



Yaron Meishar

Dancers don't have the patience to learn dances; therefore, many of them dance by "copy-paste".

Follow Me = Copy-Paste

Correctly "Calling" the Steps



Our permanent session, Tuesdays, Disengoff Center. To join the Group by Watsapp: <https://bit.ly/3EIHERI>

What dance will I teach this evening to the group that I lead?

This is a question facing every instructor two days, one day, and perhaps only two hours before the beginning of the session. What considerations does an instructor take into account when choosing what dance(s) to teach at the session?

- There is pressure from the dancers to teach the dance that was taught yesterday or the previous week at another dance session.
- Pressure from choreographers, who want the instructor to teach a dance today that they choreographed just "yesterday" or the previous week.
- I heard from other instructors that the dance caught on very well in their groups.
- I choreographed a new dance and I want to try it out on my community of dancers.
- "The majority wins". The dance is already being danced in many other places.
- The song is so pretty... (Have you tried to dance the dance? To understand the steps?).
- Your own understanding, as an instructor, of what's right for your group.

The last section is the important one, but it seems to me that in most cases, it's not **in the place that it deserves**. When I studied in an instructors' course in the seventies (then we were still called "instructors" and not "dance leaders"), we learned that the dance that we taught on a given week should be reviewed and retaught the following week as well. Maybe one of the dancers had missed a class, and even those who had learned it once could benefit from learning it again, making it more exact... who does that today?

There's no doubt that this is the correct way. I don't know if many of the instructors work this way today. I hope they still do. I know that some of them teach, in one evening, a circle dance and a couple dance. And if there's a need to review and reteach a dance or two that were taught the previous week (as it should be), then we would have three or four breaks in the evening for instruction... and, as such, you don't get the chance to simply dance and enjoy.

Teaching Methods

a. The Old Method, the correct one

In the past a new dance was taught with great excitement, almost with reverence. A good amount of time was devoted to instruction and we repeated and polished the dance all the time. We never heard the instructor calm people down by saying: "Five more minutes and we're finished...", or "that's it! Another few steps... we are already at the end of the dance," or "two more minutes and we're done", or "just one more small section", and other such apologies, as if the dancers are suffering during the instruction and we must emphasize to them that the "suffering" is ending.

We learned and became familiar with the names of the steps and thus we had a "common language" with the instructor. The teaching was thorough. Each step or part of the dance was demonstrated once and sometimes even twice. Only after that were the dancers asked to dance, with the instructor and at a slower rhythm, the part of the dance that they had learned, after which they danced it faster.

The dancers tried to internalize the new steps, their proper order in dance, the overall structure of the dance – the division of the steps, the division into "verses" and the full structure – and in this way to learn and to remember the dance as it should be. And finally, after all the parts of the dance were learned, the full dance was **danced without music** accompanied by instruction. Where do we learn this way today?



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b. The New Method

Today, when the instructor demonstrates the part of the dance that he wants to teach, the dancers (impatiently) execute the steps with him/her even before they've actually seen them or understood the structure of the part [of the dance] that is supposed to be taught. So they aren't **learning**, they are **copying**.

Can one truly learn and internalize the steps of the dance, the general structure, the order of the parts this way? Of course not, but who cares?

Thus was born the "follow me" method and complete dances are danced through imitation.

Giving directions while the dance is an extremely important and assistive tool. Calling out the steps while actually doing them doesn't give the dancer the chance to be helped by instruction of this nature.

Calling the steps needs to be done so that the dancers will be led to the next step, to prepare them for what comes next.

Follow Me

The "follow me" method was born in the kindergartens. Someone wrote an entire "bible" based on imitation. The children don't learn rhythm, steps, parts of a dance and a whole dance. They learn "do as the teacher does" to see what he is doing and to imitate him. In my opinion, this is not the way to teach the younger generation, or anyone... but we'll leave the kindergartens for the moment.

Many dancers "spend" most of the evening of a dance session hastily copying others who may or may not know the dance as it should be danced... unfortunately I dance this way as well because I don't go out to dance every evening.

