

John Nicholls workshop April 2015 Melbourne

Thanks to John Nicholls for a wonderful workshop in Melbourne last week. It was truly astounding to be led for four days by such an experienced teacher, who has been so connected to the incredible lineage of Alexander Technique from the origins of FM's work. I always feel proud that Alexander was an Australian, but it was brought home to me just how groundbreaking his synthesis of ideas and original thought was at that time, and how extraordinary the development of hands on work has been. What power the technique has for good today.

With many wonderful teachers, John guided us in both a bigger group and small groups, hands on each other and with guidance from him. To manage a group of teachers seamlessly through many procedures and exercises is a testament to not only John's astounding hands, but also to his years of work and application in meeting and working with new and known teachers. For me the sheer volume of work that has led to such seemingly effortless expertise is an inspiration. We went always to the basics, stopping any tendency to teach, concentrating on the real communication of our hands that comes through our work on ourselves.

John led us through things like chair work in a way that explored the real benefits of a simple act of bending, for example monkey and rising up again, referring to the "back line" as in terminology from working with horses (the "top line" in a horse). Particularly he reminded us of the great benefit of thinking carefully about how we come up. I think all of us gained tremendous continuous length through an internal line, in rising up out of a monkey. The amazing thing for me was John's clarity of thought in proposing and introducing a procedure and explaining why it might be useful. He closely referenced many examples and ideas from past and present teachers, which helped us understand the evolution of thinking and practice that has taken place since Alexander started in his earliest years, leading to the "body" of experience we have today (sorry, couldn't resist). He gave plenty of examples of things that might work better than others, always explaining why. Particularly interesting were his comments about his own evolution as a teacher. Many delightful examples of how experienced teachers used words and precise expressions were not only extremely helpful, but indeed charming and humorous. It was good to laugh together, and chat about our work.

Procedurally it was things like hands under a neck on the table, how to place hands under the shoulder, thinking about feet and legs, and always John's amazing widening which moved our whole thoracic and back area up and out so subtly but powerfully. We worked on all fours, lifted legs, and took shoulders and arms in the upright and on the table. Breathing of course, and its unity with the back. For me the clear explanation of the function of the diaphragm and breathing was great - sometimes things just click and this was one time for me. I'm sure to have missed a few things in my memories of the four days but it was so comprehensive and we seemed to cover an awful lot in passing. There was such an amazing flow to the four days. I take my hat off to John for his ability to work with a group of teachers so fluently and inspiringly.

A big thank you to Jane Refshauge for organising this event efficiently and graciously. We were privileged to use her teaching room, a lovely high ceilinged room, with wood panelling and charming wooden windows, soft carpets, good chairs and tables and lots of space. We couldn't have had a better environment.

There was great enthusiasm to do another similar workshop if John is able to come again.