



Attorney Mark Saiki

398 Cypress St, Broomfield, CO 80020-2929
Website www.msaike.com; Email: marksaike4@gmail.com
(303) 974 - 0074

My Dance Teaching Method
By Mark Saiki
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I. My Teaching Method.

- a) Explain the Turn
- b) Break down the Turn
- c) Demonstrate the turn
- d) Practice the turn

a) **Individual Feedback.** I follow each couple. I give them individual feedback. It is important to follow individual couples around the floor and praise them (catch them doing it right; the use of positive reinforcement).

b) **Catch Them Doing It Right:** I follow each couple around the floor, and I ask them to show me the left side pass. I would then watch them do it once, twice or thrice until they did it right. I watch them until they did it right, and then worked to verbally reinforce what they did right.

It is that teacher thing of catching them doing it right instead of commenting on what they did wrong. It also reinforces independence. A couple generally knows when they did it "wrong" and can sense what went wrong. But letting them do it over and over until they get it right, it reinforces self-correction instead of relying on the teacher to fix the problem.

c) **Diagnosis and Prescription.** Figure out what they are doing wrong and how to correct it. Figure out whether time and practice will solve the problem, or is something else required.

d) **Switching.** The man will dance with my teaching assistant. I will dance with the lady. This is similar to the World War II switch when the man would tap the other gentlemen on the shoulder to indicate a switch. I generally do not switch unless they look like they have problems, which they might not correct by themselves by the end of the song.

e. Whole songs: Over three decades ago, the first dance teacher I worked for talked students through a step and a turn. Then she played part of a song, had them walk through it once, and then she switched. Diverse students have commented that they "hate" dancing to only part of a song. I play whole songs and watch each individual couple do each turn several times. Some of my former students "love" whole songs. It also reinforces independence.

We can figure this out on our own; we don't need to ask the dance teacher every time. It is also a far superior method for encouraging actual leading. In most dance classes the women learn today's turn way before the men. The slightest touch means that they dance through the entire sequence on auto-pilot. Whereas, using my whole song method, the guy leads the taught turn at his own whim and generally other turns at his leisure during the song. The women cannot auto-pilot because they don't know when or where the taught turn is going to begin.

f. Style Pointers. 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.

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.

g. Review. I generally start each class by reviewing from night one. I think this helps long-term memory. I review the two step turn group. I put on some two-step music. The class reviews the two step turn group. I check each couple trying to catch them doing it right two or three times.

I then review three step turn group. Each turn group is reviewed from night one to the present. This gives them six weeks, six reviews and six times to practice one of their most important turn groups, the three step and the two step. I continue my review until we reach new material.

New material we learn one turn group at a time. I demonstrate the turn. I explain the turn. I ask if there are any questions. I play some music and check each individual couple to watch them doing it right. A strong point in my method is that each couple gets to practice the turn five or more times each song. If it takes two songs for me to check each couple, then they do each new turn ten or more times. Then I demonstrate the second new turn within the three-part turn group.

2. Arm Tension. However much force I apply toward my body (core) with my left hand, you need to lean back and apply as much, of an equal yet opposite, force as I do. If I pull back with two pounds of pressure, you need to lean back with two pounds of counter-pressure. I have a light lead. However, if I pull toward me with one pound of pressure, you need to lean back with provide one pound of counter-pressure. In actuality, it is probably one-third of a pound of pressure.

Patrick Swayze, in Dirty Dancing, said that each dancer has a frame. There was a zone near his body, where he danced. There was a zone near her body, where she danced. Your right and left arms frame those zones. They are contact points, through which I transmit my leads.

a) Pay Attention. Pay attention to what you are feeling, whenever you are on the dance floor. As soon as you begin, men must establish proper arm tension. Women must match this pressure equally, applying a like counter-force vector. Wherever the men touches you; touch him back with equal arm tension. This establishes your connection.

What step we are doing, which direction we are traveling, and what foot we are on are all communicated to you through arm tension. This is the language of the hands. Proper arm tension communicates to me that you are paying attention.

b) Spaghetti Arms. Avoid spaghetti arms. I had a couple down in Denver who took three levels of my Kunsmiller Adult Ed dance classes. He was Italian and when his schoolteacher wife had too little arm tension, he said that she had spaghetti arms. They were too limp meaning that the spaghetti was overcooked. My understanding is that spaghetti needs to be *al dente*, meaning that it can be strained through the teeth. It must be stiff enough to stick on the wall when thrown to see if it is ready.

