

is to develop properly, it cannot be placed in the therapeutic sphere because, in that context, it will inevitably be misunderstood and used largely for its benefits, not as a foundational part of child development. To be recognised in its full measure, to fulfill its promise as the revolutionary breakthrough that it is, we must place our work in the field of child development and as the foundation for a complete model of conscious development.

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Miss Goldie's Understanding

'Come to Quiet; Give Consent, and the Right Thing Will Do Itself.'

Penelope Easten

This paper discusses the key principles of Miss Goldie's teaching on working on yourself as I understand it and as we explored in the workshop at the Congress. A second workshop took the principles into putting hands on, and won't be covered here. The quotes included are her teaching phrases to me – her phrases that burnt somehow into my brain, so that years later I can still hear them as they were spoken.

WHO WAS MISS GOLDIE? WHY DOES SHE MATTER?

Miss Goldie (1905-1997) first went to F. M. for lessons in 1927, then learnt to teach by apprenticeship, as all teachers did then. Froebel-trained (the alternative education method of the day, in some ways akin to Montessori) she was main teacher in Alexander's little school from 1929 until it folded in 1942. She was on the first training course (1931-34). When F. M. went to America during the war, she and four other teachers took the small school

there also. After they returned, F. M. and Goldie lived together, Goldie acting as F. M.'s housekeeper. She stayed closest to him to the end of his life and nursed him after his stroke, hearing his last thoughts on his discoveries. She loved him like a disciple, and he in turn was a great admirer of her work. She was with him when he died.

After he died, she kept largely ^{→ weitgehend} separate from the rest of the profession, as she felt it had lost its way. She clearly considered herself the true guardian of the Technique, and attempted in her work to stay completely true to the principles by which F. M. discovered and evolved the Technique. Those of us lucky enough to be allowed to work with her, and with stamina to withstand the frequent insults, felt that through her one was taught to return to the essence of F. M.'s teachings. This old lady in Edwardian dress, including hat with hat-pin, who spoke always in measured, clear, perfectly-enunciated English, took one into a different, older world.

In workshops, I use games to enable participants to experience the qualities her teaching brought about, as I experienced it. She herself never used games, but worked with chair, and occasionally table, in the traditional way. The differences between her teaching and that of others were subtle but powerful, and difficult often to convey with words alone, as our words are often the same. The games have proved over many years now to be a fast, reliable way to shortcut to the experience.

OBSERVATION FIRST

Her work always contained observation. Fiercely ^{→ heftig, erbittert, wild} precise, she was able to get one to see what one was doing, even though her remarks often sounded like insults! 'You have legs like bus-stops. . .' 'Now look at you! You are like a sack of potatoes, no! That would be insulting to the potatoes, because potatoes have life, and in this moment you have no life. . . .' They were not intended as criticism, however, only as honest comment to help you to understand what you were doing. Then soft, almost murmuring ^{→ murmelnd}, continual instruction: 'Now not your thing, not your thing with your head. . . .' 'Come to quiet. . . .'

So we began the workshop at the Congress with observation of how we engage in a simple task – looking for hidden objects round the room. Several participants noticed how easily they reverted to anxious or scattered ^{→ zerstreut} thinking, endgaining, etc., and observers noted that the actions looked much more careful, even sleepy, than they might while doing such a task at home, or that small children might bring to the task. Miss Goldie might have remarked that they were either not conscious enough, or were over-involved with their actions. Continual consciousness in any task was a central theme: 'There is no switching off!'

MIND IN THE BRAIN, ATTENTION AND AWARENESS

We then embarked ^{→ sich einlassen} on discovering how to become conscious: by finding the place from where Miss Goldie wanted us to think. She often told me to

bring my mind to my brain, rather than letting it be continually checking on myself. 'You are over-involved with your feelings!', 'How do you know what you are feeling?', she would demand.

She seemed to define 'mind' as the place from where one is thinking, which can move around the body (or be outside it). She contrasted it with the brain, which is a fixed organ, in the head. (I am aware there are other definitions of 'mind'; I will not discuss these here.) She wanted me to think from the top of my head, rather than from below the eyebrows, or at the neck. 'People forget they have all this area above the eyes and the neck.' She told me: 'At the end of his life, Mr Alexander told me he wished to God he'd never said "free the neck" – "All they can think about is their necks!"' Mind is different from attention. Attention is what one is thinking about. So as we will discover, attention and mind can be in the same place (the state of over-focusing on something, to the exclusion of all else), or they can be separate, so that you are aware of yourself as separate from the task.

