Tinbergen, 1978:252) Learned habits of speech, posture and gait acquire associated kinesthesia of effort. When we decide to move a limb, the efferent signals (brain to muscle) result in a movement that generates new afferent signals (muscle to brain), the perception of which becomes our sensation. With repetition of that particular action, the sensation becomes habitual, establishing what we thereafter expect to experience as normal and correct.

By becoming habitual, kinesthetic expectation becomes an independent force which structures the acquisition of future experience. An actor who employs excessive effort when speaking and breathing comes to feel that this amount of effort is necessary for every word spoken, every breath taken. A child who slumps before a television associates that sense of efforting with sitting and relaxing. A person sipping soup who concentrates on getting soup to mouth becomes accustomed to craning his neck to do it.

Although out of consciousness, kinesthetic expectations govern these actions. As behavior becomes repetitive, what feels normal becomes fixed and ceases to be efficient. It is not *back* motor habits that resist adaptation to new conditions. It is the overlay of acquired, unconscious, automatic *right* sensations and *left* sensory judgment associated with *back* motor habits that resist adaptation. *AT* education—by shifting focus from what we do to how we do it—shows that awareness of the interplay between *right*, *back* and *left* self is not only subject to distortion but also open to modification.

“We Can’t Get No Education” Pink Floyd

Education involves more than acquiring new *left* knowledge and correcting *left* errors. It is a process. Learning is a semiotic voyage which runs aground when, in our *left* hegemony, we overlook the influence of subconscious inner-dialogue, acquired psycho-motor habits and sensory expectations.

The Alexander Technique bears the same relation to education that education itself bears to all other human activities. (Dewey, 1932: xix)

Self-sensing is fundamental to learning—but fallible. Habitual sensory expectations interrupt learning. Because our kinesthetic expectations govern all of our doings, any attempt to make a change merely by “doing something” remains imprisoned in habitual sensory expectation. The circle is vicious. We mis-attempt to change, and then fail—because we do not consider sensory habituation.

In trying to remedy some problem by ‘doing something’ we rely upon kinesthetic expectations, but our expectations are based on past sensory experiences. Our teacher will advise us to stop imposing [*left*] sensory judgment, encourage us to inhibit habitual activity and, instead, to [*right*] listen to the new instructions, and to [*back*] allow the teacher to guide us, by means of manipulation, a new, revitalized kinesthesia. (Alexander, paraphrase, *CCCI*:15)

After the actor realizes that his preconscious kinesthesia is suppressed and pre-fixed, he discovers that sensory expectations are susceptible to revitalization by an interruption of habit. Strategic interruption leads to a spontaneous re-integration of self use. The actor discovers that awareness of habitual sensory expectation offers a basis for education—and self evolution. The educational focus is not on learning new procedures or on correcting errors but on enhancing kinesthesia.

A Communications Model

Pupils learn by imitation, by subliminal postural identification—*back-to-back*, as it were. Teaching *AT* depends upon continuous awareness and communication of sensory self process. We hinder teaching—and learning—when we fix our body into positions based on fixed expectations and sensory misperceptions. The *AT* teacher must consider himself as well as his pupil, and examine his own as well as his pupil’s mode of sensing and understanding.

Communication in *AT* education is a three-way conversation among teacher, pupil and a science. We use Peirce’s semiotic stages of experience and knowledge as a frame of reference to identify the many facets of this pupil/teacher/science communication.

The semiotic stages represent ten learning stages occurring simultaneously within teacher and pupil. The learning stages interact in forming a teacher’s experience, in forming a pupil’s experience, and in fostering communication between teacher and pupil. And, at each stage—occurring within and between teacher and pupil—learning interacts with a science defining the principles underlying that stage.

10 Stage, Three-way Communication Model

Stage		AT Teacher's	AT Science's	AT Pupil's
10.	A	Education Theory	Principles	Use gestalt
9.	B	Assessment of pupil's reciprocal muscle use	Measurement	Reciprocal muscle functioning
8.	C	Story of pupil's use	Comparison Model	Life Story
7.	D	Specific observations	Observation Model	Personal Observations
6.	E	Expression	Lexicon	Expression
5.	ϵ (epsilon)	Thoughts on lesson	Cognition theory	Inner dialogue
4.	δ (delta)	Palpable response to hands-on contact	Manifestation theory	Palpable manifestations
3.	γ (gamma)	Sensations	Sensation theory	Sensations
2.	β (beta)	Reactions (neuro-motor)	Reaction theory	Reactions (neuro-motor)
1.	α (alpha)	Detection capacity	Detection theory	Detection capacity

Teacher Impositions

Disruptions to pupil/teacher communication can originate from within the teacher. They include the teacher's incomplete mastery of *AT* principles, an inability to assess his own or the pupil's reciprocal muscle mechanics, a fixed idea about how pupils are supposed to learn, failure to observe an important *AT* event, failure to suitably express an observation, failure to listen to the pupil, and, most important of all, the teacher's failure to be self aware. The teacher's mastery of *AT* science comprise semiotic stages E through A.

