CONNECTED LIVES

PART THREE: IRENE TASKER AND THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

Image courtesy of Ruth Diamond

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Abstract

This is the third in a series of articles about women who played important roles leading to the founding of the American Center for the Alexander Technique (ACAT). The first article in this series, "Connected Lives," AmSAT Journal, no. 17 (Fall 2020), was devoted to Ethel Webb, who taught in Alexander's practice in New York from 1914 to 1922 and participated in the training of Frank Pierce Jones. The second article, "Margaret Naumburg and the Alexander Technique, Part 2," AmSAT Journal, no. 18 (Spring 2021), focused on Naumburg's introduction of the Technique into New York classrooms and the early history of the Alexander Technique in New York City. This article explores the life of Irene Tasker, who met Naumburg and Webb in Rome in 1913 at the first international Montessori Training. Tasker was F. M. Alexander's assistant, and she and Webb edited Alexander's books. She introduced the Technique into childhood education, and she was the first to teach it in a group, using everyday activities.

Editor's note: This is the third in a series of articles exploring the lives of a small group of women who played pivotal roles in the events leading to the birth of the American Center for the Alexander Technique (ACAT). Earlier parts focused on Ethel Webb (part 1) and Margaret Naumburg (part 2).

Irene Tasker (1887–1977) was almost eighty when she marked her fiftieth year teaching the Alexander Technique in 1967. Frail, with an injured foot and nearly blind in one eye, she still enjoyed teaching six to ten lessons a day (Stratil 2021, 151–54). In the autumn of that year, she gave an informal talk at the Constructive Teaching Centre, run by Walter and Dilys Carrington. She called it "Connecting Links." Standing before an audience of first- and second-generation teachers and trainees, all descended from Alexander's original training course, Tasker spoke of a thread that led her through disappointments and failures to her groundbreaking achievements as an Alexander Technique teacher (Tasker 1978, 1–2). She asked her listeners to understand her accom-plishments and her views in the context of the time, place, and community in which she was raised (Tasker 1978, 2).

Born during an era of great change, Tasker's accomplishments came from her ability to navigate between old and new ways of doing things. Raised in a prominent family of Wesleyan ministers, missionaries, scholars, and colonial supervisors, her outlook and actions were influenced by Victorian colonial values and her strict Wesleyan Methodist upbringing (Tasker, 1978, 8–9). But after graduating from college at the beginning of the twentieth century she found herself at the forefront of the progressive education movement. She attended the first International Montessori teacher training, studied with John Dewey, taught in Margaret Naumburg's progressive school in New York City, helped edit F. M. Alexander's books, and became one of the world's first Alexander Technique teachers. As an innovative thinker and groundbreaking teacher, she benefited from rapid social changes occurring during her lifetime. Montessori training introduced her to progressive education and her fascina-tion with Alexander's work was consistent with her interest in exploring new educational methods.

When Alexander broke with the progressive education movement over fundamental disagreements about the role that formal education plays in learning, Tasker agreed with Alexander's more conservative position which rejected the use of free play in classrooms. Yet she wanted to be remembered for founding the Little School in 1924, an achievement that blended ideas from the progressive movement in childhood education with the Alexander Technique. What's more, this school provided a laboratory for Alexander and his trainees to apply Alexander's concepts in their work with children. Teaching children in this manner demonstrated the potential of this kind of application work as an additional mode of instruction for adults within the Alexander Technique. Application work eventually became central to some Alexander Technique training courses spread particularly through Marjorie Barstow's work—and it was a key component of ACAT's training course, stemming from Judy Leibowitz's approach.

Early life

Young Irene Tasker did not fit narrowly defined Edwardian standards of physical beauty. She did not have the pale skin, rosy cheeks, big wide eyes, and dark lashes that were so admired at the time (Gio n.d., paras. 9–12). Shortsighted and gawky, she wore thick glasses and photos show her dressed in long, dark, and baggy dresses (Stratil 2021, 8), not in the starched lace, knee-length dresses that were popular among more secular upper-class girls (Reddy 2020, Children's Wear, para. 2). Her father, John Tasker, worried that his daughter was too homely and too intelligent to find a husband (Stratil 2021, 167). Cultural norms ampli-fied her self-doubts. The national British aversion to physical abnormalities was reflected in popular books like Mary Shelly's Frankenstein, Byron's The Deformed Transformed, and Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The social philosopher Herbert Spencer had coined the phrase "survival of the fittest" (Spencer 1864, 444), which was later used to reframe Darwin's biological theories in social terms. British authors like Rudyard Kipling cele-brated a myth of British physical perfection in short stories, one of which was based on Tasker's uncle George Sanderson, who was a colonial administrator and well-known elephant hunter in India (Tasker, Theodore 1971, 12; Theodore was Irene Tasker's older brother).1

Unmarried upper-class British women in the early part of the twentieth century did not have many career choices open to them. Tasker could not be a civil servant in India like her brother Theodore (Stratil 2021, 47) or a classical scholar like her father (Lenton n. d.) and grandfather (Wikipedia 2021a), or even a minister like the women in the more progressive "nonconformist" off-shoots of Wesleyan Methodism (Bebbington 2018, 247). Teaching was one of the few acceptable alternatives to marriage for a woman from Tasker's social class, and she was lucky to have attended the King Edward VII High School for Girls, which provided her with a strong academic

education. This school had been founded fifteen years earlier to meet the need for new teachers after Parliament mandated universal elementary schooling for both sexes in the 1870s (Vardy 1928, 15), but there was still strong local opposition to educating girls. When the school opened in a wing of an already crowded boys' school, one disgruntled master declared that he "wished all the girls in Birmingham had but one neck and that it had a rope around it" (Vardy 1928, 16–17).

Tasker was happy at school. Well-liked and respected by the other girls (Stratil 2021, 270), she participated in sports, theater, and music, but she blamed herself for not getting better grades. She worried that her body was not strong enough to support her mind. Echoing her father's fears, she berated her younger self for "too hasty replies—careless errors" (Tasker 1978, 2–3), bad posture, and poor eyesight. Despite her harsh self-criticism, she was accepted into Girton College, Cambridge in 1907 (Stratil 2021, 10).

Alexander arrives in London

When F. M. Alexander arrived in London in 1904, Tasker was a seven-teen-year-old schoolgirl. The London tabloids were filled with articles about a new government study regarding the physical deterioration of army recruits (Bentley 1965, 149). Opposing theories about the reasons for this alarming decline included child poverty, social Darwinism, the industrial revolution, and cultural malaise. Proposed solutions included social welfare initiatives, education programs, physical education regimes, and eugenics (Bentley 1965, 143–9). Frenzied editorials warned the country that the declining competence of British minds and bodies was undermining Britain's imperial power (Prior 2013, 4).

In 1910, Alexander added Man's Supreme Inheritance (MSI) to the burgeoning body of literature addressing the topic of British physical decline. He wrote, "There are many reasons why I should hesitate no longer in making my prelim-inary appeal, chief among them being the appalling physical deterioration that can be seen by any intelligent observer who will walk the streets of London or New York" (Alexander 2002, xxi).

