

Moorpark College

Beth Megill

Sabbatical Proposal

Sabbatical Proposal 2014-2015

Movement Literacy

Dance and Movement Literacy Curriculum Project

About Me

This is my first time applying for a sabbatical. I am in my 7th year teaching dance full-time at Moorpark College. While working at Moorpark, I have continued my research in the discipline and presented my findings annually at conferences including the National Dance Educators Organization, the World Dance Alliance Americas, and American College Dance Festival. As one of the few certified Language of Dance® Specialists, I am working on the cutting edge of the field alongside the elite dance literacy and notation scholars, including Tina Curran (University of Texas, Austin), Teresa Heiland (Loyola Marymount University) and Susan Gingrasso (University of Wisconsin, Professor Emeritus). Just this past October, my research team presented two sessions at the National Dance Educator's organization Conference on Jazz Dance Literacy, utilizing literacy as a model for improving dance education. We have jump-started the conversation nationwide about the role of notation and cognitive integration in the dance classroom. Our inquiry in this area of dance pedagogy is leading scholarship within dance curriculum across the nation.

While I have continually engaged in professional development, I am at a point in my research where a year of dedicated tool building and curriculum development could provide an invaluable platform for future years of teaching. Being on the forefront of this research is challenging me to reexamine my own pedagogy as well as current practices in the field. This timing is also key in that, I have just been granted a year-long mentorship with Luna Dance Institute in the Bay Area with the goal of developing my role as a leader within the dance community. Such discipline specialist support offers me a wonderful platform during my year of ground-breaking course development.

What is Dance Literacy? (Discipline Context for Project)

While dance scores (similar to music scores) have existed since the early ballets of the 1600's, integration of dance notation scores into dance pedagogy is still developing. It is also important to note that dance literacy includes more than just the ability to read and write a dance score. Functional dance literacy, rooted in the research of education scholars Elliot Eisner and Brenda McCutcheon (among others), can be defined as follows: use of the dance-based dance language and symbols of Laban Movement Analysis and Language of Dance to connect cognitive, kinesthetic, and affective learning to deepen the way we comprehend dance concepts. With this new definition of dance literacy, dance pedagogy research is exploding with possibility.

My 95 year old mentor Ann Hutchinson Guest authored the first textbook on a full but complex dance notation (Labanotation), but later developed a simpler and more functional dance notation system called the Language of Dance® which I have studied and achieved the level of LOD Specialist. Since learning and studying dance literacy, I have been incorporating literacy based lectures and assignments more and more into my classroom. In addition, I have presented research on the positive learning outcomes from the incorporation of dance notation within both theoretical courses and practical technique courses at various conferences over the past four years (see appendix).



Research by Edward Warburton, Tina Curran, and Ann Dils, provides clear evidence of the benefits of notation in the study of dance. I believe systematic and well-scaffolded courses should seamlessly integrate notation with the theory and practice of dance. There are currently very few dance scores for use in the classroom. *Therefore, my task is to create working dance scores specifically geared toward the community college dance population.*

If I were a choir or orchestra director, I would teach a classical piece of music by selecting a score and then having the students read the score. Or, I might have the students turn in a music harmony assignment where they have written their own composition. In dance there are not many dance scores that are simple enough for students to read. Those that exist are intended for dance reconstruction at the highest level and are extremely difficult to interpret. There is a great need for accessible dance notation projects to be created and shared within the dance community. Such scores need to be accessible for new dance readers and for dancers at all skill levels.

Project Outline

I plan to use my year-long sabbatical to create a canon of eight dance scores to use in the classroom and share with the broader world of dance scholarship. These eight scores will lay the foundation for an effective and useful canon of dance scores for the community college Modern and Jazz Dance curriculum. Both Modern Dance and Jazz Dance have four levels (fundamentals, beginning, intermediate and advanced). I would like to write one score for each level with increasing difficulty so that after taking four semesters, the students will have well-rounded exposure to the essentials of dance literacy through the lens of Language of Dance. Thus, this curriculum will be integrated into 8 courses that are central to the dance departments core training, serving a large majority of our dance majors and transfer students.

