Teaching
& Salsa

The Nutshell

Look before you leap

Stop yourself from jumping in right away. **Watch and listen** to your student carefully.

The more you can observe, the better your chance of being able to help.

Get it sorted

Collect all relevant bits of information together and place them in **order** of importance.

Mark out the goal posts

Set achievable goals. Your students must **feel that they can do it**.

Look for the golden nugget

Try to find one teaching point that ties up most of the information.

Forever the optimist

Phrase the teaching point positively! (Crucial and often overlooked.)

Edit the speech (less jaw-work means more footwork)

Try to say what you have to in two sentences instead of in ten.

Present it from your **student's point of view**.

Feed them snacks

Deliver the information in **small digestible** packets.

Watch the impact of these packets on your students and how they **react** to them.

Sock it to 'em... Twice!

Give an **accurate** demonstration, then turn by 90 degrees and show it to them again.

Reinforce the demonstration with a verbal comment.

Lead them up to the goal posts

Explain things slowly and deliberately, one small step at a time.

Positive reinforcement while they learn drives the point home.

You're doing fine

Positive feedback. **Let them know** when they are doing it right, visually and/or verbally.

Play the percentage game

Don't let your students be disheartened if they don't get it right first time.

Don't let yourself be either.

Start off with 2 right out of 10, and work your way up to 9 out of 10.

Contents

Overview

I would like to define teaching as the process of helping someone to learn. This is because the term "teaching" often places too much emphasis on the teacher, and not enough emphasis on the person doing the learning. This course undertakes to help you acquire and develop the skills necessary to become a teacher. How good a teacher you become depends upon the amount of mental and physical effort you invest. Let's put it this way; the course was not designed to produce just average teachers.

The book is divided into three parts covering teaching, salsa, and expanding issues. The first part addresses aspects of education and is kept separate from salsa, in order to render teaching skills more easily transferable to other physical activities. This means that you may substitute salsa for any other physical content (*e.g.* swimming, tango) and the education principles should still be valid. You may find that the first part is more abstract for this reason, and that more general examples are used. The second part provides information relevant to salsa the dance. These two sections are biased heavily towards skill acquisition and development. Background information, methods and techniques are detailed as necessary. Expanding issues is so-called because it explores issues relevant to teaching and salsa in greater depth, and will be constantly added to. Expanding issues exists to help teachers understand more and improve faster.

In order to fit a lot information in a limited amount of space, the language used is very much condensed. Also, the information given is developed along different strands that are gradually brought together. To get the most benefit, I suggest that you read this book at least twice, each time in small instalments. The first reading should be light, skimming over the details. This will help you get an impression of how the ideas arranged without getting bogged down. Once the idea framework is set up, read it again paying a more attention to the details.

This book is not meant to be read just once; revisit it occasionally and it will reward you. Neither is it meant to act as a substitute for the practical aspects of teaching and salsa; no one becomes good at these things just by reading about it. What this book is designed to do, is to promote unassisted learning on your part insofar as possible. Being able to read it cover to cover and make sense of it, empowers you, the reader, with the flexibility and responsibility to learn from it in your own time.

The practical sessions of the course provide the necessary opportunity for you to raise questions about the content of the book, and the way it should be implemented. The course has been rewritten in this manner to maximise the amount of practical time available to you; the time when the most learning is done.

Please, take advantage of the opportunity.

So, what is teaching?

Teaching is supposedly the most unambitious of vocations. There is little personal glory because it is done for the benefit of somebody else. If the results are good, the student gets the credit. If the results are poor, the teacher gets it. So why should anyone in their right mind assume such a task with such apparently little reward?

I feel that the real ambition lies in the challenge of helping someone become good at a particular subject. The real benefit is that by teaching the subject, a greater depth of understanding is brought about. And perhaps a little pride in watching your students do well. However, just because you know a subject well does not mean that you can teach it.

Teaching is more than the dissemination of information; any loudspeaker could do that. Apart from the prerequisite skills of comprehension and communication, there must be a way of determining what your students need to know, and to make them want to learn. These are the skills of observation and motivation respectively. Placing these skills in approximate order of execution in teaching, we need to: observe what the students are capable of, understand what needs to be done next, communicate the information, and keep them wanting to learn more. Therefore your route of development is clear.

The first step is the acquisition and development of teaching skills *i.e.* observation, comprehension, communication and motivation in equal measure. The second is the understanding of teaching concepts and methods. The third is knowing how to apply these skills and concepts in a lesson. Finally, the teaching section is summarised.

If you think about the various topics that you are fond of or are not, and think back on the way they were taught, you will find that the way you perceive them (positively or negatively) correlates with the way they were taught. This may seem obvious, but some teachers do not appreciate the weight of their responsibility nor the impact of their legacy upon their students. I reiterate that teaching is indeed a most ambitious task, but one that I feel provides more than fair recompense.

Observation

Understanding the importance of observation, its nature and learning to develop it as a skill is the theme of this section. Observation underpins all the other skills to follow, and should therefore be tackled first. We begin with the fundamental question, "what can you observe of your students?" (see Expanding issues). What you do see relates to:

your actual lesson content

You can gain a measure of the physical abilities of your students by, *e.g.*:

> **watching** their step size, knee and hip action;
> **feeling** their balance and orientation through the hands;
> **listening** to their timing by their foot-strike on the floor.

As many senses should be used as applicable, sometimes interchanged. In many instances one sense is used to verify the result of another (**feeling** step size and hip action *etc.*). The unbiased development of each sense, and their effective integration, by observing in **clusters**, can help you achieve an accurate image of your student's performance.

your way of teaching

You can gauge their state of mind; before the lesson begins and in direct response to your teaching. This crucial use of observation is, tragically, often overlooked. Helping your students to learn requires sensitivity to the nature of personal interaction *e.g.*:

> **watching** their facial expressions and certainty of movement;
> **feeling** their degree of muscle tension and presence of perspiration;
> **listening** to their tone of voice and choice of words.