Stage E—Speaking

Teachers use touch and words to encourage pupils to refrain from habitual muscling.² Touch directs a release of overly tense muscles in

order to precipitate a natural torso extension and freedom of arm, leg and rib joints. *AT* words— “lengthen,” “widen,” “inhibit,” “allow,” “free”—reinforce this body learning. But misunderstanding occurs when a teacher fails to acknowledge that it is the pupil’s interpretation of the teacher’s touch and words which determines the pupil’s course of action.

Any attempt to incorporate a new idea is conditioned by past interpretation. This interpretation, in its turn, is conditioned by the palpable psycho-physical functioning of the individual teacher and pupil— this palpable state again being influenced by each individual’s kinesthesia. The teacher’s and the pupil’s conception of what they are talking about includes more than an accumulation of abstractions, more than acquiring information. It includes their ongoing internal environment—their habits of self-sensing and interpretation.

Stage D—Distinguishing

The teacher helps a pupil notice habitual patterns as they emerge.³ When a pupil anticipates standing up, he tenses his necks (nt). Pointing this out distinguishes (D) a key moment in the standing up process. The distinction ‘neck tensing’ (D_{nt}), in combination with experience gleaned from hands-on contact, enhances kinesthesia of standing. Such distinctions empower a pupil to transcend habitual anticipation, expand his response repertoire, and gain a new awareness of reciprocal muscle use during the standing process.

Stage C—Ordering

Pupils, as Dewey noted, naturally compare old use with the new. (1923:v) An emerging awareness of relationships among distinctions (D) tells a story (C). As *AT* lessons generate a new kinesthesia, pupils begin to notice when they are contracting vs. expanding, allowing vs. anticipating, accepting vs. resisting.

This linking of new distinctions with existing self-perceptions generates comparisons and value judgments, constructs an order. This ordering is a dynamic, ongoing, communication among *right* sensory expectations, *back* action and *left* cognition—a communication in which new events resonate within a pupil, shedding light on problem areas and spontaneously suggesting a new solution for each new moment.⁴

Stage B—Measuring

AT education aims to make conscious the standard by which we assess our body and subtle movement. *AT* teachers notice a pupil’s anticipatory tensing responses at the moment of speaking, sitting, standing, breathing. These distinctions include neck tensing, habitual

torso slumping, background shoulder tensing, hip and leg joint tension.

We all have a background kinesthetic standard, a subjective yardstick against which we predict how much effort we need to accomplish a task. Without knowledge of this yardstick, we remain imprisoned by it.

Each *AT* teacher establishes for himself a more conscious—yet still subjective—yardstick against which to measure a pupil’s use and to measure how that use changes over time. The task for *AT* science is to objectify—to bring out into the open, these subjective assessments.

Stage A—Theory

Diverse strands of cognitive science—in neuro-physiology, psychology, philosophy and psychometrics—amplify the central role of body processes in cognition. As young children we are curious. We want to find out how things work. Natural inquisitiveness propels the process of self-education. Interest in the workings of our own body grows steadily and comprehensively.

By touch and example, an *AT* teacher revitalizes the adult pupil’s curiosity about body mechanics. *AT* education recognizes the subjective, sensory process of learning, and encourages pupils to allow new possibilities and new understandings to emerge by paying attention to the how of doing.

Open-ended relationships allow the possibility of new, unforeseen knowledge to present itself. Acknowledging kinesthesia, in consciousness and language, is a means to access a fundamental basis of all knowing. Self-esteem

is born of success, not of failure...And our process...in the general art of living must be based upon principles which will enable us to make certain of the satisfactory means whereby an end may be secured. (Alexander CCCI: 120)

Five Stages of a Teacher’s Communication

Theorize	A Conceptualize an education that emphasizes how a pupil learns rather than what is taught
Measure	B Measure psycho-physical processes such as respiratory and reciprocal muscle function.
Compare	C Order the changes that occur during a lesson to let them tell a story.
Notice	D Distinguish before and after changes for the pupil—point out, show in mirror.
Express	E Speak words that engender receptivity and change.