Girton girl

In 1910 Tasker graduated from Cambridge (Stratil 2021, 12), which had been the exclusive domain of upper-class gentlemen and Anglican clergy for most of its history. Non-conformist clergymen like Tasker's father and grandfather were confined to their own smaller and less prestigious institutions. But the industrial revolution called for a new class of educated workers to fuel economic growth, and pressured by internal and external forces, all religious restrictions were removed by acts of parliament in the 1870s (Legislation.gov.uk., n.d.). At Cambridge, this led to a more diverse male student population and a gradual shift away from math and the classics, as new programs in language, science, and history were added to the system. But even as British universities opened to young men, public opinion firmly opposed college-educated women (Stephen 1933, 2–3).

In 1869, Cambridge opened Girton College, the first college for women within the university and the first university in Britain to offer residential higher education for women (Roberts n.d.). Two years later, Cambridge also opened Newnham College for women. Both colleges operated under severe restrictions: Women students needed written permission and a chaperone to attend lectures and could only visit the library during reduced women-only hours (Stephen 1933, 76).

The two colleges represented markedly different models of education, based on competing ideas about equality. Girton was founded on the principle that a "different education can never be the same as equal education." Its founder, Emily Davies, insisted on holding the students to

the same entry exams the men took, even though there were few academic women's high schools in England to prepare applicants for admission (Cambell, 2019). The Newnham model, created by Ann Clough and Henry Sidgwick, adjusted the entry requirements and curriculum to meet the needs of individual students (Stephen 1933, 52). Davies wanted to prove that women could compete on an equal playing field (Stephen 1933, 16); Clough wanted to provide education to as many women as possible.

Equality for women was hard won at Cambridge. When women petitioned— unsuccessfully— for full membership in the university in 1897, male students hung an effigy of a bicycle-riding woman from a dormitory window. The "Girton Girl" was lampooned in cartoons, novels, and plays as the embodied threat to the British way of life (Cunningham 1978, 2–4). The popular British novelist Marie Corelli characterized her as a "'Christ-scorning,' sexually knowledgeable, ugly, short-haired and bespectacled bicycle-riding and tennis-playing female" (Crozier-De Rosa 2009, 22). Girton was not officially affiliated with the uni-versity until 1948 (Springer 2021), which was the first year when degrees were given to women.

Tasker never saw herself as a brash "new woman." In Connecting Links, she described her younger self as a shy, gangly girl who stooped in corners and hid behind pianos, trying to make herself as small as possible (Tasker 1978, 7–10). But she was proud of her classical Girton education and, like Davies, never questioned the existing Cambridge system. Tasker said, "I think the discipline of having to write prose and verse in Latin and Greek, involving close adher-ence to rules of syntax, meter, in other words, putting principle into practice, helped to curb my slapdash ways, and proved of value when F. M. wanted help with his books" (Tasker 1978, 8).

Like her older brother Theodore, Tasker majored in the classics, crediting the Latin mens sana in sano corpore (a healthy mind in a healthy body) for arousing her interest in the "mind-body problem" (Tasker 1978, 7) . She also believed that her classical education made her more mindful and prepared her to understand Alexander's theory. "It was the thrill of encountering new (yet so old!) ideas which made me open to those ideas on education which I met as soon as I started teaching and which culminated in my reading F. M.'s early books" (Tasker 1978, 8).

Tasker's world expanded during her years at Girton. She attended lectures by Bertrand Russell and developed an interest in contemporary philosophy (Edman 1938, 143). Her college notebooks contain quotes from classical writers and a modern poem by Robert Browning. References to sports and cultural activities in Connecting Links suggest that she was moving away from the nar-row confines of her early life. She took up bicycle riding and participated in university life. One of her notebooks suggests that she was interested in music and played the piano (Stratil 2021, 218).

During her senior year, Tasker developed an inflammatory abdominal dis-ease "and for the last two terms … was very restricted, not allowed to bicycle or play games, etc." Tasker remembered that the doctors never told her the diagnosis, but she excused the doctors with an aside—"remember this was some sixty years ago!" At the time, Tasker blamed the unknown illness on her defective body. Speaking about it sixty years later, Tasker diagnosed her problem as coming from doing too much in an "end-gaining fashion" (Tasker 1978, 7).

Lady Isabel Margesson's home school

When Tasker graduated from Girton in 1910, no classics teaching posts were open in the relatively small pool of British girls' high schools. Her father wanted her to attend Cambridge's first graduate school dedicated to training women for the teaching profession, but Tasker was determined to start her career. A librarian at Girton told her that Lady Isabel Margesson was looking for some-one to teach at a home school. Her father objected to his daughter accepting what he saw as a dead-end position as a private tutor, but Tasker got her way (Tasker 1978, 4, 8). Her high school teacher,

Mrs. Gilson, was not surprised by this turn of events. She saw Tasker as a girl with an original and creative mind who had never wanted to be an ordinary teacher (Stratil 2021, 140).

Tasker had quietly joined the growing number of middle- and upper-class women in England who were finding ways to break out of their velvet corsets. Virginia Woolf, who was just five years older than Tasker, insisted that women needed to carve out their own spaces where they could break free of long-stand-ing masculine traditions. In two famous talks at Girton and Newnham colleges, Woolf referred to this kind of space as "a room of one's own" (Woolf 2022, 1–3). Without openly embracing Woolf 's overt feminism, Tasker found her "own room" in Margesson's house, where she was given the chance to teach various subjects to a small group of children of different ages and abilities (Stratil 1978, 197). "My activities with this family were varied, to say the least of it! Games of course, tennis and badminton, riding, acting.… I remember that for the coronation of King George V, we organized a pageant for which I had to train in their parts, not only our own household but the village people.… All of these experiences—which is why I mention them—were invaluable later when I had to teach people, not only children to apply the Technique to a variety of activities" (Tasker 1978, 5).

Lady Margesson was the perfect mentor for this insecure young woman just learning her craft. Married to a wealthy lord, she divided her time between a lavish estate in Worcestershire and a posh London home. Leaving the care of her home and children to servants, Margesson gave speeches all over the country on diverse topics, including domestic happiness, progressive education, women's suffrage, and tax resistance. She edited a children's science book and wrote for a wide variety of newspapers and magazines. Wildly creative, she patented various gadgets for women, including an innovative way to carry money safely and the "Lady Isobel apron fastener." Most of all, she enjoyed helping young women like Tasker to find their voices (Spiers 2020, 101–10).

Margesson gave Tasker assignments that involved public speaking and did everything possible to bolster her confidence. Many years later, in tribute to her mentor, Tasker repeated Margesson's words of encouragement during her 1967 talk to the Alexander Technique teachers when she said, "Of course, you'll never hide behind the piano again" (Tasker 1978, 12). By all accounts, Tasker was a talented teacher—good with children, patient, creative, and able to synthesize new ideas. In Lady Margesson's school, she began to develop her unique approach to teaching, one which would eventually incorporate theory and practice from Montessori and Alexander, along with pieces of progressive pedagogical theory introduced by Lady Margesson (Stratil 2021, 14–15).

