

Constructivism in Action: Motif Writing and K-12 Teacher Preparation

Language, whether symbolic, physical, or written, is designed to communicate. When written, language is a vehicle to transmit and receive ideas, information, and knowledge across space and time. Motif Writing is a vocabulary of tangible symbols to document any style or form of dance, thus offering users a versatile mode for communicating their ideas.

Motif gives teachers a language they can use to create, communicate, and document their thoughts and ideas through dance. These actions and ideas are conveyed through a selected symbolic vocabulary, and authorship (choreography) is achieved by converting movement ideas to symbols and writing them on paper or by translating actions from a score (notation on paper) and creating a movement representation. Motif provides a mental exchange between concept and creation.

Motif provides a way to communicate basic movement concepts. In teaching, Motif can help the educator organize and structure lessons. Preston-Dunlop (1966) states that Motif Writing “clarifies [the teachers’] point of view on movement education and helps them to see how they might aid their students more than they have been doing, and how their range of teaching methods might be enlarged” (p. 19). When using Motif Writing, students grasp ownership of the tools of dance and, therefore, are less dependent on teacher supervision and direction. Venable (1994) concurs by stating that as educators become more articulate, “Our students get clearer and seem to have more resources independent of the teacher. The ability to symbolize movement ideas seems to help support this independence and to challenge new explorations, new combinations” (p. 2).

In addition to teacher education, preparation, and organization of lessons, Motif Writing displays the components of dance composition which can be sequenced, revised, analyzed, and documented. Consequently, a teacher can ask her students to create a dance score in one lesson and revise and complete it in future lessons. A person can see the effectiveness of Motif Writing by integrating the raw materials of movement, the physical experience, the visual symbols, and the act of writing scores. As a language of symbols that students of any age can use to organize, read, share, and remember, Motif Writing unites expression of the body with a modality for communication and creation.

When Motif Writing is used as a tool for movement analysis and dance composition, the notation presents a language which we can use to articulate concisely the basis of movement. As Betty Redfern (1978) states, Motif Writing can be used "Not only as a tool for recording any form of dance, but as a means ~~too~~ of learning to think in terms of movement and thus to compose dances other than by improvisation or spontaneous response to stimulus" (p. 10). By the incorporation of Motif Writing with the creative process, Copeland and Cohen (1983) suggest that the "advent of a usable choreographic notation would encourage the development of an art of greater subtlety, complexity and originality" (p. 26).

Over the past 10 years as a CMA and dance educator, Motif has provided my university, secondary, and primary school students with educationally enriching experiences: they benefit from both the plastic nature of the symbols and the immeasurable possibilities for creative stimulus. In "Constructivism in Action: Motif Writing and K-12 Teacher Preparation" I will present current research conducted at Arizona State University demonstrating the influence of Motif Writing in teacher preparation and curriculum development. Clear and concise representations have been organized to show the ideas in action. The presentation will include a synopsis of the development of the research and curricular method, an overview of the contents, physical exploration using the approach and research reports from pre-service teachers using Motif.

Initial research shows that Motif Writing is valuable in the field of teacher preparation. It is proposed that learning and using dance notation can increase teacher competencies in dance. Good teaching requires an understanding of analysis of movement. By transcribing movement into notation, reading notation, and creating movement, a teacher will be better able to analyze and instruct movement material. It is believed that Motif Writing can have a strong impact in the field of dance education in curricula development and pre-service and in-service teacher training.

References

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