

# The Discovery and Use of the Eye Order in Teaching the Alexander Work

Countess Catharine Wielopolska and Dr Mario Pazzaglini  
Edited by Carol A. Attwood

On a visit to the New York Training School in New York City, Countess Catharine Wielopolska and Dr Mario Pazzaglini spoke to the students about the discovery and use of the eye order in teaching the Alexander work. The Countess, known to her associates and friends as Kitty, is the founder of the Wielopolska Training School and is the top master in the field today. She is one of the few people alive who studied personally with F. M. Alexander, for whom the work is named. She has worked in the field for nearly 60 years. In addition to her long association with the work, she has an impressive list of academic and nursing credentials.

Dr Mario Pazzaglini, who has been associated with the Alexander work for over seven years, is a clinical psychologist in private practice. He has an impressive and varied list of accomplishments. Dr Pazzaglini, Mario to those who know him, is a clinical teacher at the Jefferson Medical School in Philadelphia. He is consultant for both the Bureau for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, and the Board of Education in the State of Delaware. He is credited with starting the drug clinics in that state. Dr Pazzaglini is uniquely qualified to give insight into the Alexander work. His dual background includes both clinical psychology and neurophysiology. One of his key areas of research is in the field of imaging (or image formation), and he has studied with Dr Roberto Assagioli in the field of psychosynthesis. In addition, he enjoys drawing and painting to further his own awareness of the process of imaging.

*Carol A. Attwood*

*Kitty*

It is a great pleasure to be here. I have known New York but I don't know your school so I am delighted to see such a lot of people. I thought that I would begin about FM himself, because very few of you knew him personally. Perhaps I am the only one in the room who knew him, and a few stories about him might bring him alive to you.

He was about my height, very compact, very springy, so well coordinated that if you saw him walking down the street you wouldn't especially notice him because he was so smooth and so easy. He was amusing; sometimes very lively. I remember a few things about him that I think that you may not have heard. After a session of ten lessons in the summer, he would take you by the left arm and say, 'Well keep it going' and out you would go. When you would come back a year later he never made any comment. You didn't know if you had deteriorated or not. He would just say, 'Oh come in', and then he would begin again. One time he said, 'If you're a burglar when you come to me, you'll be a better burglar.'

You can reason that out yourself. I never did. And another favourite thing of his was, 'If it's good, throw it away.' And, 'Keep it going.' He said the 'hands over the back of the chair' and 'the whispered ahs' were the best things that he thought he had worked out. Those things he worked out from singing techniques that he had picked up. 'Hands over the back of the chair' was a great thing. We were doing it for hours. I am sure that he worked by himself everyday. He would have assumed you worked everyday. You just didn't ask questions at all. You didn't want to – you thought well, maybe I'll learn something. One day he came prancing in very, very electric; just up on it. He said, 'I've got it – the trouble with Christ is that he didn't have a system.' Well, you should have seen peoples' expressions. He said, 'I've got it, I've got it with the "whispered ahs". Don't start with a smile, but think of something funny.' It's a completely different center. For instance, a stroke victim can't smile but, if you say, 'Do you remember that funny thing that happened?', then they smile. F. M. didn't know any neurology or anatomy. Have you all read Lulie Westfeldt's book? So you know how he felt about it. We had no anatomy. We didn't study any of those things. Lulie always thought that I was fortunate to have been a nurse, and maybe that's true. Of course one of his things was 'beware of specifics.' He didn't say avoid them but beware. If you get tied up in specifics you can forget the primary control. I'd like to emphasize what a great man he was. A genius, no question. Perhaps he was not a genius in teaching. I don't believe many geniuses who make these big discoveries are outstanding in teaching. There are only a few of those. His first discovery

was the primary control, which lies in the relationship of the neck, head and back. The second was how to influence it through direction. The third was inhibition and the fourth was faulty sensory appreciation, which, I think, many of you find to be the most important thing that he discovered.