Rome

Using her influence as a board member of the newly founded British Montessori Society, Lady Margesson arranged for Tasker to travel to Rome to attend the First International Montessori Training (Stratil 2021, 18–19). In the fall of 1912, Tasker moved into a boarding house in Rome, where she later met Ethel Webb, a pianist and music teacher who had recently started working for Alexander (Stratil 2021, 118), and Margaret Naumburg, whom Tasker described as "a young American who was studying with Montessori and was herself a pupil of [John] Dewey's and friend of his family" (Tasker 1978, 11). In their free time, the three women toured the city and celebrated Mardi Gras together (Bloch 2004, 95).

Webb lent her new friends a copy of Alexander's second book Conscious Control, and Tasker was struck by the similarity she saw between Alexander's use of the "means-whereby" and the way Montessori structured her classrooms so that "no piece of work done was an end in itself, but a means to another end.

For example, the children learned to write not by writing but by preparing the means for writing in other occupations" (Tasker 1978, 5–6).

From a different perspective, she recognized herself in the grim picture of physical deterioration that Alexander painted—tormented by a dreadful stoop, shy, self-conscious, and shortsighted. "The book had thrown a light, showing me clearly the cause of my faults and frustrations of the past." Wanting to move past the limitations that held her back, she hoped that reading Conscious Control would offer a means for her to change. But acknowledging this possibility may have frightened her. When she started lessons the following year and Alexander promised her, "We'll make ten women of you," she was horrified. "I already thought there was too much of me anyhow" (Tasker 1978, 10).

Dorset

In 1914, the Montessori Society assigned Tasker to a teaching position at a newly formed Montessori nursery that was part of an experimental community for delinquent teenagers (Stratil 2021, 23). Because the community was located in the rural county of Dorsetshire, more than one hundred miles north of London, Tasker had to discontinue her lessons with Alexander. The Little Commonwealth was run by Homer Lane, a protégé and friend of Dewey. Noticing similarities between juvenile crimes and children's games, Lane looked at teenage crimes as a form of play (Stinton 2005, 30). Further exploration of this idea led him to Montessori's theories, which defined play as the necessary work of childhood (Stinton 2005, 31). Over the course of his career, Lane experimented with vari-ous forms of self-government (Stinton, 2005, 32–33). His work became known to Montessori enthusiasts, including Lady Margesson and George Montagu, the founder of the Little Commonwealth community. Montagu (later Lord Sandwich) invited Lane to run the community at Dorset (Stinton 2005, 8).

By then, Lane had moved past Montessori's "orderly approach" to learn-ing, rejecting all educational systems in favor of what he called real freedom. Freedom, he said, "cannot be given. It is taken by the child in discovery and inventions" (Jones 1960, 19). By refusing to make decisions for the adolescents, Lane's risky approach allowed for mistakes—even dangerous ones, which he believed to be part of a necessary process of learning to self-regulate. "Homer Lane constantly pointed out that by self-government he meant self-regulation which could be applied to a baby in his eating, in his playing with fire, or to an adolescent in his responsibility for his own studies or bread and butter work" (Weaver n.d.).

The decision to include a group of babies and toddlers in a community de-signed for teenagers with criminal records appears to have been a "somewhat impromptu" housing solution for eleven children between the ages of two and five who had been removed from "disreputable" homes (Stinton, 2005, 54–55). The placements were expected to last a year, but the Montessori school continued until the dissolution of the Little Commonwealth community in 1918. Educated in their own classroom, the babies and toddlers were housed in cottages with the older "citizens" as a way for the older girls to develop their maternal instincts (Stinton 2005, 56). Lane's approach to education was incorporated into the Summerhill School by A. S. Neill and has been copied in "democratic free schools" around the world (Wikipedia 2021d).

It is not clear how many months Tasker spent teaching at this nursery, be-cause there is no record of her in the school's archives. But what is known is that the school opened in late winter 1913 and she was gone by June (Dorset History Centre, email to author, July 23, 2021). Tasker never spoke or wrote about her time at Dorset. Even in Connecting Links, where she describes each new teaching experience in detail, she skips right over Dorset. Issues regarding the oppositions between freedom, play, creativity, and self-control would turn up again in Tasker's teaching career, first as a Montessori teacher and later when she started working with Alexander.

Alexander Technique in Darlington

In September 1914, the Montessori Society placed Tasker in an experimental nursery school run by Darlington College (Stanton 1966, 116). She was offered a residence in exchange for teaching a weekly lecture series on Montessori Method principles. At the end of the term, the principal of the college praised Tasker's teaching, joking, however, that Tasker "guarded Mme. Montessori's methods as if they were state secrets!" (Stanton 1966, 116). Although Tasker could not resume lessons with Alexander, since he had moved his practice to New York (Bloch 2004, 98), she began to experiment with applying concepts from the Technique to her Montessori-based classroom teaching.

In Connecting Links, Tasker describes using "inhibition" and "means-whereby" to teach thirty small children in her classroom how to sing a new song (1978, 10). "I decided to call it a listening—not a singing—lesson; and I got them to sit with their fingers to their lips, to wait and just listen. I gave them a very simple tune, which I made up myself and made them wait… and wait; saying 'When you think you've really got it you can cross over the floor.'" After a short while, most of the children crossed the floor and sang the tune to Tasker's satisfaction. She said, "Their first attempt was correct and charmingly clear. There was none of that horrid noise so often heard in small children's class singing." She was pleased enough to have the children sing the song again for her Darlington College students. She explained that "this was due entirely to the application of Alexander's principle of inhibition and to getting the means really clear before starting to talk or act." A few of the children never stood up to sing, and Tasker said that it was "noble" of them to acknowledge their unpreparedness (Tasker n.d., 340). She did not explain how she determined that they were practicing inhibition as opposed to acting on something else, like shyness or fear.

In contrast, Tasker's translation of Montessori's Own Handbook described the Montessori approach to learning how to sing in tune:

The first application is that of calling forth rhythmic exercise by the sound of a march upon the piano. When the same march is repeated during sev-eral days, the children end by feeling the rhythm and by following it with movements of their arms and feet. They also accompany the exercises on the line with songs. Little by little the music is understood by the children. They finish,… by singing over their daily work with the didactic material. The "Children's House," then, resembles a hive of bees humming as they work. (Montessori 1914, 29)

In this approach the teacher provides the song, the rhythm, and the repeti-tion. The children are allowed to start singing immediately, making whatever "horrid noises" (Tasker n.d., 340) they like. In a contemporaneous talk at the University of London in January 1915, Tasker spoke of "liberty" as a core value in Montessori training. Defending herself against criticisms from both ends of the educational spectrum, she said:

This term has been widely used in connection with Montessori's work and sometimes in a sense which is not hers. This has caused much misunder-standing of a theory so that on one hand it is criticized as giving too much freedom to the child, and on the other it has been said that in Rome it was more didactic material than freedom. (Tasker 1915, 182)

Quoting one critic who claimed that Montessori enthusiasts believed that children could educate themselves, Tasker responded by defining the "sci-entific organization and direction of the child's work" as the actual means of education. When the teacher stayed in the background, invisible to the child, the child could attend to the materials in a productive way (Tasker 1915, 183).

