How to Use Generous Movement in your Rolfing Practice

Part II

by Roger Pierce

Movement Teaching Is a Natural Companion to Rolfing

Probably in one way or another most Rolfers teach their clients about movement. The situation itself, the relationship between practitioner and client, almost demands that clients be encouraged to take the responsibility for examining and changing their movement behavior. Rolfers and other practitioners of structural integration–those who already have a skilled grasp of Rolfing principles–were much in our minds during the writing of *Generous Movement*, with the hope of assisting in the development of movement teaching as a dimension of structural integration.

Ida Rolf's statement that "Rolfing is not a manipulative technique, it is a system of education," plays on the ambiguity of the word "Rolfing," which has different meanings on various levels of generality or specificity. We speak of Rolfing (at level 1) as a background of principles about how the human organism relates to gravity, and also (at level 2) as a manual technique for applying those principles and, even more specifically (at level 3), as a 10-session recipe. The principles are ideas which, being general, find expression in more specific forms. Those who have lived by Rolf principles–the "system of education" Ida was talking about–know them to be powerful, inspiring, and true to the human condition. Since they are general, they are a source for creative interpretation, suitable to many different foreground techniques.

Rolfing as a manual technique (level 2) is only one of the possible ways in which the principles can be carried out. And the 10-session recipe is only one of the possible forms of Rolfing. It is important that these levels of generality/specificity be distinguished, as Ida was pointing out in her ironic way.[1] Otherwise we lose the creative possibilities inherent in the principles by tying them to a single form. They deserve to be explored not only as structural integration and movement education, but, say, as dance style, or kindergarten pedagogy, or furniture design, to mention only some obvious possibilities.

Like the 10-session Rolfing sequence, *Generous Movement* is a recipe. It begins with balance (sitting and standing) and the release of weight into balanced self-support, then takes up walking, a simple stretching routine, the reverberative flow of spinal flexibility, core support and finally reaching, which integrates everything that has gone before. *Generous Movement* can also serve in a less systematic, more occasional or supportive way.[2]

Movement teaching is a complex affair. It calls for a range of diagnostic and pedagogic skills and a sensitivity to the psychological challenges presented to clients as they become aware of their movement behavior. Sustained, systematic training is the obvious path for those who want to educate themselves for professional teaching. But if enrolling in the movement training program is not immediately practical, there is much to be gained by plunging into teaching without it. Unlike Rolfing, which works from the background of principles only by a full-scale, multi-session, integrated series, movement can profitably be taught to clients in a momentary and freehand way. A little bit is much better than none. Rolfers can, as teachers, experiment, grow, and develop skills out of their knowledge of the informing principles.

Generous Movement can serve as a second technique alongside Rolfing, and be used in a free-swinging way that adapts itself to each practitioner's skills and interests and to the demands of a particular Rolfing practice. If you study the book carefully and do the processes until you have internalized them, you are ready to teach them to your clients. If you wish, you can go farther and absorb *Generous Movement* as a coherent overall recipe.

My Own Experience

I have been teaching movement as a part of structural integration sessions for over 15 years. (Sessions are 1-1/2 hours long, with about a half hour for

movement and an hour for structural integration.) Here are some of the benefits.

1. Working from the Rolf principles (level 1) with two different techniques–structural integration and movement teaching (both level 2)–has deepened my understanding of the principles. Ida used to badger students not to mix Rolfing with other practices until they were thoroughly experienced, because she feared they would never get clear what the principles were. In our culture those principles live a precarious life, being out of step with so much that is taken for granted. I am glad that I followed Ida in this for several years.

But movement teaching is not "mixing." It refers back to the same principles. The more experimenting we do on the level of technique–of applying the principles in practical ways–the more we will learn about them. We acquire synoptic vision, perspective, two lines converging on a single background point. I wish there were by now a hundred or a thousand disciplines or techniques and their spawned recipes all converging on that same background of understanding.