Table 9-2

Pupil Preconceptions

Disruptions to pupil/teacher communication can originate from within the pupil—from the pupil’s expectations and mis-perceptions. The pupil may come to the lesson with an unconscious theory that the teacher is supposed to do something to correct his condition. Or a pupil may have a pain that masks underlying reciprocal motor processes. Or the pupil’s preconceived story about his problem may prevent him from allowing the lesson experience to tell a new story. Or the pupil may fail to observe the tactile cues the teacher presents.

A pupil’s subconscious imposition of self-limitations is a major obstacle to learning.

Too often...the pupil will immediately balk. He may not openly refuse to receive new information but...will make a ‘mental reservation’...He subconsciously believes that he knows more than his teacher about the things he cannot do. So that when he receives new information, he imposes a plan of his own...and so intent is he on this plan that the new instructions do not reach his consciousness. (Alexander, paraphrase, *CCCI*:56)

“[A] bad stutterer...made rapid progress” and became “able to speak without any sign of stuttering as long as he spoke slowly.” (ibid:59)⁸ But when the teacher suggested that the pupil speak more slowly in his everyday conversations, the pupil replied he could not do that because “everyone would notice” and become impatient and angry. The story the pupil tells himself anticipates a negative judgment from others. This mirrors the stutterer’s own critical self judgment which overwhelms his ability to sense how fast he speaks and how others respond. Assessing speaking speed involves a subtle kinesthesia of vocal muscles as much as aural feedback. By touch and example, the teacher encourages the pupil to not respond to his ongoing anticipatory assessment.

When a teacher, by “readjustments,” guides a pupil to undo “twists and distortions,” very often the pupil exclaims “you’ve pulled me *out of shape*.” (ibid:60-61) To this pupil, crookedness is straightness. The pupil allows a change but judges it to be wrong because his sensory interpretation of his bent shape condition is that it is straight. The majority of our beliefs are based on what we feel. When our kinesthesia is pre-fixed our judgment is

bound to be misleading and out of touch with reality...Our approach to life generally, our activities, beliefs, emotions, opinions,

judgements in whatever sphere, *are conditioned by the preceding conceptions, which are...conditioned by the [habits] of our individual sensory appreciation.* (Alexander's italics) (ibid)

To meet the obstacles within a pupil, the *AT* teacher can only encourage the pupil to not respond impulsively to bodily changes that result from the lesson. This strategic delay enables the pupil to integrate the new experience through *right* awareness of *back* action, rather than to *left* reject the new experience through mistaken judgment based on habitual expectations.

Inhibition is the trigger that releases awareness of new experience. The pupil's job is to inhibit habit—to inhibit anticipatory tensing—while projecting *left*-reasoned directions that inspire good use. The teacher's job is to help the pupil link up the new *back* experience delivered through the teacher's hands with a *left* understanding of spoken directions. In so doing, the teacher guides the pupil's awareness to process rather than ends.

[The pupil] has no 'end' to work for, and therefore nothing to get right. All that is asked of him is, when he receives a guiding order, *to listen and wait.* (Alexander's italics, *CCCI*:64)

However, doing nothing—just listening and waiting—arouses anxiety. We feel compelled to act. Learning to wait is learning to inhibit—the antidote to compulsion.

A pupil speaks too quickly, without pausing between sentences. The teacher first manually facilitates the mechanics of natural breathing while making the pupil aware of his habitual gasping for air at the end of each sentence. The teacher then fosters the idea that breathing is a natural reflex that is hindered, rather than aided, by effort. "The teacher [asks] the pupil to stop, to wait at the end of each sentence...and to refuse to take another breath until he has inhibited the habitually incorrect, subconscious guidance concerned with the act of taking a breath." (Alexander, *CCCI*:68) The pupil protests that this takes too much time, that it will be noticeable to others. But even when singing, the pause required to wait for a natural, unforced breath is momentary.

Incomplete Science

Disruptions to teacher/pupil communications can originate from faulty science—including incomplete theory, inadequate measures, over generalized comparisons, failure (of the science) to acknowledge crucial observations, misleading terminology.

Traditional educational is most concerned with interaction between a teacher's knowledge and a pupil's knowledge. This arena of communication is via abstractions that stress conceptual understanding over sensation and embodiment. It is a component of AT education, but far from the essence.

