



"How are we living our lives?" Interviews and talks 1982-1988. by Grethe Laub. 2016 eBook, Novis Books.

Review - Judith Kleinman (Published by STAT news)

This book is a little gem. Novis publications have digitalized the original 2006 paper version, with the intention of introducing Grethe Laub's ideas to a new generation of Alexander teachers. It explains her approach to life and, in particular, teaching children. The book contains some timeless wisdom and is essential reading for those of us with an interest in child development, parenting, Alexander work with children and taking our work into schools. The book is also a rewarding social history of the twentieth century, the changes in society after the war, the development of educational ideas and the changing role of woman.

The book is divided into several parts with interviews, talks, and letters. It has beautifully clear introductions from both Sue Holladay and the publisher Chrariclia Gournairs, which tell us just how remarkable this quiet woman and her work were. Over the years we have all heard much of the fundamentals of Alexander's work described by many interesting men. How wonderful then to have another strong yet gentle female voice, describing the magic of Alexander's work in relation to her own life story and to her ideas on child development. The most compelling thought for me is that it would be common sense for our work to be made part of every school-teacher's training.

We hear from Grethe how Alexander's ideas gently woven into lessons, can help children learn self-esteem and independence of thought, through quietly learning to take care of themselves in relation to the world around them. How children given responsibilities appropriate for their age can naturally develop the understanding of the "means whereby" as a principle to live by. How children and adults can become more comfortable with themselves.

Grethe's watch words for teaching are about firstly creating and valuing the relationship of mutual trust and respect with children, listening to them, teaching through conversations and stories, connecting with them before eventually working with hands on. "It is a matter of give-and-take between teacher and pupil that makes teaching successful." She emphasizes how important it is that the "grownups" around children exemplify the work, and is often says that it is as important that the parents and teachers have lessons, alongside introducing the work to the children, if nothing else for the grownups to learn how to be patient.

There is underneath all her gentleness of approach, a rigor and understanding of Alexander's ideas that is very thought provoking.

Where and how do habit and choice effect our society's development? How can we bring our lives, indeed our world, back to balance? How can we create kind but clear boundaries so that children can make useful choices about how to live their lives? Grethe is very clear that it is our thoughts and attitudes that are at the base of our actions and that without deep care and understanding children can very easily run into problems. There are many touching examples of her work with children and a bit like the famous book "Dibs In Search of Self", we hear the story of Grethe's teaching of Anders and can only be deeply moved. How this work of ours can be so indirect yet make such a difference, how good teachers can make children feel clever and heal their wounds.

The book has some other hidden jewels, pictures of Grethe, whose face expresses all her warmth and compassion, wonderful letters of recommendation from her past employers, which leave us in no doubt of what a special person she was, what a contribution she made and how loved. There are memories of Walter Carrington and a letter he sent to her before she trained - that might usefully be read by all trainees before embarking on an Alexander Training Course?

The republication of this book in digital format does make it more accessible in our increasingly digital age. This is the first eBook I have read and I would highly recommend it; at 10 Euros it seems very good value. Overall I don't think I have read a book about the work that has been so touching and thought provoking for a while. There are some ideas that might seem a little dated to us now, and a certain amount of repetition of the material. However I was left, after reading it, with the thoughts from Grethe's letter to the Froebel Institute that, never has there been a more important time than now, for Alexander's work on adaptability and freedom to change, to be taught to children, parents and teachers. What a contribution Grethe's work and ideas are on how we might go about that.

I hope Grethe would be pleased that her inspirational approach to working with children lives on at Educare Small School in London and that some of us are keeping the torch of the work alight in other educational settings.

Judith Kleinman



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