

Essay for Application to Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies
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My introduction to the work of Rudolph Laban and Irmgard Bartenieff was a fairly recent event. Movement, however, has been furthering my personal development since I began taking dance lessons twenty-eight years ago at the age of three. The continuation of those lessons has helped teach me discipline, acquire technique, and further my career. Yet the journey that I have shared with my body, discovering its strengths and weaknesses with its aptitude for movement and therefore expression, has had the most positive effect on my life.

I discovered at an early age that the body, and therefore movement, is a powerful catalyst that deserves respect, as it is one of my most personal means of communication. As an actor, I've found that a physical *self* plays an enormous role in discovering a character. Whether playing the role of Bombalurina in *Cats* or Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, I owe a great deal of my artistic development and integrity to what I've discovered through the examination of movement. Therefore, as an educator, exploring emotion and meaning through movement for character development and enrichment of performance has become one of the primary foundations of my teaching.

I have had a few negative associations with movement but, fortunately, none have negated or had a derogatory effect on my work. For example, there have been occasions where I had trouble finding a physical self for a particular character I was playing-- I simply couldn't get out of my head and into my body. There have also been instances where I have gotten frustrated with a particular approach or concept such as my introduction to Laban's effort actions. Because I wasn't used to struggling with something movement-related, I was hindered by my aim for perfection. But I overcame this obstacle by being patient and letting the work happen. I try to instill the same attitude in my students as they grapple with "foreign" concepts.

Jackie Hand's *Introduction to Bartenieff Fundamentals* at LIMS is another experience with which I initially struggled. After the first day, I encountered dire fatigue and nausea due to the fact that I was working parts of my body that I did not know existed. But eventually I began to love every aching minute of the work. Such "negative" experiences help me to grow as both a person and an artist in that they challenge and push me to examine both my body and myself more closely. The fact is, there are many occasions where I have found enormous joy in the aspects of my life that are motivated and inspired by movement because, although the path traveled by artists is often long and arduous, the journey is filled with great rewards.

As an instructor of theatre and dance, the edification of movement, no matter what the methodology, drives my classes and inspires both my students and myself. I teach various levels of acting, movement, stage combat, tap, ballet and jazz dance, and will therefore be able to take what I learn in the Laban Movement Studies Program and apply it to all of my classes as well as to directing and choreography.

Part of my current curriculum includes exploring Laban's eight *Effort Actions* and the dynamic of time, weight, space, and flow. I introduce this concept as a rehearsal technique-- a way of "dropping in" or approaching a character when you're stuck. Through this exposure, I have witnessed students surprise themselves, going beyond what

they thought they were capable. But, as I've discovered from the pre-certification workshops and my own research, these effort actions encompass only a small fraction of Laban's work and the Laban Movement Studies Program will allow me to immerse myself in all aspects of his work. No doubt the possibilities will be endless when I take it back to my students.

Because the Laban Movement Studies Program is a philosophy that offers a vocabulary of movement, I will not only be able to share my exploration and needs with those at Arkansas State University and within our theatre department but also, through various workshops and classes, with people throughout this region, which is somewhat isolated from such exposure. Access to such a comprehensive and clear movement theory provides a more effective way of communicating with other professionals in my field as well. Consequently, it allows us, as an artistic community, to better understand and embrace other acting/movement styles.

Whether a methodology comes from the work of Stanislavsky, Chekhov, or Laban, each seems to encompass the connection between external objective and internal desire or need. Such innovators, although through differing methods, have the same ultimate goal and, in actuality, are presenting the same idea with different words. After all, "movement for the actor" means more than good physical use of the body and the Laban Movement Studies Program enables actors and dancers to examine their own bodies' strengths and weaknesses by connecting emotion to physicality. Essentially my job as an educator in theatre then is to help the actor or dancer express themselves by connecting inner life to outer movement.

Although I have danced most of my life, I chose not to major in dance. Therefore I have limited knowledge of kinesthetics, anatomy and physiology; components of movement that will no doubt help me to better communicate with my students and others in the movement field. The Laban Movement Studies Program is therefore of great value to my professional goals and objectives as it is important to know how and why we move, speak or think as we do so that we can be truthful as well as comfortable in the moment.

In addition, becoming a Certified Movement Analyst means that I will be able to help artists in their unique physical problems. Whether creative or physiological, by tapping into the resources of feelings and insights, we, as artists, are allowed to speak with our entire being. Once you have trained yourself to investigate how and why people move, you are able to avoid movement clichés when developing a role. After all, not every elderly person moves in the same manner and not every shy person walks with his or her head bowed and shoulders hunched forward. Essentially, this program will help both my students and I to free our own creativity, spontaneity, and imagination so that we are able to go beyond playing ourselves and become someone else.

I hope that the Laban Movement Studies Program will first enable me to make use of self as a human being and then it can become an extension of this improved self to meet the demands of the theatre. Therefore, I believe the integration of personal and professional work to be gained is both vital and inevitable. I wholeheartedly welcome something that will help me to develop a way of both living and working more healthfully and honestly. And, as an educator, I believe things have to be personal before they can be shared. According to Peggy Hackney in *Making Connections*, "a fully functioning expressive body increases life's possibilities". Who wouldn't want that?