

# Creating a Safe Container for Rosen Trainings

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## Introduction

Teaching Rosen Method involves a lot more than teaching skills; it requires guiding students through a transformational process which requires them to let go of much of their cultural conditioning as well as their personal barriers and patterns. Although a teacher is a trainer and not the student's psychotherapist or Rosen practitioner, the teacher must nevertheless maintain a supportive connection with each student who enters this journey of bringing forth the truth of who they are. For this to happen, students and teachers alike need to have a safe container.

Since I became a Senior Teacher, I've thought a lot and interviewed my immediate colleagues and students about what it takes to make a safe container. This article sets out to describe what we have experienced in the Rosen Method Open Center, which has its own unique circumstances and challenges. Similarly, other Rosen Method training centers and teachers, like practitioners, necessarily have their own styles and priorities. In training new teachers, I find that it is eye-opening for them to discover how much goes on behind the scenes to create a safe container. For me, the process is still evolving, as I consider what can be helpful to students and to staff. I hope this article can serve to open a door to a productive discussion for the whole Rosen Method community to share what we have found works, and how we can evolve and thrive.

## Before the Training Begins

### Screening Students

In my experience, I often find that a conversation with someone about what Rosen Method is and does is not enough for them to understand its scope and intention. When they see a demonstration or receive a session, they begin to get how it's different from massage + talk, or any other expectation they might have had. Sometimes it turns out that a process that actually gets them more in touch with themselves is not what they want at that point in their lives, even if they came to us believing it was. (One example is a client who stopped after her first session because her diaphragm released and her back pain went away. She was so used to living with that holding that to be without it was "like a bomb going off.") Therefore, before I allow someone to register for a weekend introductory workshop, I want to make reasonably sure they are ready for it. To me, that means they've had some experience with Rosen, or that the person who invited them knows them well enough to believe they can benefit, or I interview them beforehand to make sure they know what to expect.

As for teaching intensives, teachers begin to create safety even before the training, starting with the process of screening students to see if they are appropriate for a group experience. Because the Open Center community is spread over such a large geographic area, our intensives are most often in the form of 5-6 day retreats. The need for screening is especially true if we've never met them and they are about to spend a week in retreat with us. The registration form asks questions that allow us to learn something about their medical/psychotherapeutic experience. We know that they've had some experience with private sessions and an introductory workshop, so (with permission from the student) we can consult with their practitioners and previous teachers about their readiness for this experience. Other training centers may have different ways of screening people; I'd love to have teachers share what has worked for them.

We would of course exclude anyone who does not meet the criteria for receiving Rosen work according to our Scope of Practice established by the Rosen Institute. But additionally, I have had very appropriate clients who were not ready for a group experience. Some people have been deeply hurt by groups and may or may not be ready for an experience with one. Some people need to keep building the foundation of their private work so that exposure to a group will not be too overwhelming. In any case, many students may have some fears about being in a group which is all the more reason to create safety.

People who are not ready may act out, withdraw, or take up an inordinate amount of time and attention. A training will go best when we are reasonably certain that each student knows what to expect and has agreed to engage with the challenges of doing their personal growth work in the context of a group vs. in a private session. Sometimes, of course, applicants do not disclose information about themselves, or they get unexpectedly triggered by group situations even if all prior indicators seemed fine. Teachers need to be ready to address these issues as part of maintaining safety for that individual and the group as a whole.

## Creating the Physical Container

Even before the students arrive, teachers are responsible for creating the right kind of physical container. We have to find a suitable space, spacious enough for all our activities. It is important to emphasize that each school and each country may have different resources for their training sites. Safety can be created in many different ways even with limited funds and physical resources. Achieving the ideal is of course not always possible. For myself and my trainings, I prefer having windows onto a natural setting. It's easier to relax when the floors and bathrooms are clean, the furniture is solid, and the lighting and the temperature can be regulated. At a retreat center, the quality of the meals makes a huge difference in our students' experience. We work with the chefs to make sure everyone's food allergies and preferences are considered, and sometimes we have to educate the cooks as to what we believe constitutes healthy food.