2. Teaching movement has given me a steadier awareness of my own movement behavior, something of fundamental importance to people in our profession. I don't mean that I match the ideal, though I have made and still make progress in that direction, but that my care for the principles, my faith in their value and effectiveness, expresses itself consistently in this personal way.

An insidious inside voice says, "who are you, with all your movement sins, to represent this work–and, worse yet, to dare teach it to others?" This voice needs to be faced resolutely. The fact is, you will never be perfect. What you can effectively model for others is not the ideal itself but the fact that you are in the process of transforming yourself under its guidance, and that awareness of movement enhances your life and does not tear down your self-esteem–the result is humility, not humiliation.

3. Teaching movement has made my working relationship with clients increasingly rich. At the 1991 Rolf Institute annual meeting in Boulder, Gael Ohlgren commented that Rolfers live under the stress of expectation that their work will always produce magnificent and startling results. This faulty perspective may arise in part from enthusiasm and advertising hype, but also from the initial assumption of most clients–and perhaps of many Rolfers–that this is fix-it work, like automobile repair.

If the behavioral, habituated aspects of the clients' problems never get any attention, then the responsibility for the incompleteness of success continues to rest on the practitioner. And this is a sure source of stress, because you as practitioner don't hold all the cards. Movement teaching is a sharing of responsibility and it puts Rolfing into a context where, however miraculous a change might occur in some respects, a longer and slower process, embedded in life's activities, can go on indefinitely.[3]

4. Teaching movement as part of a structural integration session has over the years transformed the style of work that my hands and elbows do, making it both deeper and gentler and easing the stress on my own body. Movement teaching keeps alive the

challenge to practice what I preach. If, as we claim, following our principles can change the quality of life, if they are spiritual, if they apply in a practical way to everything that we do, then surely they belong above all in our movements as we work.

Movement awareness, applied by and to yourself as you work at the table, can be a form of meditation, a state of consciousness that becomes, with practice, deep and calming.[4] To be more precise about my own experience, this "arranging" of myself–to establish core support, open breathing, balance the head, allow an easy flexion in the joints of hands and arms, and release along the spine–finds its focus in awareness of the client's tissue. It ceases to be self-conscious and becomes functional.

The benefits to me of movement teaching have been, not surprisingly, an intensified and more sustained version of what they have been for my clients: an internalizing of the principles and an application of them to the significant or trivial details of life as it is actually lived.

Some Examples

I'd like to illustrate the flexibility of *Generous Movement* by showing it in action with a variety of clients. The first is a client for whom the sequence in *Generous Movement* (from balanced stature to supported weight throws) was just right.

Ellen

Ellen, a clinical psychologist in private practice, 53 years old, was in excellent health and had no chronic neuromuscular problems. Of a holistic turn of mind, she had been hearing about the benefits of Rolfing for many years, but did not like the idea of being changed by someone else without herself fully understanding and espousing the choices being made.

When she came across a copy of *Expressive Movement* [5] in the library, she was fascinated by its discussion of how movement embodies settled attitudes and values. She called me in order to set up a series of movement lessons, discovered that I was also a practitioner of structural integration, and decided to do a series of sessions that brought together the two disciplines.

Since sitting was so much a part of Ellen's life, SITTING BALANCE was a natural beginning point for her movement education, as it is for a majority of clients. She easily mastered the basic outline of the process by going through it with the music a couple of times, and she noticed an immediate improvement in respiration. Then we experimented with sitting on a dining room chair, a soft chair like the one in her office, a sofa, and a car seat. She was alert to the psychological dimensions of different postures–how her relationship to me (as a mock patient) changed as she slouched or arched or balanced–and she noticed that she could maintain a keener awareness of her emotional state by keeping an eye on her postural responses, and that observing the movement of clients could become a valuable diagnostic tool.

This had been a suggestive half-hour, and it put the structural integration session into a context where she was encouraged to be an active participant. The non-verbal aspects of the session's touching work linked up with her conscious understanding. We were launched into a good working relationship.

