



DANCE AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Teaching Styles – a studio focus

By Tania Huddart ©2012

Giving the gift of learning

Throughout our lives we experience different teachers and each teacher may have had quite different instructional techniques. It is likely that certain types of teaching appealed to you more than others and this experience may have influenced the way you feel about teaching dance.

Being aware of different teaching styles can allow them to be used in an effective and creative way and have the ability to greatly enhance the way we teach and learn dance.

What is meant by "teaching styles"?

The term itself has no agreed definition but over the last three decades a number of writers and researchers have identified particular teaching styles and related them to different philosophies of teaching or to specific learning outcomes. There appear to be two important findings that are consistently discussed:

1. That teaching styles have more effect when students are actively involved in the learning process.
2. Relying on personal preference is not effective in itself and that when selecting a teaching style it should be based on a logical and scientific basis.

However, there is no denying that each teacher's personality and their individual styles of instruction are intertwined.

Teachers make decisions about their class long before a lesson. This preparatory phase involves subject matter, learning objectives, organisation and presentation.

During class time the teacher makes a variety of decisions relating to performance and execution and at the conclusion of the lesson the teacher incorporates evaluation of performance and feedback from learner to teacher and hopefully self-evaluation too.

There will be varying degrees of responsibility assumed by the teacher or the student for what happens in a lesson. When applying teaching styles to a lesson, there are a whole range of styles to choose from. At one end is the direct, teacher-led approach and at the other an open-ended, student-centred style where the teacher acts in a facilitator's role.

There is no right or wrong style of teaching. Through the use of different styles the teacher

is able to meet different objectives within a class. By exploring different styles the teacher can identify which is most appropriate for the class. The different styles can be used at all age levels, but with different emphasis according to the learning preferences of the different age groups. Young children, teenagers and adult students are likely to respond better to different styles.

Teachers will initially use the command style with all age groups as the learners need to become familiar with the dance style or the lesson content. Then the teacher can use the practice style to give more responsibility to the dancers while also giving them a framework to work within. This will help to increase their competence and confidence. Lastly, the inclusion style can be used to give students the opportunity to work at their own level while being supported by the teacher. The inclusion style can also be used where a teacher needs to get to know the students and their abilities, enabling the teacher to structure appropriate classes for each age group or individual students.

In general, younger children may respond better to the command style, teenagers to command and practice, while adults are likely to respond better to the inclusion and practice styles.

In this resource we will be focussing on three distinct styles of teaching and how they relate to teaching dance within the studio and workshop setting.

Teaching styles

1. Command style

What it is: In the Command style, the teacher is responsible for making the decisions such as subject matter, location, posture, starting time, pace and rhythm, stopping time, duration, feedback, etc. The learner makes the minimum number of decisions. The learner's role is to reproduce a precision performance that follows the demonstration, cues, pace and rhythm that has been established by the teacher for practising the steps or movement sequences. This is the style most commonly used within a studio setting.

Goal: The goal is for learners to reproduce and learn to perform the content in a very precise manner in a short period of time. This ensures that the specific Command style learning objectives can be achieved.

Learning Objectives: When the Command style is used students will be able reproduce a step, sequence of steps or a dance by immediate performance. They will achieve the movements with accuracy and precision in a short space of time. Students are expected to adhere to a predetermined model and demonstrate skill acquisition. This style of learning is used to perpetuate cultural traditions and rituals very successfully and allows the teacher to cover more material.

Every dance style has a cultural tradition e.g. there is a culture around ballet which includes the behaviour, protocols and values of the dance form. This is the same for all other dance forms e.g. musical theatre or hip hop, but each can be quite different dance cultures.

Despite that, the Command style is technique focussed. Understanding the culture of your dance form enables you to make decisions about what aspects of the command teaching culture may be able to be changed to adapt to modern circumstances or new dance teaching approaches.

Behavioural Objectives: Using the Command style enables the students to achieve conformity and uniformity. They will build an individual identity as well as be part of a group and take pride in it. Students learn to follow directions on cue, adhere to a particular type of discipline and achieve specific aesthetic standards.

2. Practice style

What it is: In the Practice style, the teacher makes all subject matter and logistical decisions and provides private feedback to the learners. The role of the student is to individually and privately practise a task while deliberately making a variety of decisions. These decisions may include where they will practice, what to wear, the order of steps or movement sequences, the starting time, the pace and rhythm they will use, when they will rest and when to stop practising. Students may also formulate questions for clarification at a later time with their teacher's guidance. This teaching style is part of the developmental process of independence and typically follows on from the initial command style of learning.