Consequently, aspects of human behaviour inherent to us all, such as happiness, enthusiasm, concentration, trepidation, nervousness and distraction can be detected. These can then be exploited or resolved to give your student the best chance of **early success** (see Motivation). Again, the principal use of senses, interchangeably and in clusters, is most effective.

Why would you want an accurate image of your student?

The link between observation and comprehension can be obvious, *e.g.* we are generally familiar with the facial and verbal expressions of confusion. Others are not immediately so, such as the consequences of taking a large backward step. The stronger your observation skills, the better your chance of developing an understanding of your students' actions, both physically and mentally. You can then plan their best routes of development more effectively. Ultimately, observation also provides you with the **crucial feedback** necessary to assess your **own effectiveness** as a teacher.

How do you go about developing observation skills?

In the context of dance, progress by:

i.   comparing **differences** between just two people. This is where we start because differences between people are usually the easiest to detect.

ii.   noticing **similarities** between them. Judging whether two people have aspects in common is more challenging because it can be a more complex process (you may need to make sure that more than one criterion is satisfied).

iii. increasing the **levels of detail**. In dancing, *e.g.* from getting a **general** impression of movement to asking something more **specific** about what individual elements contribute to that movement. An analogy using the visual sense would be; as a lens brings an object into focus, the outline first becomes apparent before the details become clearer. (Can you find analogies for the other senses?)

iv.   extending these practices to **larger groups**. From the observation of two people, apply these exercises to groups of increasing numbers, so that with large classes you start dealing with **trends** (and then increase in detail).

Applying the processes to just one person requires you to compare the student with one virtual person (or more) called an **ideotype**. Arguably, we employ ideotypes unconsciously *e.g.* our ability to recognise when someone is confused could be because we have an ideotype for a confused person.

Observation is the cornerstone skill which determines the effectiveness of the other skills that follow. Hence the development of **all the senses**, not just of sight as the term might imply, is paramount in laying the foundation of good teaching.

Ideotypes

Ideotypes, or ideal-types, are imaginary models with desirable properties. They are formed as a result of experience in observation and comprehension; the more developed the two skills, the more detailed the ideotypes. Both students and teachers make heavy use of ideotypes as a means of development. Role models play an important part in establishing ideotypes, by providing something to work toward and be compared against.

An ideotype should be **flexible**, or there can be more than one of them. In dancing, having one rigid ideotype (the words "the ideal dancer" has not been used because it implies just this) results in all your students dancing like clones, and negates the ability to tailor your teaching to suit the individual. As teachers, we are required to construct ideotypes of teachers, students, classes and that relevant to the content material, in this case dancers. The construction and application of ideotypes are an essential part of the learning and teaching process.

Comprehension

We next need to understand what we have observed. We do this by breaking down an observed phenomenon into what we understand to be its smallest component pieces or elements. Our ability to resolve what we observe into component elements, and comprehend how they link and interact with each other, is based on our fluency with a particular subject matter. The term **element** is therefore arbitrary. You will find that:

1. Some elements link with others to support another element,
   e.g. balance and consistent step size help regular timing;

2. Some elements can support another element on their own, usually because the former define the latter *e.g.* a weight transfer gives rise to a step.

If you liken these factors to building blocks in a pyramid, then you will find that blocks can either sit on the same level, or that one or more blocks support other ones on top of them. The lower the block, the more important it is. The pyramid analogy can help you determine which elements form the foundation pieces for others, and prioritise which aspects your students should learn first. The closer the element is to the bottom of the pyramid, the higher the priority that it be taught *e.g.*:

> foot placement, weight transfer and balance help support timing;
> timing, body part isolation and body part co-ordination help support lead/follow;
> lead/follow, observation and dance vocabulary help support floorcraft.

Hence in order to help your students achieve floorcraft; foot placement, weight transfer and balance are some of the skills to be developed first. This route-map of skills, and there can be many alternate routes, is called a **hierarchy of development**.

The hierarchy of development (HOD)

Our understanding of the way dance elements relate to each other should determine the order in which they are taught. To increase our understanding we need to:

1. become **aware** of a new element,
   awareness of a new element comes via the observation of people
   (previous case study), or an extrapolation from current understanding (synthesis).

2. **link** the new element with old ones,
   linking requires us to question what, if any, are its component parts and hence where it belongs.

3. **reposition** old elements if necessary,
   occasionally a new element casts such a new light, that the relationships of old ones need to be reassessed.

4.   **test** its validity.

check whether the system works by applying the new hierarchy, normally using yourself or some poor students as guinea pigs.

Increasing our understanding occurs quickest by experimenting along the line of "variations on a theme". For example, if we were analysing hip action, we could ask what would happen if we: kept our knees straight, bent our knees, kept our heels off the floor, lowered our heels to the floor, turned our toes in, and turned them out. We would then have a framework to link the result, by observation or synthesis, of the question, "what happens to hip action if we keep our knees bent and heels off the floor?".

But then you realise that while you were looking at the effect of knee action with respect to hip action in the first instance, you had also to decide what to do with the heels and toes at the same time. This demonstrates that no parameter (in dance) is truly independent of each other.

Recognising the **holistic** nature of the framework, as well as its constituents will help you when the time comes to apply the hierarchy. Furthermore, you will find a link between the framework and ideotypes; the more comprehensive the framework, the more detailed your ideotypes.

Applying the hierarchy of development

The principles of applying the hierarchy of development remain the same, irrespective of whether you are teaching an absolute beginner, someone you have been teaching long-term, or someone who has learnt from a different teacher. You need to ask just three questions:

1.   what skills does the student already **have**?
2.   what skills does the student **lack**?
3.   in what **order** should the missing skills be taught?