During the following week, Ellen did SITTING BALANCE with the music once or twice daily and actively experimented with her sitting during therapy sessions. She read the introduction to *Generous Movement* and the chapter on sitting, and these added a level of detail that there had been no time for in the session.

We added usually one, sometimes two, new processes from *Generous Movement* each week, and she looked forward to a few minutes of quiet self-exploration each day as she moved to the music.

Annie

Annie was a "difficult" movement client. The book and the tape were inappropriate, and it seemed best not to present too much material. A 13-year-old, she had been referred by an optometrist for 4 structural integration sessions as an adjunct to developmental eye therapy. She had no idea what the purpose of the work was or how it related to her eye problems. She came to me as she would go to the dentist or the television repairman, to have something taken care of.

Annie spent an amazing portion of her day sitting–in school, in front of TV, talking on the telephone with her friends. As she told me about it, she sat on the edge of the table on her tailbone, her organs compressed by the extreme curve of the spine, and her occiput pinched into the back of her neck–not an uncommon picture of a teenager.

The teaching problem with Annie was to establish a sensible and appealing reason for her to experiment with her movement behavior. She gave the impression at first of being a little sullen, and lacked curiosity about what lay behind whatever I was going to do. Given her age, I could reasonably expect touchiness about anything involving self-image, reluctance to deviate from the behavior of her peers, resistance to authority, impatience with explanation. Daunting obstacles! My hope was to give her a distinct sensory experience on which to build understanding and the impulse to experiment with her movement.

I asked Annie to close her eyes and coached her to focus attention on

breathing, and then to try different sitting postures for their effect on her breathing. The lesson lasted about ten minutes and succeeded in showing her what she called the "opening" effect of balance on her breathing. As we chatted during the structural integration session, I was able to establish a connection between sitting posture, respiration and eye therapy.

In our three subsequent sessions, I essentially repeated the sitting lesson. Annie's interest was fitful, and the idea that she might herself take responsibility seemed best reinforced by simplicity and repetition. I made sure that the mechanics of balanced sitting were clear and encouraged other sensory experiences–the tension in her atlanto-occipital joint and in her face and eyes, for example, when she slouched, and which was released by "sitting up." This was a perception which I could then discuss as we worked on the table. We talked about peer pressure and I suggested she could choose freely between slouching and balance, depending on the particular situation. She was encouraged to feel the learning as an expansion of possibilities, not the imposition of yet another adult constraint.

Given the limitations as I felt them, I was satisfied with the results of our 4 sessions. A seed of interest had been planted, Annie had been treated as a responsible person, and the optometrist's objective had been addressed in both structural integration and movement education. Another practitioner might, with the same bag of tricks, have taken quite a different tack with Annie. This call for adaptive creativity is one of the rewards of including movement teaching with structural integration sessions.

Jerry

Jerry is presented here as an example of a client for whom the *Generous Movement* recipe was generally appropriate, but who needed to begin somewhere other than with SITTING BALANCE.

He was 37 years old, a teacher and counselor in a school for the deaf. He had been severely injured in an automobile crash 15 years before, had had multiple spinal surgeries, and had suffered lumbar and cervical pain more or less constantly since then. He moved cautiously. Within three or four sessions he realized that the work was inducing a profound change in his life, and being the strong-minded, energetic person he was, he pursued it enthusiastically.

Because of his pain, we began the movement learning with stretching (SIX SPINAL MOVEMENTS), at first without music so that he could deepen the stretches slowly enough to suit the delicate state of his back. Later the music was helpful, in this and the other processes, for pacing and for maintaining focus.

Jerry's movement learning centered around spinal flexibility, as does *Generous Movement* itself. After stretching we took several sessions for him to learn the balancing and weight-releasing processes, and then went on to SWAYING. This was a therapeutic activity, softening the rigidity that had developed in response to his years of pain and habituating him to the play of reverberative movement that would heal the stressed tissues, and it helped establish a sensory recognition of what his spine felt like as it expanded into movement. GRACIOUS CURVE (reaching) integrated spinal flexibility with the movements of limbs and encouraged him to allow it into a multitude of daily actions.

