

Courtesy of The 92nd Street Y

NOTABLE INSTRUCTION

Help your students develop more fully as dancers by integrating Labanotation and Laban Movement Analysis in your classroom.

✦ by Amy Kail ✦

As educators, we are constantly looking for new strategies to help us guide our students toward greater artistry, creativity and mastery of technique. Laban's movement theories and systems are powerful approaches with multiple benefits: They encourage dancers to break down and understand movement, enable performers to interpret choreography with greater precision and inspire dance-making.

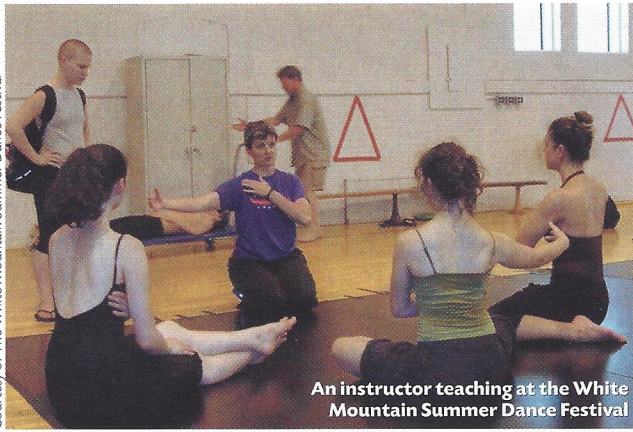
THE BACK STORY

In the early part of the 20th century, Rudolf Laban began developing Laban Movement Analysis, a system for observing, exploring and analyzing movement. During his work with LMA, he also created Labanotation, a language of symbols used to document dance. It is the most widely used and available dance notation system invented, with more than 700 scores of dance by choreographers ranging from Alvin Ailey to Merce Cunningham housed at the Dance Notation Bureau. Benesh Movement Notation and Eshkol-Wachman Movement

Notation are two of a half dozen other dance-recording systems still used despite never attaining the popularity of Labanotation.

Laban's work inspired generations of others to explore and analyze movement. Dr. Ann Hutchinson Guest, founder of the Language of Dance Centre in England, adapted Labanotation's symbols to develop Language of Dance, a simpler system of identifying, recording and creating movement. Irmgard Bartenieff opened the Laban/Bartenieff Institute for Movement Studies in New York City and brought the Laban work into therapeutic settings.

Today, Labanotation, LMA and the systems that grew from them help dance educators reflect on classical and contemporary techniques, find new ways of understanding movement, invigorate students' work with familiar steps by bringing their attention to subtle dynamics and qualities, and help them develop individuality and artistry as performers. Read on to find out how four dance specialists harness these vibrant approaches to enrich their students' learning.



An instructor teaching at the White Mountain Summer Dance Festival

LABAN MOVEMENT ANALYSIS

Who: Laura Glenn

Where: Dance Division at The Juilliard School

What: Laban Movement Analysis uses four factors: Body, Effort, Space and Shape. “Body” describes what part of the body moves, dancers’ coordination, movement actions and the progression of their movement: Do they move their whole body simultaneously or begin with one body part and then move the rest of the body successively or in opposition? “Effort” refers to the quality and energy in movement: Is the movement strong or light, direct or indirect? “Space” addresses a dancer’s pathways and spatial pulls in the performance area. “Shape” analyzes the way the body creates form: Are dancers contracting or expanding, rising or sinking?

Why: Glenn, a member of Juilliard’s dance faculty, believes this work empowers students to discover their strengths, access diverse movement choices and accurately articulate movement.

How: In her Limón technique classes, Glenn’s goal is to wake her students up to both the simplicity and possibility of movement. She begins with Space by guiding her students through an exploration of the six directions/three dimensions (up and down/vertical, forward and back/sagittal, side and side/horizontal), giving her students opportunities to experience how the dimensions translate in their own bodies. For example, while performing tendus in parallel she cues her students to be aware of maintaining a vertical dimension as they reach their gesturing leg forward.

