

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF LABAN MOVEMENT ANALYSIS

Introduction/General Thoughts

Laban Movement Analysis is a theoretical and experiential system for the observation, description, prescription, performance, and interpretation of human movement.

“LMA provides a rich overview of the scope of movement possibilities. These basic elements can be used for generating movement or for describing movement. They provide an inroad to understanding movement and for developing movement efficiency and expressiveness. Each human being combines these movement factors in his/her own unique way and organizes them to create phrases and relationships which reveal personal, artistic, or cultural style.” (Peggy Hackney, *Making Connections*)

“At the heart of LMA is a recognition that movement is a psycho-physical process, an outward expression of inner intent.” (Ed Groff, *Laban Movement Analysis: Charting the Ineffable Domain of Human Movement*, JOPERD, February 1995.)

Laban Movement Analysis was developed by Rudolf Laban (1879-1958). Laban was a scientist, teacher, artist, social activist, visionary, and a creator. Combined with Irmgard Bartenieff's (1890 – 1981) contributions to the Body category, the LMA/BF work is a living system that continues to evolve.

What can LMA/BF contribute to the field of education?

- An embodied knowledge and experiential learning experience
- “Whole person” education (self as psychological, physical, sociological, spiritual, etc.)
- Understanding of the relationships between Individual/Group/Society
- A perspective for both theory and practice
- A dynamic, evolving body of knowledge—a living system for our changing world
- Transformative experiences
- Using movement in education for a full range of content or subject-matter
- Teaching movement with a larger lens: dance, theater, fitness, health, community recreating
- Learners are active agents in their own empowered learning rather than passive recipients of received knowledge.

“Men and women develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation.”

Major Categories: Body, Effort, Shape, Space (with a context that also considers Phrasing and larger themes.)

Some Major Themes: Bridging Polarities

Inner/Outer	Function/Expression	Mobility/Stability	Exertion/Recuperation
Part/Whole	Evocative/Analytical	Individual/Group	Simple/Complex

Shape

Shape is about form and forming. Shape is the bridge between Body and Space.

Basic Shape Forms (aka: Still Forms):



Pin



Ball



Wall



Pyramid (Tetrahedron)



Screw (Spiral)

Shape Flow Support: The growing and shrinking of the internal Kinesphere. (Supports the inner architecture of the body in space). Shape Flow Support is related to Breath which feeds the growing and shrinking of the torso.

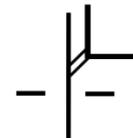
- General: Growing/Shrinking
- Vertical Dimension: Lengthening/Shortening
- Horizontal Dimension: Widening/Narrowing
- Sagittal: Bulging/Hallowing



“Movement goes out into space and creates shapes. But also there is inner space, and breath is an inner shaping experience. The body shrinks and grows with each breath. Inner breath changes can be supported by sound. Posture is not built by muscles but by the whole way you breathe.” (Irmgard Bartenieff)

Shape Qualities: Describe “toward where” the body is changing shape. The baseline of Shape Qualities is Opening/Closing (which is also the most basic thing we can say about Shape). It is **process oriented** (a process of “growing toward”) whereas Space is destination oriented.

- Vertical Dimension: Rising/Sinking
- Horizontal Dimension: Spreading/Enclosing
- Sagittal Dimension: Advancing/Retreating



Modes of Shape Change: Describes shape change that is either motivated by self or the environment. The modes of Shape Change are about creating relationship.



Shape Flow

“All about me.”
Shape change that is self motivated.



Directional

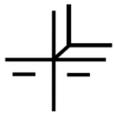
Shape change that is environment motivated—through bridging or connecting **to** the environment. Can be **Arc-like** (generally moved from one joint in an arc) or **Spoke-like** (generally unfolds from multiple joints in a direct line).



Carving

Shape change that is environment motivated—molds **with** the environment. It is co-created, adaptive, 3-dimensional, uses rotary function. Both mover and environment (space, other person, etc) are changed in Carving movement.

Effort



Effort can be described as the dynamics, qualitative use of energy, texture, color, emotions, inner attitude, etc. There is an ongoing (Flow) sense of self (Weight) in relation to the environment (Space) over time (Time).

Effort is both functional and expressive. Effort is not quantitative—it is qualitative. There is sometimes an underlying **functional** Effort (for example: Strength in a weight shift underneath a Light upper body). Usually, however, we are more concerned with the **expressive** aspects of Effort.