Learning Objectives: When the Practice style is used, the student will be able to practise by him/herself and correctly reproduce the movements. The student is able to activate the cognitive memory necessary to perform the movement(s). They will realise that in order to accurately perform they will need to repeat the movement(s) and that it takes time to internalise the actions. It will also stimulate their internal feedback.

Behavioural objectives: Students will experience the beginning of independence by making decisions and will develop the ability to initiate skill acquisition through making their own decisions. Students may realize that decision making accommodates learning the task and they may learn to be accountable for the consequence of each decision, for example:

- the relationship between the effort involved and the time it takes to achieve the desired result
- pacing each session so as not to over train or practise a movement with incorrect alignment and possibly sustain an injury

Students may learn to respect others' rights to make decisions differently from their own and learn to initiate an individual relationship with their teacher. They may also develop trust in their own abilities to make good decisions.

3. Inclusion style

What it is: The defining characteristic of the Inclusion style is that students, with varying degrees of skill, are able to participate in a class. The class can be designed with multiple degrees of difficulty. Students are able to select a level of difficulty at which they can practise/perform. Students are expected to decide which level they are going to attempt

first and if necessary they may need to make some decisions to adjust their choice. This will lead to them making self-assessment decisions which may be based on guidelines the teacher has given the class. All these decisions are shifted to the students.

In this style of teaching the role of the teacher is to make all subject matter decisions, set the different levels in the task, and make the logistical and performance criteria decisions. The role of the teacher is to also observe students as they explore making a decision on where to start interacting with the task. The teacher must decide when to offer support as a coach, facilitator, motivator or advisor. The skills needed are observation, listening and providing appropriate input to enable the student to develop their initiative.

The role of the students is to consider the available levels in the task, select a starting point, and practise the task. They may need to make an adjustment in the task level, and check their individual performance against the criteria. This style of teaching makes it possible for every student to participate.

Learning Objectives: When the Inclusion style is used, the teacher is able to accommodate individual performance differences through designing a range of options for students to explore a new movement sequence/movement idea. New movement content may be developed through this exploration and provide opportunities for continued participation. Students will be able to make adjustment decisions and develop self-assessment skills. Students might work in pairs or small groups on a particular task, for example, helping each other to learn a phrase.

Behavioural objectives: Students will be able to experience making a decision about how to approach a task by choosing an initial level of performance for themselves. They are also able to practise self-evaluation skills using performance criteria and experience making adjustment decisions in order to continue participating.

Students may be able to accept the reality of their individual differences in physical and performance abilities. They will learn to deal with congruity or discrepancy between their own aspiration and the reality of their own performance. This may lead to a sense of self-reliance and honesty in self-evaluation. This style of teaching is useful when exploring choreographic principles or when working toward a production. It may also give younger students the opportunity to interact with more accomplished students from the same studio, allowing them to evaluate their own progress and possibly inspire them.

Example

Initially you may teach a class using the **Command style** in order to discuss and demonstrate the importance of a particular step or movement sequence and model the correct way of performing the movement(s).

You can then use the **Practice style** and invite the students to participate in your demonstration by asking questions rather than giving answers. For example, "What are some important things you must remember when ...? A variety of answers will make discussion possible and allow you to check their understanding. The students should then be

given the opportunity to practise the movement(s) with your guidance before you divide the students in groups and ask them to work together to refine the movement(s). This may work best with older children, teenagers and adults. Younger students will respond better to a rich imaginary world created by the teacher. For example, using the song "The wheels on the bus" and getting them to sing the song while making use of movements to show how the doors open and shut or the bell goes "ding, ding, ding". It is a creative way to use the command style but allows the younger children to participate in their own way while teaching them useful technique in a fun way.

When working with teens or adults, you could ask the students to create their own movement or movement sequence, which incorporates what they have learnt in class, to share with class members at the next class. The teacher will then be able to use their movement ideas to facilitate the students' learning through the ***Inclusion style***. Alternatively, after learning a movement sequence the class might work in small groups to develop and perfect the movement sequence. Adults particularly enjoy the inclusion style as it uses their experience and their intellectual and critical skills.

Summary

In a studio setting it is advantageous for a teacher to use a range of teaching styles to encourage broad student engagement and learning. Different students are attracted to different styles and so you are broadening your capacity to reach and motivate them.

The dance sector needs thinking dancers, choreographers and other professionals, as the dance work they have to perform and engage in is diverse. The sector needs teachers who can assess their students' learning needs and apply appropriate teaching styles to achieve the desired results.

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