Dance Literacy: Learning Dance Notation and Performing a Masterwork

Teresa Heiland, PhD, Dept of Theatre Arts & Dance
Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA
What the field of dance education is good at?

- Educates physically and affectively quite well, but cognitively we only begin doing this at the college level: Elements of Dance, Principles of Design, Anatomy, Kinesiology, Dance History, Choreography, Laban Movement Analysis.

- Dancers are educated via storytelling and oral histories taught by an informed teacher. This can be an exciting experience and also limiting, depending on how many experienced teachers you have access to.
Music Literacy: What are the benefits?
So then, what is dance literacy?

- Understanding movement
- Understanding the body
- Understanding culture/s
- Understanding theater and body, space, time, energy
- Understanding aesthetics of dance: Elements of dance
- Being able to describe in the language of a genre, e.g. tendu, top rock, popping, cross-body lead, 6-count turn
- Writing and speaking about dance in English
- ... but what about writing and speaking about dance in a dance language?
2011 SoTL Scholars and Mentors Dance
2011 SoTL Scholars and Mentors Dance

Turn right or left

Stillness

Turn head right or left

Middle level

Release support from chair

Breathe

Support self on chair

Move away from partner

Release grasp

Minor movements up & down 3 times

Grasp right hands

Motion toward partner

You supported on chair
Parsons Etude, by David Parsons—more traditional, yet athletic modern dance

1982 – Caught 1994 – Mood Swing
1987 – Sleep Study 1996 -- Touch
1991 – Rise and Fall 1997 – Scrutiny
1993 – Bachiana 1997 – Channeling
1993 – Destined 1997 – Closure
1993 – Ring Around the Rosie 1998 – Anthem

Teaching package includes:
• License to learn and perform the work from score and video
• Historical notes
• Improvisation exercises
• Music CD
Parsons Etude
Excerpt of Elizabeth Koeppen rehearsing
Labanotation of *Parsons Etude*

Measures 7 & 8

Labanotation vs. Motif Notation
Labanotation* vs. Motif Notation**

*Mary Corey

Teresa Heiland
Motif Notation

1. All movements
2. Legs, head only
3. Arms, legs, torso, head
Structure of Course:

- **Independent Study course**
- **Meet** twice a week for one semester, or once a week for two semesters—I want to teach students to read beginning notation and to dance the movement
- Will probably only a small group of students
- **Perform** in student concert
- **Course lessons being developed** from Language of Dance motif notation curriculum, beginner Labanotation readings, and my own ideas
Research Tasks:

- **Pre-tests/Post-tests:** Write about a dance seen on video; learn a dance from video and write about it; read a simple dance score, perform the dance, write about it.

- **Qualitative Journal Entries** by teacher/researcher before and after each teaching session about expected learning outcomes, teacher experiences, and observed student experiences.

- **Student Journal Entries** written or video after each class based on their experience learning, as well as a follow up each week as to whether or not there are times when their learning in the course seems to transfer to other classes.
Research Questions:

- Did learning a dance-specific language (dance notation) enhance the dance education learning process, the interest in and awareness of choreography and dance heritage, and the level of empowerment among college dancers?

- If so, how was this experienced for each participant and how was it experienced, embodied, and expressed?

- Does increasing the level of literacy empower students to take on their own learning?
Questions to ask after the research has been completed:

- **How does it** seem this will serve them in their futures? What is the role of dance notation in a dance degree, if students really want to be dancing?
- **Was the ability to speak and write** in English about dance enhanced by this experience?
- **Did students gain new physical** awareness, quality, or precision (and how can we tell if this happened—probably their stories and opinions)?
Help!

- My student group might be very small. What can I learn from a small study?

- Gathering Data:
  - Pre-test, post-test—describe dance before and after.
  - Keep written and video reflection journals.
  - Teacher’s reflective journals
Your Move second edition
Ann Hutchinson Guest
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LABAN
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JEAN NEWLOVE & JOHN DALBY
Thank you