The freedom of the child is therefore deliberately defined and limited, not arbitrarily but by the selection of the work most adapted to his needs at that particular stage of his development.… In other words, instead of leaving the child in free activity to receive his impressions in a haphazard manner from the outside world, [Montessori] has provided a definite technique by which through his occupations he shall lay the foundations of an orderly mind and prepare himself for

later intellectual and constructive work. I would like particular stress on the word "prepare" for "preparation" is the keynote for the whole method. (Tasker 1915, 183)

Freda Hawtree, the principal of Darlington College, was pleased enough with Tasker's work to write a proposal, in 1915, for an extension of the experi-mental nursery school, but she suggested a more eclectic approach. Hawtree questioned Tasker's emphasis on mastery at the expense of creativity. After praising Tasker's Montessori-based successes in building necessary skill sets, she wrote:

More attention should be paid to the aesthetic development of children, so that they may find freedom of expression through music, poetry, rhythmic movement and all kinds of handicraft, coordinating the various experiments in this Direction initiated by Dr. York-Trotter, M Jacques Dalcroze, and Professor Dewey.… Children must have real freedom if they are doing cre-ative work. (Stanton 1966, 127)

We can't know if Tasker would have incorporated any of Hawtree's sug-gestions into her classroom teaching, since the First World War put an end to the program in the summer of 1916, after the male teachers were all mobilized. Just before the nursery closed, a telegram fortuitously arrived from Margaret Naumburg in New York:

Want you for Position Miss Webb Cannot Take Enlarged School Develop New Primary Class School Mornings Dewey Class Afternoons If Specific Questions Cable My Expense Cable Immediately. (Stratil 2021, 27)

Music in America

In 1914, Margaret Naumburg and Claire Raphael opened a Montessori-based nursery school in a rented room at the Leete School, and a private school for girls in Manhattan (Staring and Aldridge 2014). The music program was designed and run by Raphael, who was a gifted musician. When Alexander arrived in New York the following year, the school's prospectus announced a related program in rhythmic free movement and dance based on his "funda-mentals in physical coordination" (Stratil 2021, 30). In 1916, when Tasker took over the morning class in the newly renamed and relocated Children's School, Raphael had left to get married, and Alexander was no longer affiliated with "free movement and dance." The school's new catalogue explained that Alexander would oversee a program of "Physical Coordination" to help children achieve the "physical and mental equilibrium" to overcome the "root of maladjustment." The change in programming suggests that although Alexander may have al-ready voiced objections to the way the Children's School taught music (Stratil 2021, 29–31), Naumburg was still committed to developing a curriculum that integrated the Alexander Technique into a Montessori-based program, along with several other methods including Dalcroze, Bentley, Trotter, and the work of other progressive educators (Hinitz 2002, 184).

While Naumburg and Raphael were experimenting with a variety of ed-ucational techniques, Tasker had been working to combine the Alexander Technique with the Montessori Method. Back in Darlington, she had success-fully inhibited any desire she may have had to instruct the children in how to sing, choosing instead to ask them to sit and listen. She successfully combined the two theories by using inhibition as a "means-whereby" for herself and the children while avoiding correcting, instructing, or interfering with how children approached any activity they engaged in. Her experience at Darlington helped her develop the skills that she needed for applying Montessori's "means" to her classroom teaching (Tasker 1978, 10).

In a Montessori classroom, the teacher is always actively engaged with the child in an unobtrusive way. But rather than giving specific instruction, the teacher's job is "preparing a series of motives of cultural activity, spread over a specially prepared environment, and then refraining

from obtrusive interference" (Montessori 2007, 4). Thus, the children are left to their own devices to the greatest extent possible. By introducing a toy or an "occupation," Montessori interventions guide children's attention to help them stay engaged in activities so that they can spontaneously develop the self-control necessary for teaching themselves new skills in an organized manner. Montessori said, "It is on this principle of the development of the child through handling interesting objects that I have built up my method of education" (2019, 27).

Alexander called for a more teacher-centric approach to instructing children in learning a new skill. He wrote in MSI that "the children of to-day, born as they are with very feeble powers of instinctive control, absolutely require certain definite instructions by which to guide themselves before they can be left to free activity" (Alexander 2002, 82–83). For this reason, he offered "conscious guidance and control" with thinking and a gentle guiding touch so that "old habits can be broken up, and every muscular action can be consciously directed until the new and correct guiding sensations have established the new proper habits, which in their turn become subconscious, but on a more highly evolved plane" (118). He wrote "to place him in the right environment and then to give him materials and allow him activities through which he may 'freely express himself ' presupposes, firstly, that the child if left to himself has the power of expressing himself adequately and freely" (76).

Alexander's criticism assumed that the child was being "left to himself," but Montessori worked to design lessons that kept the teacher actively engaged with the child in an unobtrusive way. Rather than giving specific instruction, the job of the teacher is "preparing a series of motives of cultural activity, spread over a specially prepared environment, and then refraining from obtrusive interference" (Montessori 2007, 4).

In his preface to the 1918 edition of MSI, Dewey echoed Alexander's cri-tique: "Freedom of physical action and free expression of emotions are means, not ends, and that as means they are justified only insofar as they are used as conditions for developing power of intelligence. The substitution of control by intelligence for control by external authority, not the negative principle of no control or the spasmodic principle of control by emotional gusts, is the only basis upon which reformed education can build" (2013, xxvii). An article about Dewey and the Montessori Method by Thayer-Bacon points out that Dewey was not a neutral party in this debate, since he was indirectly responsible for Montessori's long losing battle with the American progressive education community. Dewey never wrote or spoke against Montessori's methods, but his views were represented in print by his student William Kilpatrick, author of The Montessori System Examined, published in 1914. Kilpatrick called the Montessori Method old-fashioned, questioned its scientific basis, and criticized it for the freedom it gave children. Kilpatrick never mentions Montessori's idea of discipline coming through the children's work and, instead, describes the discipline as coming from the liberty the children have in working with the materials (10–12).

Naumburg rejected Dewey and Alexander's assertion that schools like hers allowed children to be controlled by emotional "gusts," insisting instead, that the school offered a learning space where the teacher took responsibility for structuring the experience in ways that would protect the child from feeling shame, insecurity, guilt, frustration, or other emotions that interfere with developing skills and habits of learning (Karier 1979, 68). Describing the way young children learn to monitor their own behavior through carefully planned activities and interactions with the group, the school catalogue said, "At first children flipped from one thing to another showing very little concentration, but from day to day an evident change takes place in the entire group, some more rapidly than others, until gradually the whole class becomes a self-directed community" (Hinitz 2013, 305).

There are reasons to believe that Tasker disapproved of Naumburg's in-terpretation of the Montessori Method. Subtle but significant differences can be glimpsed in their respective statements about Montessori. Speaking at the University of London in 1915, Tasker (1915, 182) said,

"I shall try tonight to illustrate a principle which underlies the whole of the work, by reference to the children not only as individuals, judged from the standpoint of intellectual progress and a general development, but also as social beings in their relations with others both at home and at school." In contrast, Naumburg's advertisement in the December 1916 issue of Seven Arts reads, "The aim of this school is to develop each child's personality as a basis for social consciousness. Emphasis is placed on creative self-expression through music, drawing, carpentry, etc (Seven Arts 1916, 197)." While both statements speak to the relationship between the individual and the larger social group, Naumburg cherished individual creativity, while Tasker emphasized self-improvement and mastery.

