

Teaching Notes and the Wisdom of Alice Pryor

I moved every two or three years until my thirties. Every move was an opportunity to decide whether I wanted this bowl or book or not. Now that I am not moving I still find myself culling my material possessions every two or three years. I also attribute this pull to cull to the death of parents when I was in relatively young. My brothers and I found ourselves on the beach on Penobscot Bay burning boxes of long saved papers. They had carried around these papers for sixty years. I find myself looking around my office or holding a notebook or letter wondering “Is this something my girls will burn on the beach?”

In my recent culling, I found a notebook of my teaching notes from 2001. I am lucky to have been mentored by a brilliant teacher, Alice Pryor. She is an Alexander Technique teacher but she had been an Art teacher for years. She is a TEACHER in the fullest sense of the word. What I discovered in this notebook is a summary of her feedback over a year or two of watching me teach. I share her comments with you because she is wise, observant and succinct. The ideas are appropriate for all kinds of teaching and basic human communication.

Notes from Alice:

1. Notice the receiving. How are people receiving the information?
2. Sacrifice the detail for the central concept.
3. What is your expectation?
4. What is your core message? How can you say it clearly, in one sentence or two?
5. What’s your purpose?
6. Trust the flowering of the details. The details will come from the students. Your fun will come from fostering the flowering.
7. Your role is to guide learning rather than pour in and overly direct.
8. Say it one time. Then ask questions.
9. One question at a time!!!
10. Alice’s asks people: “What did you notice about your thinking process? What influenced your movement?”
11. Sift and sort old ideas.
12. In responding, honor and affirm them. “Thank you, that’s helpful.”
13. You (*Babette*) are caring more for the information than the learning.
14. Did you finish any sentence during that class?
15. Don’t talk over them. Find a means of getting their attention without shouting.
16. Take care of yourself, (*This is an Alexander concept. It means watch my behavior when I don’t see what I want in the student. Generally they aren’t the problem – I am.*)
17. Self-question – gentleness to self.
18. When someone is sidetracking, honor and redirect: “Thank you, that’s real interesting hmmm....What would it be like for you to....”
19. When listening to someone, accept the answer. It is true for them.
20. Your job is to draw out clarity. Make sense of what they felt as the core thing: “Those are your inner-thoughts, how did you talk to yourself?”
21. Be inclusive. Give permission to feel a wide assortment of responses. “Some of you may have...”

Thank you, Alice. I am and will be forever grateful for your example, your guidance and most of all your honesty.

The big question: Do I keep this notebook or recycle it?