Teacher's Knowledge to Pupil's Knowledge

Stage	Teacher's	Stage	Pupil's
A	AT Theory	A	Understanding of use gestalt
B	Assessment of reciprocal muscle use	B	Understanding of reciprocal muscle use
C	Suggesting new possibilities	C	Reassessment of story
D	Specific observations	D	Ability to observe
E	Vocal Expressions	E	Ability to articulate

Further interaction occurs between a teacher's knowledge and a pupil's process. This communication provides a theory of how to change habits and gives the pupil instructions to follow which are designed to release the pupil's use. A teacher's observations distinguish use that affects a pupil's kinesthesia.

Teacher's Knowledge to Pupil's Process

Stage	Teacher's	Stage	Pupil's
A	AT Theory	α	Detection capacity
B	Assessment of reciprocal muscle use	β	Pupil's neuromotor reactions
C	Suggesting new possibilities	γ	New sensations
D	Specific observations	δ	Palpable manifestations
E	Vocal Expressions	ϵ	Inner dialogue

Table 9-4

But a teacher cannot reach a pupil’s *right* sensations and *back* actions via *left* concepts. An *AT* teacher, instead, communicates new sensations to a pupil through the teacher’s own sensory process. As in the performing arts, the *AT* teacher communicates with the pupil empathetically, from process to process. A process to process communication is transparent. All stages of experience and knowledge are present in a teacher’s touch. Kinesthetic communication occurs via

Teacher/Pupil Empathic Process to Process Communication

Stage	Teacher’s	Stage	Pupil’s
α	Stimulus	α	Detection capacity
β	Reactions	β	Reactions
γ	Sensations	γ	Sensations
δ	Hands-on contact	δ	Palpable manifestations
ϵ	Thoughts on lesson	ϵ	Inner dialogue

Table 9-5

These communication arenas depict an array of complex interactions that have only just begun to be explored. The aim of an *AT* science must be to identify those communication links that create the best opportunity for successful *AT* learning.

Any science distinguishes things and sets of things. Social science works with sets of questions answered by samples of persons about sets of objects (groups, events, properties). In an *AT* communication, a teacher reduces the multitude of palpable (δ stage) processes to a few significant distinctions related to kinesthesia and movement functioning, which are idiosyncratic to that pupil. These decisive observations also serve to define *AT* education and draw boundaries for an *AT* science. ⁵

Reinvigorating Kinesthesia

We have difficulty assimilating new experience. We come clad in the habits which keep us safe. We feel what we expect to feel.

Each of us differs in the nature and source of our habitual tendencies and in our ability to gain awareness of them. Each of us needs to be contacted and invited individually to rediscover our natural selves.

Being able to relinquish fixed habitual automatic control is the key to allowing a new, more adaptive response. A teacher guides us to not rely on automatic, habitual self-sensing, but instead to listen and to allow, to become open to new experience. Enabling alternative possibilities fosters a new self-control and self-invention. The pupil/teacher relationship is not dominant nor submissive. Both must give themselves to the process of stopping the familiar to allow the new.

Touch and Example are Not Enough

Reconnecting *right* awareness with *back* action does not complete *AT* learning. We also need a *left* initiated inhibition and *left* directions that focus *left's* attention away from doing its usual. We need a new set of *left* goals that are beyond habitual *left* associations.

But the evolution of self-revival does not begin with explicit directions. An *AT* lesson begins with the teacher's hands-on contact with the pupil's largely unconscious, *back* dominated kinesthetic sense. Whatever directions happen to be given at that moment are just to smooth the way, to help the pupil's *left* accept the teacher's touch. Touch is the first step in a lesson—touch while sitting, standing, walking.

Left awareness comes last but not least in the evolution of *AT* education. Until *left* gets it too, until *left* begins to have some ideas of *back* process, *AT* education remains wordless, incomplete and *left* inexplicable.

While our experiences are funded by the preconscious workings of our *under*, *back*, *right* processes, our ideas of what we are doing—our words, our explanations, our science, our capacity to tell each other what we know—are *left* willed, *left* worded and *left* understood. How we manage *left* will ultimately determine whether information from *under*, *back* and *right* becomes more accessible—or less.

Hands on Back of Chair

A pupil describes a paradox, her experience of opposition from Alexander's touch. Her head "grew up" opposite the downward pressure of Alexander's hand.