Now I will get back to eye direction. I was sitting in front of the mirror as I had countless times directing. I was rather distressed because my sister, older than I, had told me she had double cataracts. (She hated the Alexander work. FM had said to her in the 20s, 'You're the worst pupil I have ever had.' She didn't take kindly to these words. He didn't always behave that way at all. He could be tremendously feeling and compassionate.) This was in 1967 and I was thinking, 'I wonder what the Alexander work has to contribute to geriatrics?' I thought of my sister's cataracts. It seemed a pretty tall order to expect the Alexander Technique to affect cataracts. Then I thought about glaucoma and loss of periphery vision which was about all I knew about it. I decided to take a chance, so as I was sitting there, I thought to direct my eyes apart. So I said, 'eyes free to go apart.' What was my astonishment to find that my forehead cleared, my mouth went into a smile and my shoulders went out and my knees also went out, but it was something else. I didn't say anything to anybody because I thought they would all jump down my throat. I couldn't find anybody until about '75 when a very nice ophthalmologist came up from Washington. We thought he would reveal why this happened. He was very interesting and I loved having him, but he couldn't help. So during the second lesson with Mario I said quietly, 'I am going to give you eye directions. These are not FM's. I don't know how and why they work, and I don't want to teach them generally until I have some idea of the scientific background for it, but there must be something.' I knew the eyes themselves didn't move but that's all I knew. So I asked Mario to ask his 'eyes to go apart.' Then I said, 'You'll find your forehead, your mouth and lips, your shoulders and your knees will go apart.' I was wrong there, I missed the seventh vertebrae. Mario told me later that I also missed the tongue and the insides of the hip joints. Then he explained it to me. Mario, give the technical explanation. How tremendously important it is.

### *Mario*

I should preface this by saying that everything that I am about to say is totally hypothetical. The first important point is that the western system of thinking about the body is centered around structure. We have a skeletal system, a muscular system and a circulatory system, so that the classification is based on structure. This is helpful if we are interested in

structure but it tends to block thought about function. There are functional organizations of the body that don't follow these strict structural categories, but actually cross over. The second point is that thought is directly represented in physiology. Physiological change happens in two categories: biochemical changes and muscular changes. They are actually the same thing but it is important to know that thinking influences what happens in your muscles. An interesting sidelight here is that Hermann Rorschach also knew that there is a seesaw between what people feel with their muscles and what they think. When a person looks into a Rorschach inkblot one thing that you look for is called big 'M' for movement. The more readily they see things moving, the more you are assured that the personality is intact. There is a smooth flow between what a person is thinking and what their motor outflow is. Let me stop there and see if you have any comments and I will answer any questions.

*Audience*

What is moving?

*Mario*

For example, inkblot number 3 has areas that look like two people. 'Two people bending over a pot' is a stronger response than 'two people.' Statistically two people bending is 'healthier' than just seeing two people. There is a man at McGill University named Wolfgang Luthe who developed a system called autogenic training. This system is important because it is another system where verbal orders are used to change physiology. Three of his 'orders' are 'my forehead is cool', 'my stomach (or tummy, depending upon who you are talking to), is warm', 'my hands are heavy.' The Alexander orders take much of this same form, using a noun and a verb. When giving the eye order, 'my eyes are free to go apart,' or 'eyes free to go apart' (using this model that thoughts, what you think and say influence your muscles), a general 'opening' of the system to further ordering occurs. This 'opening' is complex because we mean it in both a concrete way and figurative way.

The body is wired to operate in certain ways. As a person listens there is competition built between the way he is wired, the natural outflow of that, and the stance he has to take within any given situation. For instance, if you have parents that are angry all of the time, a child will take an angry defensive posture within the context of that family and this is then contrary to the normal outflow.

The result of that conflict is permanent postural change, and perma-

nent postural change then leads to misuse. The Alexander orders seem to be a way of getting back to that original wiring and its natural outflow into patterns of muscle use. The eye order appears to be a way of opening the system to receive orders better. I am going to go one step further, and look at this in terms of evolution. Our basic primitive ‘vertebrate’ or cordate has a head-like area and a tail and something called a notochord, which eventually becomes your backbone. The plan of this body is a series of muscular bands. There is no musculature in terms of organization except for these serial bands. These are called myotomes or myomeres, although the name changes as you go through history. What is important is the lead muscle in this system. What happens to the lead muscle usually happens to the rest of this organism. It is interesting that FM studied the work of Coghill because he had studied a bit with Sherrington, who talked about this plan. Once you get the lead muscle to do something, the other muscles all tend to do something organized around this lead muscle’s action. The whole organism is wired that way. In human evolution, this muscle organization still exists, except that it is highly evolved. The first muscles within the human system are the eye muscles. Once you place an order in the eye muscles, it is equivalent to placing an order in this first band of muscles of the original organism, which then pass that order down the organism. We are much more complex because the center for this action is now represented at the back of the neck. This eye center is related to the primary control.