Jerry passed what we both came to see as a significant milestone of his series of sessions when he had a relapse. He had been "carried away" in a basketball game, had twisted suddenly on a jump shot, and had regressed–as he put it to me on the telephone–"back to square one." He was terribly discouraged. With some persuasion he agreed not to come in for an immediate first aid session but to see what he could do for himself with stretching and swaying. He was successful with these simple and obvious strategies, and learned that he was no longer simply the victim of his disabilities–that he could take healing action himself and with time and practice become increasingly skilled at it.

Using *Generous Movement* and his movement experiences in and out of sessions, Jerry began to teach movement himself, as part of his work with deaf children. He is grateful for what we did together, including, of course, the work on the table, but he has not felt it necessary to come back for further sessions. He is on his own. Neither of us could say which part of his sessions–structural integration or movement education–accomplished what.

Ron

Ron, like Annie, needed a particularly loose and undogmatic approach to movement learning–a readiness on my part to respond to his particular needs and capacities. He was 27 years old and worked in a medical laboratory. He had suffered ideopathic scoliosis as a child and teenager, and a Harrington rod had been implanted in his back when he was about 12 years old. Ten years later he had had it removed. The scoliosis was not progressive.

I began by teaching Ron the SITTING BALANCE process and suggesting that he practice it daily. My reasoning was that he needed a regular, steadily applied program that would focus around spinal flexibility, and I intended to teach the processes one or so at a time, session by session, in the sequence followed by *Generous Movement* and the tape.

At his second session, Ron seemed

to have absorbed little of the previous week's teaching. He did sit with a little more spontaneous balance but he showed no particular evidence of being aware of his sitting or of having an interested, experimental attitude toward it. He had not practiced SITTING BALANCE at home–he had "forgotten." He had tried reading *Generous Movement* but had found it difficult.

We agreed to drop the book and the tape from his movement learning and to focus instead on the movements that were most on his mind. Ron brought up lifting. At work he loaded 10-gallon bottles into a machine, and the strain worried him. Also, he took a program of weight lifting very seriously as a way of maintaining the health of his back. And so we began again, this time on core support, counterbalancing, and mobilizing the pelvic girdle, not generalizing too much but keeping the work specific to his immediate interest. Ron came to the next session with a number of questions that showed he had been actively working with his movement. By the time we finished his series of sessions, we had been over nearly all the particular activities covered by *Generous Movement*. Ron had an unsystematic but useful grasp of principles.

Al

Al was a client whose movement interest was so specific that we focused everything around his one passion, golf. His wife, a pianist, had had a series of sessions some time before. She had been relieved of chronic shoulder pain and had found new ways to approach rehearsal and performance. Al decided to see what sessions would do for his golf game. He was a dedicated and successful amateur on the national circuit.

He was not much interested in generalizing about his movement life. Other than in golf, he was not inclined to discipline it. We did, in the course of our work, some extrapolating to other situations, usually in the context of the game.

We were both clear that I was no golf pro (I had played once when I was eleven years old), but that general principles of movement would nevertheless be relevant. Because golf is so full of lore backed by authority, it was important for me to stay out of conflict with what Al took to be the gospel. I was not shy about inquiring–Al probably did as much teaching as I did–and I constantly adapted my suggestions to what was already working for him or what he was unwilling to give up. The result pleased us both. His game improved, and looked as though it would go on improving, and there was an overflow into other realms of Al's life.

In Conclusion

Movement teaching is a natural complement to Rolfing when it works from the same background of principles. In my practice the two disciplines have supported one another in helping clients and in developing my own skills. *Generous Movement* can be used by a Rolfer as an integrated series, as a source for occasional teaching as need arises, or as a self-learning guide for clients to use.

Ordering and Discount

Generous Movement and *Expressive Movement* are both available from the Boulder office of the Rolf Institute or directly from The Center of Balance Press, 126 East Fern Avenue, Redlands CA 92373.