Consider someone's experience as they enter a room. Is it set up so that a student will know immediately what is about to happen? For instance, are the chairs in a neat circle or the room emptied for movement? Is there a board up announcing the day's schedule? Is there a central focus: a small table at the center of the circle with significant objects? I usually have flowers and a "talking stone," with enough tissues at hand. Borrowing the idea of a "talking stick" from Native American traditions, the person holding the object (ours is actually a glass heart) has the floor without interruption. Again, each culture and country and training center may have specific objects or ways of creating a sense of beauty and order in a room that feels holistic to the participants and contributes to our ability to open up.

As the teacher, my responsibility for the space continues throughout the week. People are necessarily deeply involved in their own process. I'm the one who has the overall picture of what the group needs at any given moment. So, if we're entering an introspective activity and people come in from a break chattering and small-talking, I have to ask them to change the tone, the atmosphere in the room. If clients on the table get too loud during practicum, I have to help them contain their process so that it doesn't intrude into the rest of the room. I monitor how people are being in and with themselves, so the group doesn't get scattered or lose focus. This is why I like having a co-teacher, and this is also why our assistants are so important, to help us keep the room feeling cared for and safe.

Before becoming a teacher, I hadn't really given these details much thought. I learned many of them from a teacher who modeled taking extreme care with the space, down to what kind of music she wanted playing each morning before people even came in. Many teachers, including me, don't choose to play music, but at the time I was curious about her intention. After being in training with her for a while, I once asked her, "What are you doing that I'm not seeing?" I had the feeling that something was happening beyond learning specific leadership skills. She replied, "I'm making sure there are no energy leaks."

That was a language I couldn't relate to at the time. I don't see energy, and I don't see it leaking. However, I do know when the atmosphere is interrupted or corrupted, when deepening is dissipated because of chatter or lateness or too much attention to objects (like notebooks and pens). 'Energy leak' does convey the sense I get when I get restless and feel myself wanting to protect the group. How I manage this is by feeling in to what is causing this 'leak' – I'll talk about how I handle things like my own irritation that may occur, later in the article.

Rosen Method teachers put a lot of thought and care into creating a safe environment. Students and teacher trainees may not be aware of all the details that are the foundation of the safety, but they do appreciate it when they become aware of it.

## Creating the Circle

Let's set the scene: Students have walked in to a welcoming environment which already tells them what to expect, that is, sitting in a circle, or doing movement, or perhaps a creative project which some schools offer (creative projects) and some do not. What is important is that students know in advance as part of the plan of creating safety. In some schools, the schedule of the day is up, including breaks and meal times. The students found you waiting for them and have received a positive welcome. But they're still thinking and feeling all kinds of troublesome things: *Do I belong here? Will I be liked and accepted? What happens if it gets too hard for me? Can these people handle my stuff? Oh, they'll never like me if they knew the truth...*

The essence of these questions is: will this be a safe container for me? So the first three things we do is to begin to answer that question and set the tone for the rest of the week.

First, a quick go-around of sharing your name, where you're from, and perhaps what your experience in Rosen is. I often add a simple question, so we can get an insight into their lives, like "What is something you've accomplished that you're proud of?" This at least gets everyone to have their voice heard, to put themselves into the room. Before this, they were scattered individuals; now they are a circle of fellow-travelers.

Second, I invite the group to hold hands, and I formally create the circle. Some schools and teachers may begin with a “hands-on-shoulders” exercise. However teachers begin, they acknowledge and make transparent what it took for folks to get here and what they may be feeling. Transparency now means that you normalize their doubts and fears and excitement and say specifically that we’re about to do something that will address those things. We are coming together to create a safe enough space that will provide enough support that people can explore themselves deeply, delve into unknown internal places, and process their barriers to their authentic selves. Doing this requires courage, truthfulness, and especially each other’s acceptance and support.