I [have] a vivid recollection of Alexander's hands...His hand on top of my head...made quite sure that [my head] didn't move backward...[A]s he moved me [his hand] kept my head very slightly dropping forward. All the while, [his hand] nevertheless pressed firmly in such a way that my head grew up towards it, and [my head] stayed that way. His top hand seemed to suck me up out of the chair without any help from the [other] hand (Dilys Carrington, 1984).

This hands-on communication—teacher kinesthetic process to pupil kinesthesia—can be taught by patient cultivation. In *AT* teacher training, the seemingly simple activity of placing one’s hands on the top rail of a chair is a procedure to acquire this ability. In placing hands on a chair back, teachers develop a register of the muscle tension in their hands and arms. It is a coordination of arms and torso that parallels the plowman’s lessons (Chapter 2).

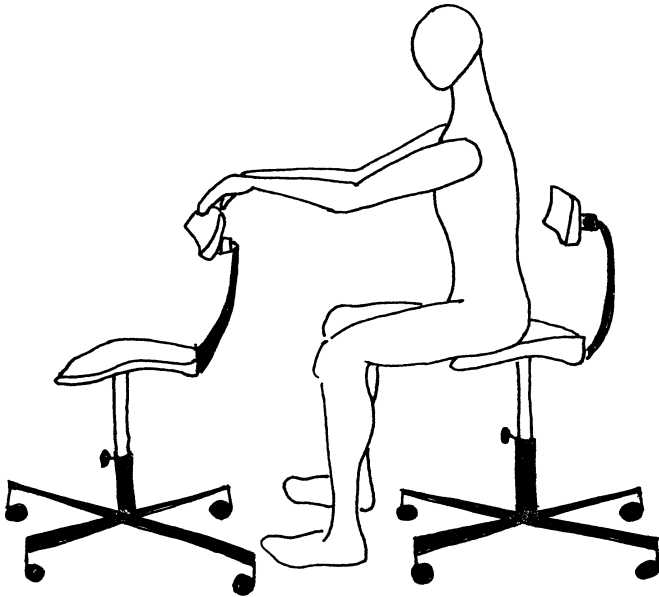


Figure 9-1

Plowing—Hands on Back of Chair

Drawing by Julie Paparella

Hands on back of a chair teaches that “what is essential [for] a coordinated use of the arms” is that “the movement of the arms [be] linked up with the use of the other parts of the body,” especially the large back muscles. (Alexander, *CCCI*:74) This is done by maintaining equilibrium of head and trunk while allowing the reciprocal opposition of the head, neck and trunk muscles that support shoulders, arms and hands. The procedure is taught either while the pupil is sitting or bending forward with a natural torso extension in Ready. It facilitates latissimus dorsi and back extensor widening in connection with limb

use. It is a gentle isometric exercise that engages the arms and back muscles in a way that has an integrative effect on the respiratory process. As the pupil gently grips the back of the chair between fingers and thumb, and directs a width through the upper torso, a deep inspiration from the lower part of the lungs is stimulated.

This procedure trains an *AT* teacher to maintain self awareness while in kinesthetic communication with a pupil.

[When training *AT* teachers] I have found that they all immediately want to get their hands on the body and to do something to it... You must get yourself working properly before you put your hands on anybody...

[A] free lengthened [torso] is necessary to begin with, with no thought of doing anything to anyone... Just keep the lengthening and widening whilst you use your hands, leaving them free from any expectation of doing anything, so as to let them 'listen' to the other person... Get all the freedom you can in yourself and let it flow into the other person. (D. Carrington, 1984)

Habitual tensions interfere with "listening" with one's hands. Expecting to do something with your hands increases tensing. Freeing hands and wrists is not only a matter of hand and forearm muscles. It involves total psycho-physical coordination. It is not the hands but "the teacher's whole body [and mind] that is the instrument for giving... direction." (Binkley, "Notes") It is an empathic, process to process communication.

Student teachers are taught first as pupils to use their head and torso in an integrated manner; then to inhibit interference of that integration while in Ready; then, to inhibit interference of that integration while using their arms and hands on a chair; and, finally, to inhibit interference while putting their hands on a pupil.

Speaking *AT*

Connecting with another
reaching, touching, relating,
is to speak *AT*.

Learning by imitation,
we mirror each other naturally and unconsciously.
Mirroring is decisive.

When listening to a speaker,
spontaneously, unconsciously,
we subvocally imitate their speech.
Our vocal cords mirror their vocal chords,
somewhat as we see them,
especially as we hear them.

This *back* cerebellar mirroring is essential
to understanding, believing, trusting,
recognizing the other person.

