

What is Rolf Movement® Integration?

The Challenge of Coordinative Learning

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Rolf Movement Integration addresses parts of the Rolwing® Structural Integration (SI) process that don't automatically improve through application of fascial touch. Fascial mobilization is a central feature of the Rolwing tradition. Because fascial work can so dramatically shift human function, the 'movement part' of the work is often less understood and appreciated. Movement intervention can take longer to learn than fascial mobilization – the skill sets are different, the protocol not as visible. Movement interventions can be harder to sell to clients used to receiving fascial work – work where the practitioner does most of the moving. Clients, understandably, have more confidence in their practitioner's hands than their own movement intelligence. Practitioners understandably shy away from time spent evoking a client's discovery process. Intuitively, change to fundamental usage patterns feels complex. Why go there?

Perennial questions: What draws someone to movement inquiry? How does it fit in? The audience for Rolf Movement Integration includes Rolwing clients and students who see and feel movement as a central feature of their experience. These are people who have noticed meaningful and lasting structural shifts derived from changes in: 1) perception (how we sense the body and the world), 2) coordination (how the body orchestrates movement when we don't think about it), 3) regulation of the autonomic nervous system (ANS; the part of the nervous system that governs arousal and internal well-being), and 4) expressivity (the range of ways our bodies develop and learn through expression). For folks who have stumbled into this territory, or have found limits to other territories, this domain elicits curiosity.

Rolf Movement Integration is a domain within the field of SI – a domain of inquiry into the perceptual, coordinative, ANS-regulation skills, and expressive dimensions of the craft. This domain is not separate from other parts of Rolwing SI but has often, historically, been taught separately. Rolf Movement

Integration developed parallel to training in the Rolwing Ten Series, in courses that originally included the 'auditing' phase of Rolwing training. The larger field of SI has hesitatingly embraced movement work, often with questions about how movement work fits within Rolwing SI. At the Rolf Institute®, regional Rolf Movement faculty groups continue to define the scope of Rolf Movement Integration more fully. To that end, this article defines some of the challenges to working with coordination.

Coordinative Challenge: Vulnerability

Usage patterns, or motor patterns, are at the heart of the concept of coordination. Coordination is at the heart of SI, posture being a prime example – posture is coordination. Of the various challenges we encounter as we help people discover/rediscover missing coordination, one factor that can intimidate experienced manual practitioners is the inherent vulnerability of the situation. Practitioners face vulnerability because coordination looks like a 'hit or miss' gambit. One faces uncertainty about how coordinative coaching will go: How comfortable will the client be? How well-embodied is the coordination in the practitioner's body? Just even heading toward movement work may put a chill on the session. The client is likely to associate to all the athletic, performance, and developmental experiences of life in which there was often little forgiveness, let alone support for learning. In short, we invite a client to visit dicey territory. Wisely, we don't look forward to potential decompensation without a reliable exit strategy. As a result, coordinative input may reduce down to one or two pithy cues in the last minutes of a session.

The predicament of vulnerability is expressed poignantly by Yuki Ojika (2012) in her article "The Wisdom of Uncertainty in Movement." Embracing uncertainty turns out to be a rewarding adventure, but at first, we might avoid it. It takes time, as Ojika describes so well, to begin to trust

uncertainty, and it is an iterative process. It takes repeated experience to see that there is a world of sensation-based wisdom that is only revealed as we confront the limits of the known.

Clients and practitioners may both be reluctant players. Why? Foundational coordination is not meant to change casually. It's woven into the fabric of our non-conscious security – our sensory motor system allows time-limited plasticity during early development, for example, so a young hunter-gatherer might survive in the wild. Once set, these vital subroutines resist tinkering. Evoking new coordination requires that we temporarily let go of how we know and do things – the familiar fabric of our life. As we let go of the known, we will likely feel clumsy and awkward. We may feel pressure to learn quickly. We may feel that an inherent incompetency is going to be exposed. That's the predicament of someone who had normal developmental experience. For those for whom early development had hurtful interruptions, the challenge is typically greater.

A simple illustration: a child, who senses anxiety in the caregiver as he/she learns to stand up and walk, will likely internalize the observer's emotional state – our self image is formed through the eyes of the observer. In this way, learning to stand gets coupled with anxiety. Additionally, the struggle to learn to move becomes, ironically, an ingredient in adulthood, to what could be termed *contextually specific* dissociation. How does this occur? Child development includes the study of how dissociation is acquired. (Dissociation – in our work, meaning lost contact with the body – is part of normal development and related to developmental interruption (Carlson et al. 2009; Menegon and Tschopp 1995). As we mature, moments of challenge require increasingly socialized channels of coping. We don't kick, scream, or cry anymore. Coping starts to include internal conversations that replace outward expression. We adapt spatial mapping toward processes of abstraction. We learn to organize spaces of consciousness to learn something new, instead of organizing the space of action through movement. Body regulation is replaced by organizing one's thoughts about the challenging event. It's a normal process and relevant to adult coordinative learning.