Since honesty and telling the truth without judgment are central to learning Rosen Method Bodywork, each teacher finds a way to bring this into the training process. Personally, I make it clear that each person in the circle is a brick in the wall of shelter that we’re building, that we are incomplete without each one, that their presence matters. I tell them that they are crucial to making the safe container, and the more real and honest they are, the stronger the container gets. I tell them that they will be offered support without judgment, and if they judge others, they don’t have to judge their judging. This usually gets a laugh of recognition, but I think that’s one thing they’re afraid of: that they won’t be able to be nonjudgmental.

Another core principle of Rosen work is that the container is a kind of “sacred space.” Some teachers convey this with a sense of gravitas or just by being aware of keeping the container with this felt sense. Personally, I end the opening circle with being explicit that we are doing “soul work” here, and that the container has to be a sacred space. We acknowledge this deeper dimension that we are entering together. We’re not just learning bodywork or doing emotional healing or fun movement; we’re regaining our whole selves. I can always feel a change in the atmosphere of the room when I include this part of creating a circle. It’s a relief to people. It puts more ground under their feet. I can feel things deepen already. We end this ritual with letting go of hands.

Then, we discuss the agreements we make to create a safe container. They are all about creating and maintaining the right boundaries. These agreements include confidentiality, timeliness, and bringing issues into the circle. We also have people pair up with a “buddy;” these pairs will be there as a resource for each other and keep track of each other’s whereabouts.

## Teaching Concretely

For some people new to Rosen Method, sessions look like “magic” because they don’t know the simple components of what makes a Rosen session happen. It’s very scary to be thrown into this mysterious ocean of a process without knowing how to swim. And what you think you know already, you probably have to unlearn.

Learning Rosen Method is necessarily experiential. However, if it doesn’t include actual information, it can be a frustrating process. I speak from my own experience here. I came in to Rosen Method training pretty much disembodied, so I must admit I still don’t know if my teachers never explicitly taught me how to touch, or if I was unable to hear it. I was a massage therapist and had to be constantly told what NOT to do with my hands. It took me a long time to realize that my hands were supposed to be feeling or sensing something—but what? As a teacher, I’ve noticed that often, not even people with training in massage or yoga necessarily know what a muscle feels like as it is relaxing. Novices to touch don’t know what a hard, tense muscle feels like vs. a relaxed one or a toned one. So I show them. I also give them handouts and

demonstrate the various ways to touch and their purposes. This is the kind of concrete information that can build a foundation for moving into the Rosen Method process, which necessarily involves spending time in not knowing what will unfold.

The same applies to learning how to use words. It's okay to explain why certain ways of speaking to clients (such as asking questions that begin with "why") do not deepen the process. In addition, teachers can illustrate by example and demonstrate different ways of speaking so students can witness how they work. Exercises such as a verbal dyad where the person in the practitioner's role may only respond, "I'm right here," or when students practice how to reflect without parroting, or how to formulate a question, can be helpful teaching tools.

When I began my training, I had no idea what words such as "presence," "showing up," or "come into your body" meant. Over the years, I see that I'm not the only one who has been in that boat. Our intention as practitioners or teachers is to create the conditions that allow people to experience these things. I was very surprised when I finally learned that these states correspond to physical responses in the body that signal that these states are happening (or not happening). Learning to track muscle tension and breath and their meaning is a skill that develops over time. For me, it includes concrete information (like what a relaxing muscle feels like) and exposure over time to various ways of experiencing the process: demonstrations, private sessions, practicum, and so forth.

Rosen Method has taught me so much that I value, but one of the most valuable pieces of growth was to get comfortable in allowing the unknown. After all, the whole purpose of the Method is to discover and explore the unknown—what is held unawarely in our bodies. The process itself is about confronting a series of unknowns: we don't exactly know what kind of touch will be right for any particular client in any particular moment until we contact them and look for the response. We don't know what will happen next, and therefore we don't know what we're supposed to do until it happens. This work is so alive and dynamic that learning how to do it involves three layers of development:

1. Learning concrete skills
2. Unlearning cultural conditioning (see discussion below)
3. Personal healing such that the practitioner can be present and embodied.

That's why it takes time. That's also why it's not a linear learning process, and why students take in the learning at their own pace.

