

Flow and Inhibition with the Collaborating8

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The Collaborating8 have been meeting once a month for three years on Zoom to exchange ideas and experiential work. As Alexander teachers we have all been profoundly influenced by our many years at the American Center for the Alexander Technique (ACAT), first as trainees and later by our combined decades of training teachers there. ACAT was founded on a collegial model of teaching and ran a training course for 54 years in New York City where over 300 teachers were trained. After ACAT closed its training course in 2018, we were inspired to get together to honour and illuminate its legacy. At ACAT we had a weekly theme, and each day of the week a different senior teacher offered their take on that theme. This allowed trainees to be exposed to multiple perspectives, and the faculty to be enriched by our unique collaborative process. As trainees and teachers, we learned that there is no right way but rather a rich variety of explorations available to enhance our understanding of the work and to support its evolution.

Our Continuous Learning workshops in Dublin followed a similar model, as the eight of us each offered a 20 minute or so exploration – that we call *études* – on the theme of flow and inhibition. We decided on that theme, as we all find that flow is at the core of our work and that inhibition is inherent in inviting flow. As you read the descriptions of our *études* that follow, you will see how varied each one is on the theme, expressing our own personal interests. At ACAT, in our work together since, and in our Continuous Learning workshops at the Congress, we have found our approach of multiple perspectives and collaboration to be incredibly rich, creative, and empowering. As a group we respect each other and our unique approaches, we treasure our connection, and we are deeply committed to our collegial process, all of which has grown over time.

As in all the Continuing Learning workshops, we had four two-hour workshops ostensibly with the same group for two consecutive days (in actuality, more participants always showed up on day two and we welcomed them). On day one we had time for introductions from the group, we introduced ourselves and said something about how we came to work together and a little about our process. Day two we started with reflections about what they learned the previous day. We had 20 minutes each for our individual *étude* and the eight of us offered them over two days – four each day in the order you see below. At the end of each day we did some processing and integration, making time for participants to share in a dyad and then an opportunity for discussion with the whole group if they chose to.

DAY ONE

MELISSA BROWN: FLOW AND EXPANDED AWARENESS

Before becoming an Alexander Technique (AT) teacher, I was a civil rights attorney. I became very expert at making to-do lists and overthinking everything. Accordingly, expanded awareness has always been an important aspect of our work for me. It has played a critical role in helping me to find flow.

In my *étude*, I led the group in an exploration of connecting to their environment through the senses – specifically hearing, touch, smell and sight. In our exploration of seeing we included other students in the room as well as objects.

Afterwards, we took a walk and noticed how we felt when we were not only aware of ourselves but also aware of the environment through the senses.

We then played an expanded awareness game to find flow not only in ourselves but also with one another. In this game, we used our expanded awareness to notice the movement of our colleagues as they walked. Any person could randomly begin to walk, and any other person could stop the walk and the group was asked to follow that person's cue. This starting and stopping was repeated for several rounds. In this way our awareness of one another allowed the group to move in a kind of unison and even flow together.

JUDY STERN: WISE OWL TURNS ITS HEAD

My recent experience of flow has been strongly influenced by my qigong practice. My intention in this workshop was to create a group experience of enhancing flow in the context of this qigong movement, 'Wise Owl Turns Its Head'.

I initially brought the group to standing and demonstrated the qigong activity. First both hands are rotated away from the torso, palms facing forward. The arms are about 30 degrees from the torso (noticing the availability of movement at the thumbs, the wrist, the elbow and the glenohumeral joints). Next . . . the eyes lead the head into rotation to the right followed by allowing the head and arms to return to neutral. This activity is then repeated with head rotation to the left and then the entire movement sequence is repeated several times. Inherently the principles of inhibition and direction are imbedded in this activity and guided by the teachers' verbal cues.

With my ongoing verbal guidance, we all performed the qigong movement together and repeated it several times for clarity. Questions were answered regarding the details of the activity while my colleagues were invited to offer hands-on assistance to the group for support. We all explored and experienced the challenges of learning a new movement.

In order to explore the quality of flow in this experience I then invited the participants to pair up for a hands-on exchange. I verbally guided the group to place hands on the feet of their partner. The Wise Owl movement was then repeated several times with my verbal guidance and with 'hands on'. The pairs then switched roles in order to create the same 'hands-on'

experience for one another. My verbal guidance and the hands-on approach were both important to the learning experience.