An adult, while re-learning how to stand or walk, wants to do a good job. The

practitioner offers reassuring words but, sometimes, the system may say “no.” Sometimes the client obeys the suggestions and produces image-based movement – what he/she thinks he/she should look like; but now there is more of a strain pattern than before. Hard-won coordinative structure has two big reasons to resist change: fear of performance and/or fear of losing a routine that (at least) works. A client often reverts to his/her symbolic reality, rather than actual body sensation and awareness, thus avoiding a childlike expression of primary distress.

In this situation, the practitioner may sense a session tending to fail (while, of course, offering a friendly, reassuring demeanor). Clever cues and well-executed fascial work have been welcome, yet with this modality, the body steers back onto familiar tracks. What’s the prudent response? How to begin? How to start over? How to build a foundation for coordinative change? We begin over and over, with something small, a small detail of movement that can be slowed down – something taken up in a context that feels safe. The practitioner looks for a proposal in which the client’s acquired capacities and knowledge can be put aside – a perception or simple movement that feels easy. These are chances to begin to unlearn that which prevents the movement.

What allows us to let go of our goals for preconceived excellence? How do we learn to embrace these moments? It is useful to remember what it was like to learn something new when we were young: learning to ride a bike, throw a ball, hold a pencil, or draw a letter. We probably don’t remember trying to stand up or walk – too early. But we might remember something between ages three and six. Can we appreciate the potency? What has really changed? When playing with coordination, it is as though we have regressed to early childhood, but are still in an adult body. We re-negotiate learning, and the issues about being in that vulnerable position.

Now imagine, as an adult, what our ideal learning companion or mentor might be like. What would we wish to receive in terms of coaching? What would truly feel helpful, as opposed to well-meaning but annoying? What is our learning style? Are we most supported with visual, auditory, or kinesthetic information, or a particular blend of each? Do we need a story? Do we need to understand why and how coordination changes, from a scientific

point of view? Do we need time to play? To play with improvisation that’s in the ‘neighborhood’ of the new movement? Does ideokinesis work for us? What is one digestible piece of information that doesn’t overwhelm? Do we appreciate a chance to be listened to, to make meaning of the situation in our own words? What demeanor of the practitioner conveys a message of safety? Are we predisposed to humor? To probing curiosity? To quiet presence? To dramatic demand? What do we know about the circumstances that led to happy coordinative surprises in the past?

We imagine what works for us so that we may empathize with the client and thus step out from performance anxiety. It’s not about proving our expertise. It’s really about providing support for each person’s willingness to explore and willingness to be joined in the process. The bulk of our knowledge belongs on the shelf, waiting to be called on in brief amounts. Our value as practitioners mostly stems from being an embodied, differentiated presence, a presence that tends to amplify a client’s capacity to perceive. Can we remain curious? Can we tolerate quiet spaces in the interaction? Can we allow time for not knowing what is going on but allowing the person who is learning to digest? How do we grow our tolerance or delight in not knowing?

A Trail of Breadcrumbs

Understanding the role of vulnerability is a step forward. At the same time, what can we practically do to improve the odds of success in a holistic exploration of coordination? Where might we start? How do we rewrite the script so discovery and innovation become inevitable and unavoidable? How do we show clients a path from here to there?

It’s helpful to offer brief introductions to coordination early in the Ten Series, before the client even lies on the table for the first time. We want to foster learning moments that are successful, to demonstrate to the client and to ourselves that this process is about inherent movement intelligence: the bundled software that lives inside all of us, but is obscured by overlays of effort and habitual dissociation. Here are some examples, in question form: Can the client allow sensory impression on his/her skin, or in his/her hands, while he/she walks; can he/she allow the air to touch his/her skin? As he/she makes the weight change to

standing on one foot, does using peripheral gaze shift the ease with which he/she finds balance? Each of us chooses short intros to coordinative change from our short list of favorite things to do each day, in our own bodies. We invite simple comparison between movements with and without a shift in orientation and perception.

In a first session, one can, for example, take a tiny step in the direction of linking the gaze (of the eyes) and the feet. Could some time be taken to notice that the ‘front line’ exists, in potential, in the space, rather than just in the body tissues? One can draw an arc of spatial orientation on a piece of paper or show it through gesture. For a client who is ready to do so, the toes and gaze can enjoy the bi-directional nature of the arc of space that is beheld. Linking the feet to support for movement with the eyes is a challenge, but it can be titrated or touched on briefly in such a way that the exploration is gentle and, at first, limited. A seed can be planted. Coordination starts to feel tangible, and intangible, at the same time.