To answer questions one and two, you will need to compare the student with an ideotype. In question one you note the similarities between them, a positive process. In question two you note the differences between them, a negative process. Noting **positive before negative** should always be done, because it establishes a **constructive perspective** (see Expanding issues).

The missing skills to be taught are **prioritised** by looking at their relative positions in your hierarchy of development. The resulting route of development is called a **hierarchy of correction (HOC)**. The hierarchy of correction is a flexible subset of the hierarchy of development, valid for that particular student, at that particular time.

Development and correction

In an ideal world, we would find the answers to the three previous questions easily, derive one clear hierarchy of correction, apply it to our student and have it work first time... it doesn't happen. Sorry.

In reality, you will first need to ask whether a particular difference between your student and ideotype is an **acceptable variation** or an **actual fault** (this then begs the question "what is acceptable variation?"). What would be considered a fault in one person could be an acceptable variation in another *e.g.* incomplete weight transfer in the Cuban style. The answer requires a **value judgement** on your part; a process that should get easier with the accumulation of experience. A **good rule** is to leave things alone for a short time and watch. It's better not to correct than to overcorrect and cause an error. Undoing erroneous teaching is a real pain.

Then comes the ordering of skills; elements of the **same priority** are used to provide **flexibility** in teaching. These points of flexibility provide **alternative routes in development**, which allow you to tailor your teaching to individuals by playing on their strengths *e.g.* a student with good rhythm should find timing related skills easier to acquire. In this particular example, these timing related skills are known as a timing **cluster** (of skills), and each component of the cluster can be taught more quickly. There are many kinds and ways of forming clusters (*e.g.* balance clusters, dance move clusters) based on your own comprehension. In the short term, teaching skills in clusters can result in faster progression (see Motivation), but be aware that playing towards a student's strengths whilst neglecting his or her weaknesses can lead to pigeonholing and uneven development in the long term.

Clustering plays upon the nature of connected parts; in that no element is truly independent, not even errors (that was the bad news). The good news is that with the holistic view (that word again), solving the right problem, or acquiring the appropriate skill, results in a much greater improvement because it tends to pull the other wayward elements into line. Locating the key element is the "golden nugget" of comprehension.

Another **handy rule** is that the error is in the stage previous to the one observed *i.e.* in a five stage process, if a difference is observed at stage four, the error is usually found in stage three. This is because stage three is required to set up stage four, and if it isn't set up properly, the error is evident in the next stage.

Communication

Communication is the transmission of information **between** teacher and student. The word "between" is used instead of "from" because I believe that communication is a **bidirectional** process. There are three forms of communication: visual, verbal (or other sounds *e.g.* arrgh), and manual. Within the teaching context, a message conveyed by one form should be reinforced by other forms whenever possible. Likewise, **feedback** derived in one form should be verified using others.

Visual

People, in particular children, usually learn best by watching and copying. A good visual demonstration helps your students develop a clear picture of what is required.

> *i. provide a demonstration that is accurate and consistently performed.*
> *ii. use visual cues where possible to save wear and tear of the voice.*
> *iii. provide visual feedback when verbal or manual feedback is committed or not applicable.*

Verbal

Verbal guidance is usually secondary and reinforces the visual; describing an action before it is seen is generally useless and confusing. Major exceptions are when you are assisting your students in rhythm, and counting them into time. Verbal guidance should be concise.

> *i. use verbal reinforcement for every practice and repeated practice.*
> *ii. provide verbal reassurance and combat boredom by filling gaps of silence and varying tone.*
> *iii. say what you need to in two sentences instead of ten.*

Try to emphasise using positive instead of negative points *e.g.*:

<div align="center">

"place your left foot closer to your right foot"

is **direct** and more useful than

"don't place your left foot so far from your right foot"

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Manual

The manual guiding of limbs is seldom used because the student gains little appreciation of the forces acting on the limb throughout the range of movement. Dancing is the big exception, where a level of contact is encouraged, nay, required. Indeed the fundamental skills of leading and following a lead are defined by their requirement for contact. Verbal reinforcement is handy during manual guidance.

Note: followers should be encouraged to wait until they receive a lead, and not to lead themselves. It takes longer to develop a lead than to follow one, so followers often try to lead themselves earlier on, depriving their partners of any opportunity to develop a lead.

Communicating information

Communicating ideas to your student is a two step process involving the **translation** and **transmission** of information.

Translation

The details derived from your comprehension might well be incomprehensible to your student in its raw form. You will have to **interpret** these details into a form that your student can understand and benefit from the most (see Teaching point bridge). This is usually **presented from the student's point of view** (student first person), although it may sometimes be necessary to present it from their partner's point of view (student second person).

The next step is to **select the modes** of communication which would be most effective, and to **adjust teaching angles** in each mode to suit the target audience.

visual - partnered or not, part of the body, amount of exaggeration, omitting another sense
verbal - accounting for age, background, strengths of student
manual - amount of contact, omitting other senses or committing them elsewhere

Teaching point bridge

The teaching point **bridges** your understanding and your student's ability to act upon it. It is a form of translation that turns content detail into a form that your student can easily comprehend and implement. The teaching point tries to encapsulate everything necessary to achieve the next goal. It is usually expressed verbally as a single word or phrase, but can be of one or more modes. For example, "treading on grapes" and "pressing down on long nails" are two teaching points for generating hip action.

A good teaching point is both simple and practical, illustrating one or more technical concepts in a manner that captures and holds the student's imagination.

Selecting the appropriate teaching point requires you to either have had previous experience with it, or otherwise the ability to predict its effects. Finding a single teaching point that addresses more than one relevant aspect allows for the quicker progression of the student and saves the teacher energy in the long term. This is what I call the **unifying** teaching point, and is considered the "golden nugget" of verbal communication.