Schedule

I propose to create a score for each of the four levels of Modern and Jazz dance at Moorpark College. A score takes roughly a month to design, create, write, edit, and proofread. Below is an example of the process for writing a dance score, which I propose to repeat 8 times:

- Identify the appropriate student learning outcomes for a given score 8 hours
- Develop the dance material (choreograph the combination) 16 hours
- Notate the score (1st draft) 30 hours
- Test the score (with participants/ students) 16 hours
- Refine the score (2nd draft) 20 hours
- Vet the score (with my dance literacy colleagues for accuracy) 10 hours
- Finalize the score (3rd draft) 20 hours
- Video a performance of the score 8 hours

I will need to engage with my dance colleagues nationwide to help proofread the scores for both accuracy and pedagogy. I have discussed my project with Susan Gingrasso, Tina Curran and Teresa Heiland, and they have agreed to act as peer editors. Therefore, I should be able to complete the four levels of Modern Dance in the fall semester and the four levels of Jazz Dance in spring semester. Depending on the nature of the score, I may also need to write accompanying material or create video to support other users (including other VCCCD faculty) who wish to teach from the score.

Implementation

The dance scores I propose to write will be directly integrated into all of my classrooms and offered as tools for the rest of the Moorpark College dance faculty. The primary benefit to the department comes in the form of improved performance of the dancers in the program.

In addition, the integration of dance scores can improve the department's ability to assess student success in these courses. Incorporating literacy into student learning objectives allows the students to more easily identify the goals of the course in terms of physical skill, performance, and cognitive processing, and empowers the instructor to more accurately determine student achievement. Literacy is easily measured and documented, thus improving our ability to determine the success of the program.

In addition, I will house the dance scores to be adopted publically by other institutions bringing acclaim and attention to the college and the district.

Benefit to Students

The most direct benefit to the student will be the use of the scores in my classroom. Using notation in the classroom offers the student a richer learning environment that translates to improved skill acquisition and performance artistry. Our students must transfer at junior level technique, and increasing their dance literacy will make them more competitive upon auditioning for programs.

Dance literacy:

- Trains a dancer to read and write using a dance-based dance language.
- Teaches a dancer to identify, understand, interpret, create, and communicate in a dance based dance language.
- Provides a conceptual framework for the dancer's physical experience.
- Is a visual representation and aid to connect body/mind/affect in performance. Aids development of vocabulary: physically and cognitively.
- Develops awareness and movement observation.
- Enhances critical and creative thinking in the creative process of composition.
- Expands expressive choice.

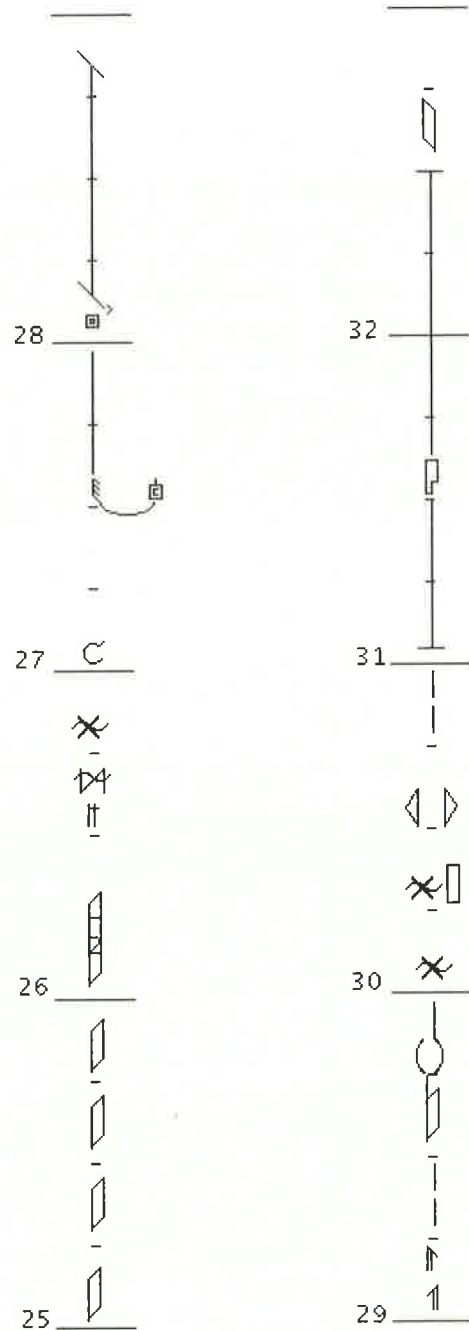
Benefit to Moorpark College and Ventura County Community College District

There are only two full-time faculty members in the dance department, and I am so lucky to work with Robert Salas, who is also trained in dance theory and notation. He supports the incorporation of dance notation into our classes and sees the benefits of incorporating dance literacy into the department curriculum. We have already discussed the need to standardize the use of notation within the dance course work. This project would be a huge benefit to that process.

