Motif and development

Compiled by Fiona Smith and Lucy Pocknell.

The ability to create and develop motifs is an essential skill for a choreographer

A motif can be a single movement or a phrase of movement (for pupils in school, short phrases are often more helpful as they provide greater scope for development)

A motif contains 'the essence 'of the dance; a dominant feature that is repeated, like a reoccurring theme throughout a dance

A motif is usually introduced at the start of a dance, then once established is developed and varied

An entire dance can be built around the development and variation of a few contrasting motifs.

It is good to use motif development when you are 'stuck' for what to do next. Improvising using aspects of motif development produces inventive and original material. Basing choreographic tasks around selected aspects of motif development teach pupils about the 'craft tools 'of composition.

Consideration should be given to selecting aspects of motif development which relate to, and will enhance, expression of the dance idea.

Development of action features

- Instrumentation - perform the same movements with other parts of your body (for more interesting results use unusual body parts such as elbows and hips)
- Change the order of the movements within your phrase – divide your phrase up in to 4 sections and mix up the order
- Add other body actions into your phrase - such as jumping, turning, rolling or travelling steps
- Repeat actions on the same or other side (vary the number of repetitions)

Advanced developments
- Embellishment – select parts of your phrase to make more elaborate, decorative or difficult
- Retrograde – perform the movements backwards, like a film on rewind
- Fragmentation - concentrate on small parts of the phrase, repeat and explore the detail
- Inversion – perform the movement upside down (try on your back, on you side, facing the floor)
- Verse / chorus – divide your phrase up in to 4 (ABCD) use the A part as the chorus, perform ABACAD
- Add in moments of suspension and fall to your movement phrase

Development of spatial features

- Change the size of some / all of the movements within your phrase, making them smaller of larger
- Repeat some of the movements within your phrase a few times, each time getting progressively smaller or larger
- Change the direction of some / all of the movements within your phrase
- Change the level - within the phrase include moments in the air and on the floor
- Develop the phrase to travel further through the space – take movements that happen on the spot and make them travel
- Change the pathways – interrupt the pathway so that it changes between straight lines and curves

Advanced developments

- Perform your phrase constantly switching between small and large movements
- Perform a standing phrase, entirely at floor level making adaptations when necessary
- At key points in the phrase extend the line out in to space
- (use different body parts to do this)
- Perform complimentary movements at a different level
- Trace the air pattern of your movement and use it as a floor pathway

Development of dynamic features

- Change the speed of some / all of the movements with your phrase – show slow motion and double time (when you perform fast movements keep the size of the movement the same as the original)
- Include moments of stillness in your phrase(vary the length of the stillness) followed immediately by movements which get faster and faster
- Change the quality of some / all of the movements within your phrase (if it was jolty make it smooth)
- Change the rhythm

Advanced developments
- Perform your movements phrase to reflect key words such as urgent, hesitant, restless, impulsive, indulgent, persistent
- Include moments of impulse, impact and swing within your phrase
- Stop at unexpected points within your phrase and change to the opposite quality of movement (if it was strong change it to light) then return to the original quality

Development of relationship features
(Motif into composition for a group)

Numerical variations
Different sub divisions of the group
E.g. A group of 3 might work as 3 individuals, a duet and a single dancer or all 3 dancers together

Placement & shape of group
Different group formations, placed in different areas of the stage space
E.g. a diagonal line spread across the stage, a random cluster of dancers close together or a large circle of dancers centre stage

Orchestration of time
Use of unison and canon
E.g. Unison,at a simple level, where all dancers perform the same movement at the same time. At a more complex level, where dancers could be performing complementary or contrasting movements at the same time.
Canon – at a simple level, where all dancers perform the same movements but with a time delay for one or more dancers. At a more complex level, with complementary or contrasting movements. For a group of 3 this might be
Sequential – 1,2,3
Cumulative – 1. 1+2, 1+2+3
Random – 3, 1, 2

Copying
When dancers do the same as each other
e.g. they perform the same actions regardless of their position in the space

Contrasting
When dancers do the opposite to each other
e.g. if A goes to the left B goes to the right, if A performs fast B performs slowly, if A is on the spot B travels, if a is high B is low, if A performs a movement furiously B performs it calmly

Complementing
When the essence of the shape, movement or quality of one dancer is echoed by another E.g if A performs a circling action with a sweeping feel, B performs their own version of a circling and sweeping action, but not exactly the same. If A performs a asymmetrical balance on a high level B might perform a similar action at a kneeling level.

Contact
- Brief - sustained contact , with small or large body surfaces
- Partial weight bearing – full weight
- Manipulating
- Lifting or carrying
- Assisted flight