*Kitty*

So that’s why we talk about the point of vision.

*Mario*

This is the skeleton for the reasoning of how this eye order may be working. It seems to preset the system to receive other orders. It is important because it represents a primitive relationship between these eye muscles and the trapezius muscle (or primary control) and the muscles around it. Let me stop there.

*Audience*

I just wanted to see a couple of more specifics about what type of connection there is between the eyes and the neck muscles. I know that eye muscles coordinate head turns.

*Mario*

There is an anatomical connection with the structural approach, but not a lot of data. There is some functional data which is interesting. For instance the trapezius muscle is an important muscle in the ancient process of sleep and dreaming. The trapezius muscle manifests the switch from deep sleep into REM sleep. You get a funny connection between what happens to the eyes during REM sleep and loss of tonus in the trapezius muscle. This can be seen in cats because when cats are sleeping they crouch down. Then when they begin to dream they lose trapezius tone and the cat flops over. There seems to be an inborn, ancient system within the nervous system which guides it in organizing movement. It is called the entrainment system. The primary control represents one of the external manifestations of this perceptual circuit called the entrainment circuit. This is what gets snakes to follow you when you move your hand back and forth. When birds fly in flocks they don't fly into each other. This is all due to these entrainment circuits that lock the organism perceptually into the environment and into others of its own species or into its prey. It is helpful for birds of one species to be coloured the same way so that they are coordinated to each other.

The innovation for the eye is in the first six cranial nerves. The first is the olfactory, the second is the optic. These are sensory. The first muscular control of the eye is the abducens which is the third nerve. The other muscles are the rectus lateralis controlled by cranial nerve number 6, and the superior oblique muscle which is innervated by number 4.

*Kitty*

FM always said, while you're working on someone, just don't start the work, run your hand like that; it's very soothing.

*Mario*

You can disturb an unuseful pattern. In psychotherapy, children occasionally get locked into a behavioral trap, and if you just brush against them you produce a micro-hypnotic trance which allows you to change the train of thought. What you are doing is working the system in reverse. The system will open and you can talk about something else.

*Kitty*

You can imagine my tremendous excitement when very quietly Mario said, 'I think I can tell you where this comes from.' It had been over six years that I had been looking around, hoping that I was not going to have

to do any studying myself. He said that the eye order relieves the forehead, the mouth, the lips and tongue, the seventh vertebrae; the inside of the shoulders and the inside of the hip bones. All with that order. Not below the torso, however. We don't know much about that. The next time he came, he said the tongue is affected and the seventh cervical vertical, which I had missed. It is a very pleasant thought that if you ask your 'eyes to go apart' and 'see from the point of vision' all of that is going to get done. FM's techniques for directing was to give your directions non-vocally, in words, in your head. He was a genius. There is, I think, a step that he left out. That step is to think the words without meaning. In the early and mid '20s people were not familiar with the phrase 'the body's intelligence'. The 'body's intelligence' will pick up your direction and interpret it as it wishes, not as you wish it. You are on the way to forming a psychophysical whole but if you interfere with it it will block. I have been through it all for years and know every pitfall. I finally came up with words without meaning so that the body's intelligence does the outcome.

*Audience*

I am not sure what you mean by 'words without meaning'.

*Kitty*

Say the words but don't qualify them in your head. Think clearly of it and know it.

*Mario*

You are using words as tools rather than as the words themselves. If you use a word like face, there is some connotation that pops up, so conceive structurally what you mean by face. Think about the noun but leave the verb alone. The noun constellates what you are going to do and the verb sets it in motion. Don't tinker with the verb because you will be getting in the way. Then you are heading for trouble, because you want the wiring to take over.

*Audience*

So don't interfere, don't try. Trying really knocks it out because it is your ego that tries and that is where you get into trouble. Can you say again what you said about the noun and the verb?