Finally, time was given for sharing the changes in experience of flow with the Alexander directions enhanced by touch. First the conversation was with one's partner and then, if willing, to share the experiences with the whole group. The sharing was rich, positive, and helped clarify the learning: Flow experienced in guided activities can be enhanced with well-directed 'hands-on learning'.

KATHY MIRANDA: DANCING WITH THE HEMISPHERES

(Offered in absentia via the other seven members of Collab8)

I've been exploring the work of Iain McGilchrist and the differences between the left and right sides of the brain. I find it especially interesting to look through the lens of the body and the way sensory/motor communications differ on the left and right side of the body. The right hemisphere is better at perceiving the reality of the moment and comprehending the wholeness of experience with flow and continuity. It is the right side of the brain, which sends motor signals to the left side of the body, that is most activated during flow states and the left side of the brain that is most inhibited.

My colleagues presented these instructions for the participants: 'Take a moment and turn your attention to the right hemisphere of your brain, the space inside your skull on the right side, give those cells some appreciation. Now expand your attention to include the whole left side of your body. When we play some music for you to dance, let the impulses and initiations of movement emerge from the left side of the body. Don't think too hard, let it flow.'

The whole group danced with the beautiful song 'Stand Like an Oak' by Rising Appalachia. It was enlivening. Suggestions emerged to play the song again and dance from the right side of the body (left hemisphere) and then again to dance from the centre as if the two sides were talking to each other. The whole experience felt opening and freeing. It was like there was collaboration between the Collab8 and the whole group.

A lively discussion ensued where participants shared what they noticed about the palpable differences in the quality of movement coming from the different hemispheres of the brain.

JOAN FROST: EMBODYING FLOW IN MOVEMENT TRANSITIONS WHILE DOING HANDS-ON WORK

We can have an interest in each moment of aliveness having equal value within the flow of time. In the context of giving an Alexander lesson, sometimes the arrival of our hands gets our attention, but the in-between or transition movements can pass without as much awareness. We want to bring the transitions to fuller consciousness.

A brief experiment to get the idea

I asked participants to pair up, standing, 'As' ready to put hands on 'Bs', aware of the whole room and inhabiting their entire self. I invited them to bring their hands up to make contact with their partner, thinking as if their hands never arrived (even though they did arrive). Then, to follow the journey of their hands back to their sides.

Continuing with the instructions as I gave them in the workshop

As walk to the other side of your partner – think up and wide before you begin walking and as you are going. Can you be aware of each footfall? The whole room?

Everyone walk around the room. Think up and allow a flow down through your legs. Renew your awareness of the whole room. Have a light awareness of your breathing.

Return to where you were with the same partner, but with roles switched.

After Bs put hands on As as above and everyone walked, I asked them to return to where they were working. Taking their time and inhabiting their transitions, I invited As to position a chair behind their B partner such that they could use it.

Here's the étude

A had *three minutes* to put hands on B, inhabiting the transitions:

When they moved their hands from one place to another –

When they moved their feet from one place to another –

When they changed level –

I asked them to keep it simple and to replay a move as often as they wished.

For Bs, I asked them to renew their presence, what they were seeing, to have awareness of the room around them, of the touch they were receiving, of their whole self and of their partner's presence.

After the three minutes of A working on B, I instructed them all to go for a walk, then return to where they were working and to switch roles, Bs working on As.

This étude was followed by about three minutes of partners sharing with each other what they just experienced or noticed.

To close, all gathered back in a circle with participants sharing with the whole group.

DAY TWO

REBECCA TUFFEY: 'ONE AT A TIME AND ALL TOGETHER, AT THE SAME TIME'

Even though 'flow' isn't considered one of our classical AT principles, I feel it is a foundational aspect. An attitude of flow is especially relevant when we are sending directions. In *The Use of the Self*, Mr Alexander described projecting one wish/direction and keeping it going while adding another in. This

practice helps to develop inner flow capacity.

I enjoy being in groups. I am curious about the interaction between our personal flows and the flow of energy within the group. Our use and presence affect each other, so do the sound of our voices and the words we choose to speak.

In Dublin, I invited our Continuous Learning group to explore speaking one direction at a time around the circle. Each member of the group spoke a direction scripted by a sequence I offered from ACAT co-founder Debby Caplan, and we let the flow of spoken direction cycle around our circle. Then, I invited each member of the group to go off-script and speak a direction that either came from their present sense of self or one that invited a shift in their present use of self. The challenge – to stay in the greater flow sequence of wishes (neck–head relationship, affecting back and breath, relating legs to back, relating arms to neck–head–back, recognising wholeness). As we played the game, we got to experience each individual’s uniqueness and experience ourselves as one system. ‘One at a time and all together at the same time . . .’

