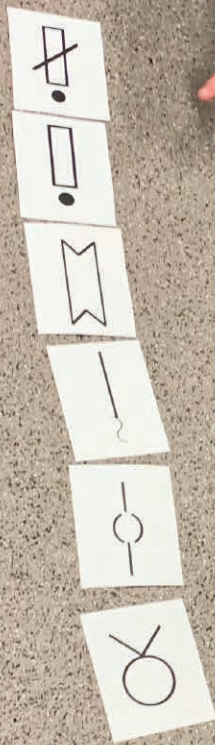


STRATEGIES FOR Encouraging Originality

BASIS Independent
Brooklyn students Sam
and Teddy. Photo by
Hetty King.



ABSTRACT

This article demonstrates how I use Language of Dance® to encourage originality in student dance making in a school setting. The ideas are presented in a step-by-step format so the reader can experience the progression from big idea to student-created dances. It is a flexible plan that teachers can modify to suit their objectives, age group, or intended performance outcome.

in Dance Making in the Pre-K–12 Setting

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In 2018, I created a dance-making project with my second-grade students at a private school in Red Hook, Brooklyn, New York. Each time I have taught the unit I have made slight variations. Some have been in response to the students' needs and some have been a result of my reflections on how best to teach the material. My main goal is for my students to begin to think like choreographers; that is, to make choices that reflect their understanding of basic movement concepts as building blocks for dance making and performing that is original and student driven. Using the Language of Dance (LOD) as my anchor for this unit allows students to approach movement as concepts rather than steps from a specific genre or style of dance. They are free to choose how to jump, rotate, or fall; to use what they know and are able to do and grow from there.

STEP 1: STILLNESS AND ANY ACTION

LOD was developed by Ann Hutchinson Guest (see <http://www.lodcusa.org>). The LOD approach links movement exploration with motif symbols to build an explicit foundation of movement knowledge. *Motif* is the term used to describe what is essentially a “shorthand” or simplified version of Labanotation. The way students use LOD in this article is also known as motif notation, which teaches how to use the movement alphabet to symbolically represent and record their movement concepts.

I begin with stillness and any action. Students explore these two concepts by brainstorming actions they want to perform. Students already understand the difference between locomotor and nonlocomotor movement so they have the option to choose either for this exploration. I write a score on the board: Stillness, Action, Stillness, Action, Stillness, and explain how we read LOD vertically from bottom to top.

Children enjoy choosing which actions to perform and different ways to be still. We discuss that stillness is also active and not a frozen shape or a limp pause in the action.

STEP 2: DURATION

I introduce the concept of duration and teach how to write this in LOD. I use music with different musical sections and have the children explore duration by being active in the short sections and still in the longer ones. Then we reverse

the score. I also use music with sections that become increasingly longer and we dance this. In these explorations, I ask the students to choose their own actions. I ask the students which they like better, being active for longer durations or still for longer durations. It is fun to discover that not everyone likes being active longer better.

STEP 3: LEVELS

We review levels, a concept the students already know from previous lessons, and learn the LOD symbols. We continue to explore duration, now adding level changes (see Figure 1). I write the basic score on the board and then ask students which part of the score they want to change. They come to the whiteboard and change a duration or a level and the whole class dances the new score.

STEP 4: WHAT IS CHOREOGRAPHY? WHO IS A CHOREOGRAPHER?

Now that the students have begun to think and act as choreographers, I ask them to reflect on the meaning of these two terms choreography and choreographer, and to create a definition as a class. It is always interesting to hear their thoughts and help guide them to a useful definition of the two terms.

STEP 5: A CHOREOGRAPHER'S TOOLKIT

I continue to introduce LOD symbols. I teach balance, fall, rotation, spring, away and toward, and gesture (see Figure 2). Each symbol is rich with opportunity to teach about the movement concept as well as to guide the students through more complex movement explorations.

- ◆ *Balance*: How many points of balance can we find? How many do you want to use in your choreography?
- ◆ *Fall*: How many ways can you fall? Try melting, collapsing, and crumpling.
- ◆ *Spring*: This is my opportunity to teach the five ways to jump—two feet to two feet, one foot to the same foot, two feet to one foot, one foot to two feet, and one foot to the other foot—and get the students exploring how to execute each way of springing from the ground with

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DURATIONS AND LEVELS!

Name _____ Element _____

Directions: Use the symbols for **Stillness**, **Action** and **Levels - high, middle and low** - to create your own choreography.

