

Laban Movement Analysis and Applications

In this issue of Moving On, we are pleased to present a focus on Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) applications through a series of articles, several from dance movement therapists who are also Certified Movement Analysts CMAs). The average dance movement therapist (DMT) would probably not use LMA in as much depth as a CMA, but LMA is still integral to a DMT in providing a means of describing someone's movement in qualitative terms; in providing a basis for recording observations and analysis and a working movement language that enables them to communicate a person's profile or movement signature and/or record change. That is record changes in quality of movement in an ongoing movement process.

The first section on LMA, provides the reader with an overview of Laban Movement Analysis and the Bartenieff Fundamentals, then an article about Laban's philosophies and Space Harmony with some suggestions for applications of this component of LMA in dance movement therapy. This is followed by an application in the area of Autism, prior to an analysis of a particular type of dance form for the reader's interest. The second section is about LMA and Gesture.

Laban Movement Analysis/Bartenieff Fundamentals™



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The Laban System is one of the greatest movement map-making tools available to Dance Movement Therapy. We spread through space, carving shapes and exerting dynamic effort with our bodies to execute a simple walk, engage in a conversation, or grieve a loved one. Without realizing it, our bodies develop unique movement patterns and dynamic qualities that adapt and change with our environment. This occurs as a result of our genetic givens as well as the intersubjective interactions that occur continuously and dynamically throughout our lives. Like psychological defences, some of our movement patterns and dynamics may aid or protect us, while others may inhibit us from enjoying our

fullest moving potential and personal relationships.

Using Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) and the Bartenieff Fundamentalssm (BF), a Dance Movement Therapist can observe, analyze and notate current patterns of movement, regardless of where the movement occurs and for what purpose. With this non-verbal information, so much becomes available – for example, options for attunement and therapeutic relationship building are opened, understanding and acceptance can be communicated, and effective interventions can be planned and implemented.

As DMTs non-verbal attunement is one of our most powerful skillsets. When working with a client, I use my own somatic/movement self-awareness to sense the feeling quality of the client's movement. I then apply the Laban Movement Analysis language to give this felt information a verbal framework. In this process I might ask myself questions like:

Does my client move abruptly or leisurely? With a need for speedy stimulation or an enjoyment of the luxuriousness of taking their time? This allows me to understand their experience of time, reflecting perhaps the attitudes of their caretakers or their current workplace situation. (EFFORT: TIME)

Is the client's use of his/her body burdensome and heavy, or can he/she summons force, or delicacy? How do they choose to make an impact on their environment, if they do at all? These questions assist my sense of their connection to the physicality of their body, their relationship to gravity, and their sense of personal agency. (EFFORT: WEIGHT)

Do the client's movements feel rigid and sticklike or do they have fluidity and ease? Can this person relax, and if so, does it happen through the entire body or just in specific body parts? These questions help me evaluate muscle tension and possibly the client's feelings around control/being controlled, or even more psychologically,

their state of cohesion/fragmentation (i.e., psychosis v. neurosis). (EFFORT: FLOW)

Does the client seem to fixate on particular points in space or is his focus dispersed and ever changing? Can he/she coordinate their focus with the required action? This allows me to observe the ways that the client might respond (and possibly) process stimuli. (EFFORT: SPACE)

Do the client's movements skim the space close to his body or extend away from himself into the distance? Does it seem like he/she is "elbowing" the world away to create a safe distance? These thoughts relate to their use of the kinesphere and their sense of the safe space currently available. This also informs me of their sensitivity to others, perhaps experiences of intrusion or invasion, or the longing for closeness. (SPACE: KINESPHERE)

How does my client breathe? Can I sense a repeated rhythm or phrase, or is it chaotic and unorganized? How deep or shallow does the breath penetrate? What body parts are allowed to move? These questions lead me to wonder about my client's internal emotional state, ability to self-soothe, and life support. (BODY: BREATH)

Which body parts lead or support the client's communication? Does animation involve the entire body or just a definable part? In their communications do I feel like they are "laying things out", as if on a table; are they holding them up for me to see, as if they were a painting on the wall; or are they thrusting them in my face, jabbing and pointing, so that I get their "point"? The information communicated by the client's use of specific planes of communication (as above, horizontal, vertical and sagittal, respectively), help me understand relational styles. (SHAPE)

Finally, as I sit or move with this client, how do they organize their body parts (radiating from the centre; upper to lower or lower to upper; more right sided or left sided; comfortable with all organizations)? Can I get a sense of the chronological age that I am experiencing in the presence of

this person? (BODY:
DEVELOPMENTAL PATTERNS)

Through sensing the client's use of these movement qualities separately and in various combinations, I can create a verbal opening into their non-verbally communicated subjective state. I can start with a relatively valid, objective data set and move to more subjective interpretations as I get to know the client more. With that knowledge I can shadow, mirror, exaggerate, explore, oppose, and intervene. These qualitative data inform me much like the mother of a developing child, such as described in Daniel Stern's evocative work (1985) on mother-infant attunement.

What is LMA exactly?

Laban Movement Analysis is a comprehensive system of observing, analysing, notating, and organizing all forms of movement. Although initially conceptualized for use with human movement, this system has spread to the animal and computer-animated worlds. This multi-faceted, theoretical system was developed by movement researcher, pioneer and father of European modern dance, Rudolf Von Laban. Although Laban is most notably recognized for his development of "Labanotation," a clear and concise language for notating human movement, his broader understanding of the dynamics of movement has offered dancers, actors, and especially therapist so much more. His work has been expanded upon by numerous thinkers in the movement field notably including:

Irmgard Bartenieff, a physical therapist and dance therapist. Bartenieff applied Laban's movement theories to the physical functioning of the human body, and developed a system of "correctives" now known as the Bartenieff Fundamentals™.

Warren Lamb, professional dancer turned corporate consultant. He worked with Laban to develop the "Laban-Lawrence Personal Effort Assessment." He developed Action Profiling, later renamed Movement Pattern Analysis.

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Occupational Therapist and developer of Body-Mind Centering®. An innovator and leader in the somatic world (an embodied and integrated approach to being human), she used movement concepts (based on LMA/BF) to inform her approach to touch and repatterning, experiential anatomy, developmental principles, perceptions and psychophysical processes.

Dr. Judith Kestenberg, child psychiatrist, spent many years trying to understand the non-verbal communications of infants and their developmental implications. After study encounters with Irmgard Bartenieff and Warren Lamb, she was able to understand and systematize her observations using LMA. She further extended the LMA system through her development of Kestenberg Movement Profiling.

As Dance Movement Therapists we know that almost nothing feels better sometimes than just moving our bodies. The joy of expressing ourselves through movement, giving voice to inner attitudes and feelings can at its zenith, enhance our sense of self and foster new growth, and even minimally, give us a sense that our mind and body are connected. We can experience how our mind responds to our body – for example, if we slump our shoulders and put our heads down. After being in this position for a few minutes, one's mind begins to feel the emotional repercussions of this body position, not to mention the muscle aches and pains that may come with it.

As Dance Movement Therapists we hold the basic belief that a person has the ability to alter their inner life and enhance their quality of life by expanding their movement possibilities. Thus the most powerful, and yet fundamental function of LMA/BF is its provision of the language which allows Dance Movement Therapists to think through and recognize the possibilities.

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“our movements are imperfect crystallizations, fragments of directional tensions, divided into the mortality of our time-feelings... an effort action or reaction is an approach towards values, the primary value being the maintenance or achievement of the balance needed for the individual’s survival”

(Laban, 1971, *Mastery of Movement*)