I've experimented over the years with how to give them foundational information that can make spending time in the unknown more available to them and effective. For example, I've made lists of types of touch and how they correspond to the words (the "third hand"). I've made session flow charts just to convey the idea that what happens next depends on what happens now. I've even tried to express concretely the more abstract elements of Rosen, such as whether you feel connection or not. To a Rosen practitioner, connection means more than simply touching or talking. We have to feel that our contact is eliciting a response, that we are in communication with the client's inner being. As part of the intention of bringing things into consciousness, we can tell students how we know if this is happening or not. (To get a better sense of what this kind of attunement is and why it's so important, see the article by Ivy Green entitled "The Safe Container of Interpersonal Relationships" in the Spring 2014 issue of the Rosen Method International Journal, Volume 7, Issue 1.)

In supporting the process of transforming a student into a practitioner, we offer them concrete information and guidelines. In our school, that's why we have delineated exactly what skills and ways of being we expect students to have at each track of the training, and we discuss this with them along the way. These skills are so contrary to what's normal in the world that students may not believe that they're not there to manipulate anything, or that simple reflection is often enough, or that they can trust themselves when they don't have an agenda.

Most of the skills themselves are simple; the tremendous challenge is to become a person who can learn and implement them.

## Education Based on Rosen Method Principles

Rosen Method Bodywork practitioners offer non-judgmental presence to their clients and guide them to deeper connection with themselves. We do not manipulate, criticize or abandon them. **The Training sessions to learn RMB can feel more safe** if teachers applied the same principles to teaching as they do to offering private sessions:

- Practice being non-judgmental.
- Connect, love and support.
- Slow down; get curious; don't skip over what is arising to move ahead.
- Collaborate.
- Course-correct; if something isn't working, try something else.
- Trust the process.
- Track yourself.
- Approach each client/student as a unique individual instead of imposing a set protocol on them.

It is my sincere hope that as we move forward in training new teachers and in the continuing education of those who are already teaching, that we can come to a shared agreement about these and other ways of making teaching as safe as possible. We must continue to bear in mind, however, that some students may take a long time to learn to trust and feel safe and that honoring their process is another aspect of safety, of being with what is, and of trusting the process.

### What is Safety?

Being safe and feeling safe are not necessarily the same thing. Being safe means that the people around you are not going to attack, undermine or abandon you but are able to support you through whatever you are facing. If a breach in safe connection happens, it can be repaired. This is the kind of safe container Rosen Method teachers intend to create, but it's actually a rare experience in most of our educational backgrounds starting at age four or five, or even in our experiences with family. Therefore, it takes a while for Rosen students to experience being safe before they can recognize that it exists. Trust has to develop through experiences, so teachers don't have to expect students to trust them right away. We want students to begin to discover the experience that we teachers can hear them and be with them.

People sometimes feel (or act) safe when they are not. I think this comes from years of having to live in an unsafe world and pretend that it's okay, that you can handle it. People ignore boundary violations or expose their feelings in situations where they are not likely to be well received. With clients and students,

I watch out for when they are taking on too much too fast, when they are trying to suppress fear to move ahead. It's an amazing experience to be allowed to feel how unsafe you actually feel; that alone lays the groundwork for safety.

The ultimate safety is embodiment. It means that you are so grounded in yourself that you no longer experience fear in situations that might have scared you before. As one colleague so beautifully put it, "I'm safe because I'm me."

## Dealing with Perfectionism and Authoritarianism

Not just in education, but throughout our culture, we run into these two tendencies: perfectionism and authoritarianism. They go hand in hand, and they don't create a good learning environment.

I'm constantly amazed that students come in expecting themselves to know things they can't possibly know yet. They get embarrassed if they don't understand how to practice Rosen; they dare not try things for fear of making a mistake or being inappropriate. They expect themselves to be perfect. If they expect perfection from the teacher, and if the teacher expects it of himself or herself, then everyone is in trouble.