*Mario*

You have two parts to the order. The noun tells you where the action is

going to take place. It is helpful to place that action where it is to occur. You think 'my eyes'. So you think where that is. Then you leave the verb alone. The verb is actually doing the work. The verb is setting in motion those natural connections that will allow that relationship between brain and muscles to flow back to where it was.

*Audience*

So you're not saying to eliminate the verb, but not to interpret it.

*Mario*

Do not interpret the verb. You say the verb and let the verb work.

*Kitty*

You say the words in the orders and let them work. That is right. That would explain it. You see how important it was for me to come here? It was fascinating when you said that one could see what happened. This all started 300 million years ago. These sides of the shoulders became the front legs and our arms. The insides of the hip bones also developed. I think, myself, that now I am getting a slight pathway through this lower nerve center which you say dinosaurs had but did not have time to develop. They got killed. Of course, the East has always had the lower center here.

*Audience*

The supposition that the eyes open things for orders – what is that supposition based on?

*Mario*

There are two processes of development: evolution and fetal development. The general plan is that there are a series of muscular bands which then reorganize into our muscles. The second part is that what happens in band number 1, 2 and 3 is going to happen every place else in some form. Bands 1, 2 and 3 make up the eye muscles, so that when you put a message into 1, 2 and 3 you're organizing and presetting the entire system for second order functions. So the first order, 'get ready', is the eye order and the second order is the specific way to do that.

*Audience*

Is this true of the animal kingdom that as the animal is moving his eyes that in turn will set up movement?

*Mario*

Yes, that is true. It is wired that way. Those are the entrainment circuits. The eyes, and those organisms that depend on the eyes will then use that as the lead.

*Audience*

There are two things that I would like to say. I think that this is so important and so exciting. All of us who are teachers have experienced the guy who stares into space which is not at all what should happen. The other comment I have is about people that are blind. Even though they lack something very vital there is something about the human nervous system that can compensate.

*Mario*

If it is purely a sensory blindness, then you don't lose too much because the muscles are intact. Now in some sense you lose something because the input of light changes that but you don't lose the whole thing. Sometimes with blind people, a gentle tap may change it enough so that you can get in.

*Kitty*

I think it is wonderful – especially the gentle part.

*Audience*

Can you explain what you mean by 'getting in'?

*Mario*

You are born with a relationship between your nervous system and your muscles which computes gravity rather well. But you have to live within a psychological and emotional context as well. That produces competing demands on the motor system for that computation, so that you compute gravity and your family emotional atmosphere at the same time. The eye order resets the system to be receptive to that first order of computation. It computes gravity rather than the family. Mechanically it is really complex, but there is a relationship between thinking and the inborn patterns that are laid-out in the wiring relationship between your nervous system and your muscles to compute gravity.

*Audience*

Wouldn't any thought, 'forehead cool', for example, do the same thing?

*Mario*

A little bit except 'forehead cool' tends to go into those muscles that have to do with vasculature, because you have been taught that. There are so many learning versus genetic issues, that it is almost impossible to pull them apart after awhile. 'Forehead cool' does do that. 'Forehead cool' is interesting because some people will say, 'Well I am going to go home and I want to do this really good', so they say, 'forehead freezing.' When you say that you almost get 'ice cream pains.' You have to watch out where in the system you are putting it. You don't run into those kinds of difficulties if you correctly place it. Putting it in the eyes places it better because forehead muscles are probably subordinate to these.

*Audience*

I think I understand that using the word eyes or using the word neck serves to orient the organism to a specific area. My question is when we use a word like 'free', what does the organism do with an adjective? I can understand the orientation awareness but I am not quite sure how the body can understand 'free'.

*Mario*

You have thought the word 'free' for many years. Every time you think the word 'free', a certain constellation of physiological muscle reactions occur. The sum total averages in such a way that a particular part of a person's life gets knocked out, and what you are left with is a clear form of what the word 'free' means. When that goes in as the message the system tends to unfold. There is a process that as you grow older, there is a general folding in. It has to do with grasping the environment. You want to push that process back a bit. The word 'free' seems to do that.

*Audience*

Are you working with the interface between language and action by taking thought back to where it was a little less complicated relationship?

*Mario*

Yes, it has a little less specific content.

