

Ep. #316 - The Second Arc: The Stepwise
Progression from Cues and Alignment to True
Biomechanical and Therapeutic Skill



Full Episode Transcript

With your host:
Susi Hately

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hately

Introduction 00:00:01 You're listening to From Pain to Possibility with Susi Hately. You will hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain, and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hately.

Susi 00:00:23 Welcome and welcome back. I'm so glad that you're here, because in our last episode, we spoke about a pivotal moment that so many yoga teachers encounter. The realization that your 200 hour training, while valuable, no longer fully equips you for the students in front of you. We explored what I call the first arc: the process of moving beyond alignment cues and alignment rules and step-by-step protocols into a more responsive, intuitive teaching. We discussed how that shift isn't a sign of failure, it's a developmental milestone. It marks the beginning of becoming more skilled, confident, and an attuned teacher. Today we're going to continue that conversation. Once you step beyond the "fix-it" mentality and really start noticing the patterns and how your students move and compensate, a new question arises:

Susi 00:01:09 What's next? What's the path from intuitive noticing to having the skill and clarity to truly, truly help? And that's what we're going to explore today. I'll walk you through what I call the "second arc:" the five stages teachers typically progress through as they deepen their skills and biomechanics, nervous system patterns, and therapeutic problem solving. This isn't just about trusting your instincts. It's about developing the ability to see movement patterns clearly, adapt strategies with confidence, and guide students through meaningful change without taking responsibility for fixing them. And this last piece of that is really important. So if you've ever felt that pull to go deeper, if you've ever noticed the rules breaking down but didn't quite know how to replace them, this episode will lay out the stepwise process that so many of my trainees have followed. Let's get started. So why does the second stepwise process matter? If the first arc was about moving away from rigid rules and towards curiosity and observation, this second arc is about turning that curiosity into skill.

Susi 00:02:17 I often say this is where teachers move from hoping that they can help to knowing how to help. Not because they have every answer, but because they have a clear process for assessing, adapting, and partnering with students to foster real change. If you've felt that your instincts are ahead of your technical skills, or if you've noticed patterns and you aren't sure how to address them, this stepwise process will clarify how to really bridge that gap. So let's walk through these five stages. Stage one I call the "rule follower." And this is really what happens for people in the 200 hour stage. In this stage you've been taught the basics. You have anatomy fundamentals, you have alignment principles, breath guidance and foundational cues like stack your joints and engage the core. Your role there is to apply what you were taught, to replicate the cues, and to keep students safe using generalized principles. Your focus is on pose shapes, avoiding unsafe positions, and giving students the cues you were taught. But soon something starts to feel off.

Susi 00:03:22 The teaching tends to be incomplete or overly generalized. Knee over ankle; engage your core; lengthen your spine. None of these cues account for the movement variability, compensations, or individual nervous system patterns. So when students

compensate, struggle, or feel pain despite good alignment, you notice that something's off, even if you can't yet explain why. The key feeling here is: I'm following the rules, but they aren't working for everyone. At this point, you aren't yet intuitive about it although you are sensing something is happening, you are a thoughtful rule follower even though something's niggling at you. This is the first spark, though, and you're noticing that the rules are not always working in real world bodies. This is where the second stage begins. I call this stage the "observer" and it's stage two. This is the moment when many teachers reach out to me, or begin taking my on-demand trainings. And out of those trainings, you start to notice patterns, particularly in the Power of Pure Movement series or even the Power of the Glutes.

Susi 00:04:34 In these programs, you start to see compensations. You understand them. You feel them in your own body. You get words for them. You also sense nervous system holding patterns. But as you're learning, you don't quite know what to do with what you see. You might be applying what I've taught you, but it's not fully ingrained in you yet. Your key questions at this stage might sound like what is that movement I'm seeing? Why does my cue not seem to land? Is that a compensation or is that just their version of the pose? Many teachers describe this as both frustrating and exciting. Frustrating because it feels like they are seeing more problems but not solving them. Exciting because you can feel awareness expanding. At this stage, teachers will often say things like, I feel like I'm noticing so much more, but I don't yet know how to help. It's like I've opened a door, but I don't know yet what the map is. And you're exactly right. This is where your intuition truly has awakened, and you're paying attention to it, and it recognizes you're paying attention to it.

Susi 00:05:45 Your observational skills are also growing, but the language and the technical knowledge and the practical strategies to address what you see are still developing. And the next stage is where that skill development starts to take shape. In this stage, stage three is the "pattern recognizer" and this is the middle phase. And it's the tipping point where intuition and skill really start to meet. This is a whole brain thinking and living experience. Here you begin to be able to identify, so you're seeing it and your left brain prefrontal cortex can clearly name common compensation patterns, for example: the ribs flaring, the shoulder hiking, the breath holding. Notice nervous system bracing and collapse responses where you didn't notice them before. Understanding basic load transfer issues. You're starting to notice, like, deviations and compensations within planes of movement and you're starting to build a language for what it is that you're seeing. You can name the patterns and compensations without immediately jumping in to fix them. Your cues begin to shift. You notice yourself not using cues like "stack your joints" or "engage your core."

