

Ask the Movement Faculty

Integration of Structure and Function in the Training of Certified Rolfers

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What are some ideas in Rolf Movement Integration that make it essential to the study of Rolfing®?

To begin, this question should be set in the context of the evolution of basic Rolfing training, which now integrates structural and functional work. In the training, the understanding of movement work and its connection to the Ten Series is foundational. Students exchange movement sessions during Unit Two and teach movement sessions to clients in Unit Three. They also learn to address the functional aspects of each Rolfing session. Because of this focus, it is essential that a student enters the training with a basic grasp of the interwoven nature of the structural and functional aspects of our work.

To answer this question, I will draw from ideas and concepts articulated by various movement faculty members, in order to offer an answer that is comprehensive and reflects the current evolution of Rolf Movement work. I will give only a broad overview, as the details are better conveyed through training and mentorship avenues.

The first exposure that many students have to Rolf Movement is during their five-session movement series that is required for entry into the training. Through experiencing this series, the Rolf Movement faculty would like a prospective student to gain a basic understanding of the following three fundamental concepts:

1. The movement work frees fixations in patterns of movement while the structural work frees fixations in the tissues.¹

Rolf Movement work and structural Rolfing have a reciprocal effect on each other. The

tissues need to become free to have the necessary adaptability for new coordination in movement. New coordination may reveal that what appears to be in the tissue

actually derives from habits of conflicted motor control. Core stabilization illustrates this concept. Many spinal fixations are chronic because of faulty patterns in coordination. Core stability is an expression of coordinative integrity. When stability fails, as in chronic low back pain, Rolfing offers a way to recover it through movement. It is not enough to free fixations in the tissues because if we do not also free the fixations in movement patterns, the tissue releases will either be ineffective or the patterns will re-create themselves over time.

2. While structural Rolfing provides the necessary conditions for the Line to emerge, the movement work gives life to the Line.²

The Rolfing "Line" is an aliveness to context expressed through the attitude of posture. Awakening this aliveness is the enduring goal of Rolfing and Rolf Movement. Aliveness to context is rekindled over and over when we understand and develop a kinesthetic sense of gravity and support from the ground, along with a felt sense



of the support that we get from adequate connection to space. Contact with the world opens as we become aware of the unique ways we use our senses, which in turn organizes our movements even before we move. Through awareness of how we connect to our environment, objects and "the other," the Line becomes something fluid and adaptable, a presence that is relevant to our daily lives.

3. To work with Rolf Movement techniques does not mean to fix, to correct, to change the client, but rather to create possibilities for the client to be in the world with greater stability, flexibility, fluidity, vitality and unity.³

Life is relational in that we must adapt to the constant flow of demands from the environment and situations we encounter along the way. Some of our responses are hard-wired and our survival depends on them. But when survival isn't at stake, we can respond more adaptively instead of reacting in fixed patterns, and better absorb the richness of our individual life experience and have a positive impact on our world.

"Integration" has frequently been a word ascribed to the goals of Rolf Movement. Several movement theory ideas foster the client's ability to organically assimilate information and experiences pertaining to structural work. Skills for working with coordination and perception are taught throughout the entire training, but are most refined during the Rolf Movement Certification. These skills provide a Certified Rolfer™ with techniques that enhance the integrative aspects of a Rolfing® series. In what follows, I will describe three types of movement interventions along with some theoretical background relevant to movement work in the training of Rolfers.

PRE-MOVEMENT

First there is the art of making an intervention at the level of "pre-movement." Pre-movement is how our body orients in preparation for movement. It happens beneath our conscious awareness and precedes the actual action. Adaptable pre-movements orient us skillfully in gravity and are harmonious with the demands of the movement. For example, a good batter grounds for appropriate stability while at the same time orients skillfully in space for a powerful swing. The degree to which all of this happens occurs in a split second based on the batter's assessment of the direction,

timing and velocity of the pitcher's pitched ball.

Our pre-movements become entrenched, just like tissue fixations, and are constantly repeated in many circumstances. Once the pre-movement is set up, the actions that follow will be organized around that set of conditions. For example, a walk across the room may be preceded by contraction in part of the diaphragm. In order to find an organic option for a shift in gait, the practitioner must first address the pre-movement, the tiny clutch in the breathing muscle. Any movement cues that do not first address this primary issue will lay on top of it, causing the gait changes to seem awkward or artificial. Unless the habitual pre-movement is addressed, a true responsive contralateral gait will not emerge.

