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Comparison to My Teaching Method to the Normal Way to Teach Dance
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7/25/2015

1. **Presentational Method to Practice.** Most dance teacher follow a presentational teaching paradigm. They demonstrate, call out parts of the turn, count for the students, and then they expect students to perform these turns in unison. I think of this teaching method as lecture, or as the children's game of Simon Says. By contrast, I condense explanations and follow this with two demonstrations; me first and then them. Then I play whole songs and students practice all the turns they know with the same partner. I tell couples to hold onto their partners and allow singles to switch.

The presentational teaching method relies on choreography and is much like synchronized swimming. By contrast, my teaching method is like real dancing. The man decides when to start. He decides what turns to do. And the woman decides how to follow.

I dislike the presentational method because: a) it does not give any individual couple an indication that they are doing it right. It lends itself more to the dance teacher's zonk. b) It does not allow each couple to practice the turn and get immediate feedback.   c) It does not set up the correct leading and following scenario.   All too often the girl learns the turn first. She lifts her own hand and then twirls beneath it. d) A number of students are less confident after the last lesson than they were after the first lesson.   Similar to the Peter Principle each couple learns enough turns that they find some they cannot do. They focus in on what they did wrong and generalize that they just did not get it.

In my interactional method: a) I follow each couple and try to catch them doing it right two or three times. b) I immediately point out that they did the turn right. I seldom say that they did a turn wrong. I show them alternatives. c) Since all of the couples dance a whole song or two with the music, they have time to practice. The man learns to lead at his own whim and the woman learns to follow accordingly.

My method emphasizes practice and individual feedback. I encourage students to learn from their neighbors and to build confidence based on the still standing rule. They have time to practice each turn at least five times during each song. My emphasis is on your working out the bugs yourself.

a) **Dependence to Independence.** Most teachers count out the steps, break down each pattern and talk their students through each step. If we were to time these teaching activities, each brief practice session is blanketed and dominated by large chunks of talking. Relying on the instructor's count and having the class step it off in unison is teacher centered and dependent. By contrast, I explain a step, demonstrate it, walk them

through one exercise, play a whole song and let them practice it. My teaching method is based on focused practice, not short three-paragraph essays (talk, talk, talk. Talk less and teach more). My condensed rhetoric and long practice sessions force them to listen to the music and rely on their own count. My purposeful failure to tell them what turns to do in what sequence is designed to give the men practice at thinking up their own sequences and the women get practice following, instead of responding to rote instructions. My method is student centered, based in focused practice, and individual feedback.

b) **Audio to Feeling.** In Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) terms, most dance teachers are audio. They fantasize that if they find and practice the correct rhetoric, they can talk their students through a series of turns. By contrast, a feelings dance teacher knows that students need strong theoretical background, basic principles and then they need to work out the bugs on their own. Jim Allharsh used to say that it takes doing the same turn fifty times before it feels right or smooth. Students need to learn and then repeatedly practice getting to know how the right turn feels.

2. **Lax Oversight to Individual Feedback.** Most dance teachers stand in the middle and make some meaningless comment like, "It looks like dancing! Give yourself a hand!" By contrast, my coteacher and I line up all of our students and we each go down opposite ends of the line. I say, "Let's see an underarm turn." They then do a variety of turns including an underarm turn. If they do it wrong, I have them keep doing the same turn until they get it right. I then catch them doing it right and praise them, instead of jumping on them when they do it wrong. After I have reinforced the right way to do a turn, my students have it in their muscle memory what a good turn feels like.

If they still do not get it, I call over my coteacher and we switch with this couple. In this manner, the female student knows what the turn should feel like, and much more importantly, my coteacher gives the man feedback on what they are doing wrong and how to correct it. By individually observing each couple, my coteacher and I keep going down the line until everybody has individual feedback. If it takes more than one song, we just keep playing the next song, switching only after a whole song, until we have the chance to give everybody specific feedback.

3. **Rapid Switching To Whole Songs.** Most dance teachers talk their students through a turn once or twice and then they switch. By contrast, I have them practice over and over at their own pace interspersing their own turns in their own sequence. To perfect any turn, a couple has to practice it over, over and over again. When students practice to a whole song, they get three minutes of focused practice. They do the underarm turn, then they do a sugar push, and then they do a side pass. They learn how to lead, follow and make up their own less boring sequences.

4. **We Must Learn from the Best.** It is an error to think that the best dancers makes the best dance teachers. Likewise, it is an error to think that the best dance teachers make the best dancers. If you think about it, they actually draw from different skills sets.