Early on in any training, I make it clear that I expect that I will make mistakes and will, with people's help, correct them. Now I can relax, because I don't have to be perfect and I don't have to be alone with the responsibility of making sure that I'm not missing something. Mistakes are inevitable in an experiential learning process, and what we should do with mistakes is notice our experience, tell the truth, and make connection. We need to stay connected to ourselves, to hearing each other's experiences and feelings, and to finding what is true in the present moment. As teachers and no less for students, we may need to explore what in our personal histories have led us to not be as connected or tuned in as we would have liked to be.

This is the same attitude we strive to have as practitioners. We don't know what will happen, or that we will respond in the most optimal way at every moment. If we get off track, our task is to get back on, in collaboration with the client. Just as a Rosen session is a collaboration, so is the training. That means both the practitioner/teacher and the client/student are responsible and do not relinquish their authority. And everyone can relax because no one is expected to be perfect.

My authority comes from claiming my own competence, from practicing what I preach, and from my own vulnerability. I know vulnerability sounds like a weakness, but it is, in fact, having full possession of yourself. When I'm vulnerable, I'm allowed to be a human being and not some robotic role. I don't give away my power; instead, I share my actual experience. I expect respect because I offer respect to anyone who is courageous enough to share what is true for them.

We live in a hierarchical culture in which if one person has power, the others don't. If someone has a credential or status, people believe they got there by being superior and more worthy than others. In many groups, including businesses, cultural organizations, education, etc., I've seen people act as if the leaders are supposed to be perfect, and when they're not, people get mad at them or withdraw. That is not a safe container for anybody, but students may come in so conditioned to this that they have to learn through experience that the Rosen Method setting operates on different values. We want everyone to be embodied and empowered. In my teaching experience, I notice how I feel when people are claiming their power and when they are not. This includes fellow teachers, teachers in training, assistants, and students. When another

person steps into her or his full presence, uses her voice loudly and clearly, and claims her/his authority, *I feel safer*. I'm not surrounded by people who hesitate to show up. I'm not left trying to carry everything myself. What a relief to have a lot of strong people in the room! And what is more, these people are leading the way for others to come forth and claim themselves.

## Dealing with Fallout of Past Educational Experiences

For most of us, we grew up in school systems that conditioned us to believe that there is a right answer, and if we don't know it, we're stupid. This makes it a challenge to learn Rosen Method, since it's not about learning a protocol. I have found that it is important to teach students that Rosen sessions are about tracking the client and responding in the way that is needed in that particular moment. I've seen students confused about seeing one demonstration with a certain approach to touch, and the next one is different. Do different practitioners do it differently? What's the "right way"? They have to learn that how light or deep, how long, how much movement or stillness, where—all that depends on what is going on just then. This confusion is a natural part of the experiential training process until students learn that the only universally "right way" to touch, for instance, is with awareness.

The same is true for use of words. This is often one of the greatest stumbling blocks to becoming a practitioner. Students don't believe how powerful simple reflection and mirroring is, until they experience doing it authentically instead of by parroting. They don't allow themselves the simple curiosity that is at the heart of the process; they think they have to know what's happening and where it's going at every moment. Sometimes student practitioners grope for the right words, just like their clients, to describe some felt experience. But they feel that, because they are the professional, they are not allowed to not know; they're supposed to know exactly the right thing to say at all times. What a relief to be told that they can get their client's help in groping for the right words. Collaboration actually works better.

All of this discomfort with the unknown and unpredictable stems from a previous educational experience outside of Rosen trainings of being taught the rules and being judged and evaluated on knowing the right content. Students are scared of not knowing, making mistakes and being real because they expect criticism; they expect to be made to feel like failures.

They need something beyond mere information to get where they need to be to become practitioners. If the information isn't getting through, they need to explore what is getting them stuck. No doubt what gets in their way is some deep hurt or shame, maybe even one they've never identified. Of course, if they are going to bring this forth, they need to be safe from blame, judgment or criticism. They need the teacher's open curiosity instead.

## Being Transparent

Nothing makes a training safer than transparency. Transparency is saying out loud what is actually going on, which is a key quality of Rosen Method. We all know that making something explicit can bring a freeing breath. This is what we mean by bringing the unconscious to consciousness; it helps us relax. It's the same when leading a group. You don't have to pretend anything: if you're teaching and you're in some kind inner turmoil, most of us teachers will say it out loud. We're real, we're authentic, and that lets us be present, in spite of any inner turmoil we may start off feeling.

