

## THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE CENTRE

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### **The duet of piano pedagogy and Alexander Technique: Researching our practice Gabriella Minnes Brandes, Ph.D.**

Handout for The Developing Self conference, Alexander and Education, (on-line conference, July 2020)

#### **Abstract**

In this talk I share findings from a case study, which was designed to explore ways of applying principles of the Alexander Technique to increase whole-body awareness in young piano students, specifically by using activities to teach how to release shoulders, both standing at an adjustable surface away from the piano and while playing the piano. Through this study, we explore ways of researching the application of Alexander principles while developing vocabulary to be used by both the piano teacher and a young student. This vocabulary allows them to express the unique and specific experience of learning to play the piano. I discuss the interplay between piano pedagogy and the application of Alexander Technique principles in the context of teaching piano. I explore the methodology for data collection and analysis using multiple perspectives. I analyze time-specific comments made about videotaped piano lessons. Teaching and learning are examined in terms of choices made in real time, using questions, modelling, developing a shared language and using metaphors to express the new embodied experiences of learning. I conclude with recommendations about the ways in which Alexander Technique could provide specific tools to enhance teachers' repertoire of choices and approaches to the connections between the physical aspects of piano playing and the musical elements in the lessons.

A fuller account of this case study:

Brandes, G.M., Condie, J, Wielinga A., (2020). Using Alexander Technique principles with Beginning Piano Students: A Collaborative "duet" between an Alexander Technique teacher and a piano teacher. Music Teachers National Association eJournal (February, 2020)

**About the presenter:** Gabriella Minnes Brandes has teaching Alexander Technique for over 30 years. Much of Gaby's current work and research focuses on exploring the connections between Alexander Technique and creativity for performers. Gaby collaborates closely with musicians, voice and movement coaches, and acting instructors. Informed by her Ph.D. and research in education, she is also interested in the connections between learning, teacher training and pedagogy in relation to the application of Alexander principles. Gaby has been teaching in the Theatre department at Capilano University, and in her own private practice. Gaby was the founder and co-director of the Vancouver Teacher Training course that ran for 18 years. Gaby has shared her work in many conferences and training-courses nationally and internationally.