

Benesh Movement Notation (BMN): An inclusive tool for teaching children and adults

**Gisela Ronecker-Wiesnauer A.i Chor¹
Translated by Anne Walzenbach**

We began to offer BMN lessons for children for a couple of reasons: in order to allow for them to develop their memory skills, as well as help them connect with their environment. The daily use of technologies in German schools today implies that few students really get the chance to practice fine motor skills, such as writing outside of the tablet or keyboard, and refine their memory skills. We were also keen to use music as a tool for imaginative and creative play. The children picked up BMN quite readily, and were very proud to learn this “secret” knowledge. It helped them to move within the real space, away from the virtual reality of their tablets and computers.



A young Ballettfachschule-Ronecker student learning BMN. Photo Credit: Carina Mayer

We later brought along our Dance Pedagogy students, who are currently studying theory and methods of classical ballet in Russian Methodology, and are new to dance notation. They joined in

¹ Gisela Roecker-Wiesnauer is principal of the BALLETTFACHSCHULE-RONECKER in Fellbach, near Stuttgart (Germany). She graduated in 1973 from the Institute of Choreology as an Associate of Institute of Choreology (now Benesh International).

the BMN classes, and the group of combined students meets once a week on Saturday mornings. The children are enthusiastic to explain the notation to the Dance Pedagogy students. It is fascinating to see the two groups interact: how the older participants ask questions, frequently very detailed in scope, to the younger participants, how the two groups create a positive and inspiring atmosphere were one group moves and the other writes it down.



Learning BMN in the Dance Pedagogy Class. Photo Credit: Carina Mayer

What surprises me is how quickly the young children pick up the tasks in the notation. While the older participants have a different view of notation as a tool for analysis, the younger participants use BMN in the same way as 'play' or creating movement vocabularies. Nevertheless, there is always a very busy and open atmosphere.

In addition, we are currently using BMN as part of choreographing a Fairy Doll variation. Our young students use BMN to mark out the position of the dancer and the travel pathways in the choreography. They also use BMN to note the 'musical bars', phrasing and of course the rhythm. We encourage our students to prepare for their choreography class by revising the choreographic notes that were written down in the previous class.

Inclusion is currently very important within schools in Germany; it is supported by the politics of the government. At our dance school, we make inclusive practice happen through our use of BMN, bringing together two very different groups of students.



Using BMN on Saturday mornings. Photo Credit: Carina Mayer

Testimonials

Victoria (age 11): For me the BMN is like a secret code we can write and dance the written part immediately afterwards. What is written down cannot be lost.

Lena (age 11): I like dance writing. We can write down our own ideas.

Nadine (Dance Pedagogy student): For me, the Benesh Movement Notation supports me in my training as a dance teacher. I can imagine movements and internalize them more easily. I now have a better understanding of the meaning of the music bar and beats through BMN. My goal is for me to be able to write down different variations quickly, which is often not so easy in words. Reading the recorded movements in Dance Notation is equally important. The work together with the children relaxes the learning atmosphere and it is interesting to learn from the perspectives of the children, and to see how fast they can understand the signs because of their logical approach to ballet.

Anna (Dance Pedagogy student): BMN came to my life as I started my Education for Dance Teaching at Ballettfachschule Ronecker. Most of the pedagogy material that Mrs Ronecker-Wiesenauer gives us is written in BMN. And this is something very special - a secret code that only a few can read, those who have really deep, profound and professional knowledge of the subject. It's a great feeling when you are able to read some lines and discuss them with our teacher, or to even dance them. I enjoy the beauty of the life at that moment.

For further information on introductory courses in BMN courses, please contact Lui Sit at lsit@rad.org.uk or on 0207 326 8035. For professional BMN courses, contact Kendra Johnson at kjohnson@rad.org.uk.