I remember the first time I ever gave a demonstration. I had been a practitioner for years but had not attended an intensive for quite a while and was being checked out for acceptance into teacher training. The demo mostly went well, but there were a few moments of total silence during it. Moments during which I had no idea what I was doing and trying to act cool. Afterward, one of the students asked what was going on during that silence. I replied, "I got so scared that I went totally blank."

"Oh, not deep, meaningful process!"

"Nope. Just terror."

We all laughed. Later I received a comment from one of the new students, a person from a different cultural background from the rest of the group and who had felt like an outsider among us. She said what a relief that was, to see that no pretense was necessary. She felt safer.

I felt safer too. I've carried on with the belief that it's better to be transparent, and it was reinforced for me this summer when I was teaching in Denmark, my first time out of my own school. One morning, something was obviously interfering with my presence, since I had been losing things, going blank in the middle of saying something, etc. So, there I was about to give a demonstration and feeling lost. I said out loud, "I don't know what's going on, but I am off my game right now. Let me see if I can get grounded by just beginning the session, touching the client, and trusting myself. Let's see what happens." I didn't have to hide my discomfort and act as if I'm fine, and I got to demonstrate that practitioners don't have to be flawless. It all went great after that.

Transparency also means that teachers may be asked to explain why they are doing what they're doing. That's not just during a demonstration, but throughout the day. What is our intention in setting up the schedule as we have? Why do we teachers eat our meals separately? How do we talk about the students? Why did we respond to a question this way and not that way? What are we feeling when we don't know what to do? How do we proceed?

## Handling Negative Feedback

**In my experience as a teacher, I have found** that transparency is the best way for a teacher to handle negative feedback from a student or staff member. Such feedback could stem from a simple misunderstanding that can be cleared up pretty easily, or it could be a matter that needs discerning. Students enter our training with all kinds of hurtful experiences in the past that they may be projecting onto the teacher. The teacher also has to listen to what the complaint is to see if they acted unwisely in some way. When we self-examine, then we can discern which it is, a projection or something we missed.

To take one example, there was a discussion of some Rosen Method theory in one of our intensives. Toward the end, a student asked a question and got a response. But she asked it again, with a bit of agitation. Again, her question was answered but she was still upset. Finally, another student spoke up for her and said, "She is clearly having feelings about this." That's when the teacher woke up to the fact that the student needed a process response, not an informational one. She admitted having missed the student's real concern, did the right thing, and thanked the student who had pointed out her error for making it a safer container. What a relief to all of us! Teachers aren't perfect, but we get help.

Another time, I was accused of ignoring a student on the first evening before a residential intensive. When I said I had never intended to, the student said something like, "They talk nice, but they stab you in the back." That made it clear to me that the student may have been projecting some past experience onto me. But why would this student think I ignored him? As I recalled the evening, I remembered a brief moment

when this student, whom I had never met before, walked into the dining room right past me and I did not reach out because I thought he was one of the retreat center staff on a mission. So, I told the student that I remembered that moment, and just hearing me confirm that I did indeed ignore this person for a moment allowed the student to drop the whole concern.

In teaching Rosen Method, the tone we convey, our attitude of respect as we communicate with a student can facilitate learning or create a situation that does not foster learning. Negative feedback is not the same thing as attack, and it does not require the teacher to defend or withdraw. It means something happened the teacher missed, and/or the student is projecting. Our task is to apply the Rosen Method value of getting curious to find out the sources of the problem, in each person and in the incident. This can be done with respect for everyone involved.

Although we are required to be non-judgmental, we do need to evaluate student progress and give helpful corrective feedback. It's likely that students come in dreading this and won't learn to expect such feedback to be loving and supportive until they experience it that way. Teachers have to deal with students' projections of past experiences of felt rejection or criticism, especially during supervisions. Some students may need extra time to trust that they are safe during a supervision, that the supervisor is not out 'to get them' or 'make them wrong'. For one student who seemed especially sensitive to being hurt, I told her, "My goal is to have you feel seen and loved as you learn." She relaxed.