In 1916, Naumburg introduced Alexander to leaders of the progressive school movement in New York City, including Lucy Sprague Mitchell and Caroline Sprat, both of whom worked with the the Bureau of Educational Experiments (BEE) to get the Technique introduced into New York City classrooms (Staring 2015, 6). Still, Alexander did not approve of the schools that he visited. His 1918 edition of MSI included new chapters criticizing the methods utilized in these schools (Alexander 2013, 67–96). Alexander's offhand remark in a letter to Tasker, in the spring of 1917, suggests that she shared his views on the matter at this time. "The last two chapters of the first part will amaze you" (Alexander 2020, 25). Those two new chapters in MSI critiqued the progressive schools he had observed in New York, including Naumburg's classroom in the Leete School.

Meeting Dewey

John Dewey's afternoon seminar at Columbia University entitled "Psychological Ethics" attracted graduate students, undergraduates, teachers, and well-heeled society ladies who wanted to hear America's leading philosopher speak (Edman, 138). Fortunately for us, the 1916 Spring semester seminar was also attended by American philosopher Irwin Edman, and in his 1938 memoir Philosopher's Holiday, he mentions a "young lady who had come from England where she had studied philosophy with Bertrand Russell at Cambridge" (143). This young lady was almost certainly Tasker, a Cambridge student who had registered for Dewey's class when Russell lectured there in 1910 (Stratil 2021, 17).

Edman (1938) uses Tasker's reactions to Dewey's lectures as a literary vehicle for explaining the difference between Dewey's pragmatism and more classical approaches to describing reality.

> She [Tasker] listened patiently for weeks to Dewey's varied insistence that the truth of an idea was tested by its use. One day she burst out toward the close of the seminar in the sharp, clipped speech of the educated English woman: "But, professor, I have been taught to believe that true means true; that false means false, that good means good and bad means bad; I don't understand all this talk about more or less true, more or less good. Could you explain more exactly?" (143)

Tasker's religious and classical education had been grounded in Plato's belief that truth is an eternal property that does not reside in "the changing world of sensation, which is the object of opinion, but with the unchanging reality which is the object of knowledge" (Plato, 266). Dewey espoused a more dynamic world view, asserting that mental perception and sensation influence our understanding of external reality. While Alexander worked to overcome the traditional split between definitions of mind and body, Dewey and the other American pragmatists struggled to unite human consciousness with external reality (Reck 1984, 88–89). Dewey was exploring ways in which we become more conscious. Unlike Alexander, who maintained the classical separation of external stimuli from internal response, Dewey defined them as parts of a single coordinated event which he called an experience. For Dewey, an experience is different from something that happens to you. As living creatures, we face an ever-changing environment. However, our experience of our environment and its changes is such that usually, things happen, we notice

something about them, and then they slip away from us. But then sometimes we notice a stream of sensations, thoughts, and feelings in a unified manner that marks them, for us, as one unified experience—a great meal or a big fight followed by a long walk. These experiences are distinguished by a sense of completeness (Dewey 1980, 60). Dewey's seminar dealt with creating these experiences (Edman, 141).

Setting up the scene between Tasker and Dewey, Edman uses the words "varied insistence" and "patiently" to capture Tasker's growing frustration with Dewey's slow reflective process and shows us the inhibitory quality of Dewey's gentle response to Tasker's question about truth.

Professor Dewey looked at her mildly for a moment. Then he said, "Let me tell you a parable. Once upon a time in Philadelphia there was a paranoiac. He thought he was dead. Nobody could convince him he was alive. Finally, one of the doctors thought of an ingenious idea. He pricked the patient's fin-ger. 'Now,' he said, 'are you dead?' 'Sure,' said the paranoiac 'that proves that dead men bleed'.... Now I'll say true or false if you want me to, but I'll mean better or worse." (Edman 1938, 143)

Characteristically, Dewey did not meet Tasker's challenge head on. Rather, he directed her attention from the definition of truth to a flaw in the doctor's method of relating to his patient. The doctor's argument depended on a con-sensual agreement about the conditions necessary for human life. The doctor offers this as a connecting point between them. He says, let's agree that if you bleed, you are alive. It was a rational, mind- centered appeal. By refusing to even consider the doctor's premise regarding the definition of life, the patient refuses to connect with the doctor. Dewey was saying that the existence of a truth depends on our shared agreement about its validity based on our socially shared experiences. Edman's vignette ends with the paranoid patient, so there is no way to know what Tasker thought of Dewey's answer. But what is known is that sometime during that seminar, Tasker and Dewey embarked on a long friendship (Stratil 2021, 27–29), and that Tasker played an important role in incorporating some of Dewey's ideas into Alexander's books (Williamson, 2017, 36).

Training with Alexander

Tasker left Naumburg's school in 1917 but said very little about her experiences there. She mentioned it briefly in Connecting Links, describing the school as "a contrast in experience. A small class of older children—some of them very gifted" (Tasker 1978, 13). In an earlier talk she said that she had struggled to find a way to reach one of the children. "His name was Donald, a pretty little boy of about eight, with a fierce stammer. He turned out to be the first child I really could not teach. He 'end-gained,' he wouldn't listen, he wouldn't rea-son; he just didn't respond in any way. He was really impossible" (Tasker n.d., 341). Calling this her "first failure" as a Montessori teacher, Tasker (n.d.) said that it caused her to question her career choice. She thought "if, with all my gifts for teaching, there could be conditions like this over which I could have no influence, [I] would rather change my job." When Donald responded to a course of lessons with Alexander by becoming "reasonable and cooperative," she decided that she wanted to become an Alexander Technique teacher (341).

Tasker's reasons for leaving Montessori were probably more complicated than experiencing a failure with one student. She had worked hard to find an autonomous role outside the strict Wesleyan community, which offered few career opportunities for women. While still in her early twenties, she had ini-tiated one of Britain's first Montessori programs, lectured to college students, and trained other teachers. Her first teaching job at Dorset gave her full charge of her own Montessori program. But at Naumburg's school she was a part-time associate teacher with very little, if any, control over how the school ran.

In the middle of World War I, the chances of finding another Montessori teaching job were slim. There were no Montessori teaching positions in war-torn England, and after a surge of popularity, Montessori was on the decline in America, mainly because of criticism from Dewey and his protégé William Kilpatrick. Dewey, then considered by many to be the dean of American ed-ucation, claimed that the Montessori Method asked too much of children at a young age and that it was too controlled. He wrote that Montessori has an "unconscious suspicion of native experience and consequent overdoing of ex-ternal control in the material supplied as in the teacher's orders" (Dewey 1916, 232). But the real death blow to the American Montessori movement came from Kilpatrick, known as "Columbia's Million Dollar Professor" (Encyclopedia. com n.d., para 3). Hugely influential with educational associations across the country, Kilpatrick published a book in 1914 that was sharply critical of the Montessori Method for giving the children too much freedom and leaving them unsupervised in their activities (Thayer-Bacon 2012, 13). Other critics followed suit, calling Montessori "outdated, overly rigid, overly reliant on sense-training" (Kramer 1976, 227–9). The differences between the Montessori Method and the methods that Dewey and Kilpatrick favored were not substantial. Still, their criticisms effectively stopped the Montessori method from spreading in the United States (Thayer-Bacon 2012, 16).