When participants played with putting their mind in their foot, they could clearly perceive something moving downwards. When they then gave consent to wiggle their toes, they noticed that the sensation was definite, that they felt in control, but it felt tight. They were only aware of the foot, excluding the rest of the body. Their vision dimmed; there was pulling down and in; the world was lost to them. In contrast, with the mind in the brain and eyes seeing surroundings, they needed to trust that the message would reach the toes. Many found it hard initially to think of giving consent to wiggling toes without going down there. When they succeeded though, there were clear differences: the physical sensation was much less, but there was a sense of the foot integrated with the rest of the body, of greater freedom and lightness in the movement. The vision and connection with the world stayed clear. Miss Goldie often talked of trusting that the brain messages would get through.

But mind in brain does not shut us off from the body. Miss Goldie would talk of keeping the whole body alive, not switching off in the legs, for instance. We played with including awareness of each part of the body in turn, while maintaining the mind in the brain and eyes seeing out. Afterwards, participants observed a sense of lightness, wholeness. The awareness of the whole body then becomes a peripheral awareness (akin) to visual peripheral awareness, and similarly spatial in nature.

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ähnlich, verwandt

VISION AND PRESENCE

Though Miss Goldie didn't talk about vision, I noticed that for me, her work brought about a quietening of my usually reactive eyes, and that depth perception came in, so the whole room would come quietly present. I have found that one can work this the other way round. Coming present to the whole room in this gentle 3D way in turn quietens the desire to over-involve with the body, although that too stays present. So we played with looking gently around, letting the eyes glide over what they saw, seeing spaces between

objects, seeing detail across the space between self and object, seeing from the back of the head. Participants noticed a quieting of their whole being.

INHIBITION, THE KEY TO REAL CHANGE

'Come to quiet' was Goldie's key phrase; for her, conscious inhibition was the key to change. Only when we let go of all desire to do an action will the brain stop preparing every muscle in the body to act in the old way, and we come to quiet. From this point true change can happen. Then we have a real choice whether to act or not, as we are not secretly committed (prepared) for the usual action. Only from this place of no preparation can the brain return to an earlier setting, even to blueprint, and re-find or configure integrated muscle patterns. Goldie called this 'making a discovery'; also 'going into the unknown'. But mostly, we do not come fully to that quiet; we pause, rather than stop.

Participants threw beanbags, initially to a partner, then to their other hand, letting each one drop, until they let go of ALL desire to catch the beanbag. Then we played with real choice to catch or not, checking we are still 'quiet throughout' – fully alive, not sleepy. From this quiet, alive place, participants could choose to give consent to catch. Then the hand moved as if by itself to catch the beanbag. The process was completely easy; coordination sorted itself.

Only a peripheral glimpse of the beanbag was needed to enable a catch. When 'quiet', the brain knows where all body parts are, and their spatial relationships. So we can understand Goldie's repeated instructions: 'Come to quiet, then give consent and let it happen' and 'Let the brain sort the task out.'

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER TO REDISCOVER THE TECHNIQUE

We set simple tasks, like walking to an object and picking it up. The first need always was to stop, with mind in the brain, seeing gently out to the task with depth perception.

To let go of all desire to do the task, we played 'No' games. This is the same game F. M. developed, and which he described in *The Use of the Self*,¹ in order to bring about a new way of reciting. Through this game he discovered how to bring about an entirely new way of doing any action. A series of instructions are given, then let go of. 'I will pick up the blue ball' – be aware of any slight preparation, such as leaning towards, starting to tense the hand. . . instead say 'no'. Let go of that idea. Completely. Instead, choose a new task, and repeat, changing tasks each time. 'I will pick up that green ball' – 'no'. 'I will walk to the chair' – 'no'. Sometimes we are only aware of preparation when we say no and it releases. By letting the brain begin preparing for the task, and then letting it go, repeating this with several tasks, eventually the brain gets tired of preparing and 'gives up'. Then we come to quiet, an alive place from which 'the brain is waiting out for the new instruction',² rather,

than guessing ahead. Participants noticed that bringing in depth perception, the sense of separation between self and object, helped them come to quiet much faster.