Susi 00:07:03 You're coming up with other language based off of what you're seeing with your students, because you're seeing them, sort of noticing where they are or are not feeling support. You can see them where they are and are not transferring load clearly, and you can match language to what they are experiencing. So your cueing starts to be more deliberate as opposed to rote. And as a result, what led to this and what continues to grow from it, is that you're really trusting what you see and sense. You're realizing, oh, this isn't about doing the pose right, it's about clarity and movement. Pain or compensation isn't a failure, it's a signal. At

this stage, you're also beginning to experiment with small adaptations, whether it's the changing the stance width or using props really, really intentionally, not by happenstance. And you're starting to modify breath cues really based off of what you're seeing. And this is really key because you might be using some of the same cues and what you learned in your 200 hour, but how you're using them is what's becoming different.

Susi 00:08:11 There's much more discernment and deliberation and just being very specific with specific students. And as a result, you're seeing results. Small at first, but enough to build confidence like you've got this. The key feeling here is that I'm starting to connect the dots. I can see patterns and make informed choices. Your intuition now has a framework so that right brained, intuitive sense is getting named by that left brain prefrontal cortex. There's a framework there for how you can continue to grow this connection. And there is still a deeper layer to unlock. And here we're looking at stage four. And I call this the "adaptive practitioner." This is where the work becomes both an art and a science. You're now able to assess compensations and nervous system patterns in real time, adapt movement to reduce strain and clarify load transfer, facilitate nervous system down-regulation, and support autonomic flexibility. This is what people really learn in the therapeutic yoga intensive. It's where your role shifts from being a teacher to a facilitator. Instead of trying to fix a student's movement, you are offering explorations, creating conditions for their body and mind to self-organize. You're prioritizing clear and sustainable movement over achieving poses.

Susi 00:09:37 And your cues, they they continue to evolve based off of what you are seeing. Right? And as a result, you're seeing the difference when they start to change load pathways based off of the cues you're using, like the cues you are using are actually landing. You're seeing the difference that your words are making, whereas at the 200 level you were throwing the words out hoping they would stick. Part of you was like, are there like universal cues that I can rely on? And the reality is, no, there are not. But now you're so clear in what you're seeing, the clarity is transferring over into your language. And there's this deliberateness with what you are saying and people are getting it. You can see change. You're adapting movement in ways that reduce bracing and compensation while increasing clarity. Students will often report that they're feeling lighter and more supported. They're noticing reduced pain or strain, experiencing a sense of ease or freedom in movement. The feeling for you at this stage is that, yes, I can respond to what's happening in the moment.

Susi 00:10:40 I have enough tools to adapt safely and effectively. Perhaps more importantly, I don't have to have all the answers. I can co-create solutions with my students and this statement here fundamentally marks the shift from practitioner to true therapeutic problem solver, which leads us into stage five, which is the "integrative yoga therapist." The final stage is where technical fluency, nervous system awareness and intuitive presence come together. And this training happens in my Functional Synergy yoga therapy programs, whether it's the Functional Synergy program or the full IOIT accredited program. At this point, you can: confidently apply biomechanics and nervous system-informed teaching; assess and adapt fluidly in complex or novel situations; trust your observations, your students feedback, and your process. You no longer look for right or wrong answers, you work in context, nuance, and

partnership. Your teaching becomes responsive rather than reactive, collaborative rather than prescriptive, curious rather than corrective. And this is huge with all the corrective exercises that are out there. Oh, man. Being curious changes the game in ways you can only imagine at this point.

Susi 00:12:06 And perhaps even more critically, you celebrate results as data, not as proof of your worth. You've let go of the heavy responsibility to fix students or to facilitate change. Instead, you hold space for inquiry, growth and clarity. And as a result, the change that you are seeing amongst your clients is just gobsmacking quick. Not because you're making it fast, but because of the presence that you hold, the way that you're teaching and the deliberateness of how you're teaching and cueing and all the things. Your cues become really simple. Noticing, feeling what's changed? What are you now present to? Do this with your leg bone in your hip socket. Try this. Notice this. What's going on with your breath as you move through that? Now, it might seem like there's vagueness in those, but once you get to this point with your students, they are so involved and connected with you. It's this dance, this fluidity that happens, which is so beautiful and so darn fun. Students absolutely sense this, right? They feel seen, heard and empowered and it becomes this dance, as I mentioned, that really they have not found anywhere else in the medical model unless they get a truly remarkable medical professional.

