

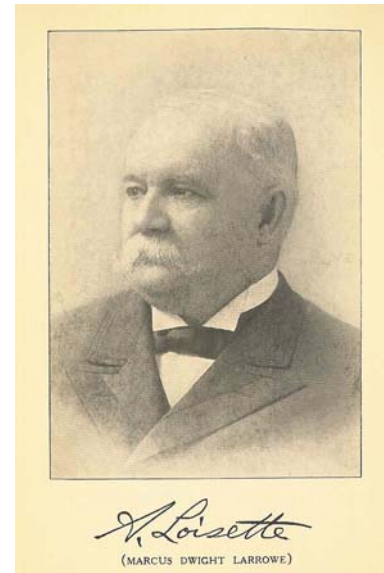
# Alphonse Loisettes' *Assimulative Memory*<sup>1</sup>

Circa 1950, in an "Autobiographical Sketch,"<sup>2</sup> F. Matthias Alexander recollected that when performing in Auckland, New Zealand in 1895 he formed a "close and helpful friendship" with "Profesoor Loisette (memory system expert)."<sup>3</sup> Loisette invited Alexander to join him on a tour of the United States. Alexander ultimately declined Loisettes' offer; noting that "during this time, I became convinced of the value of my technique, which did much to encourage me to make teaching my career instead of reciting. But I had many things to consider, including Professor Loisettes' offer..."<sup>4</sup>

Rodney Mace points out that Loisette was not professor but a memory system vendor<sup>5</sup> and suggests that key themes concerning attention and learning in Alexander's 1922 *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* parallel to learning theories articulated by Loisette in *Assimulative Memory*. The samplings below were assembled by Jeroen Staring. Whomever developed the "Loisettes" memory methods, they anticipate effective meta-cognitive comprehension strategy instructions.<sup>6</sup>

## Excerpts

[...] PROF. A LOISETTE wishes to call the attention of those who are now for the first time becoming acquainted with his System of Memory Training, that he was the first teacher of a Memory System to announce and to insist that Memory is not a *separate faculty* whose office it is to carry the recollective burdens of the other faculties—but that Memory is a Physiological and Psychological property of each mental act, and that such act retains the traces and history of its own action, and that there are as many memories as there are kinds of mental action, and that, therefore, Memory is always concrete, although, for convenience sake, we do speak of it in the abstract, and that consequently all



1. Loisettes, A. (Nee Marcus Dwight Larrowe). *Assimulative Memory or How To Attend and Never Forget*. Funk & Wagnalls Company, New York and London, 1896.
2. *F. Matthias Alexander Articles and Lectures*, J.M.O. Fischer editor. Mourtiz, 1995, pp 220ff.
3. p 233.
4. p 236. Among the "other things" Alexander had to consider upon returning to Melbourne before embarking for the United States was the unplanned arrival of his mother and sister to Melbourne — while his father remained in Tasmania. Alexander characteristically chose supporting his family members over pursuing what may have looked to him to be a career opportunity. At age sixteen, for another instance, he left school, against the pleas of his headmaster to work as an accountant in order to supplement the family income.
5. Loisettes had been exposed as a plagiarist by George Fellows in *Loisettes Exposed, Together with Loisettes' Complete System of Physiological Memory: The Instantaneous Art of Never Forgetting to which is appended a Bibliography of Mnemonics 1325-1888*; G.S. Fellows & Co., NY, 1888.
6. For reviews of current comprehension strategy instruction research see Michael Pressley's *Reading Instruction That Works*, Guilford Press, 1998 and "Teaching Readers How to Comprehend Text Strategically" by Tom Trabasso and Ed Bouchard in *Comprehension Instruction: Research-Based Best Practices*, Cathy Collins and Michael Pressley, eds., Guilford Press, 2002.

