

Editorial Comments

In this issue of JASHM readers will find two informative articles about movement notation plus an extended review essay.

The first article, by Edward C. Warburton, an American dance educator, describes an experimental study on the effects of movement literacy on the dancing skills of American children. Warburton argues that the use of movement notation is key for knowledge acquisition and cognitive development in young dancers. He hypothesizes that the use of spoken language in the absence of notation may compromise the child's ability to develop and employ visual-kinesthetic ideas. The article carefully outlines Warburton's experimental approach and the methods he employs to test this hypothesis.

The study is neither ethnographic nor anthropological, but contributes instead to a research tradition in educational psychology that examines the development of children's competence with symbol systems across various domains of knowledge. The anthropological value of the paper, hence its inclusion in JASHM, lies in its revelations about the effects of movement literacy on conceptualization and subsequent movement performance. It substantiates untested claims made by many notation experts and practitioners (including both editors of JASHM!) who intuit from their own experience that this is indeed the case.

Readers will notice some anthropologically problematic statements within Warburton's paper, however, such as "...when dancers learn the language of dance, and "in the world of dance..." Unfortunately, it remains the case that many dancers and dance researchers accustomed to working within Western settings rarely question the ethnocentric and universalistic assumptions revealed in such statements. From an anthropological perspective neither "dance" nor even "the body" can be taken as universals. An important anthropological caveat to Warburton's study, then, is that one must expect the kinds of conceptualizations involved in learning movement/danced skills to be open to cultural variation. This fact does not undermine the value of Warburton's experiment, rather, it points to the need for caution when discussing the possible content and form of visual-kinesthetic conceptualizations outside of American approaches to teaching creative dancing within educational settings. Similar experiments with movement literacy and non-Western dance forms, or other genres of human movement, would develop this research in important directions.

It is also worth noting that expectations of such cultural variation in conceptualizations do not compromise the ability of the Laban script adequately to represent different cultural taxonomies of the body, action, or time/space. This is directly parallel to the way in which the Greco-Roman alphabet (and its expansion into the International Phonetic Alphabet) can be used to write spoken languages other than European ones.

The second article in this issue, "Movement Notation Systems" by Brenda Farnell was written primarily for linguists and other scholars interested in writing systems generally. It was first published in 1996 in a book called *The World's Writing Systems* edited by linguistic anthropologist William Bright and linguist Peter Daniels. The article provides a brief history of the development of movement writing systems in Europe and America, plus a comparative look at the development of Benesh, Eshkol-Wachman and Labanotation, the three major extant systems. A detailed example of movement writing using Labanotation follows, which provides readers with sufficient information to read the example and invites the reader to experience first hand what is involved in movement literacy.

The World's Writing Systems (Oxford University Press, 1996) is a large scholarly tome that provides detailed exegeses of the world's numerous spoken language writing systems. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the chapter on movement notation systems is the last chapter in the very last section of the book, following a chapter on musical notation systems. Although this placement reflects the marginal status of movement writing in the scholarly world at large, it is worth noting that during the editing process the editors repeatedly expressed their fascination with what to them was an entirely new subject. They appreciated Farnell's ability to talk in terms that would interest those knowledgeable only in spoken language scripts. Reviews suggest that this book will become a classic reference text on writing systems, and so the inclusion of an authoritative chapter on movement writing is especially pertinent. We are pleased to reprint the article here, since most JASHM readers are perhaps unlikely to consult the original volume.

This issue concludes with an extended review essay by Drid Williams of a book entitled *Studying Dance Cultures Around the World: An Introduction to Multicultural Dance Education* by Pegge Vissicaro. Sadly replete with some of the worst excesses of "multicultural education," the book provides an instructive example of how *not* to approach the study of dances and dancing in different cultures. Williams not only provides an illuminating review that explains why the book is so problematic from both anthropological and educational standpoints, but also provides JASHM readers with a useful bibliography that serves to counter the book's many shortcomings.

The Editors

Errata:

1. We regret that during the printing of JASHM 13(2) pages 85 and 86 were inadvertently omitted. We apologize for any inconvenience and are pleased to include the missing pages with this issue.
2. The cover sheet of issue 13(2) should read "Autumn 2004" not "Autumn 2005."

The Editors