

November 18th 2002

Dear LUTSF Secretary,

I am enclosing a report on my presentation at the Conference of the International Association of Dance Medicine and Science, held at the New York School of Medicine in New York, U.S.A. from October 24-27 2002.

I am delighted to say that, in spite of difficulties described in my report, the reason for my being there, to promote the use of the Alexander Technique in young dancers to help prevent injuries and careless accidents, was made well known. The other presenters and delegates came from all over the world, Australia, Denmark, Greece, Holland, Sweden and other countries.

It was a great opportunity to share our experiences; for instance I was amazed to hear from one presenter that dancers in some Companies are still being forced to dance with injuries. I thought that this was not happening any more. We concluded that better education of young dancers in the care of themselves physically and psychologically, as in the Alexander Technique, could help bring about the end of these practices. Another presenter talked about the effects of a dancer having a total hip replacement operation, and we were able to look at preventing the misuse of the dancer which can lead to the necessity of having to have an operation, and also, if an operation has to be performed, how the use of the Alexander Technique can aid a better recovery.

There were other instances where I was able to lend my knowledge and experience to others, and, of course, I was learning and gaining more experience myself ... it is a continual process ... and I am very grateful to the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund for helping me to be at the Conference. I

am going to Australia for the second time to promote the use of the Alexander Technique in dancers next year, and intend to talk at Dance Schools, Colleges, and Universities, and put them in touch with Alexander Technique teachers in their neighbourhoods, as I did on the previous visit.

The results of this work come slowly; there is no "quick fix" with the Alexander Technique, and it requires patience and quiet persistence to teach. However, it is extremely rewarding work, and I am passionate about it! One day the Alexander Technique will be on every school's curriculum and there will be less back pain and stress. I strongly believe that we should be taught "mind and body maintenance," as a matter of necessity!

I am about to write an article about the I.A.D.M.S. conference for the Journal of the Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique, who kindly paid my conference fees, and who encourage me in my work. I shall, of course, mention your assistance.

I hope I have fulfilled some of my obligations to you. If I have missed anything, please let me know.  
Yours sincerely

Madeleine Samuelson

I am writing to thank the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund trustees for their help in getting me to New York to present at the annual conference of the International Association of Dance Medicine and Science this year. It was held in New York at the New York Medical Center, and hosted mainly by the Harkness Center for Dance Injuries.

My presentation was entitled "The use of the Alexander Technique in the prevention of hip injuries." I also gave a movement class called "Anyone can Dance." This latter was intended to encourage freedom of movement and expression by using the Alexander Technique, to people who felt for one reason or another that they could not dance. Although I had only six pupils who had to work on the not-too-clean concrete floor of a cafeteria, they all agreed that when they danced with music at the end of the class, their movements were more free and flowing, and, very importantly, they had enjoyed themselves.

There is a story to my presentation which I entitle "The Presenter's Nightmare, or "how the use of the 'self' is mightier than the machine." I shall be writing a report for the Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique who sponsored my conference fees.

The purpose of my presentation was to convince the delegates that the use of the Alexander Technique is beneficial to dancers. We were focussing on hip problems in dancers, including total hip replacement operations. As I had been a professional ballet dancer with the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet, had run a Ballet School for twenty years, and also been the recipient of a new hip joint, I fitted in well with the other presenters. Some of these were reporting on dancers performing with injuries and the consequences of doing so, some on the psychological effects, and some on the physical effects. The Alexander Technique regards the psychological and the physical as indivisible so I was able to use their work and conclusions in relation to my work. Prevention of accidents and injuries, particularly in young children before bad habits of "use" became too set, was the subject about which I was to talk. I had learnt to use a computer while recovering from the hip operation, so when I was asked to present at this, the sixth conference I had attended, I learnt to use Powerpoint, bought a video camera and tripod, and videoed one of my young pupils in her Alexander lesson, performing a step incorrectly, then correctly, and finally in the ballet classroom.

I worked on this presentation for nine months. When the conference opened I asked advice from the conference computer expert, and found I had been misinformed with regard to what I needed to bring with my computer. To cut a long story short I had to buy an expensive new component. First thing in the morning on the day of my presentation I made sure everything was working fine with my computer and the attachment to the large screen in the hall. Several people made their presentations before me, so my computer had to be unattached. Each presentation followed directly after the other with a tight time schedule, and when my computer was re-attached the picture did not appear on the large screen!

No matter what the expert did he couldn't get my picture on the screen ... so I had to use Plan C ( Plan B was to use the copy disk I'd brought with me, at great expense again, but there wasn't time to set up another computer.) Plan C was to just get up and talk. As I am passionate about my work I found it relatively easy and more personal to the audience, whom I involved. First of all the audience was sympathetic and warm towards me, and I had certainly practised what I was going to say. Secondly, I invited a member of the audience ... someone who was a dancer ... to be a "guinea pig" to demonstrate the step my little pupil had demonstrated on video, first with unnecessary tension in her neck and then with release. I had encouraged this by putting my hands on her neck, and she reported that it was much easier to carry the leg from one position to another with a released neck, with appropriate tension (thank goodness!). This gave her better balance and enabled a much freer movement in the hip joint.

So really this was almost a better way to demonstrate my point. Doing steps similar to the one she had demonstrated, a demi-grand rond de jambe en l'air, could, with bad "use" produce injuries in the hip joints. Later, during question time, I invited a questioner up on the stage to demonstrate another point I was making regarding the poise of a person's head in its dynamic relationship to the person's body. Again I think this method was more convincing than material on the screen. Judging from kind and positive remarks afterwards I think my presentation had more impact because of the non-use of the computer, and my "use of the self," as Alexander would have put it. I will enclose a disc of the outline of my presentation, but ask you to return it. Thank you.

I think I brought the use of the Alexander Technique for young dancers to people's notice in my presentation and also in "networking" during the Conference. Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to use my combined experience in dance, dance teaching, the Alexander Technique and knowledge of children at the Conference.

Yours sincerely,

Madeleine Samuelson White