A **teaching point vocabulary** can be increased in three ways, by:

i.   directly acquiring points from other teachers,
ii.   "eavesdropping" on how students interpret information themselves,
iii.   creating your own.

Transmission

Setting a **suitable learning environment** is necessary in order to allow your students to become receptive to information; an environment that they feel is **safe** and **comfortable** to learn in. Much of this should occur **before** information is conveyed.

A mentally safe class is one where your students can comment or raise questions without feeling ashamed to do so; without fear of derision by their peers or teacher. Careful design of a lesson and its presentation helps students take a more **active part** in their learning process. As they interact, they should be encouraged to be **mutually supportive** and, to a certain extent, **self-teaching**. Breaking down the "me and everyone else" attitude builds a class with a stress-free attitude and better prospects for progression.

Physical safety is of paramount importance in any classroom. With this consideration, the room itself will be a determinant of your lesson content and presentation, with respect to space, quality of floor, background noise, lighting and temperature *e.g.* travelling moves, spins, effectiveness of communication, attention span. Attention should be paid to classroom organisation as regards:

1. **visual angles**

    what part of the body and partnership do they need to see, how many angles to demonstrate from, how best to arrange them so they can see.

2. **acoustic angles**

    how close they should be, how they should be arranged so they can hear, requirement for music.

3. **distractions**

    removing or negating potential hindrances to learning.

The nature of the lesson content will also determine the manner in which it is taught to ensure acceptable levels of safety. Foremost amongst these are demanding combinations containing fast turns, sudden changes of direction and dips. **Points of safety** should always be emphasised while the combinations are broken down and **learnt at slow tempo**, before they are attempted at normal speed.

Register

The information that is transmitted must be presented accurately. This applies to all modes of communication, and is especially evident in the visual demonstration of a physical skill. The demonstrator must ensure that visual information **correlates** with the verbal commentary supplied *e.g.* a so-called backward step must be demonstrated as a step taken backward and not to the side. **Discrepancies** can often be found when individuals think (and therefore say) that they are, for example, taking a step directly backward when they are really taking the step diagonally backward.

The difference between what you think you are doing and what you are actually

doing is called **register**. Having **perfect register** *i.e.* there being no difference between what you think you are doing and what you're actually doing, is necessary in a teacher.

Quantity of information

So far we have dealt with the quality of communication but not with the quantities that should be transmitted. Information should be delivered in **bite-sized** pieces so that it would be easy for your students to absorb and place in their framework of comprehension. It will be necessary for you to break up, order and condense your message into small packets so that your students can act upon it. If this is not done *i.e.* if the message is large and contains multiple points, then your students would find it difficult to organise and implement the information.

How communication can break down

Learning is dependent upon communication, so it is important to understand how communication can be degraded:

Saturation

Information overload. Your student has reached absorption/assimilation capacity and is no longer able to take in any more points. The saturation level is influenced by memory capacity, intelligence and previous experience (see Expanding issues).

Distraction

External distractions (*e.g.* environmental) and internal distractions (*e.g.* apprehension) affect the way information is received by your student.

Confusing presentation

(The student has no idea what you're on about!)
Incorrect translation and/or transmission. Occurs on the part of the teacher. Message not pitched properly from the student's point of view.

Misinterpretation

(The student thinks he/she knows what you want, only it's not what you want at all!)
This occurs on the part of the student. You (the teacher) may have translated and transmitted the information correctly, but your student has misunderstood. Usually due to inexperience with the lesson content or method of instruction (don't be quick to blame your pupils, symptoms are similar to confusing presentation).

Assumption

(Don't assume: Don't make an **ASS** out of **U** and **ME**) Teachers assume that their students are familiar with certain terms and concepts, without first describing what they are. This often results in confusing presentation and misinterpretation.

Motivation

Motivation is the key that keeps your students learning. It all hinges upon the kinds of goals that you set for your students, and how you help them achieve those goals. The principle is that **early success breeds motivation**. The more important rules of thumb to assist with the application of this principle are given below.

1. The goals must be **achievable**.
   Your students must feel that it is within their power to reach them.

2. The goals must be **challenging**.
   Your students must feel that what they gained was worth the effort expended. The setting of goals and how far apart they are in relation to each other is crucial; too close together and reaching them would not seem worthwhile, too far apart and they would not be attainable.

3. The **earlier** the goal is achieved, the better.
   People tend to estimate the distance to the next goal by the time and effort required to reach the previous one. From this they judge (usually incorrectly) their rate of progression. Hence the earlier the goal is reached, the quicker the **perceived progress**.

4. The pace must be **balanced** (The **rate** at which ensuing goals are set after previous ones have been attained is known as the **pace**).
   Too slow and boredom will set in, too fast and it will result in confusion and a lack of consolidation. Motivation generated by the reaching of a goal can be used to help the student reach the next one. Skilful teachers recognise the presence and importance of motivation **momentum**, and make use of it whenever possible.

5. Give **positive feedback**. There is NO GREATER MOTIVATOR.
   If your student has reached a goal, let them know! Don't assume that they will know when they have reached it; often they don't. If your student hasn't reached it yet, reassure them. Be sure to signal positively the achievement of a goal by the individual and the group, verbally with a "well done", or visually with your equivalent of a thumbs-up. Remember to maintain eye contact when doing so.

Maintaining interest

The ability to inspire and maintain interest in the subject is a direct measure of your development as a good teacher, and is ultimately one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching. There are things other than pacing that make a difference to a lesson.

Content

i. **Variation in methods (same goals, different practices).**

Effectively fooling your students into thinking that it is a different goal.
Spending a long time on a single exercise can result in a loss of motivation
(perceived lack of progress). Try alternating between different but mutually
supporting exercises.

ii. **Sidestepping the issue.**

If you feel that your student has encountered a brick wall and is losing motivation,
it may be time to move on to something different altogether. Try developing a
different element in the hierarchy with the same, or higher priority. You can always
return to this later.

iii. **Brighten the content.**

Make use of imaginative examples and vivid teaching points. Try introducing
cooperative and competitive practices in the lesson.

