

BTEC in Language of Dance Motif Notation Course (Level 1) for Special Educational Needs students

by Valerie Farrant and Lucy Lush

A short specialist course, BTEC in Language of Dance Motif Notation has been running at Brockenhurst College since September 2009. Although, over the past six years, special educational needs (SEN) students have been experiencing this approach to creative movement, the BTEC, tailor-made for Brockenhurst College, gives them the opportunity to gain a qualification accredited by a recognised awarding body. Last year, 12 SEN students were entered for and awarded the Level 1 BTEC in Language of Dance Motif Notation.

Having developed the course and established it at Brockenhurst College, we are now in a position to help other teachers to offer the course at their own school or college. We have already run several one-day 'taster' days and a three-day intensive Language of Dance BTEC course at Easter. The course gave SEN teachers the skills to deliver Level 1 to their students and enter them for the qualification. Guidance on how to gain accreditation and run the course at their own school or college was also provided.

We have spoken to a number of SEN teachers and they are excited about the possibility of being able to offer this course to their students.

BACKGROUND

Dr Ann Hutchinson Guest, the internationally recognised expert in dance notation, dance research and dance edu-

Photo: Louis Pliskin



cation, has devoted much of her life to establishing an understanding and appreciation of dance notation. This includes the revival of historical dances from scores and documenting cultural dances from around the world that would otherwise have been lost.

It was during this extensive study of movement notation that Dr Guest realised there was a need to develop a form of notation that was accessible and less restrictive than that of Labanotation. The Language of Dance® (LOD) approach to movement and dance was created in response to this need. By breaking down movement into its building blocks and codifying it, she created the Movement Alphabet®, a device that can be used as a framework for movement exploration, choreography and recording movement across all genres. LOD marries the physical experience to an intellectual understanding of dance, which enhances student learning and informs choreography. It provides opportunities through dance making for problem solving, exploration, critical thinking and movement analysis.

STRUCTURE OF A LANGUAGE OF DANCE® CLASS

Warm-up

- Creative exploration of one or more movement concepts
- Explanation of the related symbols
- Creative tasks using the symbols
- Performance of the resulting choreography
- Discussion and appreciation of the work created in class

LANGUAGE OF DANCE FUNDAMENTALS COURSE AT BROCKENHURST COLLEGE

After qualifying as a Language of Dance Specialist in 1998, Valerie Farrant began delivering LOD to A Level Dance students at Brockenhurst College. This involved covering the whole Movement Alphabet, for one hour a week, over two years. Students were given a structured framework within which to explore and analyse movement concepts, work on choreography, appreciate each other's work as well as improve their notation reconstructing and recording skills. Assessment at the end of the course took the form of a two-hour written exam paper, a 16-bar read-

ing study given to the students two weeks before the practical exam, and the task of choreographing, recording and performing their own 16-bar study.

As well as teaching A Level Dance, Lucy Lush has been using LOD when delivering dance and drama to SEN students at Brockenhurst College. This has included students with a range of physical disabilities and conditions such as Down's syndrome, Asperger's syndrome and autism. She has found that the approach to teaching movement and dance has helped to improve the students' fitness, creativity, self-confidence and interaction with others.

It was partly due to the success of delivering LOD to the SEN students that prompted Valerie Farrant and Lucy Lush to apply to Edexcel to run the short specialist BTEC course. Based on Ann Hutchinson Guest's book *An Introduction to Motif Notation* (2007, Language of Dance Centre), there were to be three levels in order to make the qualification as inclusive as possible: Level 1 to involve exploration of the basic movement concepts, Level 2 to introduce timing, and Level 3 more complex concepts and analysis.

When designing the course, consideration had to be given to the fact that Level 1 needed to be achievable by the SEN students. This was not a problem as, when delivering LOD, emphasis is placed on physically experiencing an action. The understanding is reinforced through the use of appropriate terminology before the symbol is introduced. While one or two selected elements from the alphabet are chosen as the focal point for a lesson, there is freedom in how they are interpreted, allowing for individual choice and creativity. Therefore, exploration and identification of the appropriate symbol became the basis of the Level 1 course.

In order to fulfil the criteria, the students have to participate in warm up exercises, explore movement in response to auditory instruction, and be able to identify eight symbols: Shape, Travelling, Stillness, Flexion, Extension, Rotation, Balance and Springing. Finally, the students work in a pair or group in order to choreograph a short sequence of movement using the symbols. Assessment is by teacher observation and video evidence, recorded in class.

All the students participate fully during movement exploration and generate creative ideas. They enjoy learning the symbols and some can recall all eight with no prompting. Although a number of them find it difficult to work with others, in time and with encouragement, most are able to do this successfully by the end of the course. We have found that LOD helps SEN students to develop their creativity and teamwork skills.

An External Verifier from Edexcel who visited the college at the end of 2010 was impressed by the SEN students'



Photo: Louis Pliskin

response to the course and what they had been able to achieve. His report said:

'The work with Special Needs students at Level 1 is particularly pleasing and their achievements are most creditable.'

'One student with whom I had previously worked during drama sessions was reluctant to dance at the start of the course. However, the focus of LOD is to explore movement creatively, which includes participating in different games and activities involving the symbols. The student enjoyed these, as he was able to interpret them in his own way. He was able to recognise and, by the end of the course, could remember all the symbols and choreograph some imaginative sequences.'

Lucy Lush

The fact that SEN students are able to gain this qualification is important. These students often do not have opportunities to gain accredited qualifications, especially in subjects such as dance. Receiving the official certificate from Edexcel means a great deal to them.

Valerie Farrant is Head of Dance at Brockenhurst College and Director of Language of Dance Studies. Lucy Lush is a Dance Lecturer at Brockenhurst College and a Language of Dance Specialist.

For further information on Language of Dance®, courses, resources, work in schools, colleges and the community, go to www.lodc.org