When Glenn teaches Limón repertory, she guides her students to notice how making choices in Space affects the Shape and Effort of their movement. Often she begins with Limón’s *La Patria* from the *Isadora Duncan Dances*. In the opening of the piece, the dancer raises both arms forward. Working with Space as a guiding principle, students observe that when they open their arms wider, their Shape widens and their Effort becomes more indirect. By bringing their arms closer together their Shape becomes narrow and their Effort more direct. As a result, students experience how they can apply their use of Space to make dynamic performance choices.

As director of the White Mountain Summer Dance Festival, Glenn knows what choreographers now demand of dancers. Dancers who have experience with the Laban work can more quickly learn some of the most diverse and complex choreography because they understand what makes up movement.

LABAN/BARTENIEFF MOVEMENT ANALYSIS

Who: Bill Evans

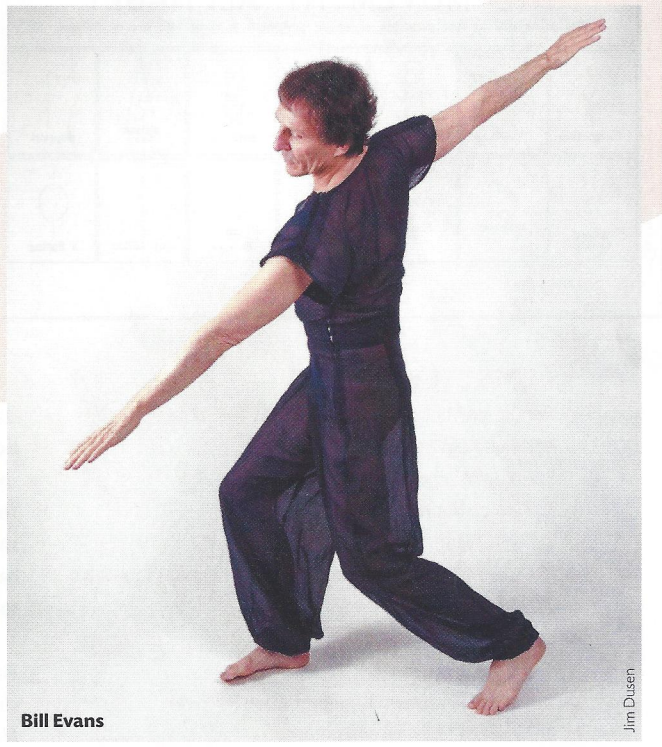
Where: SUNY Brockport

What: The Bartenieff Fundamentals were developed by Irmgard Bartenieff as an adaptation of the LMA approach to therapeutic work. The Bartenieff Fundamentals are part of the Body factor of LMA and address body organization, the relationship of body parts in space, body connectivity, articulation and internal physiological changes.

Why: Evans has found the concepts and language of L/BMA so powerful that he usually sees immense changes and growth in his students. They develop tools for change, which allow them to take ownership of their own process. One of his students said at graduation a few years ago, “You helped me to help myself grow.”

How: Evans uses L/BMA to plan, teach and describe everything he does in his modern, improvisation, composition, repertory and tap classes. He no longer uses either French ballet terms nor such modern terms as “contraction and release,” “flat back” and “knee hinge.” Instead, he refers to the anatomy of the body and pure movement actions. To describe a plié, he asks students to bend their knees with sustainment while maintaining their vertical dimension—in this way encouraging them to let go of their assumptions about how movements must be performed and giving them specific directions they can incorporate into their technique.

Evans uses Bartenieff’s work to help dancers discover the interior and three-dimensionality of the body. His students develop important connections, movement efficiency and distinct articulation. They also begin to engage in class as a process of exploration and discovery, which they bring into every aspect of their dance work.



