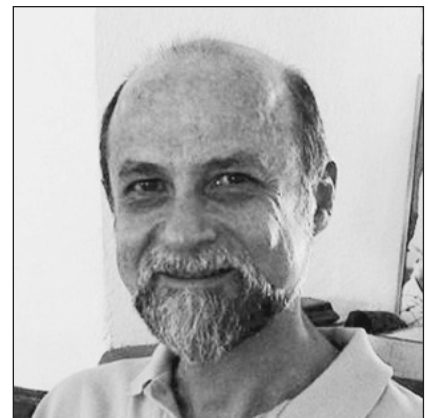


Rolfing®: Over Time . . . Across Continents Through Generations

By Pedro Prado, Ph.D., Certified Advanced Rolfer™

For me, clinical practice is the most satisfying part of being a Rolfer. As much as I enjoy teaching, writing, interacting with colleagues, and participating in the development and evolution of the Rolf Institute of Structural Integration® and the ABR (Brazilian Rolfing Association), there is something precious about my contact with individual clients – participating in and facilitating their processes – that especially enlivens and inspires me. Something in this private and intimate encounter is magic.

I have been practicing Rolfing for twenty-eight years. Four to five days each week, I find the energy to attend to six to eight clients daily. This shows me that seeing clients nourishes me spiritually and physically. Even after having worked with more than 2000 people (besides post-ten, advanced or continuous-process clients), there is no repetition; every session presents its own unique challenge. In all my years of Rolfing – despite constant travel and extensive teaching – I have made it a priority to keep my clinical practice vibrant.



It is there that all my interests coalesce, and I can make a humanistic synthesis of my lines of inquiry to help people directly. It is always a great adventure.

Perhaps because I started my professional life as a clinical psychologist, my clinical work as a Rolfer is process-oriented. It was in this perspective that I was first trained, and I brought it to my Rolfing practice.

Working from a client and process-oriented perspective is, for me, essential. What are the client's stated goals? What unspoken goals might I infer? How can I navigate the work around the various points of the Circle of Being? How is the client's consciousness affecting the process? What level of consciousness is available to the client? Questions like these guide my session planning and help me to track the client's process as it unfolds. Still, I am frequently caught by surprise and have to change course or adjust my strategy to stay on top of what is happening. It feels a bit like adjusting the gears of a bicycle – tighter or looser, more or less talk, slower or faster touching. Sometimes it is about formulating just the right question that will bring the client's awareness to the multi-layered nature of the experience, and help the client perceive the connections among experience within the body itself and other layers of experience. At other times, it is just finding and flowing in the correct layer of tissue, tracking the self-regulatory wisdom of the unconscious body.

In hindsight, I can confirm the benefits of certain practice protocols. First, I have photographed most of my clients. The photos are useful not only during the process, but also for retrospective reflection. Second, I interview the client at the start to set the tone and establish the goals of the process. Third, I make time for closure – either during the last session or in a separate post-series interview. Finally, I take lots of the time for movement education and pattern recognition. If the client becomes aware of and able to attend to the meaning of a pattern, then the client can come back and look at photos from maybe as long as twenty years ago and perceive significance in the life journey.

Practicing for nearly three decades has allowed me to study trans-generational patterns. Clients will bring their children – and sometimes their parents. Then maybe the original client's children bring their own children. I have worked with four generations – and occasionally five. A privilege!

As my work has evolved from struggling to do the "right thing" to perceiving what would be appropriate for *this* person in *this* moment of life, it has gradually become more economical. I have experienced the truth of the dictate "less is more." I often meet with clients who recall their initial meaningful – but painful – Rolfling

experiences, and I realize how much I have overworked, and how hard I have worked before. But now I hear, "People say Rolfling hurts a lot, but I have not experienced a bit of pain." This leaves me wondering whether I am not working hard enough – or if instead my touch has simply become more refined . . .

Physical pain and pain on other levels has taught me a lot. Many clients seek Rolfling because of pain. Others experience pain during Rolfling. In general, I use a process approach rather than a fix-it approach. But when a client presents with acute physical pain, I do try to determine its cause and to treat it, keeping in mind that the pain is only one aspect, one manifestation, of the client's reality at that moment and in the client's life as a whole. However, my "good heart" has produced its fallacies when, while wanting to alleviate an episode of acute pain, I fail to do so and only bring frustration to all. Although the study of biomechanics has made my work more precise, I also find that simply honoring clients' pain with empathy and compassion while accepting my technical limitations has helped many clients ford the torrent of their miseries to reach the other bank.

Two other circumstances have left their marks on my practice. First, I was the first Rolfler in Brazil. This meant I had to explain Rolfling to anyone and everyone in whatever words they could understand. From being asked (let's say at an art opening) "What's your profession?" to attending psychology conferences where I gave lectures on the principles and techniques of Rolfling, to writing articles and giving media interviews, I have had to tailor the message to the audience. I received many questions – often from persons who viewed our work with suspicion. I have accepted all such questions as legitimate and done my best to answer them with equanimity.

Another important step to bringing Rolfling to Brazil was building a respectable image for our profession, which can only be done if "we walk our talk" and behave with integrity and respect toward clients, colleagues and other professionals. I always tried to contact practitioners in other fields and discuss the cases we had in common. This helped get a "foot in the door" and build a solid and respectable reputation for the work.

But, as we say in Portuguese, "Just one bird does not a summer make." Fortunately,

I did not remain the only Rolfler in Brazil for long. Welcoming, mentoring and encouraging new colleagues, and fostering exchange among us, helped us all. I truly believe in community. I also know that my own practice developed as successfully as it did over the years in part because I did not isolate myself or seek to maintain my own position by competing with others.

Second, I have had the privilege of working in different countries and cultures. When I was in the U.S. at the start of my preparation to become a Rolfling instructor, Louis Schultz invited me to take over his practice in New York City for two months. (Louis was to teach with Stacey Mills in Florida and needed someone to take care of both his clients and his cats.) Practicing in a very different environment and culture made me really stretch myself to live up to Louis's excellent reputation. Having come from a third-world country, I arrived with something of an "inferiority complex" – but that experience bolstered my self-esteem. As they say of New York, "If you can make it here, you'll make it anywhere!" It proved true for me. After that, I started my own New York practice, which I maintained for seven years by commuting to New York several times each year. Thanks to the relative strength of the dollar in those years, the New York practice financed my training as a Rolfling instructor.

I also taught the first two Italian Rolfling classes (1992 and 1995), and had many Italian students in other classes I taught around the world. This reconnected me to my Italian roots, and for family reasons I started and continue to practice in Italy.

From this cosmopolitan experience, I have had the pleasure to see that although the cultural layer must be perceived and addressed, Rolfling is a truly universal approach. The power of the work is beyond culture.

I am grateful to Ida P. Rolf for having laid the foundation of this work; to my colleagues who have helped it to evolve; and to my clients, who have been instrumental in my own evolution – accepting my mistakes, suggesting ways for me to grow, and teaching me.