



Introducing the Work to Classroom Teachers

Some notes on the Alexander in Education Conference 2020 presentation by Sue Merry

3 Steps Forward

Simplify and Clarify

Features and Benefits

The Ready List and Transitions

Simplify and Clarify

How much time do I have and how big is the group?

How interested are they?

Deconstruct “technical” terminology

Use simple and clear language – I use the same language I will be using with the children

Features and Benefits

Probably there are two main questions in the minds of the participants in my workshops:

What is this?

What’s in it for me?

The Ready List & Transitions

It is an aim of my workshop that each person goes away feeling they have a new tool to apply immediately to their lives. Ideally, they also realise why they might want to use this tool, how it might work and that they feel engaged and enthusiastic – or at least curious – to see if this will work for them.

The Ready List

The Ready List is a simple beginning towards an understanding and experience of Alexander work. It is not a replacement for hands-on work or of more traditional ways of teaching the Work.

The Ready List is simple and clear. I have been very surprised over the years at just how effective it is.

I find it especially useful when I am teaching in a situation where I am only able to do a limited amount of hands-on work.

And/or where I have a very limited amount of time with a pupil.

I see it as a way of getting to the essence of our work in a simple way that can hopefully lead a pupil on to wanting to know more and to want to go deeper into the work.

STOP

SEE

BREATHE

SOFT & TALL

The name for the Ready List came from one of the children at Educare Small School, where we use the Ready List all the time.

Although we invented an original name and modified the list somewhat, the idea seems to have originated with Walter Carrington.

As well as being an easy way for children to apply Alexander principles to their lives at school and beyond, it is also a great tool for introducing the Work to adults.

Stop

These are some of the ways I use to explain why stopping is important. These are points that I have found people relate to. You will find your own points of course and tailor them for your group.

- Stopping is an essential first step to applying The Ready List. Puts the brain into neutral and creates a chance to do things differently
- When you think “STOP” everything stops briefly – a tiny space appears and therefore, new possibilities open up

- Very useful if your mind is driving you crazy – it is like applying the brakes to a speeding car or pressing the “Re-set” button in your brain.
- Very useful in uncomfortable emotional situations, especially if you start to feel a loss of control

See

See means to look into the distance (to the far-side of the room, or out of a window) and focus on a specific object. Take an interest in what you see.

- Staring is part of the fear-response
- This can divert activity from the Neo-Cortex
- Moving the eyes “wakes-up” the whole brain
- Looking is not always seeing

Part of the fear response involves the pupils dilating and the eyes becoming fixed. Even a relatively low-level of stress can cause this response. It seems that when we’re afraid, we perceive some aspects of the world more clearly, but at the cost of ignoring much of the detail.

Intuitively, it makes sense that an animal or human only sees the most basic detail of a potentially threatening object. It would take too much time to take in all the detail of a scene. Our brain has a clever way of quickly reconstructing what every object is likely to be using its memory of similar events and situations, rather than analyzing each new thing afresh, in depth. It is these shortcuts that can result in errors and [visual illusions](#).

- The fear response in the body responds to certain triggers, often they are from the environment. Interestingly, if we adopt bodily patterns – in this case staring – that are a part of the fear response we can trigger the hormonal activity that causes the emotion of fear.
- Many studies show that **eye movements** are closely linked to cognitive processes such as attention, memory, and decision-making. **Eye movements** not only reflect certain aspects of **brain function**, providing information about our thoughts and desires to others, but might also influence and actively participate in them. <https://dana.org/article/the-eyes-are-windows-into-the-brain>

It is possible to take action to divert the fear response. We can choose to move our eyes.

Breathe

Because so many people experience breathlessness due to trying to breathe in when their lungs are still full of air, I tend to ask them to begin by breathing out and explain why. This can then lead on to encouraging them to start to notice what is happening in their bodies. It can lead into exploring how to avoid interfering with breathing.

- I like to focus on the concentration versus focus teaching here. Most people will recognise that they sometimes hold their breath when they are concentrating. Perhaps they have also observed this tendency in children?

- If we are not breathing much we are not oxygenating much
- You are asking the brain to work hard but at the same time not providing it with some of the fuel that it needs to do this!
- Taking 3 relaxed, deep breaths balances the activity of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems
- The neo-cortex, where the brain processes academic information, is by-passed when we are responding to perceived threat. If we are calm then the neo-cortex can function optimally

Soft & Tall

If at all possible, I like to do some hands-on work here. This is certainly the trickiest part of teaching the Ready List to adults if you do not also have much opportunity to put hands-on.

However, I have found that even in with a lack, or shortage of experiential teaching, there is great value in a person learning to activate the thought process of the Ready List. People still get great benefit from disrupting a pattern of stress, and do feel the benefit of doing this.

I usually keep this explanation very simple. My hope here is that some people will choose to go into the work in greater depth once they experience some benefits. However, it is of course very important that they start to understand what AT is about and why they are seeing children slumped over their desks, unable to focus, stressed-out, unhappy and out of control. Most important: why it does not have to be like this.

- I like to briefly touch on the startle response and how that manifests in the body. Also how, again, allowing your body to mimic that response, creates a low-level version of that response. Not everyone gets this idea but for some the lights go on.
- I may have already covered the dreaded school furniture topic. Now is a good time to remind everyone of that and how it contributes to the challenges of good use in the classroom.
- I might experiment with how we feel when we adopt different postures
- I find it very important to hammer home the idea that you can change your habits, your emotions, by behaving differently. This is actually a really interesting topic and you will be hearing more from me on how I connect up learning, staying safe and behaving differently

Transitions

Originates from my AT work with riders. Riders are very focused on how to effectively and elegantly guide the horse from one pace to another. Changing from walk to trot would be an example of a transition.

We are constantly transitioning from one state to another in ordinary life too.

- Help each teacher to identify a Transition Point for themselves. It is best if they can choose a point the school day.
- Choose something easy where they might be able to apply the Ready List.
- Role play for experiential learning
- Use The Ready List with the Transition

Hopefully they are learning that you can take action to make positive changes in your life.

To change the way that you feel you must change the way that you behave

More Information

More information on working in primary schools can be found in my book:

“Alexander in Primary Education” by Sue Merry MSTAT available from Amazon via <https://thedevelopingself.net/shop>

The material in these notes forms a part of The Developing Self Alexander in Education Training Course.

For more information about The Developing Self and our courses please [visit our website](#).

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