Direction script:

1. To allow my neck to release so that my head can balance forward and up.
 2. To allow my torso to release into length and width.
 3. To allow my legs to release away from my pelvis.
 4. To allow my shoulders to release out to the sides.
 5. One after the other; all together at the same time.
- When we get to the end, go back to the beginning – Robert Fripp said in his keynote ‘a completion is a new beginning’.

HOPE MARTIN: EMOTIONS IN FLOW

My goal for participants

Learn a process to work with their emotions to enable flow instead of contraction.

Intro

I was contemplating the need for help in this world right now with so much speed, aggression, polarisation, and reactivity, and how so many of us are feeling anxious, easily triggered, and tense.

In this presentation we explored how embodiment and AT principles could shift those states into more fluidity and movement – that is, flow.

By bringing awareness to how our bodies respond to our emotions, and applying our Alexander skills of ease, expansion, a more settled nervous system and an expanded awareness of the world around us, we can be in relationship to our responses, not merged with them.

This gives a bigger field for our emotions, letting them be there yet not fixating on them.

I invited participants to:

- Think about something that bothers you. Not the biggest challenge in your life, but something that elicits a bodily response. Could be an interaction, a misunderstanding, a decision or something else. Drop the narrative about it and bring awareness to how your body is responding to that issue. Notice your breath, shape, any tension or holding, your relationship to the ground and environment. Is there internal movement or stuckness? Welcome what you discover and notice its qualities beyond I like it / I don't like it – rather, what is it like? Call out a description of the quality.
- Take a few steps as you transition from sitting to constructive rest, remember the issue and notice how that affects the quality of your movement and your awareness of the world around you.
- When you first lie down, sense how that concern informs your contact with the floor. Now let yourself unwind into that support. (Guided lie-down including whispered 'ah' and a practice to feel their whole body's response to their breath.)
- When transitioning off the floor to sitting, take a few steps, and notice any change in your movement and awareness of the environment.
- Sit and take the shape of constructive rest while being upright. Notice how you are now. Revisit the issue. Allow the transfer of weight to move through your skeletal structure into the support of the chair – letting go of tension and any resistance to experiencing the emotion – and allow that transfer of weight to feed an expansive, buoyant upright. Bring expanded awareness of the space all around.
- Notice the contrast between how you are experiencing that issue now from before. Share the quality.

Processing and integration

Turn to a person next to you. You'll each have a few minutes to discuss your experience and what you want to remember from this work.

Group discussion and closure

Salient responses included:

1. Experiencing a palpable shift into more ease and spaciousness in relationship to the challenge.
2. Surprise that bodily expansion could shift and open the tight emotional response.

Steps for flowing with emotions

1. Notice your physical response.

2. Let go of the storyline; be curious.
3. Expand, unwind, come upright.
4. Let go into the ground; whisper 'ah'.
5. Expanding awareness.
6. Revisit the emotion.

KIM JESSOR: FLOOD TIDE / EBB TIDE

'Flood tide/ebb tide' evolved from an open water swim I did in the Hudson River in New York. The Hudson is an estuary; it flows in both directions. During flood tide, the salt water of the Atlantic flows upstream into the Hudson. During ebb tide, the water flows back to the ocean. Slack tide is a calm moment in between, where the tide is turning.

The river became a metaphor for me of our sensory-motor nervous system; the flood tide representing incoming sensory information, slack tide as the moment of inhibition, and ebb outward directed motor activity. I devised five short, embodied activities to explore this.

1. I guided participants to visualise a river. I suggested they first see the incoming flow, noticing details such as light or wind on the water, the rhythm, splashing sounds. We then watched the tide turn and begin to ebb.
2. Next they were asked to focus on themselves. Incoming sensory information such as the sound of my voice, content of my words, sensations they were experiencing in standing, and what they were seeing were described as incoming tide. We then again switched to a focus on motor or outgoing activity through asking them to speak directions out loud.
3. We then walked (motor activity) as a group from one side of our room to the other, collectively embodying the river. Walking in one direction was the flood tide, when we turned around it became the ebb. Participants were asked to sense us all walking together. I added the idea of currents, for example from the wake of a boat that might move us laterally, bringing in some unpredictability to the flow.
4. We watched a video of a pier by the river in Brooklyn, where some lines of the Walt Whitman poem *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry* are inscribed. It reads: 'Flow on river! Flow with the flood tide and ebb with the ebb tide! Frolic on, crested and scalloped edg'd waves!'