Memory improvement means *improvement of the Action or Manner* of action of the Mental powers, and that what he imparts is the right way to USE the Intellect and Attention—and that hence his System does make and must make better observers, clearer and more consecutive thinkers, and sounder reasoners as well as surer rememberers; that in short the fundamental principle of his System is Learn by Thinking, and that his achievements as a mind-trainer are completed when he has helped the student of his System to acquire the Habit of Attention and the Habit of Thinking on that to which he is attending on all occasions, which two Habits combined constitute the Habit of Assimilation, and that when this Habit of Assimilation is thus established in the pupil's mind, the System as such is no longer consciously used. [...]. (*Preface*).

### **[...]fundamental principles**

WHAT IS THE BASIC PRINCIPLE OF MY SYSTEM? IT IS, *Learn by Thinking*. What is *Attention*? It is the will directing the activity of the *intellect* into some particular channel and keeping it there. It is the opposite of mind-wandering. What is thinking? It consists in finding relations between the objects of thought with an *immediate awareness* of those relations.

What is the Sensuous memory? It is association through the eye or ear of a *succession* of sights or sounds without any reflection or consideration of the units of the succession, or what they stand for, or represent. It is learning by *rote*— mere repetition—mere brainless or thoughtless repetition—a mode of learning that is not lasting—and always causes or promotes mind-wandering.

What is Assimilative memory? It is the *habit* of so *receiving* and *absorbing* impressions or ideas that they or their representatives shall be *ready for revival or recall whenever wanted*. It is learning through relations—by thinking—from grasping the ideas or thoughts—the meaning and the comprehension of the subject matter. This mode of learning promotes attention and prevents mind-wandering. [...]. (Loisette 1896, 1).

[...] *Attention is the Will directing the Intellect into some particular channel and keeping it there*. There are vitually two processes involved in Attention. The Intellect is directed into a particular channel, but to keep it there, all intruders must be excluded. To illustrate. A student attempts to learn a proposition in Geometry. To do this he must keep his mind on the printed explanations, and if his thoughts attempt to fly away, he must repress that attempt. To guide his mind into the channel of the printed exposition, he calls into play the Directory power of the attention. To prevent intruders or extruders from withdrawing his mind from the text, he exercises the Inhibitory function of the Attention.

To fully understand what takes place when trying to study, let the pupil recall there are three sources of knowledge.

First: The Senses carry into his mind reports from the outside world—Sensation—sight of the letters, words and sentences, &c. Second: The Intellect operates on these undigested elementary Sense-reports, or Sensations, and finds *relations* among them. This is Perception, or relations among Sensations. Third: The mind acts on the *perceived relations* and finds relations among them. This is Reason or relations among relations.

Now the geometrical student in reading the printed instructions to himself or in reading them aloud, might simply occupy his *eye*, or *eye and ear* with them and his Reason might soar away to other subjects, climbs or ages.

Remember that the Intellect is always active and busy, and the question for us to answer in our own case is—shall it co-operate with the senses or the matter before us, or shall it wander away?

What the geometrical student requires and what we all require in such cases is to *compel the Intellect to stay with the Senses, and follow the printed train of thought.*

*Interest in the subject helps to secure this co-operation. And the Process or Method of study*, if it be an Assimilating one, also compels this co-operation. And one of the processes which is most of all effective in TRAINING the Intellect to obey the Will and thereby to stay with the Senses (where it is not a case of pure reflection), and thereby to institute and develop the Habit of the activity of the Intellect co-operating with the action of the mere senses, is practice in the use of Laws of In., Ex., and Con.<sup>7</sup> To illustrate: In reciting the last training example of one hundred words, the Directory power is exercised and then the Inhibitory power is brought into play, and so on *alternately*. [...]. And when the Intellect is thus trained into the Habit of staying with the sense of sight or hearing in reading or listening, the geometrical or other student can keep his mind on the subject before him until it is mastered. [...]. (Loisette 1896, 20-22).

[...] Pestalozzi (1745-1827) taught that we must proceed from the “known” to the “unknown” (Loisette 1896, 32).<sup>8</sup>

[...] In pursuance of my plan to keep the mind in an ASSIMILATIVE condition when trying to learn and to further aid in making the intellect stay and work with the senses, I proceed to furnish a Training Method for committing prose and poetry to memory.

