

Teaching Rolf Movement® in a Pandemic

An Interview with Per Haaland

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ABSTRACT *When the 2020 shutdown happened, some of the scheduled Dr. Ida Rolf Institute® (DIRI) Rolf Movement® continuing education and certification classes were shifted to an online format. In this article, faculty member Per Haaland discusses how he delivered online Rolf Movement courses and what he learned in the process.*

Lina Amy Hack: Our theme for this issue is *integration* applied to the Rolwing® Structural Integration (SI) paradigm. I have heard that you responded to the COVID-19 restrictions of 2020 and 2021 by offering Rolf Movement instruction in an online, remote setting. How is that going?

Per Haaland: This has been going really well. I recently became part of the Rolf Movement faculty and, in the early months of 2020, I was planning to do several in-person classes, six-day workshops were my plan. Then the pandemic struck us.

Kevin Frank has been one of my primary mentors in Rolf Movement instruction, so I was inspired to teach a class that he had created, called “Normal Stability: Evoking Inherent Capacity to Meet Demand.” As I was putting that class together, COVID-19 hit us all. And at that point it became

clear that it would not be possible to do live classes. I decided to convert this class, originally designed as a six-day class, into a six-week class. Instead of a group of people coming together in-person for six days, everyone can be in their own home for a six-week class.

We met twice a week on Zoom for two and a half hours each time. The way that students worked with the material was, of course, completely different from a face-to-face class. Obviously, we were not able to make actual tactile contact.

LAH: Right. How did you move forward from there?

PH: I was looking for other ways to convey the material. One way I approached it was to produce videos, in-depth detailed videos that were typically about one hour long that students watched at home to

prepare for class. I uploaded the videos to YouTube and a link was provided to the students. These videos contained a series of Rolf Movement strategies that I demonstrated with a client and I gave various explanations. Mostly, it's just seeing me work with a client. In the videos, I model the use of evocative language with clients, which of course is very important in the Rolf Movement work. I put this question to my students: *How do you use evocative language to help clients enhance their sensory awareness?*

My aim has been to make these demonstration videos extremely detailed so the students have the most complete step-by-step progression to work from. I have also developed and written illustrated guides to provide easy step-by-step instructions for all the movement integration strategies presented in the video. When they work on their own with a client, they can have that guide by their side as a reference (see Figure 1 for an example).

During the Zoom class meetings, I began with a PowerPoint lecture on a topic such as tonic function. I believe Hubert Godard's tonic function model is something Rolfers might consider as a sort of 'unified field theory' for structural integration. It strengthens our theoretical background for understanding what it is that we're doing both in Rolfing SI work and in Rolf Movement Integration. So that's an important lecture. Another example of a lecture I give is a presentation on the human gait, emphasizing Serge Gracovetsky's spinal engine theory.

I then had students discuss the ideas presented in small groups using Zoom's breakout rooms. These discussions were organized around questions I had previously generated from the lecture material. Following these small group discussions, students returned to the main session and each group gave a presentation to the class in response to the assigned discussion questions. So, after

the lecture, discussion, and presentation, which took up to an hour total, we had ten-minute break. Following the break, I brought in a client-model for a live demonstration of the strategies learned that week, repeating what they had seen in the week's video. This live client-model demo that students viewed during the class was typically about a half hour to forty minutes (see Figure 2). The next portion of class time was spent debriefing the client-model demonstration. Students asked questions and responded to one another. That was a big ingredient in the Zoom meetings: talking and connecting.

The final important ingredient was live experiential movement practices. I led students through predetermined movement sequences. Students set up a space in their house where they could explore the movements. They used a Rolfing bench and a mat with access to a wall where they could push with the feet. Through the targeted use of TheraBands, walking sticks, and other tools, students were led through experiential movement practices related to the week's lesson (from video demonstration, client-model demo, and lecture materials). These practices deepened students' own embodiment and enhanced their own body awareness.

That, I think, was particularly useful and helpful for people in this COVID-19 moment when so many of us have been missing being able to go to yoga or a Feldenkrais Method® class. Whatever resources people had before the pandemic were often taken away or dramatically reduced. So, working through the course material using Rolf Movement was especially valuable as it offered us an embodied connection in a time of disconnected shutdown of our communities. Learning these principles through movement is not just the intellectual kind of learning, but also somatic and embodied understanding.

Using all of this course material, students were then invited to work with an in-person client. During the six-week class, students would take their clients through a series of practice sessions. Students were asked to write detailed notes and post the notes on Canvas online learning platform. That gave me a chance to read their notes, give them comments, and graded them. This chance to comment on what they were doing as an instructor helped me have a better understanding of how they were integrating the material. How were they applying it? How are they using their creativity?

Session One Outline

1. Walking and Perception

- A) Focal versus peripheral vision.
- B) Sensory awareness of feet.

2. Assessment, Awareness of Breath, and Thoracic Motion (Supine)

- Allowing the weight of client's body to rest,
- Speaking of the support from table.
- Position hands upper thoracic, anterior and posterior,
- Breath exploration.