Susi 00:13:19 The reason being is medical professionals aren't typically trained this way. They might evolve this way because of life happenstances happening, and they tune in in a new way, but it's not common. And as a result, and I can say this ah! over and over and over again, you're experiencing a level of professional joy and personal trust that perhaps you've always known was possible, but now you're living it. Your job of teaching is not a job. It's just so much fun and you finish your day more enthralled, more enlivened, and certainly not depleted. So why does this progression actually matter? Many teachers fear that they'll never know enough, that they'll never feel ready, that they'll get it wrong. And here's the truth. You will get things wrong. I'll be the first to say it. That's how you learn. You'll never know everything because growth is lifelong. You'll never feel perfectly ready. But readiness is built through the process itself. What matters is you recognize the developmental nature of the journey. You understand that doubts and fears are thresholds and not stop signs.

Susi 00:14:33 And you allow yourself to progress through each stage without rushing. Because when you do, you cultivate not just technical skill, but the deeper capacity to hold space for complexity, ambiguity, and possibility. And that's what therapeutic yoga teaching and yoga therapy really is all about. Let me share the story of Andrea. When she first joined my programs, she was exactly where many of you might be now. She had years of teaching experience. She cared deeply about her students. She could feel that in her 200 hour training was not enough. She noticed compensations and nervous system responses that she could not yet explain or address. And so, as a result, she second guessed herself constantly. She hoped the modifications that she offered would help, but she wasn't sure. She described feeling like she was swimming in information, but without a map. In other words, she was in stage two, "the observer." As she progressed through on demand programs and mentorship, she began to

name what she saw and she was able to move to stage three, "pattern recognizer" and she could identify compensations.

Susi 00:15:43 Now she experimented with adaptations. She noticed small changes, and her confidence grew. Eventually she was able to move into the "adaptive practitioner" stage. This is when she took the therapeutic yoga intensive. She stopped rushing to fix things. She was calm and confident. She began facilitating change through collaboration, exploration, and context-based adaptations. And today, she's almost through working through stage five, that integrative yoga therapist level. She navigates complex presentations with fluency and calm. She trusts her assessment. She partners with her students rather than leading with rigid answers. Her teaching is no longer about getting things "right." It's about fostering clarity, curiosity, and growth because these are the key ingredients for facilitating healing and recovery. This journey that she has had is absolutely and 1,000% available to you. Before we close, I want to name something really important. It's the deeper layer, which is this identity shift, which I made mention of in last week's episode too, because this is important. While the technical stages are clear and very learnable, they're skills that we can grow, the deeper work is often an identity shift.

Susi 00:17:11 And you might be feeling this desire to bust through it because innately, the 200 hour training, though it was good, it didn't really match your deeper, heartfelt desire that knowing you have in your guts or in your breath or blood or bones, wherever you feel that embodied experience. There's a movement that happens as you move from TTP 200 to a yoga therapist or a therapeutic yoga teacher. You're moving from rule follower to observer, observer to pattern recognizer, pattern recognizer to facilitator, but also from practitioner to facilitator. Fixer to co-creator. And these shifts can feel really vulnerable. At times, even disorienting. You're not just learning new skills, you're becoming a different kind of teacher, a different kind of professional. I want to be clear, though, that this isn't about throwing away what you've learned before. It's about integrating it into a broader, more flexible and more powerful approach. And that takes time, practice, and support. So your next steps:

Susi 00:18:32 I'd love to invite you to our upcoming session, The Therapeutic Shift How to move from PT 200 yoga teacher to Therapeutic yoga Teacher and into yoga therapist, and we'll explore why the 200 hour feels limiting and why? That's totally normal. The five technical stages and three phases of growth. The skills and belief that bridge the gap. How to navigate the identity shift with clarity and grace, and how to take your next step without overwhelm. Really giving you a package of how to move from this place you are to where you want to go. And what I can tell you is does not take a very long time. Not at all. The way that I teach. The results that I've seen is the shift can happen very rapidly. If your why and your why now is clear. If you know this is what you want and you just need someone who's been there already and has done it and has the experience and expertise to guide people through many different kinds of people and many different personalities. And not only have they guided yoga teachers through this, they've also guided physical therapists, occupational therapists, massage therapists into this place of integrative, embodied, therapeutic yoga teacher and yoga therapist into places where they're earning a living.

Susi 00:19:58 So even beyond the technical training, but earning a living doing what it is that they love. Now, that person might be me. That person may not be me. Whether or not you continue to learn with me, I hope this session will help you understand where you are, where you're going, and how to get there. If you want to join the session, you can learn more at functionalsynergy.com/shift. And as we close out, remember your students don't need you to be perfect, nor do they really want you to be. You're modeling the process of healing and recovery, so they need you to see them, listen and be willing to learn and grow and not shut them down. This transition from yoga teacher to therapeutic practitioner and eventually to yoga therapist, it's not just about skills, as I've mentioned. It's about becoming the kind of professional who can hold complexity and clarity and lead with both knowledge and compassion. And that's not something you get ready for. It's something you grow into. Step by step.

Susi 00:21:05 Stage by stage. Phase by phase. And you don't have to walk this path alone. I'm here. And so is my team, you can learn more about the Shift program at functionalsynergy.com/shift. Thank you for spending this time with me today. I will see you in the next episode and hopefully inside the therapeutic shift session. Take good care.