*Audience*

You had said that there is a strong relationship between the musculature of the eyes and the trapezius in the REM state. Often when people experience their neck free for the first time there is a flipping around of

the eyes that seems to go along with that.

*Mario*

There is an eastern form of meditation with a mantra, which if done correctly and quietly enough you feel tiny twitching occurring almost everywhere. Those are probably the results of the system reorganizing itself. The order is a more specific way of allowing a certain dimension in that system to free itself more easily. You have given it permission in a certain spot as a go ahead. If you are touching the two at the same time, you can feel it flipping back and forth. There are tremors occurring. A person may twitch suddenly. Those movements also have to do with the discomfort and the talking but they also have to do with discharge. What happens on the table is not random. It is all organized discharge. As a psychologist it is interesting because I want to listen to what is happening.

*Audience*

Is it possible that the letting go of the habitual holding could trigger up something like an REM sleep?

*Mario*

People will go into a microhypnotic state. Something happens where they lose ordinary consciousness. They may say 'ah' or something like that. I think that 'ah' is one of the most natural reflexes.

*Kitty*

This work is really to improve the breathing, but we never mention it. The only things that we say are 'keep breathing, please' or 'don't hold your breath.' We don't want to raise it to the central nervous system control. We want it left where it is. Don't control the breathing. Let the body do the breathing. I won't live to see it but you will. The world is slowly going crazy. I wish I could make a great man, a genius alive to you. He never did a mean thing to any of us. There was never any partiality. I thought he was wonderful and always interesting. Never boring. He repeated himself but would put it in a different way or a different context so that you got it. He was a genius. Not teaching, as I said, but someone said that the teacher takes the student into the forest and the education is the student getting himself out.

*Audience*

I have glasses, do I give directions with or without? Do I need to see

myself clearly in the air to give the direction or not?

*Kitty*

Use your glasses. I think that you will find that they will be less strong as time goes on. I had mine tested in '52 and was very dependent on them. I couldn't dream of going away for the afternoon without them. I read easily without them now. Working with somebody I think you should have – don't you think it would be easier with glasses? If you have a foreigner, it is a great help to give them their directions in their own language, to begin with.

*Audience*

With respect to the question of glasses, and your new direction of letting the eyes go apart, it seems that with glasses (especially if they were fairly strong when you look to the side) there is quite a bit of distortion. I wonder if they don't allow our eyes to go apart. Is the frame another sort of distortion?

*Kitty*

I should say yes.

*Mario*

I would say maybe yes, maybe no, because in the moment – the really ancient part of this line is really time free. The occurrence takes place almost immediately and is not connected to directional movement. Now later on in the process the frames may be troublesome.

*Audience*

Kitty, when the pupil is on the table do you want the eyes open?

*Kitty*

Open. Don't let them drowse off. Have their eyes open. FM was very particular about that.

*Audience*

Let me tell you of an experience that I had. When my sister was studying with you, she called up and said, 'Kitty has a new order – "eyes apart".' I said, 'That is interesting, I wonder what she means by that?' She said, 'She really feels that it is connected to the rest.' So as we always do, we have these conversations on the phone and we exchange ideas. I thought

about it later when I was on the table and my eyes were closed then. I wasn't having a lesson, just a rest. I thought, 'Okay I'll try Kitty's order,' not having any idea of what to expect. I had already thought the neck free and so on and remembered then, 'eyes apart'. I was quite fascinated that muscles that I had been completely unaware of seemed to be behind the eyes. It is as if they had been like this and I didn't know it. Then with the permission they went like that.

*Kitty*

Is that entrainment?

*Mario*

Yes.

*Kitty*

Well I thought you meant when you were working on a pupil on the table.

*Audience*

Yes I did mean that.

*Kitty*

Of that FM was very particular. I don't believe that you remember but a long time ago I had a wonderful lunch. I think it was then that you said 'I think neck to widen.' I was horrified! FM never said anything about that, but I use it all of the time! I hope that it has gotten back to you that I use it.

*Audience*

What has always bothered me about our technique is that we work very close up towards the peak of the pyramid and to my understanding of anatomy we had ignored the last point which was the eyes. We had gotten up to the top of the skeleton. But the eyes have the primary peak, the whole front. The very top of the neurological structure is in the face not behind it.