Keeping in contact

Although you might be paying great attention to your pupils, it may not be immediately
obvious to them. The **appearance** of being an attentive teacher keeps them focused on
their tasks. Maintaining **strong eye contact** with your class will help you do so. This is
achieved during group teaching by light eye contact with **all the members of a small
group**, or **some members in sections of large groups**. Scanning in this manner also aids
observation. Good eye contact should be made during remedial teaching, especially in **the
moment before you leave the student** to move on.

Another powerful tool is the voice. Speaking loudly results in a tone that sounds
monotonous; an increase in volume requires a greater contrast in the voice by **emphasis-
ing intonations**. Periods of long silences should be avoided, perhaps filled in by reinforce-
ment of lesson content, positive encouragement to individuals and to the group. Good
voice projection is critical to successful teaching, a skill that teachers at all levels strive to
perfect (sadly, the development of voice currently falls beyond the scope of this booklet).

Handling

The preceding points will help you appear approachable. The students are therefore more
likely to signal to you when they encounter difficulties, reducing the number of times you
actively have to intercede during practice. This is a good thing. This is not to say that the
students should be the only ones who do all the approaching. More often than not you
will find that you are the one who initiates contact, as the students may still be reluctant
to call upon you due to a variety of factors (*e.g.* mentally unsafe environment). However,
be aware that excessive handling (usually repeated interruption by you) adversely affects
the flow and reduces the pace of a lesson. A **good tip** is to walk around and look "avail-
able" during remedial/practise sessions.

Learning and the acquisition of skill

Experienced teachers recognise that people all learn at different rates and vary in degrees of natural talent. Good teachers will make use of the aptitudes of an individual in order to maximise the rate of progression. Since students should be treated as individuals insofar as possible, **success should not be measured by other people's failures**.

Learning is initially most effective in an obvious learning structure. Providing the students with as complete a picture as they can comprehend, and letting them know where they are in relation to it, lets them see how far their effort has brought them, and where it can lead them. Setting short-term goals in context helps the student focus on the tasks you have set. Students pass through four stages in the acquisition process.

The learning process first begins with the students not really knowing what is coming next (unawareness). Demonstrating and explaining the next goal makes them aware of what needs to be done, but not necessarily how to do it (awareness). At the end of the instruction phase the students should be able to execute the content, but would still need to concentrate to do so (assimilation). They then need to practise until it becomes "second nature" *i.e.* they can execute the content without consciously thinking about it (naturalisation). Therefore:

1. setting a goal begins with
    unawareness (unconscious non-competence),

2, contextual demonstration leads to
    awareness (conscious non-competence),

3. understanding and implementing the content leads to
    assimilation (conscious competence),

4. consolidation by practice leads to
    naturalisation (unconscious competence).

5. positive feedback *e.g.* "Congratulations, you can do it!"
    then begin cycle again *e.g.* "The prize is, you get something tougher!"

A disadvantage of the teaching structure is that it can act to constrain the student's perception of the subject in the long-term. This would hinder the realisation of his/her potential. Therefore bridging the gap between the learning and the actual implementing environment must be considered in structure design.

Teaching methods

Skills alone are not the full story. Knowledge of important concepts in education are needed in order to render teaching more effective.

Whole-part-whole (successive approximations)

It would be unfair to expect your students to become proficient in all skills straight away. To achieve proficiency, the method of **successive approximations** is used. After a demonstration with appropriate comments (see The lesson), encourage your students to perform their interpretation of the skill. Early attempts may not be strictly correct, but a feeling of the **whole** movement will be gained. Then focus is drawn to a particular aspect by isolating and practising it. This **part** is placed back into context by practising the **whole** movement again. Successive cycles occur until acceptable competence is achieved.

Therefore, **whole-part-whole** (or successive approximation) is a concept that tightly integrates the processes of teaching and learning in context. It has proved to be highly successful in the case of physical skills.

Deliberate errors

There are instances where it is necessary to teach a **deliberate error**. Teaching points are sometimes used to overcome an immediate problem, but are actually errors when viewed in the long term. An example would be if a particular skill required many factors to be performed properly, and the most appropriate teaching point would introduce an error later in the student's development. Then the lesser evil could be to use the teaching point with a view to correcting the deliberate error later.

Exaggerated practice is potentially a deliberate error, where emphasising an action on the opposite end of the spectrum of the student's current action is used *e.g.*: a common teaching point used to correct overly-large steps is to ask the student to "take the step on the spot", which would usually result in a step size of about mid-way between on-the-spot and the size prior to the teaching point. Be sure to provide positive feedback and to tell your student not emphasise the point any further once the aim is achieved. Otherwise like a swinging pendulum, your student may over-correct (hyper-correct).

Positive reinforcement and feedback

Positive reinforcement is a **persistent reminder** of the teaching point, and should be used throughout the lesson. It can be used to place **emphasis** on particular aspects, and therefore help your student prioritise and order information in the teaching point *e.g.*:

PRESSING down on long nails

pressing DOWN on long nails

pressing down ON long nails

pressing down on LONG nails

pressing down on long NAILS

Positive feedback tells them what they have done right and what they have to correct. It allows YOU to tell the student where you think he/she is in relation to the next goal *and* how to achieve it. Indeed, the information must be timely to be most effective *i.e.* feedback should be given immediately, or as soon as reasonably possible.

The word "positive" does not mean that you tell your student only the good news. Doing so would be unfair and give them an inaccurate perception of their own development. Both their achievements and deficiencies should be conveyed, but they should be **phrased positively**. Compare:

"tell them what they have done right and what they have yet to correct"

with

"tell them what they have done right and what they are doing wrong".