Another example: in a first session, in sidelying, can the foot and hand be linked to generalized anterior/posterior (A/P) motion of the vertebrae, accompanied by touch to the spinous processes or the base of the sacrum? What is the easiest manner for the client to feel some quality of agency between hand contact on the table and foot contact against the wall, to bring alive the movement of the spine? Once introduced, this movement assists our fascial work and provides practice in building a new motor map.

In each session, coordinative details form the basis for what can happen during later sessions when seated and when standing. While seated, the client can support himself or herself with the hands and feet while exploring slow, small, A/P movements of the spine, exploring opening the front line and back line from orientation and support, rather than muscular effort. How do we offer reasons to work this way? We desire for the client to become enrolled in the vital nature of nested subroutines of coordination. We want to enroll the client in learning to allow the body to choose better subroutines when engaged in life’s movements. We offer a story that threads its way from pre-first session, to table work, to seated work, and then to standing, walking, and self-care. Each step of the way, we build another piece of the story and more moments of experienced success. Our story

offers the view that coordination is mostly 'already there,' in potential. As we slow down to appreciate specific perceptual nuggets, the body responds by letting go of effort and improving the nuance of response. The body generalizes one detail of change to a larger scope of movement, without being told. The 'system' – the 'movement brain' system (Frank 2008) – is eager to have better information. It 'tells' us through happy accidents that surprise us. We help the client to perceive better, so the body can harvest ease and flow; vital contact with spatial directionality and articular differentiation helps unlock confused motor patterns.

A further illustration: the seated work with A/P motion in spinal segments leads naturally to exploration of this movement standing in front of a wall or leaning over a bench – hands and feet provide support to initiate A/P motion of the spine. The gait pattern mysteriously shows greater torsional dimensions, sourced in a movement exploration that was, counterintuitively, sagittal. We offer the point that this is why we can call this a system event. The movement pattern blossoms in the presence of better information, sourced in details of segmental clarity, supported by orientation and receptivity in the extremities. The system reveals its appetite for useful information when it translates one plane of spinal movement (sagittal) into a different plane with delivery of flow and ease in torsion, expressed as contralateral gait.

We now have the basis for a simple self-care exercise, one that will take the client a few minutes of time to practice – a 'homeopathic' recapitulation of the discoveries of the session. Emphasis is placed on the exercise being for the 'software not the hardware': it's not about bigger muscles; it's about cleaning up the 'corrupted code.' Coordination is refreshed by the moments of preparation to move, in some ways more than in the execution of the movement itself. When the exercise feels boring or confusing, the client is told to stop doing it! Try something else that feels easier. Back off on demand. Slow down. Remember some detail of the work together that felt natural and interesting. Find the mood of play or ease. What to offer as the 'form' of the self-care? There are many to choose from, but if we build off of the examples described, it might consist of A/P movement of the spine with the hands

on a bench or countertop or wall – in the motif of the Flight of the Eagle exercise (Frank 2005). Each session of the Recipe offers many possibilities for short, iconic explorations that clients can take home and do for a few minutes of their day.

By exploring hand and foot support to spinal movement on the table, we are re-learning the way we first learned to locomote, as a child on the floor, an exploration of push and reach. We don't try to recreate that former struggle, however. We do return to the source for innovation: sensory information, attention in the extremities, orientation to weight and space, and curiosity about the newness of the experience, without the theater of a childhood struggle. We might even take some of the struggle out of the struggle, and find the fun of being new at this unfamiliar movement, which is, in fact, playful.

Coordination Challenge: A Refreshing Opportunity

Coordination is an exciting domain of exploration for the SI field in general and is specifically a key part of Rolf Movement Integration (within Rolfing SI). We have the opportunity to re-purpose Rolfing SI in terms that offer back to the client, within the field of gravity, the source for body renewal. There will always be practitioners who are less drawn to participate in the dialogue, the back and forth, give and take, of an intimate coordinative discovery process – for whom quiet manual navigation in the fascial web is the preferred form of work. We are fortunate to have an ever-broadening array of manual skills in the Rolfing SI toolbox. At the same time, confronting the conundrum of human motor patterns is still a very new field, one that naturally fits into the SI domain. To enter into this 'other web,' the moment-to-moment conversation with the body's movement brain is primary empirical research. We may find that manual fascial mobilization and dialogue with the motor system are not so far apart. While neuroscientists learn how to image and explain pieces of motor control, we have the opportunity to embrace its wholeness in our offices every day.

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