Motion Factors: Flow, Weight, Time, Space. Each Motion Factor is a continuum between the polarities which are Effort Elements/Qualities.

FACTOR	ELEMENT (Indulging)	ELEMENT(Condensing)	Motif Symbol (Only the Factor is shown here)
FLOW , as a Factor is about continuity, ongoingness, progression, emotions, involvement.	Free Flow: Outpouring, letting the inside out and the outside in, uncontrollable, can't be stopped, open hearted, fluid, etc.	Bound Flow: Contained, controlled, keeping the inside in and the outside out, can be stopped at any moment, rigid, boundaries, clarity, etc.	
WEIGHT , as a Factor is about sensing, intention, feeling my own weight, "me" oriented (me, myself, my physicality), presence, relationship to earth/gravity.	Light (Active Weight): Delicate, fragile, overcoming one's weight, buoyant, lifted up, etc.	Strong (Active Weight): Power, "standing one's ground," immovable, etc.	
	Limp (Passive Weight): Giving up my weight.	Heavy (Passive Weight): Complete collapse.	
	Weight Sensing (can be on the Light or Strong end): Between active and passive weight. You relax and release into your weight to sense it. Generally uses a lot of Flow.		
TIME , as a Factor is about intuition, decision making, related to the moment, now vs. not now, knowing the right moment to act, reinvesting in the moment.	Sustained: Lingered, drawing out the moment, luxuriate, languidly, adagio, prolonging, leisurely, "not yet, not now," etc.	Sudden or Quick: Urgent, instantaneous, staccato, quick, hurried, condenses the moment, spark-like, now, now, NOW!	
SPACE , as a Factor is about thinking, attention, intellect and ideas, perception—using my senses, environment/other related, external.	Indirect: Multi-focused, over-lapping, roundabout, scanning, taking it all in, expansive, seeing all the possibilities, etc.	Direct: Channeled, honing in, riveted, linear, laser-like, single-focused, pin pointed, "this is it," "this is the way."	

Effort can be a single Element or configurations of 2 (States), 3 (Drives), or 4 (full Effort) Factors.

Body

Bartenieff Fundamentals:

“Bartenieff Fundamentals is an approach to basic body training that deals with patterning connections in the body according to principles of efficient movement functioning within a context which encourages personal expression and full psychophysical involvement.” (Peggy Hackney, Making Connections)

Goal: A lively interplay between inner connectivity and out expressivity.

Irmgard Bartenieff (1890 – 1981): What is truly fundamental in human movement?

1. Change
2. Relationship
3. Patterning Body Connections

Patterns of Total Body Connectivity

Pattern	Functional Concepts	Images /Expressive Possibilities
Breath 	Cellular and lung respiration, ease in movement, support in full body shaping (Shape Flow Support), Grounding, Mobility, Stability, Rhythm, etc.	Ocean waves, Feeling “at one” with one’s self, empathy, soft, fluid, oneness, taking care of self, “good enough as I am,” etc.
Core-Distal 	Core Support, Connecting all limbs to core, Clarity in limbs, Connecting from core out to space, whole body connectivity, Sets up Kinetic Chains, etc.	Star or jelly fish, Nourishing core, core beliefs, extension of self into world, relationship of me to other, supported to my very edges, etc.
Head-Tail 	Dynamic Alignment, spinal articulation, level changes, posture, Vertical Throughness, etc.	Playful, not rigid, flexible, exploring possibilities, lively sense of self, snake or fish-like, etc.
Upper-Lower 	Weight propulsion, Yield & Push to Reach & Pull, Grounding, access to space, locomotion in lower, connecting to the world with upper, Humeral-Scapular Rhythm, Femoral-Pelvic Rhythm, etc.	Hard work, endurance, relationship between earth and heaven, getting behind one’s weight, achieving goals, interacting with the world, etc.
Body-Half 	Homolateral movement, brain development, mobility/stability, strengthens spine, supports turns and barrel rolls, ect.	Lizard/camel like, Either or, “one the one hand,” Sensing the supporting side of mobility, robotic, zombie-like, militaristic, simple, clarifying, etc.
Cross-Lateral 	Makes 3D, rotary movement possible, spirals, diagonals through torso, most complex of all the patterns, etc.	Salsa or Latin dancing, Carving through the space, radiating into Diagonals, spiraling down, full movement potential realized, triumphant, etc.