Steps to Success:

*Begin and End in Stillness

*Include at least **one** LEVEL Change

*Include **two different** DURATIONS

CHOREOGRAPHY

IS _____

DURATION

IS _____

A CHOREOGRAPHER

IS _____



Figure 1. Durations and levels worksheet. **AQ2**

as much “air” time as possible. I also give each way a name. *Jump* is two feet to two feet, *hop* is one foot to one foot, *sissonne* is two feet to one foot, *assemblé* is one foot to two feet, and *leap* is one foot to the other.

- ◆ *Rotation*: I have used this as an opportunity to teach somersaults and cartwheels but that is dependent on the group. This is also a great time to discuss how rotation is different from moving on a circular pathway.

Second Grade, 2018/19, Ms. King

NAME _____ ELEMENT _____

A Choreographer's tool Kit!

A CHOREOGRAPHER is a person who creates dances. They are responsible for the inspiration, theme or idea they want to make a dance about. They choose the music or work with a composer to create original music. The CHOREOGRAPHER creates the movements and teaches them to the dancers. This includes teaching the dancers how they want them to perform the movements, how much energy to use and the duration or counts for each movement. The CHOREOGRAPHER decides where the movements will be performed; what formations and in what kind of groupings - for example: a solo, a duet or a trio.

Language of Dance gives us the building blocks for choreography. Like notes on a staff or words on a page the L.O.D. symbols help us organize our movement ideas.

Write the symbol for **Any Action** in the box

Write the symbol for **Stillness** in the box

Write the Symbols for each level:

High

Middle

Low

Figure 2. Choreographer's toolkit worksheet.

◆ *Away and toward*: These concepts create relationships without having to discuss them discretely. My students really enjoy playing the game where they choose a "secret" partner and move away and toward them for different durations. I also have them explore moving

away and toward places in the room and or objects in the room.

◆ *Gesture*: I teach gesture as a way to have the students explore small movement. They are often more drawn to large, gross motor actions like running, skipping,