This is where the dance instructors come in. By "calling the steps" correctly, while dancing, they can help the dancers significantly. I know there are some instructors who do this correctly, but from my observations, many of them don't. Calling the steps needs to be done correctly. Giving directions while the dance is an extremely important and assistive tool. Calling out the steps while **actually doing them** doesn't give the dancer the chance to be helped by instruction of this nature. There's no opportunity to prepare and to execute the step if we describe what we are doing in real time, through actually doing it.

Counting out the rhythm (1,2,3,4...) and/or calling out "right, left, hold, right, left, right and again left, right" etc., doesn't really help the dancer. Most of the steps we use have names, and there is terminology that the dancers need to be familiar with and to understand. We should use this terminology.

When the instructor calls out "grapevine" while doing the steps, the dancers aren't actually using their brains and their thoughts to figure out what to do. They aren't internalizing the steps and their place within the complete composition of dance; rather, they are operating according to the "copy-paste" method. They won't learn to dance this way.

Calling the steps needs to be done so that the dancers will be led to the next step, to prepare them for what comes next.

"Grapevine" should be said in the "pause" just before the step is to be executed and not while it's physically being danced.



Yaron Meishar in a family dance session at the Jewish school, Laude-Reut, in Bucharest, Romania



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Dance sessions in  the kindergarten

In this way the skilled dancers can dance without looking at the instructor, while their brains absorb what the instructor is saying and “broadcast” to their legs what needs to be done next. You can see this in the video here <https://bit.ly/4ceihTD>.

Questions that shouldn't be asked

There are dance instructors who ask questions of their dancers. These are unnecessary questions and **were** intended to help the instructors by giving them some breathing time to think about what they really want to say/to teach. Questions like: “Did you understand?” “Is it clear?” “Should I explain again?” “Who didn't understand? etc. These are totally unnecessary questions that shouldn't be asked. A professional dance instructor will observe all of his dancers and will see if most of them absorbed what he taught, or if he needs to repeat himself and teach the section again. Or maybe just practice it again. Or maybe just proceed further.

A good instructor sees all of his dancers and is able to decide how to continue. These questions produce (if any at all) many answers that the instructor is neither capable nor properly set to listen to.

The Terminology and the Language

And the language – oh the language... it isn't possible for a school teacher to say, for example, “I want four (using feminine grammar) boys to go to the blackboard”. This is difficult to hear, or “do a search (using the English word “search” instead of the Hebrew word) on the internet to find the information. This isn't Hebrew! This is not how a teacher should speak to the students! We need to treat the profession of dance instruction with respect! It's not enough that the dancers understand the intention.

“Cha Cha” and “Mayim” **are not correct technical terms.** There are specific Hebrew terms that have evolved to

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The field is moving into an instruction method of "follow me". This method needs to be taught and practiced. Unfortunately, many instructors don't know how to do this.

comprise the language of Israeli folk dance and are adapted to match terminologies in different languages. The names of the steps are important; the language of the instructor should be correct and clear.


We need to get a lot done

The need of the instructors (a totally imaginary need) to dance many dances at a weekly session leads to hurried instruction and to the use of the "do as I do" method. The pressure to do more dances has led to the shortening of the songs. In the past we danced each dance at least three times around, and if it was a short dance, we danced it more than three times. Today, after two times through the dance, most of the dancers stop... why? What's burning? Who's chasing us? Let us take the time to enjoy the song and the dance until they both end!

The method of a "dance medley", one dance attached to another, already exists. Each is danced only once with no introduction and no end. The instructor has to announce what the next attached dance will be.

With sarcastic humor I will suggest a much better method – a method that makes is possible to "dance" hundreds of dances in one session. Simply: listen to the musical introduction of each dance and immediately go on to the musical introduction of the next dance and then the next dance, and so on. This way you can dance many dances in one evening.

What do you think of the idea?

And now seriously, let's enjoy the song and dance to the end! Enjoy the togetherness because this is the secret of the magic of our Israeli folk dance culture. 



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