On a state and national level, this cutting edge work is just starting to change the culture of dance study. There is a continued misperception regarding the rigor of studying dance. The idea of dance being a hobby is still prevalent in much of American culture. Incorporating dance literacy into the classroom changes the depth of learning and academic demand. It gives the students something of integrity that they own as artists, something that cannot be disputed or mistaken as a "fluffy" art form.

When I first came to Moorpark and I heard about "Moorparking It," I was inspired. I am still inspired. As a two year institution, we instructors are not charged with conducting ground-breaking research, but I believe we are charged with modeling academic excellence. I firmly believe that our pedagogy should always be top notch. We are teachers looking for the best possible way to teach our discipline.

I have presented my work in over 8 papers, workshops and panels and will likely present future research on pedagogy at future conferences both regionally, national and possibly internationally. This project is another opportunity for Moorpark and the VCCCD to lead the way in providing the best practices for community college education.



*Excerpt of a Language of Dance Score
Notated by Beth Megill*

Upon Return

The goal is to create a usable package for other VCCCD dance faculty to adopt if they are interested. Each package will include:

- A LOD notated dance score
- A video of the dance
- A short description of the pedagogical goals
- A list of student learning outcomes

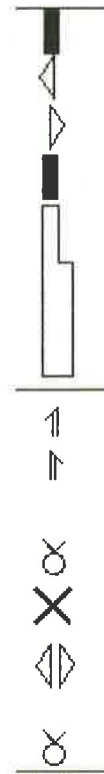
I would like to host a college-wide flex activity in which I share the power of literacy in the study of the performing and visual arts. I plan to work more specifically with my dance colleagues at Moorpark (with an invitation to those from the Ventura College dance program as well) in order to share how these models can be easily incorporated to support our curriculum.

I am also currently serving as co-president for the California Dance Education Association (state affiliate of NDEO) where I am leading the way for California dance educators across the various private and public sectors. More specifically, I have become a leader in the recent Community College Dance consortiums and summits regarding the strength of dance programs in the 2-year college setting. At the last meeting (October 2013) we identified the need to more regularly integrate dance theory and dance literacy into our programs to demonstrate the academic rigor that exists in studying dance. This project will serve that entire community of over 100 dance faculty across the state.

I am honored to be a part of the Moorpark college community and excited to develop pedagogy materials that will be used nation-wide to bring acclaim to the college.

Thank you for considering my application. I am grateful this opportunity exists for instructors, one more reason I am so very pleased to call Moorpark College and the Ventura County Community College District my home.

Sincerely,
Beth Megill



Appendix

Related Scholarly Presentations given at past National Dance Educators Organization Conferences

NDEO 2013

- *The Individual in Jazz: New Inroads for the Jazz Dance Experience* (Panel)
- *The Art and Craft of Teaching with Literacy at its Core: Jazz Dance* (Panel)
- *Exploring the Movement and Cultural Legacy of Jazz* (Workshop)

NDEO 2012

- *Pedagogical Opportunities for Functional Dance Literacy* (Panel)

NDEO 2011

- *Forging Mutual Paths: Defining Dance Literacy in the 21st Century* (Panel)
- *Notation in a jazz dance technique class!?! It can be done!* (Workshop)

NDEO 2010

- *Developing Dance Literacy in the 21st Century* (Panel)
- *Sage on the Stage or Guide on the Side: New Views on Teaching and Learning in an Online Dance Appreciation Course* (Paper)

Additional Dance Literacy Resources:

- o Journal of Movement Arts Literacy www.digitalcommons.lmu.edu/jmal
- o Language of Dance Center USA www.lodcusa.org/
- o National Dance Educators Organization www.ndeo.org