3. Turn Groups. Most of my lessons are broken down by turn group. I think that it is easier to teach the basket, basket pinwheel and basket crossover. Each turn builds on the one before it. The students have an ideological whole to refer to. The turn group makes sense as a unit.

With turn groups the students follow a more normal progression. Turns, which are related and connected, are taught in one lesson. This speeds review. I demonstrate the lasso to breakaway, the breakaway pattern and the weaving pattern in breakaway. I put on a song and let them practice. Generally I can review one night's turn group in one or two songs.

I believe that turns, which are connected by theme, are easier to remember. Lesson plans are relatively easy to devise. I take one central turn and run three variations together. I try and teach one turn group each hour. This gives them theme and a whole to work from and practice.

In educational circles, this is known as chunking, teaching related material. One idea builds upon the other. This is opposed to teaching unrelated facts.

II. **NLP Chart:** Neuro-Linguistic Programming Dance Chart.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming is the pseudo-science that suggests that most brains are hard-wired. Most men are visual, they like to watch sports, visualize patterns and see it with their own eyes. By contrast, most women are audio. They like to talk, and they want to hear the testimony for themselves. A much smaller minority are feelings. We like to get the feel of a dance turn, and we get gut feelings about the truth.

On the dance floor this means that men want to see it (and be able to visualize it). Women want to hear it (audio). And, because dancing is done by feel, couples need to store each turn in their muscle memories. Frequent switching means that each dancer has to adapt to different individuals. Dancing together for a whole song, means that each

couple has the chance to work their differences out. They can repeat each turn, until they both have it in their muscle memories. They have the opportunity to work their own bugs out. My individual feedback provides guided practice.

a. Vision on the Dance Floor. Your sense of sight is used to avoid obstacles, and I suggest that couples look toward the center on posing moves and give your partner “the look” (acting if need be). The person who is traveling forward needs to use their eyesight to avoid running into other couples, and in general you travel in a counterclockwise manner by convention. However, which direction you are traveling and how fast are not communicated by your visual senses; they are communicated by touch.

b. Visual Teachers. A visual teacher, might create a video image of how a turn is supposed to look, which creates a thin memory of what a turn looks like. In comparison, my feelings method fosters better long term dancing, leading and following. In addition, it fosters diversity as the couple can store a visual recollection of what a turn looks like, and they can associate it with the feelings, muscle memories of how a turn, when done smoothly, is supposed to feel like.

c. Audio Teachers. By contrast, I notice that audio teachers, tend to talk the class through a turn. In a very real sense, this creates an unnecessary dependency on the dance teacher. Often a couple can only do a turn, when the teacher is talking them through it. By comparison, in my teaching method, they have the feel of the turn. Most leading and following dancing is done by feel, rather than by audio or visual recall.

d. Dance By Feel. Using proper arm tension communicates a number of things, including which direction we are traveling, what step we are doing, how fast and when we start. It determines how we avoid obstacles and when we pass other couples. It helps synchronize our steps, and it lets us know when we are out of step. With your eyes closed or in a pitch black room (ah, Zen blindfolds for master dancers will be featured next week) the woman should be able to tell which foot I am on, what step we are doing, whether I am on my slow or quicks, and how I am counting my steps.

A woman shows that she is paying attention, by maintaining proper arm tension at all times. When a member of the fairer sex is out of step, turns the wrong way or makes one of a plethora of errors, it is generally as the result of poor arm tension. Poor arm tension communicates disinterest, a casual interest in dance and poor listening skills. The rapid transition from clumsy, visual and top-heavy dancer to a slick, graceful and feelings dancing diva is often accomplished by my one hour first lesson which, in country, also includes the triple step, outside twirl, and inside twirl.

Visual		Visual dance teachers want to show you what it looks like
	A visual teacher wants to show you what it looks like	A visual student wants to see how it is done
Audio		Audio dance teachers want to talk you through steps and turns
	An audio teacher wants to tell you how to do it.	An audio student wants to tell them how to do it.
Feelings		Feelings dance teachers understand that most dancing is done by feel. We want you to get the feel of a turn. Put it into your muscle memory. After a brief demonstration and explanation, our focus is to get you to practice the turn on your own. I catch couples doing it right. I give you feedback on what you are doing.
	A feeling teacher wants to dance by feel	A feeling student was to ingrain it in their muscle memory