The state of independence

Your students must come away from your lesson with the ability to re-enact the key aspects of the lesson without the presence of a teacher. Although they may not be entirely proficient at the end of the lesson, they should be able to become competent through their own work. This is the **state of independence**.

Your students must feel that they have learnt something valuable, know what they themselves would have to do to become proficient and, in doing so, become confident of using the content in an out-of-lesson context.

If a state of independence is not reached by the end of a lesson, your students will have no ability to practice and develop on their own (slow progress, loss of motivation), and lack confidence when they find themselves in a non-lesson (unsafe) context. In the long term this would engender their increasing reliance on you, the teacher (something many unscrupulous teachers do).

The lesson:

structure and application of skills/methods

The lesson has several components that can be arranged into a **flexible** structure. Parts should be excluded or rearranged if they detract from or highlight the content. Hence there actually is no such thing as a "standard" lesson.

Where possible, a short description of the purpose of each component is given. This is followed by notes about its potential benefits to the student and teacher. The notes also provide some examples of the applications of skills we covered previously.

Warm up

Determines the atmosphere / environment / tone / setting of the lesson.
The warm-up should be kept short to avoid boredom.

Student:

Prepares the physical state: isolates, exercises and relaxes relevant parts of the body. The manner it is conducted establishes the mental state: soothing, relaxed manner, *etc*. Serves to lengthen the attention span.

Teacher:

Observe and **comprehend**: physical state *e.g.* movement quality; mental state *e.g.* enthusiasm, trepidation. Gives clues for the **teaching angle** of the lesson *e.g.* serious dancers or regular club-goers. Helps students get used to your **methods of communication** *e.g.* method of counting.

Refresher (if you've taught them before)

Checks the **attainment** and **naturalisation** of previous goals. Can be used as a continuation to the warm up to lengthen attention span. Should be kept short.

Student:

Links previous lesson to up-coming content. Provides opportunity to ease into/practise relevant movements, especially if related to up-coming content.

Teacher:

Observe, **comprehend** level of development of the class, then to fine-tune the hierarchy of development/correction planned for that lesson. Gives **clues** for the adjustment of lesson content. Sometimes a complete change of direction may be necessary. Provides opportunity for **communicating feedback**, both to the class and to yourself.

Complete demonstration

Gets past the first stage *i.e.* **unawareness** (unconscious non-competence) of the learning process. Begins successive approximation; first whole in **WHOLE**-part-whole.

Student:
Crucial because it establishes the context of the **entire** lesson, and sets the **ultimate goal** of the session.

Teacher:
Observe changes in students with respect to level of attention and motivation (if any). Establishes credibility positively (if required).

Main body

The content is broken into component pieces, each part is isolated and worked on. This constitutes the part in whole-**PART**-whole.

The main body is split into two separate phases: **instruction** and **practice**. In the instruction phase the students begin with **awareness** (conscious non-competence) and proceed through to **assimilation** (conscious competence). The practice phase follows, allowing the opportunity for **remedial** teaching to assist assimilation, as well as to achieve **naturalisation** (unconscious competence). There are many cycles of instruction and practice in one session of the main body. However, the last cycles of the lesson should be dedicated to reassembling the isolated parts back into the whole context. This constitutes the second **whole** in whole-part-whole. By doing this, students should attain the **state of independence** going into the general practice section that follows.

Learning

Student:
Teachers set the **nearest achievable goal**, followed by the demonstrations up to it. Interpretation of skill by observation and imitation, with suitable **reinforcement**.

Teacher:
Application of **group** teaching skills and methods: observation, comprehension, communication, motivation, *e.g.* hierarchy of development, classroom organisation (safety, viewing angles *etc.*). Provides **general passive feedback** on your effectiveness in teaching.

Practice

Student:
All things being well, this is the most important part of the lesson. Assimilation to naturalisation are usually the longest phases in skill acquisition, therefore a **proportionately greater time** should be spent here.

Teacher:
Observation, comprehension, communication, motivation for individuals/small groups. **Remedial:** trend spotting to coalesce groups with identical faults (problem with teaching?), **tailored** teaching. Collecting teaching feedback at a more **personal** and interactive level.

The take-home message

A recap of the entire content of the main body.

Vital before the general practice.

Student:

Reaffirm the state of independence with important points **emphasised in order**, giving your students a clear idea what to go away and practice.

Teacher:

Tests **comprehension** and **communication** of the main body by summarising the hierarchy in the form of teaching points.

Where do we go from here?

A verbal and/or visual demonstration summarising the content of the next lesson.

Student:

Extends their understanding of development by seeing today's practice in context of what happens next time. Sets the **long-term** goal.

Teacher:

Tests your **comprehension** by extrapolating to future content. **Communicating** and **motivating** your students. Beware that your students might try to imitate this demonstration instead of consolidating their current content.

General practice

(Here's where they stand around chatting while you desperately try to get them to dance.)

Consolidation of lesson content.

Student:

Students can **validate** the state of independence while the teacher is still present. More naturalisation, gain in confidence, leading themselves out of the sheltered environment. Remember the dance: what is this all about? Don't get sidetracked!

Teacher:

Observe, comprehend: taking stock of progression of students and teacher. Therefore what to do in the next lesson with respect to content and execution. More remedial teaching and building atmosphere especially in the long term.

Contrasting activity

Dessert!

Student:

Change in the slant of the lesson adds more variety, interactivity and fun (therefore motivation).

Teacher:

Introduces other items that didn't fit in the main body which may be useful (but not directly so). Provides a final point of flexibility in the lesson design.

Summary

The basic part of this book covers the skills required in teaching and a means of developing them. It also has concepts useful in the teaching of a physical skill. These are brought together and illustrated in the standard lesson.

