



25.6.16

To whom it may concern,

I have known Penny McDonald since 2012 and have seen her regularly for Alexander Technique lessons since then. I am a Drama and Music teacher at Woodleigh School Senior Campus. I find my lessons with Penny invaluable. I believe that the quality of my teaching, my energy levels and the content of my lessons have each improved significantly, as a result of Penny's work with me.

Working with voice (singing and speech) students, in addition to taking Drama and Music classes, I find I draw upon her instruction regularly and often seek her out for guidance in relation to specific issues that may arise when working with my students or classes. I used to suffer from vocal strain and RSI in my wrists (associated with playing the piano, ukulele and conducting). All these conditions have resolved since working with her. In this way, I view the lessons as essential professional development.

Over the past 4 years Penny has been regularly employed by the Heads of Drama and Music at Woodleigh School to work with middle years and senior (VCE) students. She has provided an excellent overview of the key principles associated with Alexander Technique in a classroom context, and has worked with individuals in preparation for Music or Drama exams and assessments.

My students have always been transformed by this work. Penny has a lovely relaxed, but professional manner that consistently wins them over. I was initially nervous about how the teenagers might respond to the Alexander Technique, but Penny's knowledge of students' psychological, emotional and developmental needs, coupled with the strength of the practice was remarkable and transformative. She made the space safe for growth, risk taking and exploration, and students consistently embraced the new ways of thinking and moving.

Penny's preparation for these workshops was extensive. She deliberately constructed classes that supported a variety of different learning styles and catered for teenage self-consciousness/body issues. Her sequencing supported short attention spans, and championed experiential learning. There was always the perfect mix of discussion, movement, experimentation, hands on time and exercises. Bringing her model skeleton with her and a wonderful collection of images gave the students the opportunity to find a deeper understanding of function, body mapping and/or fundamental Alexander Technique concepts. These visual aids, coupled with handouts that built upon the work covered each class, enabled some of the theory to be more easily remembered. Hands on exercises designed to convey an idea invariably won over students who were initially skeptical of the work.

Years after a group class or one on one session, students often quote her or reveal marked changes in their approach to performing. Semi-supines are no longer considered odd, but are seen regularly in a wide range of students. Students in my classes often talk about freeing their necks, and finding their feet. One student who suffers from anxiety told me she was advised to go to hospital after a panic attack. However, she was able to use semi-supine to calm herself instead. In preparation for exams, my Year 12 VCE Music students pestered me for a Penny session. They had seen her since Year 10. They trusted her process and enjoyed the insights that came with the hands on work. In these one on one sessions, Penny addresses a wide range of issues, including adrenalin/nerves, pain/tension/stiffness while performing, singing or playing very long phrases, reaching high notes (for singers or trumpeters).

I have rarely been able to recommend someone without reservation. It is my pleasure to do so in the case of Ms Penny McDonald. If you should have any questions, I would be more than happy to be contacted on 03) 59786603 or via email. lwharington@woodleigh.vic.edu.au

Yours sincerely,

Lucy Wharington