After she decided to leave the Children's School in 1917, Tasker wrote to Alexander and Dewey asking for help finding a job at a publishing house. Alexander responded with an offer to work as his assistant (Stratil 2021, 37). Alexander was about to return to London for the summer, and so it would seem that Tasker had to find another job during that time to support herself (Tasker n.d., 341). However, that proved not to be the case, since there was a compelling reason for bringing Tasker on board right away. With Dewey's help, Alexander had found an American publisher for his new edition of MSI (Bloch 2004, 113). His current teaching assistant, Ethel Webb, had already started ed-iting the book, but Tasker had more experience as a writer and translator. By July, Alexander coordinated editing efforts between Tasker and John Macrae at Dutton Publishing, expressing complete confidence in Tasker's editing skills. "Do not hesitate in doing anything you feel certain is for the good of the book" (Alexander 2020, 23–24).

That summer, Alexander arranged for her to work with a family's children, although she had not yet begun to train with him and had not even completed a full course of lessons. Eager to start teaching the Technique, Tasker continued to develop her own instructional method, first used four years earlier at Darlington, that applied inhibition and means-whereby in her lessons. She called her lessons application work to distinguish her approach from Alexander's more formal, hands-on lessons. "I did what I could in getting them to inhibit in the sense of stopping to think out 'means' in whatever they were doing—games, riding, swimming, canoeing, acting plays" (Tasker 1978, 13–14). Tasker's early work was instrumental in identifying ways to teach the concepts without using hands-on. And she did this with Alexander's blessing. He wrote, "So delighted that you are moving forward with them all. It's splendid. By all means take as many as you can of them in the work. But don't overdo yourself " (Stratil 2021, 38).

At this time, Alexander did very little formal teacher training for his assistants, trusting them to find their own ways of working as he had done himself. He said that each teacher had to figure out how to teach the Technique on their own (Bloch 2004, 44), and Tasker did exactly that, focusing on inhibition and the means-whereby. By then, she had faith in her ability to teach these concepts to children using words and activities. She had been well trained to do this, first by Lady Margesson and then more completely by the Montessori Method training. It would have been natural for her to continue using the Montessori Method of setting up developmentally appropriate activities that would allow the children to teach themselves the skills of inhibition and the means-whereby.

Finding her voice

Alexander arranged for Tasker to provide application work and hands-on lessons during the summer of 1918 for an eighteen-year-old girl in California. John and Alice Dewey were also going to California, so that Dewey could deliver a series of lectures at Stanford University in Palo Alto, and the three friends travelled together on the cross-country train. Tasker gave Dewey some lessons and talked to him about his upcoming lectures, which were later expanded and published as Human Nature and Conduct (Stratil 2021, 43). When she got to Hollywood, she heard many celebrities speaking against America's recent entrance into the war. Hearing people at a luncheon "running down England and denigrating her war efforts," she "came right out (instead of over-inhibiting!) and spoke [her] mind (Tasker 1978, 14)." William G. DeMille, the older brother of the movie producer Cecille B. DeMille, invited Tasker to speak publicly in favor of the war. Her pro-war talk at the Hollywood Town Hall was the first of a series of informal talks she gave to various ladies' groups in California to raise funds for the British Red Cross. Tasker viewed this as a turning point in her life, crediting her Alexander Technique work and experience giving talks about Montessori for her increased self-confidence (Tasker 1978, 14).

In 1918, Tasker returned to New York, where she sat in on Alexander's lessons with one young man and provided application work to him and at least one other student (Stratil 2021, 44–45). In 1920, she returned to England, where her training began in earnest. She spent her time observing lessons, helping Alexander with pupils, editing Alexander's new book, and doing "odd jobs" (Stratil 2021, 47). In the summer of 1922, she traveled to the continent with one of Alexander's young students, acting as a teacher, guide, and chaperone (Stratil 2021, 46). At some point during this time, she took a job teaching in Hertfordshire (Stratil 2021 341). It is not clear whether she was hired as an Alexander Technique teacher or if she decided by herself to incorporate the Technique into her classroom. Alexander visited the school to help her divide the children into small groups, identifying the ones with "really bad use" for special lessons (Stratil 2021, 47) . The other children were taught in groups. Once again, Tasker focused her group work on teaching inhibition, as she had at Darlington. This time, instead of teaching a song, she decided to give the children a poem to learn. And instead of just listening quietly, the children were taught to "give their orders" (Stratil 2021, 46–50). A subtle but significant shift was taking place in Tasker's teaching. She was moving away from a core Montessori principle, which was that all children have an innate capacity to manage their own learning under the correct conditions, as she gradually al-tered Montessori's hands-off methods to include more corrective interventions.

The Little School

Over the next several years, Alexander continued sending young students to Tasker for tutoring and application work, but her practice struggled. For a period between May and October 1923, her journal recorded "no teaching work." However, she was still assisting Alexander in lessons, editing his books, and developing her application work while supporting herself with odd jobs. She reconnected with friends and family by traveling to India, America, and continental Europe. During this period, she spent a short time doing appli-cation work with children at a small school in Hertfordshire (Stratil 2021, 47).

In 1924, an opportunity arrived from an unexpected direction when Tasker's eight-year-old nephew, Sandy, was sent home from India. It was not uncommon for British families stationed in India to send their children back to England when they were seven or eight years old, because they believed that the native climate and environment would permanently weaken their children's constitu-tions (Encylopedia.com, 2022). Tasker's mother and uncle, George Sanderson, had spent

a large portion of their own childhoods living with their grandparents in England and attending local schools, while their parents, Daniel and Sarah Sanderson, stayed behind in Mysore (Findlay and Holdsworth 1924, 269).

Tasker does not give any details about Sandy's symptoms, but her brother Theodore and his wife Jessie decided that he was too nervous and excitable to attend a regular English school (Stratil 2021, 52). Diagnosing Sandy's "case" as "unusually bad," Alexander said that he needed fulltime adult monitoring while he did his lessons and went about his daily life (Stratil 2021, 52). This was the opportunity Tasker had been waiting for. She found other children to keep him company while she supervised his schoolwork. Like Sandy, each of these children would take half-hour individual lessons with Alexander two to three times a week (Whittaker 2021) to support their classroom work.

Finally, Tasker had found a place where she could continue developing the groundbreaking application work she had been experimenting with since first being introduced to the Technique. She set up a classroom in a small, dark office in the back of Ashley Place. She repainted the walls a light cream color and filled the room with colorful materials. Transforming the room into a typical Montessori classroom, Tasker provided small chairs and desks for the littler children (Stratil 2021, 53–54), even though Alexander was opposed to manipulating the environment to suit children's size or special needs. He wrote, "We need to educate our children not our furniture" (Alexander 2002, 92). However, there is no indication that Alexander objected to the way her classroom was set up.