We recited the poem out loud together, sharing the sounds of our voices.

5. I offered the image of the 'seaweed spine', to suggest a fluid, flexible lengthening spine. Putting our own hands onto the front of our torsos, one in the thoracic area and one a bit lower, we played with initiating a kind of undulating lateral spinal movement, much like seaweed being moved by a current. The direction of legs away anchored us while doing this.

Finally, we paired up. Each person had a chance to put hands on another's torso front and back, imagining that seaweed quality resonating under our hands and in both of our systems.

Collectively, we explored a variety of ways that our Alexander work can be infused by the inherent, organic flow that is an aspect of our sensory-motor nervous system.

BARBARA KENT: ECHO'S FLOW

As an introduction I shared my recent interest in the relationship of giving an inhibitory message to one's experience of flow. It would be interesting to notice (whether saying 'No', saying 'No' to say 'Yes', or saying 'Pause'), to see if flow was encouraged, interrupted, or conditions opened to allow flow to happen.

We began with a demonstration of a little game I call the 'echo game'. It goes like this: As I work with my student, I give a verbal direction and then allow time for the echo of those words to flow through me. The idea is to create a small space between giving the verbal direction and whatever comes next. The intent is for that inhibitory moment to give both my system and my student's system a chance to 'hear' the direction.

After the demonstration, we took a few minutes to come to quiet, expand our attention to the space around us, and to listen to the ebb and flow of our breath. Then we gently allowed our breath to turn into a hum, experiencing the flow of breath and the resonant vibration of sound.

(Having touched right brain/left brain involvement in Kathy's étude we noted that quiet humming is primarily a right brain activity.)

Next we paired up to work with each other in a short exchange exploring the 'echo game'. We would be interested to see if the little inhibitory space created by the 'echo' helped us stay with the flow of our quiet humming experience as we added language and hands-on work.

At the conclusion of our partner turns, we returned for a few minutes of sitting quietly in awareness of our environment and the flow of our breathing to rest and digest.

In conclusion we found that participants were very engaged in the theme of flow and inhibition via the varied études, and that their understanding of the themes grew well beyond their initial take as they participated in the multiple aspects and applications we presented.

We noticed that the atmosphere in the room changed palpably with an expanded sense of flow both personally and in the group altogether. Flow was clearly present in the room, creating a larger body beyond each person where flow could express itself.

Another major take-away and element of surprise was the repeated feedback we got about the quality of our collaboration; how taken they were with the way we worked together, how unusual it was, how they had never

experienced anything quite like it in an Alexander learning environment, and how excited they were about that possibility. Noted was the generosity of spirit and the inclusivity in our group.

Collaboration invites curiosity, experimentation, connection, a willingness to be present to our own responses, communication and listening skills, and sometimes the need to move out of our comfort zone. Those are much needed qualities to cultivate in a rapidly changing world displaying a dearth of those values.

As one participant said, ‘This is what the world needs.’

In keeping with the right hemisphere’s facility for revealing insight through poetry and metaphor, Kathy offered poems for the eight études. We handed them out to the participants and include them here.

Playing between Flow and Resistance Variety in the Art of Teaching

Melissa’s Wafts of Aroma

Awakening outer and inner senses
Making a whole experience
In the aliveness of space.

Rebecca’s Raindrop Ripples

Frolicking with a community
Of individuals
Sharing Life in the moment.

Judy’s Lifting Air Currents

Flowing from feathery tips of fingers
To open the chest and unfold
And free the primary movement.

Hope’s Frothy Whitewater

Current of expanded awareness
Meeting embodied stress
Bubbling with kindness.

Kathy’s Scottish Wind

Facing betweenness of left and right
With new lenses to see, to feel
The flow crossing through center.

Kim’s Flood Tide / Ebb Tide

The flow of breath
Swaying like Seaweed
Freeing a dolphin spine.

Joan’s Spring Breeze

Becoming aware of time’s flow
Curious about consciousness
To and from a still-point.

Barbara’s Spring Fed Pool

Whispers of flow
From the quietness of presence
Echoing sweet reflection.