The manner in which a lesson is conducted must be tempered with **humanity**. Keeping students on the same basic drills might be useful, but what would it do to their motivation? Likewise, is there any point in helping your students achieve many goals quickly if it means a boring presentation? Students must be kept in constant touch with the content; **techniques may help to achieve the aim, but are not the aim themselves**.

In its broadest sense, teaching is more than about information. It's about people. And that includes you as well as your students. Getting to know your students and yourself is incredibly important; we are all thinking individuals and should treat ourselves as such. This means that even within a group, the teaching should be fine-tuned to each person resulting in a lesson that caters for every individual where possible (known to education boffins as intragroup differentiation). You, as the teacher, must measure your own development by planning your lessons beforehand, and evaluating your performance afterwards.

The **nutshell** at the beginning contains a series of points that you should have at your mental fingertips. It contains essential principles of education for you in teaching point form (you can analyse them at your leisure). The points are arranged in the general order of use during remedial teaching; in the current course, this is the first form of teaching you will perform during the practicals.

Reaching the end of this section marks only the beginning of your role as a teacher. As your teaching skills mature, you should learn to apply these skills in novel and effective ways to give lessons with balanced progression and enjoyment. I could close with any of a variety of useful adages that I have meandered across before, such as "what is easiest to learn is not always the easiest to teach". Instead I choose one of my own:

Teach the person first, and then the lesson, for there is no better way.

Salsa: The Music

What is salsa music? That is a matter of opinion, musicologists included. You could apply salsa footwork to a number of songs with common (4/4) time of the proper tempo. Some would argue that you would be dancing salsa, others would not. Should you really care if you were all having fun?

The ensuing discourse contains numbers in square brackets that cross-referenced with musical examples found in the musicography (page 42).

What is regarded as salsa music would seem to satisfy **loosely**, a number of criteria. Salsa is played in common time, that is four beats in every bar. The music is played in **two bar phrases**, thereby forming an **eight-count**.
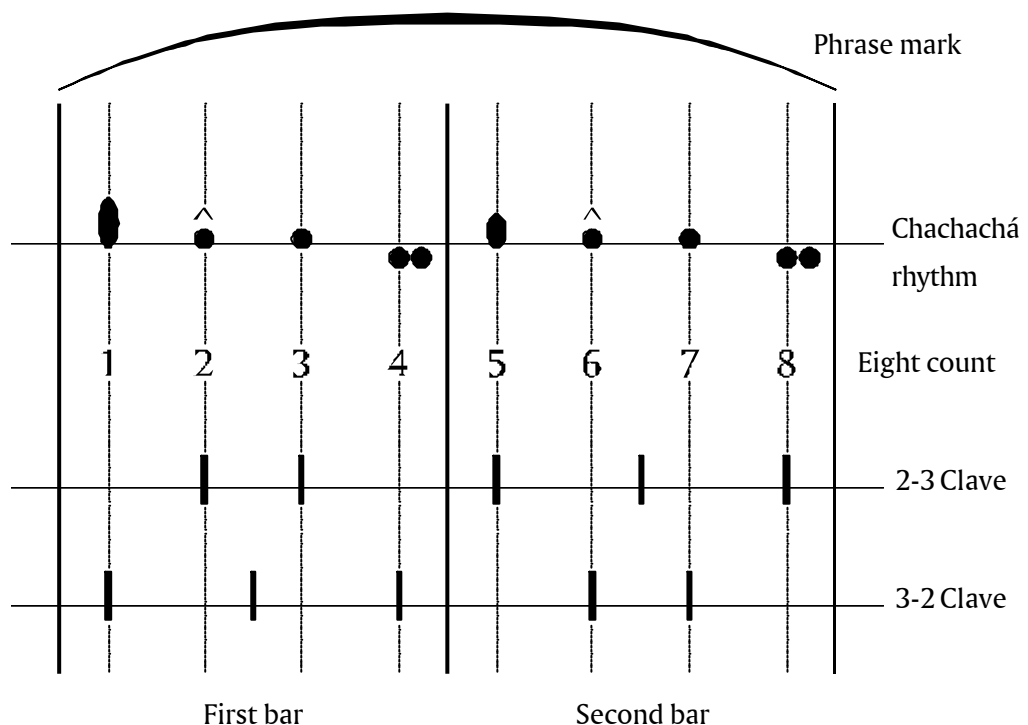
Bass Rhythm

An eight-count is usually played on a tall narrow drum called the **conga**. In the diagram a chachachá rhythm, played by a number of percussion and bass instruments (including the conga) is used as an example [1]. **The chachachá rhythm is quite common, but is by no means the only one.** The first beats of every bar, numbers 1 & 5 of the eight-count, are louder as represented by the larger dots. Occasionally beats 1 & 5 can be differentiated from each other as well. The second beat of every bar, numbers 2 & 6, usually bears an accent caused by striking the conga skin sharply. The fourth beat, numbers 4 & 8, is a clear "double tap" (two syncopated beats) played on a different conga resulting in a different tone, as represented two dots off the line. The double tap is part of the signature rhythm of the **chachachá** that lends the rhythm its name.

Tempo

Another give-away is the speed at which the music is played. The chachachá is sometimes described as **mid-tempo** music whereas songs that fall under the **up-tempo** category would be considered salsa. That's like asking how long a piece of string is. There is no sharp dividing point between them. Suffice to say that the faster the track, the more likely it is to be salsa.

Clave

As yet the most robust criterion for defining a piece of music as salsa music is that it should obey the **clave**. The clave is a rhythm that is played by striking one wooden stick against another. The sticks are called clave too. The clave (rhythm) comes in two flavours: 2-3 and 3-2. The 2-3 clave has two beats in the first bar of the phrase, and three beats in the second bar: beats 2, 3, 5, &, 8 (where & is equidistant between beats 6 and 7) [2]. The 3-2 clave is the converse [3].