3. Breath and Anterior/Posterior Movement of Spine (Standing)

- Does client's breath expand in the anteroposterior dimension?
- Do the sides of the thorax expand laterally?

4. Thoracic Spine Movement in Walking

- Practitioner observes thoracic spine in walking,
- to identify 'still' place, where there is a lack of continuity.
- Practitioner chooses one or two vertebrae to work with.

5. Anterior/Posterior Movement of Spine, Flexion (Sitting)

- Client is seated on bench, hands on treatment table.
- Practitioner standing or sitting behind client takes hold of spinous process.
- Client is invited to 'tune into' sensory awareness of palms of hands, and soles of feet.
- Whole thoracic spine invited into flexion.

6. Anterior/Posterior Movement of Spine, Extension (Sitting)

- Practitioner initiates anterior motion of same thoracic vertebra.
- Client invited to observe space above and around, as well as hands and feet.

7. Flight of the Eagle, Part One

- Client supported to find sensory awareness in hands as well as in the feet.
- Through touch and verbal cues, imaginary vectors are established.
- Teach lengthening the front line (extension) and back line (flexion).
- Have client walk to feel the changes, to express what they are experiencing.

Figure 1: A step-by-step instruction for session one given to students.



Figure 2: Per Haaland working with a client-model demonstrating a Rolf Movement Integration session.

It was very rich to see how each person found their own solutions to implementing evocative language. Understandably, this can be a little strange at first. In Rolf Movement sessions, you're using evocative language and asking your clients to visualize, often while they're performing guided movements. Using evocative language is a skill that can take time to develop. It may feel a little awkward for some in the beginning. It can feel awkward to clients too. But through ongoing practice, and while working with videos and reference guides, students learn to integrate evocative language in their work. They can revisit the videos and see how I apply those tools with my video client, as well as the examples used with my live client-model sessions.

LAH: That sounds like a really beneficial learning environment. What you are describing is quite empowering to the learner.

PH: I think it is, yes.

LAH: So interesting to hear about how you met the challenge of the pandemic shutdown, you responded to those challenges by making even more detailed content to help people learn.

PH: The fact that the class happens over a six-week period really gives people a

chance to slowly integrate the material and to actually do some serious research, which I feel in our field is a bit of a weak point. The theoretical understanding of structural integration can always be stronger and that's something I really want to support. I would like to appeal more to the inquiry, to the scientific aspects of our training, so that we can get better at understanding what it is that we're doing. To update our minds as to the new research and how that applies to our work, that all requires time.

In my classes, students read articles and we take the time to deepen their understanding of the content through lectures, discussions, student presentations, session notes, and quizzes. At the end of the course, students reflect on their session notes and course content by writing a final paper. These assessment features allow the course to qualify for Board Certified Structural Integrator^{CM} (with International Association of Structural Integrators[®]) and National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) continuing education (CE) accreditation.

LAH: Do the students get a sense of building relationships with each other as colleagues in this online format for Rolf Movement classes?

PH: Very much so, yes. Building relationships is important and is something that many people fear would be lost in an online setting, but I found that, in a different but meaningful way, students did indeed form close collegial bonds.

As I mentioned earlier, following the lectures, three or four students discussed course content in breakout rooms. At other times, students were directed to lead and receive mini-Rolf Movement sessions with one another in the breakout room. Students partnered with another fellow student and, through guided imagery and verbal queuing, practiced the techniques we were studying. We did as much as we could without literally delivering a hands-on session. This worked very well, it created a type of closeness between the students that they reported as very professionally meaningful.

LAH: So, people in your class got the opportunity to learn how to deliver Rolf movement sessions over an online format. Could they possibly be offering online movement sessions to paying clients? You modeled it and they got to practice with each other.

PH: In this course, the focus was on students taking these skills into their in-

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person practice, but it's true that they could choose to do it online as well.

LAH: Ah, this sounds great, it is a new possibility.

PH: Absolutely, and online delivery is something we might all want to learn because it expands our reach, right? We can work with people in different geographic locations.

LAH: As an instructor, does teaching through your computer screen present unique challenges? What was it like talking and teaching to a group online?

PH: Relatively soon I fell into some degree of ease. I would say that it's important that those kinds of classes need to be not too big. I found that the maximum number of students that I would want to teach would be twelve students, because then you can get everyone on the screen in front of you. I really did find that I was able to track them quite well.

I haven't been a particularly tech-savvy person in the past, so on the whole there were a few challenges, but I had some really great help. My son was there with me in the space at first and conducted all the technical stuff. Then after a while, I was able to do it myself. It was great to have that kind of help, to feel that kind of support when I first launched into this.

LAH: What did you hear back from the students? What was the feedback?

PH: I had really good feedback from students. First of all, remember this was during the restricted public health conditions of 2020. People were very excited to be able to continue their structural integration training online and appreciated a substantial learning experience in this six-week sequence format. People felt excited and empowered to have an ongoing, serious study experience, and also the kind of comradery we talked about earlier. Some people said that they really appreciated how the Zoom format enabled them to have meaningful social contact. From the feedback I received from students, they felt good about themselves and proud of what they were able to achieve.