*Endless repetition or repeating a sentence to be memorised over and over again* is the usual process. After one perusal, however, the mind in such a case has sated its curi-

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7. Loisette identified Inclusion, Exclusion and Concurrence as the three laws of memory.

8. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi outlined how Rousseau's idea of education by experience might implemented. His writings influenced education by experience applications of John Dewey and Colonel Francis Parker.

osity in regard to the meaning of the sentence and each subsequent repetition for the purpose of fixing it in the memory merely makes an impression upon the eye or ear or both, and the intellect, being unoccupied, naturally wanders away. Hence, learning by *rote* promotes *mind-wandering*: for the Attention always wanders unless wooed to its work by all-engrossing interest in the subject which in case of a weak power of Attention is rarely sufficient, or by the stimulating character of the process of acquirement which is made use of. In the Method about to be given, the intellect is agreeably occupied, and thereby a Habit of Attention is promoted.

The justification for this Method is found in the Psychological maxim that the intellect can assimilate a simple idea more easily than a complex idea, and a few ideas at a time than many ideas.

The process of this New Method of Decomposition and Recomposition is as follows: (Loisette 1896, 47-48).

[...] \* Lord Elgin, the present Viceroy, gave Prof. Loisette H. E.'s patronage when the Professor lectured in Calcutta. As his system is the foe of all artificial methods, it is *par excellence* the "Natural" System. [...]. (Loisette 1896, 106, *asterix footnote*).

[...] Suppose a teacher of the Art of Expression<sup>9</sup> has studied Moses True Brown's (see his Synthetic Philosophy of Expression) reduction of Delsarte's Nine Laws of Gesture to Brown's One Law of Correspondence—and suppose this teacher wishes to explain to his class, or to an audience, how Mr. Brown proceeded. If he desires to do this without notes, he must memorise the order of those Nine Laws; they are abstractly stated and difficult to correlate, but it can be done. The Laws are as follows:—

Motion,  
Velocity,  
Direction or Extension,  
Re-action,  
Form,  
Personality,  
Opposition of Agents,  
Priority, or Sequence,

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9. Jeroen Staring speculates that the “teacher of the Art of Expression” Loisette refers to is F. Matthias Alexander, reflecting Loisette’s advance public relations for Alexander’s expected participation in an upcoming Loisette U.S. tour. This passage from the 1896 edition of *Assimulative Memory* does not appear in earlier editions of Loisette’s material. In 1895, Alexander advertised himself as a teacher of elocution, although not as a teacher of Moses True Brown’s system, who was then a leading Delsartean in the United States.

## Rhythm.

The teacher must correlate these heads or topics of his discourse together, and so memorise his correlations that he can recall the series in the exact order. Perhaps he may proceed thus:

### MOTION.

[ Rate of motion. ]

### VELOCITY.

[ Relation of motion to time and **space**—. ]

### DIRECTION or Extension.

[ Direction reversed. ]

### RE-ACTION.

[ Mould of Action. ]

### FORM.

[ Form of the Human. ]

### PERSONALITY.

[ Its extremes. ]

### OPPOSITION OF AGENTS.

[ First opponent. ]

### PRIORITY or Sequence.

[ Periodicity of Sequence. ]

### RHYTHM.

Knowing these Nine Laws in the above *order*, he can discuss them one after the other. When he has finished his explanation of the reduction of the three Forms of Motion (Concentric, Poise, and Eccentric) to the Law of Correspondence, he can proceed to the consideration of the sub-topics under Velocity, and so on. When he has fixed the other of his topics in mind, he has a mental chart or map to guide him in his exposition, and similarly in other cases. [...]. (Loisette 1896, 141-142).

[...] Dr. Charles Mercier, who next to Herbert Spencer is the most original and clear sighted Psychologist in England, presents, in a work entitled "Sanity and Insanity," a scarcely equalled example of lucid exposition and logical development. [...]. (Loisette 1896, 157).