Bill Evans

Jim Dusen

LANGUAGE OF DANCE

Who: Tina Curran















What: Dr. Ann Hutchinson Guest created Language of Dance by using Labanotation's written symbols and LMA. She identified a list of prime movement actions (including action, stillness, flexion, extension, rotation, traveling, springing, support, balancing, falling and relating) as universal to all movement forms, which she codified and called the Movement Alphabet. Originally designed as a way of teaching children, LOD uses Motif Notation, a simplified form of Labanotation, to represent this alphabet through symbols.

Why: LOD can be used on its own or integrated with other dance activities. The use of dance symbols makes it easy for children who have no prior dance experience to investigate, discuss and create movement because they are able to identify elements of dance without knowing dance terminology. In this way, teachers can stimulate dance-making and skill acquisition in beginner classes.

How: As director of the Language of Dance Center in the United States and an LOD certification specialist, Curran uses the LOD to work with K-12 students and teachers. In teacher education workshops, participants first experience movement concepts and learn the written dance language. Participants then use the LOD Motif symbols to identify, articulate and discuss movement. The Motif symbols can also be used as choreographic building blocks (see below).

In a recent workshop, teachers identified key movement ideas in an excerpt of a masterwork using the Movement Alphabet. Teachers circled the symbols that represented the actions they saw most frequently. After the group identified the main movement ideas, teachers explored these movement ideas, improvising to create their own dance phrase.

Courtesy of Language of Dance Center

THE MOVEMENT ALPHABET						
The prime actions and concepts of which movement is comprised are as follows:						
 Destination	 Traveling	 Direction	 Extension	 Rotation	 Motion Away	 Support
 Motion Toward	 Stillness	 Flexion	 Falling	 Balance	 Any Action	 A Spring



Students at DEL

Courtesy of The 92nd Street Y

DANCE EDUCATION LABORATORY

Who: Jody Gottfried Arnhold

What: Arnhold and her colleagues incorporated Laban's work into every aspect of the Dance Education Laboratory curriculum.

Where: The 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Center in New York City

Why: To develop a personal approach to teaching dance through active movement participation, discussion, observation and dance-making with students who are professional dancers, dance teachers and classroom teachers.

How: Arnhold gives an example of helping kindergartners explore the concept of Space. In a lesson about near-reach space and far-reach space, you can ask children to imagine they are pulling strings from different parts of their bodies. Each time they pull a string, they reach closely to their bodies and then expand out, making spatial patterns close and far from the body. Next, ask the children to wrap themselves in all the strings they have pulled out from limbs, and then slash their way out. In addition to examining Space, you also introduced two action words—wrapping and slashing—three concepts which can be used to create a dance.

Laban believed that each teacher can and should develop his or her own voice. Early in the DEL program, students create a visual map of what dance has meant to them. The mapping reveals how many dance experiences the students share and the many ways they are different. They also see the powerful role dance has played in their lives. Throughout the year, students keep journals and end the year by making visual representations of their own dance philosophies.

RESOURCES

- ◆ **The Dance Education Laboratory at The 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Center**
212-415-5552; www.92Y.org
- ◆ **The Dance Notation Bureau**
212-564-0985; www.dancenotation.org
- ◆ **The Laban/Bartenieff Institute for Movement Studies**
212-643-8888; www.limsonline.org
- ◆ **Language of Dance Center**
www.lodc.org
- ◆ **The White Mountain Summer Dance Festival**
212-255-9479; www.wmsdf.org

As Laban intended, the LMA work affects not only students dancing but can also reveal to them much about the meaning of how they act in the world. LMA brings greater awareness to both inner and outer experiences and provides students with new ways to understand themselves and skills to communicate. To learn more about how you can bring this work to your students, check out "Resources" at left for a list of organizations that can facilitate your exploration. **DT**

Amy Kail is a teaching artist with Lincoln Center Institute. She directed the Fridays at Noon program at The 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Center in New York City.