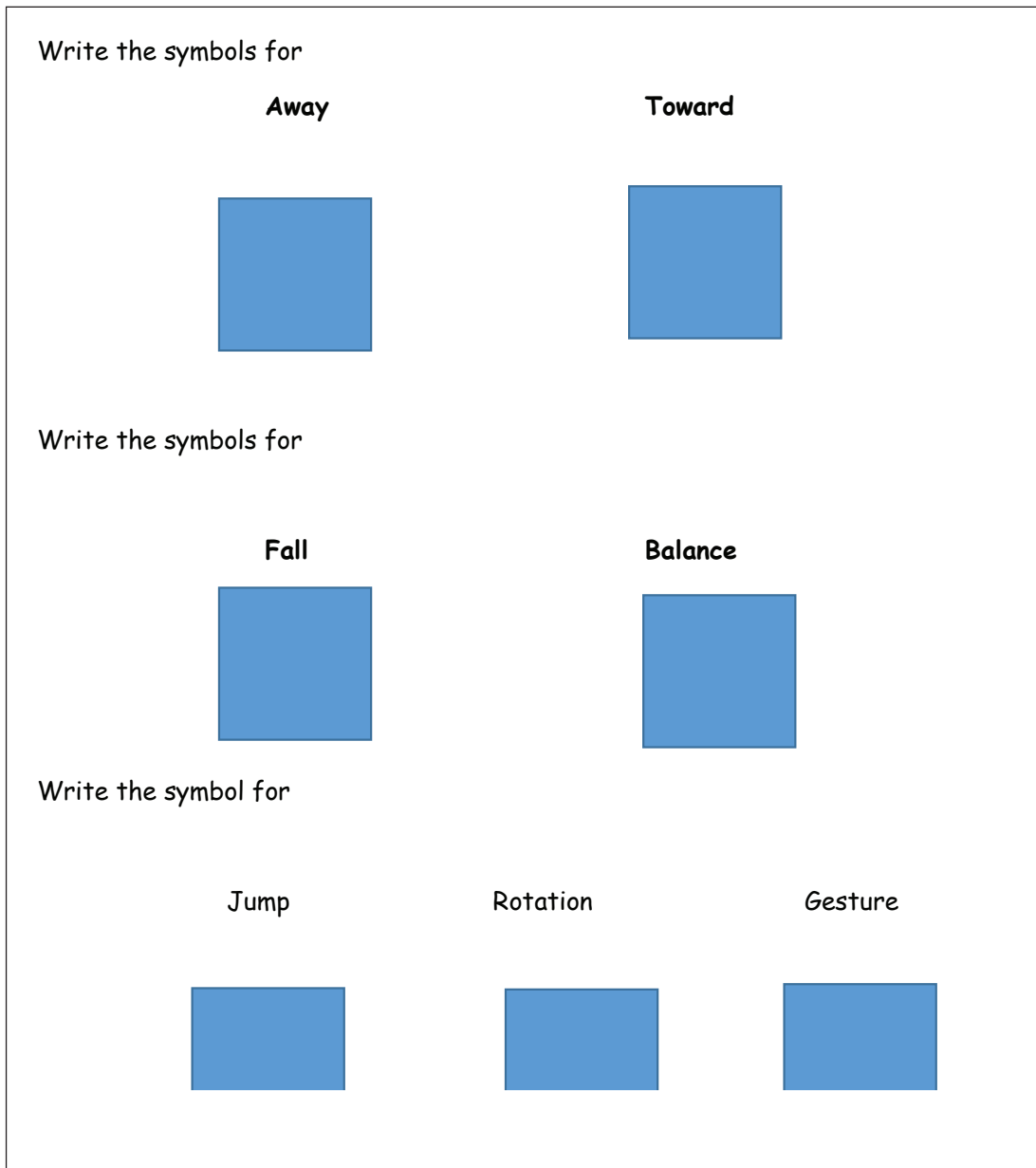


Figure 2. (Continued)

and jumping, and do not create small moments in their choreography. When I teach gesture, I have the students brainstorm movement and create a gesture phrase using their choices. We perform it at different tempos. This almost always gets a laugh as the tempo speeds up and slows down, making simple things like pointing or raising your hand take on new meaning.

As part of Step 5, I write short choreographies on the board using the symbols we have learned so far and have the students choreograph them in the moment as part of the warmup. For example, if the LOD symbols read Stillness, Action, Stillness, I will give students a few minutes to work on their own, then I will say the words, play my drum, and allow the students to dance their own movement choices.

I keep these simple and do not make awkward movement transitions. I then invite them to change parts of the choreography and come to the board and rewrite the symbols to match their choreography. Once I have taught all the symbols, I give them a worksheet to organize and practice writing the symbols.

STEP 6: STUDENT CHOREOGRAPHERS!

I have the LOD symbols on small cards and create packets of symbols. The students pair up and choose a packet of symbols. I give them a worksheet to record their work. I tell them to think like choreographers and use their symbols to create their own choreography.

The following is a variation I have used, which I call adding chance operations. I put the LOD symbols on large foam dice. The students roll the dice and notate their choices. With another set of dice, the students use chance to determine how they will perform their actions. For example, to determine how many points of contact with the floor for their balance, students roll a die with numbers on it to determine points of contact, record that on their worksheet, and choreograph their movement. Although this method can sometimes take away a lot of choice from the students, it is well suited to a unit focused on chance operations in choreography, or as a way to compare and contrast choreographic methods in a class with older students.

STEP 7: CREATE AND PRACTICE

Some students will work very quickly and others take time. To deal with this, I keep a few symbols out of the mix. As students say they are finished, I give them more symbols to add to their choreography. Saving levels is a great trick. Just when they think they are done you can ask them to create one level change and record it in their choreography! Each group is asked to share two times. The first time they are

dancing and saying the action out loud. I want them to reinforce their choices verbally as a way to hold them accountable and get them to memorize their choreography. The second time, they perform their dance in silence.

The students
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their work.