When giving feedback, I've noticed in my own teaching that it helps to begin with what they are doing right, then offering information or suggestions. However, I have found that the best way to "teach" is to bring the student back to connection with herself. When she gets out of the pattern of trying to think up the right answer and consults her own presence, she will often know exactly how to proceed.

## Trusting the Process

It took me years as a practitioner to fully trust the process. That means trust that each moment I am entering something new and unknown; I don't have to know what to do about it. Rather, I can track, name and leave it to the client's body or body/mind to provide what's next in the healing process. A teacher has to hold similar awareness for a roomful of people. Just as you don't judge or exclude any aspect of the client's experience, you don't exclude anything from the circle—not anger, not despair, not conflict. We can learn to trust that when the whole truth comes out, we'll work it out. We can learn to trust confusion, unclarity, unknown, silence, or blankness, and give them time and attention. Something will appear that needed to be known, that sets the whole situation onto a different course.

I remember one time during an intensive when a teacher said something that was a deep truth for her, but it triggered just about everyone in the room. Feelings and conflict erupted. We welcomed it all until we realized it was getting heated enough that perhaps we should take a break. So, we did, but we returned in ten minutes to keep sticking together, allowing all reactions to come out. Everyone was heard. No one was made wrong. The end result was that each person felt they could be heard and own their own thoughts and feelings.

I confess, there were moments during that incident that I feared "loss of control," whatever that is. I feared that students would get overwhelmed or alienated; I feared I was wrong. But I stuck to my deep belief that if all of the truth is heard, we would end up in the right place. That's the process, and if I believe in it as a practitioner, so much more do I need to believe it as a teacher.

## The Inevitability of “the Shadow”

A teacher needs to be self-aware and able to track herself and take care of himself or herself. But of course, no one is fully conscious, and no teacher willingly and knowingly creates a lack of safety; it's what she or he does that is unconsciously motivated. We call this “the shadow,” from the Jungian term for what we have put away from consciousness, and it includes all the hurtful behaviors that we are blind to (and even the useful behaviors we don't know we're doing).

I worried about what I would do as a teacher unintentionally and unaware. How can one know what one doesn't know? Again, I solicited the support of my staff and students. I told them of this concern and invited them to please let me know when something was off. I have been so grateful for their insights and interventions.

My first clue of my own unconscious behavior was that I would sometimes get really irritated with my students. (This would come out in curt tones of voice with inherent judgment or rejection.) When I slowed down to examine why, I realized that it was my signal from my body that something off-track was going on and I needed to pay attention to myself. I needed to slow everything in the room down and look at who is feeling what and what do they need. Transparency was my best friend here.

I made an announcement to the group: if you notice I'm getting short with you or irritated, please tell me because we need to pay attention. I said that my unhelpful behavior would not come from my conscious awareness, and that I would need help to identify it. This fostered mutual trust. To my surprise, I rarely get irritated any more.

Another “blind spot” I've experienced not notice everything that's going on in the room. I may be so focused on one or two people that I miss someone else having a hard time. That's why I make it very explicit that I expect that everyone takes responsibility to speak up for themselves and for each other. Again, this is why co-teachers and assistants are important to creating the safe container since what one person might miss, another person might see.

Clarity is essential, and sometimes I don't even realize that it's possible for students to interpret something I say in a totally different way than I meant. This won't come out until we hit some snag in the progress of the training. I have to stay open to the fact that what I assume may not be what others assume. I have to be as explicit and clear as I can.

### **Students Speak**

I did an informal survey of my students to help me open my eyes to what was going on at our intensives that puzzled me. Why did they feel so safe? Why did teaching feel so easy and relaxed to me? If we could become aware of what was going right, then we could be sure to reproduce it.