Melissa Brown (ACAT, 2016) was a longtime civil rights attorney; however, her experience studying AT was so impactful that she decided to become an AT teacher. Melissa teaches classes and private lessons in NYC, including an ongoing series at the Manhattan JCC. She is on the faculty at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and works with actors in various other venues. Melissa has taught at Haven House, a residential facility in East Harlem that assists clients with substance use issues. Given her background, it has been important to her to continue to work with people from underserved communities.

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Joan Frost has been teaching the Alexander Technique for 40-plus years. She served on the senior faculty of ACAT for 35 years and was Director of Teacher Certification there 2001–2008. In addition to training teachers, Joan taught at Greenwich Hospital's Center for Integrative Medicine and at the dance and drama divisions of The Juilliard School. She certified in Jessica Wolf's Art of Breathing in 2006 and gave AmSAT's F. Matthias Alexander Memorial Lecture in 2019 regarding her work with a gentleman who had had a brain aneurysm. Joan has maintained a private practice in the Greater Metropolitan New York since 1983.

Kim Jessor trained at ACAT NYC. She was senior faculty for over 30 years, as well as Director of the Teacher Certification Program 1991–1994. Kim has a private practice in NYC and teaches Alexander in the Graduate Acting Program and undergraduate New Studio on Broadway at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. Her teaching is informed by her joy in working with actors, extensive dance/movement background, training in Body-Mind Centering, and work with Non-Violent Communication (NVC.) Kim and Carolyn Serota co-created the 2020 video 'Remembering Judy: A Centennial Celebration of the Life, Work, and Legacy of Judith Leibowitz'.

Barbara Kent has been teaching and training teachers for over 50 years. Certified at The American Center for The Alexander Technique (ACAT) under the Co-Directorship of Judy Leibowitz, Deborah Caplan, and Ilana Rubinfeld in 1971. She directed the Teacher Certification Program for some 10 years and was a senior teacher on the faculty there until 2015. Introduced to the AT as a young singer, for Barbara, the Technique has been a long journey of learning to meet interfering habits of 'use' with kindness and acceptance. Barbara now lives and teaches in Middlebury, Vermont.

Hope Martin (ACAT, 1987) teaches privately in NYC and conducts group workshops and retreats throughout North America. Hope trained Alexander teachers for over 25 years at ACAT and served as Chair of ACAT's Board of Directors for 10 years. Hope is also a Meditation Instructor and a Focusing Trainer. For 20 years she developed and co-taught Embodied Listening® with David Rome, integrating the Alexander Technique, Meditation and Focusing in weekend programs. Hope also created The Shape of Awake® where she applies the Alexander Technique to meditation retreats and workshops. Since 1992 Hope has been a close student of Pema Chodron which has deeply informed her life and teaching.

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Kathryn Miranda has been teaching the Technique for 30-plus years and has been involved in teacher training for many of those years. She is on the faculty of the Syracuse University's Drama Department and Setnor School of Music. She has an ongoing interest in the evolutionary, physiological, and yet-to-be-understood underpinnings of the discoveries of F. M. Alexander. She attributes her openness and curiosity in lifelong learning to the influence of one of her teachers, Judy Leibowitz. To honour Judy, she edited a variety of original transcripts into the book *Dare To Be Wrong*: www.acatnyc.org/blog-posts/2014/10/02/dare-to-be-wrong-by-judith-leibowitz-now-available-on-kindle.

Judith C. Stern, MA, PT (ACAT, 1987), is a certified teacher of the Alexander Technique and a licensed physical therapist. She recently retired from private practice in New York. Judith's background includes 20 years of clinical experience as a physical therapist. The last 30-plus years have been devoted to teaching the Alexander Technique to people with pain syndromes or needing rehabilitation. Judy served professionally as vice-president of AmsAT and as Chairperson of ACAT, where she trained and was on the faculty for 30 years. In 2008 Judy co-chaired the 8th International Congress of the F. M. Alexander Technique. Today she mentors AT teachers and remains passionate about the work.

Rebecca Tuffey encountered Alexander Technique in 1994 at Sarah Lawrence College. She gained her teacher certification at ACAT in 2004 and entered the faculty, first as volunteer, then Associate. When ACAT closed, Rebecca joined the faculty at RIAT. She teaches at Pace University in the BFA acting program for Film & Media and maintains a private practice in New York City sharing AT and Jessica Wolf's Art of Breathing (cert. 2010). With Kim Jessor, Rebecca co-created explorations of Identity using AT, 'Embodying Empathy'. She co-founded the Judith Leibowitz Scholarship Fund with Jessica Wolf in 2019 and served as Chair/Co-Chair through 2025.

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