Successful dancers communicate effectively with their partners. By comparison, successful dance teachers communication effectively with their students, by relating to the problems of their students, who have much less experience and dance IQ then they themselves do. Today's analogy is that my nephew Jeremy might be a better physics teacher than the genius Albert Einstein because Einstein has his head in theoretical clouds. He not only has a difficult time relating to his students (as he had relating to his own family), but he has a difficult time communicating with them. By contrast, Jeremy is much closer to the student's level, and his communication skills are likewise more suited to college level teaching.

Another example, Manny might have the highest dance IQ in Denver. His challenge is not about worrying whether or not his material is challenging his best students, instead he has to Keep it Simple Stupid (KISS); he has to bring his teaching down to the level where the students are able to understand his concepts.

5. Information Overload. When a person new to dance begins, they go into information overload very very quickly. As a novice country dancer, thirty-five years ago I had a high dance IQ, but I found that when I went to practice for hours each night, I would only focus on at most three things per evening. More than that was counter-productive.

"Less is More," the Judds, a mother/daughter, country singing group, 1995. When you are teaching beginners, the more you tell them, the less they retain. If you give them a three-paragraph essay, they are not likely to recall, or practice, anything in particular. If you speak paragraphs at them, they are still not likely to retain the same things to work on. However, if you simplify your directions into easily followable commands (incomplete sentences), this maximizes retention. For example, "Boot length steps," is a more effective direction, than saying, "It is a good idea to take boot length steps, rather than small steps, unless they are led." Short commands makes them focus and practice the same thing. They are on the same page, rather than working on different pieces of the puzzle. As an example, when I myself was taking lessons, and I went out to practice at Ollie's Roundup, Circle in the Square, and the Grizzly Rose, I would focus on at most three things each night. Even with my big brain and high dance IQ, I could not focus on four things effectively, during three hours of dancing.

I demonstrate one point, and have each couple practice for one song, before they switch. I achieve maximum effectiveness if I can shorten my feedback down to one imperative incomplete sentence. "Boot length Step back," is more effective than "Your first walk, should be no more than one boot length backwards, to begin the walk, walk lead series." Two or three complete sentences is much more counterproductive, and the short essay mini-lectures, which most dance teachers use, in their audio modes, are terribly counterproductive.

Like the fog or war, student do not understand the central point, they do not know what to focus on, and hence they do their own thing, instead of what the dance teacher intended. Short singular commands, demonstration, whole songs of practice and individual feedback, are the most effective way to teach dance. This is my method and my mantra.

a. **Style Pointers.** By contrast, I make short commands between songs. I often give the whole class one style pointer based on what I perceive to be common errors. I fit all of my teaching rhetoric into the principle of 3-2-1. Noted Trial Attorney Irving Younger said: Three points is good. Two points is better. And one point is best. When I want to comment on three things, I have to write down my points. Two I generally can do by memory. However, one point is best. The whole class gets to focus on one thing to work on for a whole song. Communication is more effective and the class gets to use focused practice.

b. **Communication Effectiveness.** A dance teacher's effectiveness should be evaluated by student's outcomes. After the lesson is over, what have the students actually learned? What new material do they practice and integrate into their own repitoire? What they walked through in a lesson, in the short term, matters much less than what they take with them, in the long term, after the lessons. This is part of the reason why teaching dance principles is more important than teaching turns. This is why teaching basic turns is more important than teaching combinations.

When a dance teacher counts and has their students copy their motions, this is synchronized swimming. By contrast, real dancing happens, when I explain a turn, demonstrate, and then have students practice for a whole song. I follow each couple around, catch them doing it right, and I give them individual feedback. If they are on the wrong track, I call my assistant over and we switch, so they can get the feel of doing it right. My method much more closely tracks real leading and following. The man needs to listen to the music and decide when to start. The man needs to plan ahead, what turns he wants to lead. The woman needs to use her following skills to figure out what turns are being lead, and how to follow them.

6. Dance Teacher's Zonk. A couple does a turn three times correctly. They make one wrong turn and we verbally correct them. "That was wrong, raise your left hand over her head not your right hand." They have no firm indication that they did the first three right. They have a strong indication that they did wrong. They often tend to generalize that they did all of the turns wrong and the last one was the worst.

There must be a better way. You don't teach a child to walk by letting him take three steps and then criticizing when he falls down. This problem is much worse in bigger classes. This problem is not solved by saying looking good, "it looks like dancing" or other positive words of encouragement. Praise is good but not sufficient.

In my opinion, what couples need is individual feedback, and the use of positive reinforcement.