If we can do what they are doing,
then we can comprehend,
muscle it too, make contact,
relate to the other.

When viewing an athlete,
spontaneously, unconsciously
our eye muscles detect their movement
as we see them.

Our joints and limbs sub-motionally
imitate the athlete's joints and limbs.
It is an anticipatory, preemptive activity,
like moving in a dream.

This cerebellar mirroring is essential to identifying,
taking sides,
being within the athlete,
experiencing the athlete's movement and drive.

If we can do what they are doing,
then we can comprehend,
muscle it too, make contact,
relate to the other.

When viewing actors playing a scene,
spontaneously, unconsciously
our eye and ear muscles
reflect the actor's emotion.

Our muscle fibers and blood chemistry
sub-emotionally imitate theirs,
recreate in ourselves the actors emotion.

Mirroring is empathy,
being within the actor, "suspending belief,"
experiencing the actor's emotions and feelings.

If we cannot do what they are doing,
 cannot muscle it too, make contact,
 relate to the other,
 then we cannot comprehend.

(Adapted from Ben's AT Journal, 2/21/91)

The Essence of AT Learning

Shifting Attention to Means

The media of *AT* education is kinesthesia. The teacher asks the pupil to bend his knees. The pupil's initial response is to think only of the end (his understanding of what his teacher is asking him to do). The pupil, desiring to do it right, as he understands "right," bends his knees according to his habit. He does it with unnecessary tension, stiffening his neck, shortening his torso. He attains the end of knee bending, but at unnecessary cost.

While putting hands on head and back, tactually communicating a new coordination, the teacher draws the pupil's attention to his interfering habit and induces the pupil to bend his knees to the best advantage. By avoiding the excessive muscle tension of habit, knee bending becomes "a new act, bringing with it a new feeling." (Alexander, *CCCI*:55)

At first the new feeling is unfamiliar and arouses insecurity. The pupil wants to do what is familiar because that is what feels right. Unconscious fixed ideas of what constitutes right and wrong produce a deadlock. "The situation is one that no teacher, be he ever so expert, can deal with satisfactorily, one from which the pupil cannot possibly be extricated, until he stops trying to get things right—stops, that is, working blindly for his *ends*, and gives thought instead to the new *means given to him by his teacher, whereby his ends can be attained.*" (Alexander's italics) (ibid:56)

Education fails when there is imbalance between volition and inhibition. The teacher will have to demonstrate "over and over again" that the pupil will "never be able to do what he is trying to do unless he changes his 'meanswhereby' and gives up his old familiar ways." (ibid) But the pupil will persist in doing things his way because that is all he knows.

Inhibition...Non-Doing

As the pupil tries to help the teacher by re-doing old habit, the moment comes to invite the pupil to help by not doing, by inhibiting. At first this idea is shocking. But inhibiting can become an enjoyable joke on bossy *left* (in the same way that humor is fun because it outwits *left* censors).

The primal humor of this good joke is the body joy of the newly released, no longer committed, hence fresh, energy. As the pupil feels anew and likes the fun in inhibition, he wonders what to do with *left*, what job to invent to keep *left* busy. *Left* must think it has a part, or eventually *left* will forbid the freedom of the lesson.

Volition...Giving Directions

Directions are thoughts for *left* to consider, ideas to guide *left* away from the usual words and plans of its ever-ready web of restrictive habits. Directions replace old habits with new words that redirect *left* attention to *right* body images. The new words (let the neck be free; let the head go forward and up; let the back lengthen and widen) evoke new images associated with previously unnoticed sensations. The sensations are perceived through renewed kinesthetic awareness that the teacher has been encouraging through gentle contacts that lessen habitual muscle effort. This closes the circuit. *Left* and *back* are coaxed into rapport. *Right* is the intermediary—taking *left* words and creating imagery that facilitates *left*'s access to *back* body. Teacher poise and touch, and pupil inhibition and directions use each other to nourish *AT* awareness in the pupil.

What Is Education?

Is it the education that installs
 the habits of civilization,
 of 'proper' behavior, of propriety,
 which clothes our naked livingness
 in habits suitable for going out in society,
 suited to social intercourse,
 suits of civilization?

Or is it the education that offers a means,
the opportunities of reformation
of undoing *left* hegemony,
of by-passing *left* supervision,
recontacting *right* and *back* knowing,
infusing the ideas of *left* with
the instant total knowing charm of *right*,
the grace and poise of *back*,
revelling in the pure physical pleasure
of moving?

(Ben's AT Journal: 9/14/94)