Development is not a linear process but occurs in overlapping waves with each stage containing elements of all the others. Because each previous stage underlies and supports each successive stage, any incomplete development or skipping of any stage leads to perceptual/movement problems. By returning to these basic patterns, we can re-pattern our responses and establish more efficient nervous pathways to support our movement.

Imrgard's Basic 6: Femoral Flexion (originally called "Thigh Lift"), Sagittal Pelvic Shift, Lateral Pelvic Shift, Body-Half, Diagonal Knee Reach (originally called "Knee Drop"), and Arm Circles

Other General Body Questions to Ask: Where does the movement initiate? How does movement travel through my body? Where does it come out through my body? Where do I send it in space? What is held, active, leading, initiating, etc? How is the body connected?

Body Part Sequencing: Describes how movement spreads through the body.

- Simultaneous: All active body parts move at once.
- Successive: Adjacent body parts move one after the other.
- Sequential: Non-adjacent body parts move one after the other.

Space

"A definite movement with a definite trace form is always connected with inner happening such as feelings, reflections, determinations of the will, and other emotional impulses." -Rudolf Laban, Choreutics

General Space terms: trace forms, level zones, reach space, Kinesphere, pathways, personal space, interpersonal space, general space, Approach to Kinesphere.

 Kinesphere: The 3-Dimensional volume of space that I can access with my body without shifting my weight to change my stance. (Psychological Kinesphere: The space I can "attend" to.)

Approach to Kinesphere: How is my Kinesphere revealed through spatial tension:

		
<u>Central</u> : Organizes energy and reveals the Kinesphere by radiating out from and coming back into center.	<u>Peripheral</u> : Organizes energy and reveals the Kinesphere by revealing the edge of the Kinesphere and maintaining a sense of distance between the center and edge.	<u>Transverse</u> : Organizes energy and reveals the Kinesphere by cutting or sweeping through the Kinesphere between the center and the edge.

Spatial Matrix and Cross of Axis

Spatial Pull: An invisible line of inherent power (potential energy) which can be revealed in movement. (*Crystalline forms, such as the Icosahedron, provide a road map for the spatial pulls.*)

Directions: Rays that radiate out from center into space.

Dimension: Each Dimension has 2 Directions. Each Direction has one spatial pull.

- The three cardinal Dimensions are *Vertical*, *Sagittal*, and *Horizontal*. The connecting point of these three Dimensions creates the Cross of Axis. (Dimensional movement occurs through the center or by using a Central Approach to Kinesphere).

Planes: Contains 2 Dimensions to reveal a flat surface area that can be dissected through a Diameter: each Diameter has 2 Directions. Each Direction has 2 unequal spatial pulls. (Peripheral Approach to Kinesphere is evident while moving from the edge of one Dimension to another.)

- The three cardinal Planes are *Vertical*, *Sagittal*, and *Horizontal*. We discussing this in relationship to the Icosahedron, these planes take on rectangular form, meaning that in the Vertical Plane there is more Up/Down then there is Left/Right. Thus, the Directions reveals through the Diameters each contain 2 **unequal** spatial pulls.

	Vertical	Sagittal	Horizontal
Dimensions			
Planes			

Diagonal: Has two Directions. Each Direction has 3 **equal** spatial pulls (as revealed by the Cube).

Transverse Spiraling: A change in 3 unequal spatial pulls.

*To commit into one direction fully bring mobility. To control mobility, use counter tension in opposite direction.

Phrasing

Phrases: Perceivable units of movement which are in some sense meaningful. They begin and end while containing a through line. (Peggy Hackney, *Making Connections*)

- (preparation/intent) → Initiation → Main Action (Exertion) → Follow Through (transition)

What we “read” as a phrase or phrasing comes from all aspects of BESS. The “felt-sense” of what contributes to our personal meaning-making about the concept of phrasing from the perceived:

1. Body Phrasing: Initiations – follow through, simultaneous/successive/sequential, etc.
2. Effort Phrasing: “blow-by-blow” specific Effort configurations, generalized phrases (such as Indulging to Condensing), etc.
3. Shape Phrasing: Specific modes and qualities, general openings/closing, etc.
4. Space Phrasing: Volute, Steeple, Size of Kinesphere, Planes, etc.
5. Action Phrasing: Sequence of actions

“To study phrasing is to study the dynamics of pattern. The interplay between movement elements and sequence is the foundation of the tension and excitement of phrasing.” –Judy Lebric

Phrasing has meaning and often reflects personal values. Dealing with phrasing in its fullness is complex.