For orders to the Center of Balance Press, send $18 (includes tape) for each copy of *Generous Movement*, plus $2 per order for shipping. If you live in California, add 7-1/2% for sales tax ($1.35 per book unless discounted). You can also order *Expressive Movement* for $20. (California sales tax is $1.50.)

To encourage you to use the books with clients, we offer a 15% discount on orders that total 4 or more books.

Our telephone number is (714) 792-8134, and the address is the same as for the Center of Balance Press. I would be pleased to hear from you if you have questions or would like to talk about any of these things.

Footnotes

[1]Ironic because she of all people could have clarified the situation by giving different names to different levels of generality. The title of her book amalgamates two levels, if we take *The Integration of Human Structures* to refer to the principles (which is what the book is about) and *Rolfing* to refer to the manual technique, which the book is deliberately not about.

[2]What are the ingredients of a good recipe?

1. It reflects its underlying principles directly, clearly, consistently, and logically.
2. It works, it is practical, it brings the principles to realization in life.
3. It is interesting, attracting, inspiring.
4. It teaches the person who uses it. A major motive with Ida in designing the Rolfing recipe was for it to play the role of teacher after the all-too-short Rolfing classes were over.
5. It provides a safe haven for a practitioner. It is a structure, a set of limitations within which learning can happen. Background principles are broad and suggestive, they present a wilderness of possibilities. A recipe is a pathway through the wilderness.

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6. A good recipe contains the seeds of its own self-transformation. It does not freeze into a dogma but continues to grow. Five years later, it won't be the same any more.
7. It promotes a questioning and purifying of the underlying principles themselves–so that like recipes they are not sacred cows but continue to be life-giving stimuli.

[3]I am reminded of an essay by Hellmuth Kaiser, "The Problem of Responsibility in Psychotherapy." Kaiser argues that a therapist must "take all the responsibility for the outcome of the analysis–all one hundred percent of it." Any other assumption "would be as devious as to say that an obsessional patient could not be cured because he behaved obsessively."

In the professional world of structural integration, "resistance" is a favorite buck-passing term. When my work is less than fully successful, it seems most stimulating to my analytical powers to begin from the position that if I had done differently the result might have been different.

Kaiser recognizes that the success of psychotherapy involves–in a sense *is*–the taking of responsibility by the patient. And it is precisely in the *sharing* of responsibility that he sees the need for the therapist to *take* responsibility. "Where does the patient's responsibility come in? The correct answer is *nowhere.* The analyst's behavior should induce in the patient a sense of responsibility for what he says and does, but this principle does not at all mean that the patient should be held responsible to any extent for the outcome of treatment. This principle contains a prescription for the *analyst,* not for the patient. It prescribes a behavior for the analyst which will produce a certain desirable effect: a feeling in the patient that his words and actions are really and wholly his own."

We might use the word *respect* for the therapeutic attitude Kaiser is talking about. It can come into play strongly as part of movement teaching (or of Rolfing for that matter)–not as psychologizing, but as empathy with the process through which a client is passing. Being actively "in process" with one's own movement behavior is a basic ingredient.

Kaiser's article was published in *Psychiatry,* 18, 1955, 205-211 and reprinted in *Effective Psychotherapy: The Contribution of Hellmuth Kaiser,* edited by Louis B. Fierman, Allen J. Enelow and Leta McKinney Adler (New York: The free Press, 1965), 1-13. The book has long been out of print. If you would like me to mail you a copy of Kaiser's article, send a self-addressed stamped envelope and $1 to me at The Center of Balance, 126 East Fern Avenue, Redlands, CA 92373.

[4]This line of thought is developed more fully in my article, "Doing Bodywork as a Spiritual Discipline," *Rolf Lines* Vol. XVIII, No. 4, Sept/Oct 1990. For a copy, send a self-addressed stamped envelope and $1.

[5]Alexandra and Roger Pierce, *Expressive Movement: Posture and Action in Daily Life, Sports, and the Performing Arts* (New York: Plenum, 1989). □