*Mario*

One of the reasons that may have happened is that it seems there are two peaks. The primary control is one peak but it is represented again in the internal cranial framework.

*Audience*

I don't really mean to play devil's advocate but why eyes apart rather than eyes together or eyes straight? What about the whole function of convergence?

*Kitty*

Eyes don't move with this order.

*Audience*

How many people have that problem – the wandering eye?

*Mario*

When you say 'eyes free to go apart', that is what we meant earlier when we said that the words have no meaning. They don't mean that. The phrase is helpful because it opens the system. The progressive clamping, closing and curling seem to be a process within the process of growth. 'Eyes free to go apart' seems to constellate that opening better than anything else. It represents the system rather than the words themselves. If a person has an eye that goes out you are still working with the system even though there may be an imbalance there. What is important is for the message to get in even though the imbalance.

*Audience*

I remember about a year ago there was an ophthalmologist who was invited to lecture here at the center. One of the things that he pointed out was that if your head was held in one place and you looked down, the eyes converge. And when your eyes move up they must move apart.

*Mario*

I can give you some pieces of that. Looking up seems to be a trigger to going into different states of awareness. For instance, if you are having someone hypnotized, a test is to have them look up and see how far it goes. The going up and out places you in more primitive states or more basic states of that computation of gravity. Going down and to seems to bring you here.

*Audience*

I was just telling Kitty earlier that I had used this concept of eyes apart. With this in mind, so often in doing we are concerned with focus, so we use our eyes forward to focus. The focusing in itself is a narrowing or a

coming together. It is a drawing in of a specific kind of experience that has little or nothing to do with the freedom of the energy flow. So I have used the idea of letting your eyes go apart. As you are lying on the table I say let's see how much vision you can add to yourself. Instead of focusing on your peripheral vision, just experience the pleasure of letting that happen. I find it very helpful as a means of counteracting the purposeful focusing which we so often do in life.

*Mario*

That's helpful because such act of perception has two pieces. In Gestalt terms you have a figure and you have a ground. The orders are really a ground experience so that if you focus into a figure you are really defeating it. What you are doing and what Kitty is saying gives you the ground experience. In order to build a good focus you must have a stable ground.

*Audience*

Embryologically the eyes are close to the ears. As the embryo grows . . .

*Audience*

I don't know if you get exactly the same effect as telling your eyes or allowing them to go apart, but it sounds like certainly it would be helpful. I remember hearing Kitty say to allow the vision to come into you. Kitty, did you say that before you came on this eyes apart idea?

*Kitty*

No. I would like to mention again to emphasize that we do not believe in exercises. We believe in exercise – tennis, golf. We are megatrends. We are information services. We don't lift weights, curls, pound, twist. The central nervous system doesn't like repetition.

*Mario*

Yes. It has to do with this process of discharge that we talked about. The only way to do that, is to return back to ground. When you become a passive receptor, then many small focuses appear and disappear very quickly. I think that is one manifestation of reorganizing.

*Audience*

My wife loves working with children. The way a young happy child behaves if you give them a small object is to bring it right up to their sternum and drop their eyes. That gesture has a quality of release, enjoyment

and focus. When we are given a beautiful thing we say, 'Oh how lovely'.

*Kitty*

That's lovely.

*Mario*

That's also trapezius release.

*Audience*

Release goes out towards an object where vision is mostly taking in. Our young dog is quite alert and beautiful. When you let her out of the house she dashes out. Then she stops absolutely dead still and puts her head in position to get a complete feel to pick up any motion with total reception. It is a lovely use of stillness to pick up activity.

*Audience*

Would you tell the story about FM when he was a little boy? There is one other story that I really like about inhibition.

*Kitty*

I will tell the inhibition story first. FM was having a frightful time, and said 'You're not inhibiting.' The man said, 'I am'. FM said, 'Come over here.' He banged the man's head on the wall and said, 'Now you'll remember.' He came back for many years but you have to be darn attractive to do that! One day when he was working he said, 'I remember when I was a little boy about four, I was scampering around the kitchen. My mother was moping up the floor, and she got so provoked with me she just picked me up and put me in the flour bag and hung me on the kitchen door.' He said, 'There I was!' I have a vision of this bright little boy non-plussed because he couldn't get his arms out.

Well, thank you so much. I have enjoyed it.

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