First, I was surprised at how many of them mentioned the importance of putting our trainings in the context of something larger. That ritual of creating the circle at the beginning was essential. One person wrote, when asked what constitutes a safe container, “A recognition of the ineffable that creates and

holds space for all that is. Truly. This trumps it all for me, because this is the ultimate safety. Recognizing it, consistently-towards-permanently, aligns my consciousness with the actual container." One way or another, acknowledging that we are doing soul work makes it safer. Another student emphasized the "Observation of the Sacredness- When the circle is first built, the gentle rules have been recited, and everyone takes their place. There is this moment of privilege knowing you are a part of something really important. Reverence for the processes of all and a willingness to hold that space and keep it safe."

They also emphasized the importance of having teachers who know themselves, share themselves, and participate in further self-development. Here is more from a student's list of what makes for safety:

- Guides who know themselves and are fiercely and humbly committed to self-discovery.
- Guide involvement (work/check-ins) with individual participants outside of group time to keep finger on pulse.
- Individuals with high/matched level of commitment.
- Trust-building and vulnerability exhibited by each person at their level.
- Attending to and expressing level of connectedness in the group.
- Allowing, encouraging, and accepting each person's true expression moment to moment.

The fact that the staff models sharing of their authentic selves (without launching into deep process) invites students to do the same. And the more fellow-students share, the safer it gets.

Another student shared that safety came from "your emphasizing your intent and modeling it in sharing your authentic self. How a participant is received by the teachers/assistants when they share their truth, with loving attentive listening. When concerns relative to the intensive are shared they are spoken from the individual's experience; I never recall the words or energy of blame. The teachers/assistants, as all as participants allowing themselves to be vulnerable in their sharing models it and seems to invite others to do the same."

When students are invited to be part of creating the safe container, they invest more in it. "A container is built one truthful brick at time and everybody has to add a brick and gently hold the brick that was given." They feel safer when everyone participates.

In some non-Rosen trainings, some of my students have noticed that ground rules for safety may not be established before things proceed. There may be no intentional creation of a container (or even introductions) before they are invited to share deep material with total strangers. Hearing this taught me how important it is to consciously have them participate in creating the container.

One student had experienced many different kinds of valuable trainings before Rosen. She found that, "The fact that we do Rosen Movement and receive touch daily to help ground us is sure different than any other event/training I have attended." So, touch and movement themselves are part of creating the safe container, because they are part of getting people embodied.

I have observed during my years of teaching Rosen that it's safer when students know that someone is in charge. As one said, "If you say something is going to happen, I know it's going to happen." There is consistency and follow-through. When the need for flexibility arises, we are transparent about what we are changing and why.

If Rosen Method has given me one gift in my life, it is to trust being alive, to trust the process. I know that if I stay in connection with myself and others, what is required in each moment will appear. I'm also confident that if breaches in connection happen, they can be repaired, given time and curiosity. I believe in the skills we teach—they work.

## Conclusion

Teachers (of RMB) can create a safe container for learning in many different types of training centers, cultures, and teacher skills and preferences. In our school we do this through proper screening of students, arranging the physical space, and being explicit about what we are here to do together and why it requires certain agreements. What I have learned during my teaching years is that when RMB Teachers are clear, articulate and concrete about what they are teaching, then Rosen Method has the possibility to move from the mysterious or magical realm in students' minds to the very concrete and learnable.

Rosen Method trainings should feel like Rosen Method sessions in that students need to experience them as a safe container in which they will be challenged but not judged, criticized or abandoned. They need to feel free to explore the unknown, try (and fail at) new skills, and be received with compassion and openness. The key to providing safety is transparency, which is nothing more than being with what is, without judgment but with curiosity. This allows the welcoming of everybody's "mistakes," including those of the teachers. It frees everyone from perfectionism, authoritarianism and defensiveness. A teacher embodies the same values and characteristics as a practitioner, and additionally is able to track and manage a roomful of people, all with equanimity, or more humbly, with the ability to regain equanimity if it is temporarily lost.

Finally, I'd like to add a thought and an invitation to other teachers to share why they have become teachers. For me, I use the metaphor of a goldfish in a bowl: the bigger the bowl, the bigger the goldfish can grow. Teaching offers me a way to keep learning what Rosen Method is, to challenge my limitations, and to offer the world something invaluable.