STEP 8: SHARING AND FEEDBACK, USING A HOLISTIC RUBRIC

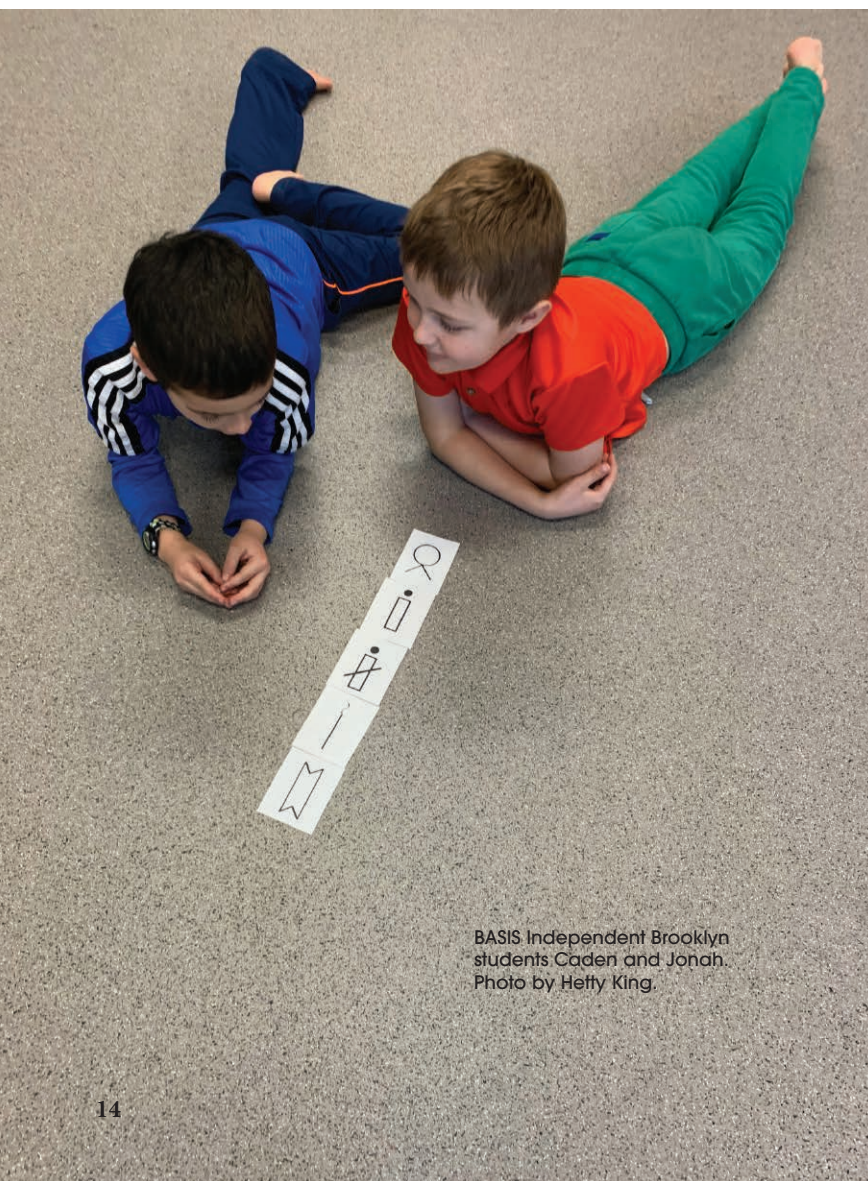
The students love to share their work. This is a great opportunity to set the expectations for audience behavior and explain how the students will use the rubric to watch their peers' choreography. Using a rubric provides a framework for viewing, giving, and receiving feedback. At this age students might or might not have experience with rubrics, so you might need to spend time explaining what a rubric is. In this project, I use a holistic rubric with general criteria for each stage but do not award points for specific elements. Because my goal is to have the students create original choreography, I want them to think broadly and not focus on a quantitative list.

Figure 3 shows a copy of the rubric I use, my Flower Rubric. The beautiful thing about this rubric is that once students understand how to use it and the meaning of each step, it can be modified to create exit tickets or compliments where students give each other flowers or bouquets. These consist of slips of paper printed with flowers or bouquets where students can fill in the "to" and "from" and hand them out. I have given students printed bouquets, rolled up like a diploma, at the end of the year when they age out of my class.

STEP 9 AND BEYOND

Where you take this project is yours to decide. It can remain an in-class choreography and performance project, you can invite teachers or other classes to watch, or you can make it into a school performance. I have done all of these things in different settings and with different classes. If the project is not used for a performance outside the classroom, I send the worksheets home so students have the opportunity to share the work they are doing with their parents.

When using these projects for a school-wide performance, I also create a unison phrase with the class using the same LOD toolkit. Students exit after the phrase and enter group by group to perform their dances ending by repeating the unison phrase (ABA), "Bow! Bravo and Brava!" When sharing this project in a school-wide performance for family and friends, I also take the time to give a brief lecture and demonstration to the audience describing the process we



BASIS Independent Brooklyn students Caden and Jonah. Photo by Heffy King.

Flower Rubric

A dance making rubric, Hetty King

SEED – I have just started.



BUD – My dance is beginning to take shape.



FLOWER – I am ready to share my dance and get feedback



BOUQUET – My dance is finished. I am ready for my audience.




Figure 3. Flower rubric.

used to create our dances. I want the audience to understand that the movement choices they see are student generated and an expression of their creativity in movement. I relate LOD to other written languages they might be familiar with like musical notes on a staff. This lecture is also an opportunity for me to emphasize my main goal: for my students to think like choreographers, emphasizing the importance of the process and realizing that it is as important as the product.

RESOURCE

<http://www.lodcusa.org>

This link will bring you to the Language of Dance website where you can purchase the LOD cards pictured in the article as well as other teaching and reading materials. 

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