In an unpublished appendix to Alexander's new book The Use of the Self, which she was editing, Tasker explained that children in the Little School were not allowed to learn a task like writing until Alexander had taught them "to maintain for themselves the primary control of their use" (Stratil 2021, 309). This meant that she was requiring individual lessons with Alexander as a preliminary step before applying Montessori's use of structured tasks and a prepared environment. Tasker said the Montessori work had taught her the value of giving children the means and then leaving them to carry on with a minimum of interference, but that now she had incorporated the Alexander Technique as her foundation (Tasker 1978, 20) . Alexander's approach was predicated on the premise that "the stupidity of letting children go wrong is that once they go wrong, their right is wrong; therefore, the more they try to be right, the more they go wrong" (Alexander 2000, 30). This was a core issue in how Alexander's approach differed from Montessori's. Montessori insisted that when children are engaged in developmentally appropriate activities, their continued interest in and attention to the activity will entice them to recognize and correct their own errors. She believed that children need to make these errors repeatedly in order to teach themselves new developmental skills (McCarthy 2022).

Despite these differences, Tasker continued to use a combination of the two approaches, which included regular hands-on Alexander Technique lessons complemented by Montessori Method materials. Ethel Webb's niece, Erika Whittaker (née Schumann), described a set of cardboard cutout letters that Tasker used to teach writing. She mentioned other Montessori-type teaching materials, like a knobbed set of cylinders of varying diameter that fit into corresponding sockets in a block of wood (Stratil 2021, 53–54). The cylinders that Webb described were designed to help children master the manual and perceptual skills involved in manipulating objects, noticing different widths and placing them sequentially. If they got to the end of the task and found that they had not fit all the cylinders correctly in the rack, their interest in the activity would lead them to repeat the process, in this way gradually developing new skills in perception and movement (McCarthy 2022).

Over time, the Little School served as a laboratory, first for developing Tasker's application work with children and then for her to pass along her teaching methods to Alexander's trainees. But most of them were less inter-ested in mastering the art of application work than in emulating

Alexander's hands-on work. During the first training, one group of trainees, led by Patrick Macdonald, concentrated on developing hands-on skills by working with one another. In contrast, a few others gravitated to Tasker's work. Erika Whittaker remembered working with Tasker this way:

She used to ask us to dinner in her tiny flat and one person would peel pota-toes, another do the sprouts, another do something else, but it was all to do with keeping your length in a useful activity, some people sitting on the floor and some on the sofa. And why not sit on the sofa? Be comfortable! Sit right back with the support behind your back and make yourself comfortable. It was all very alive and with the idea that you carry the Alexander work into the things you are doing. You are observing and not just standing around "doing Alexander work"…. On the whole I think I learnt more from my work with Irene Tasker in the school with the children. (Hunter 2013, 15)

Whittaker must have recognized the similarity of Tasker's practical approach to the way her aunt Ethel Webb had taught her the Technique when she was a young girl, by gently reminding her to "Keep your length, dear" and then showing her by taking her head forward and up and lengthening her so that she could experience how to keep that going when she was writing or paint-ing or playing the piano. Whittaker said, "If she caught me slumping around somewhere, she said, 'You are coming down, dear,' and up you came. It was as simple as that because my length was then part of what I was doing, not separated out, and it was my responsibility" (Whittaker 2011).

Over the next several years, the Little School grew steadily, enrolling as many as twelve students of different ages and backgrounds. The classroom functioned more like Lady Margesson's home school than a traditional elemen-tary or Montessori school. The children came at nine o'clock in the morning and stayed a full day. According to Whittaker, there was a very limited range of subjects taught and few extracurricular activities, probably because of the small space, the small number of students, and the lack of resources. It was not really set up to be a fully functional grammar school, at least not while it was at Ashley Place (Stratil 2021, 60). Whittaker (2021) remembered "reading and writing according to the individuals. It wasn't subjects as we understand them now, not at all." She said that Alexander was not concerned with teaching the children academic subjects and that Tasker did not have the resources to set up an academic program. Most of the children were sent to the school to overcome problems like stuttering or nervousness. Whittaker thought that Tasker cared more about keeping the Alexander Technique work going than about teaching writing or sums. She said that most of the children had prob-lems and remembered seeing remarkable changes over relatively short periods (Whittaker 2021, 5:45).

Sometime in either 1928 or 1929, Alexander brought in a young Froebel teacher named Margaret Goldie to teach at the school so that Tasker could devote more time to helping Alexander edit The Use of The Self. Miss Goldie, as she later became known, had been referred to Alexander for lessons by the principal of the Froebel Institute, where she was training to become a teacher (Stratil 2021, 54). More than sixty years before Montessori started the Casa del Bambini, Froebel had designed a new method of teaching young children using specially designed educational materials to aid in self-directed sensory learning. Comparing young children to seedlings in a garden that must be diligently nurtured and protected from undesirable elements to achieve complete maturity, he called his school "kindergarten," which translates to "child garden" in English (Wikipedia 2022).

Given the similarity of the Froebel and Montessori methods, Goldie's place-ment was pedagogically sound. But Goldie and Tasker were ill matched. Tasker had overcome her early shyness to become a jolly, outgoing person. "She liked to go to concerts, she liked to meet other people," and "she had lots of uni-versity friends." Whittaker described Tasker as a big personality with lots of charisma. Goldie was quieter and more reserved with an austere self-control that appealed to Alexander (Whittaker 2021). But while quiet and fiercely loyal to Alexander, Goldie was more openly non-conformist than Tasker. She "was highly independent and cared little for convention. When the 'Ashley Place people' went together to the theatre and the national anthem was played,

she would refuse to stand up; and when, after dinner, F. M. would smoke a cigar, Goldie would sometimes have one too—something 'not done' in polite society in those days" (Hunter 2015, 4).

Whittaker said that Alexander seemed uncomfortable with Tasker's exuber-ance, remarking on her loud voice, which he saw as a sign of lack of self-control. Tasker had strong opinions about the right way of doing things, mixed with a strict sense of integrity which had played a part in her quitting her posts at Dorset and Walden and removing her name from her own translation of the Montessori Method handbook. Whittaker remembered that FM was more comfortable with Goldie, who was more deferential than Tasker, but that the children preferred Tasker, because Goldie "was so very quiet and so apparently critical" (Whittaker 2021, 33:14).

Things came to a head in the 1930s after Alexander decided to move the school out of Ashley Place. The success of the Little School combined with the requirements of Alexander's new training program had created a space crunch. In 1933, Esther Lawrence, the retired head of the Froebel Institute, offered a house in Kensington as a new home for the Little School if she were allowed to bring in a group of Froebel teachers to teach some academic subjects. When negotiations fell apart, Alexander moved the school to his estate in Penhill. The distance from London meant the children would become boarders (Stratil 2021, 68–69). Early in 1934, George Trevelyan, the secretary of the Alexander Trust fund, sent out a letter to parents of prospective students explaining the move. But there was no mention of a headmistress or of Tasker.