In order to address this issue, the Rolfer can contribute an image, a sensory experience, or an exercise that more fully connects the client to the ground and space. As the client finds appropriate stability through better gravity orientation, the body chooses a different support strategy in its pre-movement. Diaphragmatic tension, an inefficient form of preparation for weight shift, is replaced by better support in preparation to walk. The client's restriction may just be a habit, may be part of a belief system, or may originate from an old injury. Whatever the cause, the practitioner needs to work with the client to discover a different option for initiating movement, because the current one influences the person's relationship with gravity by impeding ease in flow. Intervening at the level of the pre-movement can remove a major inhibition to contralateral gait.

It is essential to find the image, experience or information that precisely addresses the individual client's pre-movement pattern. To this end, the practitioner must find avenues of communication that connect well to each individual. For lasting and effective change, the client must understand, embrace and desire the new movement option. This type of intervention doesn't follow a formula. Rather it is more of an art that takes its cue from listening to how the client describes his or her experience, how he or she builds the world. Our pre-movements are organized at a pre-conscious level: our relationship with gravity percolates through multiple aspects of our being. Moshe Feldenkrais indicated that our relationship with gravity precedes and is

more fundamental than our relationship with mother. Deep aspects of our psychic, physical, and experiential memory are based upon our perceived relationship with gravity, so we are not working in superficial waters when we intervene at the level of the pre-movement.

COMPARISON

A second key point in Rolf Movement theory is the technique of comparison. It is not enough for the Rolfer to simply say "...now you are walking differently." For a client to fully own the change, he/she needs to arrive at the conclusion himself/herself. This is fundamental in order for the client to integrate the new coordinative option into daily life: the shift in perception must include ownership. One way to foster this awareness is through comparison of the "old pattern" with the new one. Frequently when we ask clients to go back into the old pattern of moving, they don't want to do it. We may not want them to do it, either. We both may be afraid that the new option will get lost, but exactly the opposite is true. When we revisit the old pattern we have the opportunity to gain the tools to find and maintain the new option. We improve the chances for the new option to survive. When we ask a client to "notice what is the very first thing that happens in your body when you just think about going back to the old pattern?," he/she gains awareness of his/her pre-movement. In this moment the option for change can emerge through the client's own awareness.

As practitioners, we assist the client in anchoring the new movement pattern by offering various options for images, information, and awareness that have the best potential to inspire change. As we have mentioned, the pivotal opportunity to do so is at the time of pre-movement. Interventions that affect a client's relationship with gravity help to foster change that not only transforms the actual movement, but also facilitates different conditions for movement. If I sense the floor easily coming up to meet me, instead of having to "do" something in order to meet the floor, my worldview also changes. I have allowed the world to touch me, and that is a different place in which to live. Perhaps I might need to increase my tonus by accelerating the force of my reaching, not only to the ground, but through the ground. My world now has expanded through the surfaces under and around me. The point is that each

person is different and as practitioners we adapt and respond, so that we may offer the widest range and depth in experience. What works for one person may or may not have any relevance to another. As Jim Asher says, "you just have to have lots of tools in your toolbox."

BRIDGE-BUILDING

Once we have assisted the client in finding an effective cue or awareness, he/she needs to anchor it for himself/herself. Practicing the sensations of a new movement pattern in "real time" situations will enable the client to find support in the midst of daily life. Some changes happen magically. Others take time to integrate. For the latter situations, we encourage the client in taking responsibility for the process between sessions. This is a vital aspect of bridge-building.

It is important to remember that we don't wish to "fix" or take away any of the client's options for movement, no matter how ineffective they may seem to us. We are self-regulating systems with an affinity for health, so when we facilitate an experience that allows a client to become acquainted with the potential for increased ease and vitality, along with the freedom and tools to find it for himself/herself, we provide a session that is as rich in education as it is in therapeutics.

The inclusion of coordination and perception is essential to the study of structural Rolfing® because it increases the effectiveness of the work. Structural Integration is "structural" to the degree to which the underlying structure of our movement in relation to gravity is meaningfully addressed. Rolf Movement Integration is a complex and multi-dimensional process, which helps foster a broader vision of the far-reaching potential of our work.

END NOTES

1. Caspari, Monica, "The Functional Rationale of the Recipe," *Structural Integration*, March, 2005, pp. 4-24.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

Note: The author appreciates the collaboration of the movement faculty and consultation with and edits by Mary Bond and Kevin Frank.