Only when there was NO desire to proceed, could we then give consent and let it happen. To let it happen without controlling it, feeling the way in it, checking the rightness of movement, being careful. . . Simply to see the object clearly and let ourselves follow the eyes and intent, as we stayed out of our own way. Then the Technique could be discovered afresh: participants who bent to pick something up found their bodies went naturally into monkey without any need to organise it, think about freeing the neck, etc. Walking was alive and full of intent, rather than sleepy or careful as observed in the first game of finding things. Hands reached in an alive way for an object and used appropriate strength for the task; the muscles acted responsively, not predictively, to the object's weight and size, and sensitivity of touch was vastly greater. Inhibition becomes a prelude to action, to letting life flow, rather than an end in itself which can damp us down.

MISS GOLDIE'S ANGER → Kernpunkt

This was the nub of why Miss Goldie felt the Technique had lost its way. The protocol for teaching the Technique developed by Patrick Macdonald, Kitty Merrick (later Wielopolska) and Marjory Barlow, and later Walter Carrington,³ and passed down in training courses, had turned Alexander's process around. F. M.'s original process was to come to quiet, and then in giving consent to let the body move, he discovered that the head led, the body followed, and the hand reached in a way that was secondary to the head neck back relationship. The teaching protocol then took these discoveries, and turned them round into a method: you free the neck, then let the head lead, the body follow etc, whereby we direct and organise our bodies into the prescribed movement. 'They [the training course teachers] have a theory: a set of fixed ideas which they like to impose on you – "practice". Whereas with F. M. it was the other way around: practice came first – discovery of the truth – and then the theory.'⁴ 'Mr Alexander would make more discoveries making a cup of tea than most teachers make in their entire lives!' But most of us were never taught how.

WORKING ON YOURSELF IN DAILY LIFE → eifrig, erpicht

Participants in the workshop were keen to integrate this way of working on oneself into their daily lives. Miss Goldie suggested to me a way of doing this: to take a task a week, such as opening a door or brushing one's hair, and then every time you come to that task, to allow the time to stop and 'give yourself a lesson'. To come to quiet, with the four keys described here: playing 'No' games to STOP, rather than pause; bring mind to brain; maintaining awareness throughout the body; eyes seeing out to the task. Then to give consent, let the process happen, and see what happens next! Through this, you dis-

cover for yourself how the body moves, and how to make real choices. Also you build a new habit, not of how to do the task, but of coming conscious as you do that task, enabling one to be conscious more and more in life.

This then sets us up for working on others. 'People come to you to learn the quality of your life. If you have not been living your life well, then ten minutes lying down before a lesson is not going to sort it!'

THE FUTURE

Personally, I do not believe the teaching protocol developed by Macdonald et al has no value; up until recently it has been more accessible and communicable, and without it, probably none of us would be teaching today. But I now see our profession moving gently back to F. M.'s core technique. In the last decade particularly, we have begun to understand the real science behind what we do (which is beyond the scope of this paper), which the older generation were not able to give us. Alongside this understanding, fast ways of communicating the essence, such as these presented here, have been developed by several teachers.

In my own teaching practice, I use these games alongside chair and table work with all pupils. Coming to quiet, asking precise brain work from them, and observation and work on themselves between lessons, allows much faster change of their psychophysical patterns.

I believe this original way now needs to be incorporated into training courses and all teaching. Done with real understanding, rather than simply copying skills, it will both strengthen our technique and increase its accessibility to science, as we move further in time from F. M. himself.

- 1 Alexander, F. M. (1985, 1932). *The Use of the Self*. Gollancz: London.
- 2 Goldie's words to me, as are all the quotations here unless otherwise attributed.
- 3 Hunter, John (2013): *The First Training Course in 1931: a different perspective*. <https://upwardthought.wordpress.com/2013/08/13/the-first-training-course-in-1931-a-different-perspective/>
- 4 Goldie to Fiona Robb. Robb, Fiona (1999). *Not to 'Do'*. Camon Press: London.

Penelope Easten came to the Technique in 1983. After training with Misha Magidov in the North London Alexander School, she took lessons with Miss Goldie for four years. She has had busy teaching practices in London, then Sheffield, and for ten years now in the West of Ireland. She has been running courses on Miss Goldie's work in Ireland, UK and abroad for eleven years and her booklet 'Lessons with Miss Goldie' has sold worldwide. She is now writing a longer book on Miss Goldie and her work. She works extensively with natural breathing to bring the body fully present, alive and strong. With the Emotions Toolbox she has developed mind-body-centred ways of resolving emotional blocks and boundary issues that stop us coming quiet.

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