Something I may not have emphasized earlier, with regard to the final paper, which was one of their home study requirements, students were asked to respond to higher order discussion questions. At the end of the six weeks, there's twenty or so discussion questions we have covered and I asked them to select six of those questions and write an essay response to

each. This was another thing that really made students say, "Oh, okay. I get to write about this. I get to formulate my own thoughts, put it into words." It was an empowering learning experience for people, really good feedback.

LAH: You are talking my language; I really enjoy studying too. A deep dive into the material would have been refreshing, especially that complicated moment during the 2020 stay-at-home orders. Even now, in our current moment, this is still very relevant. Hearing this makes me feel like your class has now become more accessible to me, I live in Canada and I have a young family. You have created a CE format that Rolfers who can't make it to trainings as frequently, we could be still benefiting from the Dr. Ida Rolf Institute® (DIRI) faculty like yourself. Would you recommend keeping certain classes in this online format in the future even when travel becomes easier when the pandemic abates?

PH: I definitely recommend that people continue this type of work, yes. I certainly intend to keep teaching like this. After launching my "Normal Stability" course last year, I have now taught this class three times. This last spring I created and taught another class, again in collaboration with Kevin Frank, called "Embodying Rolf's Structural Integration Recipe." This class looks at the perceptual and coordinative dimensions of Rolf's ten-session 'Recipe' and gives specific tools for integrating self care and embodiment practices that are specifically related to the goals and strategies of each session in the Ten Series.

Another class I am currently developing is called "Walking and Breathing," which provides tools to help students and their clients to better understand the mechanics and the science related to these

quintessentially human activities. My plan is to continue to offer these types of CE classes and Rolf Movement certification classes to Rolfers, SI practitioners, body therapists, and movement educators.

I think teaching these types of purely online classes is really valuable. I can also imagine a hybrid format where one might do, say, three weeks of online work emphasizing theoretical material, followed by a five- or six-day in-person training. Then, when students gather in person, one would be able to deepen much more into the subtler aspects of touch and client/therapist interaction dynamics.

LAH: That sounds really good to me. I was wondering, when you were working with the students to do their own movement exploration, would they position their cameras so that you could see their body? Could you see their movement so that you could make verbal suggestions while they go through the exploration?

PH: Good question. So yes, I would ask students to the extent it was possible, to position their cameras so they were clearly visible to me. In this way I was generally able to see their movement and make suggestions as needed.

The personal Rolf Movement explorations I led students through were part of the same types of practices that they would do with their clients and the same ones that were in the instructional material. There was a familiarity with it. With only audio guidance, people could lay down, push with their feet against the wall while observing how the spine went through flexion and extension, etc. They were invited to notice how the perception of the eyes is linked up with the pushing of the foot; they could find, on their own, with verbal guidance, how to enhance their coordination, how to foster subtlety

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of movement. All this can be done in an online format. Students could, in this way, in the comfort of their own homes, nourish themselves through deep embodiment practices. They got to slow down and take the time to sense themselves while engaging in somatic exploration.

In our modern world, our cognitive brain functions are emphasized. So, we all need time to slow down, to actually learn how to sense our bodies again, right? How to feel, how to perceive and how to pay attention to how we perceive, which is huge. So, taking time, giving students long periods of time where they can breathe into a movement, settle into it, be with the felt sense of weight, volume, and so forth. In between each individual experiential session, I would have students walk, lots of walking. After you do something, you walk, you observe, you sense, "Oh, what feels different after that?" Then after that, again, we would come together and I would ask, "Tell me about what that was like for you." What followed was some very rich, in-depth sharing of their embodiment experiences.

LAH: A word keeps coming to mind as I listen to you speak which is: enriched. This learning environment sounds nourishing. I can hear how you circle back to your core ideas so that nothing gets missed. Well, it is wonderful to listen to how you have integrated Rolf Movement with online teaching, what a great use of time for the participants. Thanks so much for telling me about it.

Before we go, can you tell me how our colleagues can find your courses? What are you offering in 2022?

PH: For sure. I have three courses scheduled for 2022 that people can view on DIRI's website, just click through to the calendar. There you will see I'm doing: 1. Normal Stability, January 12 through to February 20th; 2. Breathing and Walking, March 1 through to March 24; and 3. Embodying Rolf's Structural Integration

Recipe, April 6 through to May 15th. People can email me directly at perhaaland@baymoon.com if they are interested.

LAH: That's great, we can keep learning Rolf Movement Integration even though it's best that we not gather in big groups. Thanks again for your time today.

PH: You are so welcome. Thank you, I really appreciate being invited to speak to you and the journal readers.

Per Haaland is a Certified Advanced Rolfer®, Rolwing® Instructor, and Rolf Movement® Instructor. Per received his Basic Rolwing Training in 1989 and completed his Advanced Training in 1994. Studies with Hubert Godard and Kevin Frank shaped his understanding of SI as an interactive somatic education, highlighting perceptual and coordinative processes. Per's inclusive teaching style enables Rolfers to easily and confidently expand their SI skills into Rolf Movement applications. Per lives and practices in Santa Cruz, CA.

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