ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE AND MUSIC PERFORMANCE: EVIDENCE FOR IMPROVED 'USE'

Elizabeth R. Valentine

Royal Holloway, University of London, UK

Aaron Williamon

Royal College of Music, London, UK

Background

The Alexander technique (AT) is widely used by musicians to enhance performance and prevent misuse. Whilst self-reports testify to its benefits, rigorous objective data have been hard to obtain.

Aims

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of training in AT in comparison with neurofeedback on music performance, as measured by perceived quality of music performance and use as defined by AT practitioners.

Method

Music students (strings, wind, keyboard and voice) were randomly assigned to training in AT (Group AT; n=10) or neurofeedback (Group NF; n=8). Music performances were videorecorded before and after training. These were randomly ordered and assessed by expert judges, external to the college and blind to students' group membership, for quality of music performance and AT use. Judgements of AT use were made by an experienced musician and AT practitioner, with extensive experience of teaching AT to musicians, on the following scales: head-neck-back relationship, upper limb/back, hips/balance, direction of knees, face and eyes, breathing, fingers, thought direction, inhibition and overall impression/poise. Self-rated anxiety was also measured prior to performance on both occasions.

Results

Following training: group NF showed improvement in quality of music performance; both groups showed a significant reduction in self-rated anxiety prior to performance; group AT showed an improvement relative to group NF on the following measures of AT use: head-neck-back relationship, upper limb/back, face and eyes, fingers, thought direction, inhibition and overall impression/poise. Singers showed greater improvement than instrumentalists on hips/balance, face and eyes, fingers and thought direction.

Conclusions

Training in the Alexander Technique can enhance use in musicians and this can be demonstrated objectively.