In March 1934, Lady Margesson sent a strongly worded letter to Trevelyan. "Please forgive me for expressing my amazement at the absence of any recog-nition of her [Tasker's] pioneer work in adapting Alexander's principles to the needs of the abnormal child. Her work has been so creative, so marvelous in its practical application of the use of the self " (Sratil 2021, 71).

A month later Tasker wrote her own letter to Alexander. Politely worded and restrained, the letter reflects the deep hurt that Tasker must have felt. "In view of my practical experience in directing the work of the Little School during the past 9 years, I should have been consulted from the very first." Tasker told Alexander she would have to resign if the matter was not resolved. Receiving no satisfaction, she followed through with her ultimatum, although she gra-ciously agreed to stay on for another term during the transition. Whether or not Alexander consciously planned to push Tasker out, Tasker's resignation paved the way for Goldie to take over the work at the school (Stratil 2021, 72–74). However, as she had done after her jobs at Dorset and in New York, Tasker found a way to continue to develop her work on her own terms. She resigned as of the end of July and shortly after that, Alexander secured a teaching position for her in South Africa, with a family in the Orange Free State (Stratil 2021, 77).

After the Little School

Moving to South Africa provided Tasker with an opportunity to have complete autonomy over her own career. Between 1934 and 1949 she continued to break barriers by building a successful teaching practice in Johannesburg, training other teachers, starting a small children's school, and continuing "to spread the word" about the Technique through lectures and demonstrations (Stratil 2021, 77–146). Like Margaret Naumburg in America, Tasker continued to be interested in finding new ways to introduce the Technique into public schools. A public address she gave to a group of 300 people under the auspices of the Transvaal Teachers Association led to a proposal for offering the Technique in Transvaal schools. Unfortunately, the proposal never came to fruition for a variety of reasons, including the difficulty of training new teachers, Alexander's fear of letting unqualified people teach the Technique, Tasker's desire to return to England, and the court case between Alexander and Ernst Jokl regarding an article Jokl wrote criticizing the Technique (Stratil 2021, 84–86).

Around this time, Tasker started building a children's class with the help of her assistant Joyce Roberts, who Tasker was training to become a teacher. According to Roberts, "The day began with a general lesson. Miss Tasker then went on with individual work while I supervised the application of what had been discussed.… I watched, enthralled at teaching methods which applied the principles of the work to education, writing, speech as well as movement. The way those children of all ages and conditions were made to inhibit[,] think[,] add means whereby before letting it happen was as extraordinary as the role results were startling" (Stratil 2021, 88).

Unlike Naumburg, who had applied the Technique to creative activities like dancing and music, Tasker was more interested in using it as a remedial treatment. She said, "The demand for the Technique has generally come on behalf of children suffering from a form of disability" (Stratil 2021, 191). As at the Little School, most of the children in this class were there for remedial work, but class was also open to children with no diagnosed problems. This class of children was never formally organized into a school, but it allowed Tasker to continue integrating the Technique into academic studies and daily activities. When Tasker returned to England for the final time in 1949, she disbanded her little class of children. This was the last time she ever worked with a group of school children.

In 1943, shortly before returning to England, Tasker took on the Australian-born anatomist and anthropologist Raymond Dart as a new student, thus introducing him to the Alexander Technique. After taking a short course of lessons with Tasker, Dart started experimenting with a series of developmental movements that Joan and Alex Murray later evolved into the Dart Procedures (Stratil 2021, 116). These procedures were later incorporated into Alexander Technique training courses, including ACAT's training course in New York.

Conclusion

Irene Tasker's Connecting Links (1978) was Irene Tasker's testament to the Alexander Technique. In it, she called for present and future teachers to pass on the Technique from generation to generation. She said that our challenge as teachers is to accept new ways of doing things while refusing to do the wrong things (Tasker 1978, 25–26) . The trick, of course, is to know the difference— and that has been a sticking point among Alexander Technique teachers since Alexander's death. Errors and missteps are inevitable, and there is no way to be sure of whether we are moving in the right direction, since right and wrong only exist in relation to one another. Like living organisms, new educational techniques often emerge from the tension created by oppositional pulls. In Tasker's case, the forces were personal, professional, and cultural. Pulled between her classical roots and the progressive forces of the twentieth century, Tasker found a way to move forward and create something new. Although she was by nature a purist, she ended up modifying and combining Alexander's principles with Montessori's methods to create application work for children and adults.

Unlike the first-generation teachers in Alexander's training classes, Tasker did not have the benefit of being part of a three-year training and did not choose to concentrate on using hands-on skills as the primary means for teaching conscious control. As she had done many times before, Tasker turned what seemed to be a disadvantage into an advantage. Like Alexander himself, Tasker invented her own way of teaching using her own special gifts by teaching his principles through application work.

Tasker's great talents were her gift for teaching children and her ability to synthesize new ideas. As soon as she read Alexander's Conscious Control while in Rome, she connected Montessori's "mezzi" with Alexander's "means-whereby," recognizing the inseparable connection between our inner and outer environ-ments.2 She understood that children learn best when they are calmly engaged with their environment. It was from that deep knowledge that Tasker started to teach

conscious inhibition in the classroom, even before she had had many lessons with Alexander. Having grown up feeling that there was something wrong with her, Tasker devoted much of her work energy to helping children with learning problems.

Tasker's application work combined Montessori Method techniques with Alexander Technique principles. It introduced a paradigm of teaching the Technique that gave the pupil much more autonomy and control over their own learning. She also moved the lessons in the Technique out of a single chair into a classroom of learners, even though many first-generation British Alexander Technique teachers, concerned with issues of purity, rejected group teaching and placed little emphasis on application work. But believing that each teacher needed to find their own way, much as Alexander had found his, two of these early British teachers, Marjorie Barstow and Erika Whittaker, were drawn to Tasker's more experimental approach to teaching through application work.

In America, Judith Leibowitz incorporated application work into the train-ing process itself. Challenging pupils and trainees to "Dare to Be Wrong," she used the challenge of learning hands-on skills as a primary application for developing the mental skills at the core of Alexander's work. At ACAT, the stimulus of putting hands on other people was taught as application work for developing awareness, inhibition, and direction (Diamond 2015, 13). Leibowitz understood that good teaching needs to combine accurate verbal explanations with clear sensory experiences.

Today, as online teaching becomes more common and teachers must explore new methods for teaching people how to develop conscious skills and choices, we can recognize the value of Tasker's early experiments in expanding the way the Technique is taught and incorporated into daily life activities. As Tasker said, "It is only as individual people who have learned to use the Technique as a way of life carry it into various spheres of work, that Alexander's ideas will come to percolate into the general atmosphere of thought" (1978, 29).

Endnotes

1 "Toomai of the Elephants," collected in Kipling's *Jungle Book* (1894). See http://www. authorama.com/jungle-book-11.html.
2 The word mezzi (Italian, means) is drawn by Tasker (1978, 6) from one of Montessori's sayings: "Give the child the 'mezzi,' the means—never the 'contenuto,' the content."

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