Musicians and singers alike should obey the clave, playing notes or stressing syllables to highlight most or all of the clave beats. They should do this even if no clave rhythm actually being played, performing to an imaginary beat. Songs used to be of only one clave flavour; with musicians and singers tending to get a bit upset if a song changed clave intentionally or if cued in incorrectly by the band leader. This is no longer the case. Songs containing changes in clave are becoming increasingly common and musicians are becoming more adept at playing them [4]. The changing clave lends to the dynamism of the song, but renders it less accessible to the novice dancer.

Percussion layers

The beats of the eight count are usually determined by a number of percussionists playing in together using smaller instruments. This includes non-percussion instruments assuming a percussive role; a percussion instrument like the conga can skip beats, with other instruments filling in the gaps. The non-percussion instruments would be playing on an **imaginary** beat. The **cooperative role** of the musicians are a reflection of the **African roots** of the music. Consequently, listening to the music as an **entire piece** instead of any one particular instrument is the most reliable way of deriving timing.

In my experience non-Latin Americans/ non-Africans tend to encounter more difficulty in "picking out the beat". This is not because they lack the "rhythm" gene. More likely they are used to listening for an obvious beat, played on a whacking big drum, by a specialist drummer. Once they understand that there is no one beat to pick out, and to listen to layers instead, all notion of the phantom rhythm gene is exorcised (Hurrah!).

Heritage and influences

One of salsa's most recent and discernable predecessors is the Cuban *Son*. The *son* is the music of storytellers; where the troubadours would sing about anything that took their

fancy: how good the harvest was, what they had for dinner that night *etc*. They would **improvise** with lyrics and voice to **keep in the clave** of the song. The technique of improvising, called **soneo**, is still evident today and is a reason why certain artists are well regarded [5].

The *son* played in the older-style without the brass line-up, reveals its roots more readily [6]. Smooth African rhythms roll in the bass lines, headed by lyrics sung co-operatively: lead singers backed by other singers simultaneously, or they might sing separate pieces in alternation. The phenomenon of lead and backing singers taking turns is known as **call and response**, and is evident in the majority of salsa music, though it is found in other music forms too, like gospel. Andalusian melodies complete the partnership. Arguably most of the Hispanic influence in Latin America came from southern Spain.

Another undeniable influence is the impact of jazz. Introduced into Latin music via the barrios (Latin neighbourhoods) of New York, jazz notes played on piano and brass are testament to the days when the big jazz bands of Machito and his peers played at the Palladium theatre in the '50s. The African / Spanish / jazz mix is no longer localised to the first point of fusion that is New York, but has spread to Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, and as far as Japan. But jazz is not the only flavour, the evolution of the species and its diversification can observed, where **charanga** line-ups featuring flute and violins [7] can be found alongside **pop** and **rap** [8] movements in salsa.

Trends suggest that salsa is beginning to establish an identity in its own right, instead of being considered as a generic term for songs bearing a number of Cuban rhythms. As an example, some works by Colombian artists are now sent to New York where they are "finished". This is done by adding extra instruments and/or remixing during the final production stages, to ensure that they comply with a salsa formula.

Cousins and the accidental salsa

The **cumbia** and the **vallenato** deserve mention as cousins of salsa, and generally fit the criteria that define salsa. The former is distinguishable by its slower reggae-like rhythm (apologies for not exploring this any further), while the music of the latter is **accordion**-led. Indeed many people dance salsa to them, to the dismay of purists. The cumbia, a music form and a dance in its own right, has an immense following in Latin America but is often overlooked elsewhere, possibly because dance instructors don't perceive it as being as marketable.

When applying the criteria, you might find that Latin America does not have a monopoly of salsa music production. "Accidental" salsas can be found in the halls of Nouveau Flamenco, Ambient Native American chants, Irish Folk, and African music [9].

I am of the opinion that it is the **inclusion**, not the exclusion, of different musical influences that has been responsible for making salsa the phenomenon it is today. And it will be the continuing inclusion of musical and cultural influences, such as those accidental salsas above, that will rejuvenate and ensure its longevity tomorrow.

Salsa: The Dance

Salsa in its elemental form is danced to four beats using **three steps**, each one beat long. The remaining beat can either be tagged onto the end of the preceding step (resulting in a quick-quick-slow count), or can contain an adorning movement, called a **highlight**. Steps can be travelling or on the spot; a bit like groovy walking three paces at a time with a pause thrown in. Walk like that to time and you're dancing salsa.

Its very simplicity underlies its extreme flexibility; the sheer amount of personal choice. Just as you can walk in any direction you choose, so you can dance salsa on the spot, in straight lines, or in turning paces. The remaining beat can be highlighted with a tap, kick or pause. Note: A **step** is when you put your foot down and move your weight onto it (foot placement with **weight transfer**), a **tap** is when you put your foot down but don't move your weight onto it (foot placement **without weight**). In many Latin countries, couples even choose which beat they would like to dance on, and it need not necessarily be the first beat.

All this might sound like rhythmic anarchy and it would be, were it not for one vital constraint. **Salsa music and its progenitors has always been music for dancing**. Its cooperative heritage has engendered a belief, in Latin America at least, that everyone else has **an equal right to enjoyment** on the dance floor. This alone prevents outbreaks of destructive mayhem. Instead this attitude (especially towards one's partner) welds the forces of spontaneity, individuality and musicality together to form the atmosphere that Latin music is renowned for.

Just as the music has maintained its vitality by absorbing other influences, so has the dance. Apart from other Latin dances like the **merengue** and **cumbia** (which the term salsa sometimes encompasses), salsa bears some marked similarities with lindy-hop, swing and hustle. It has even proved capable of absorbing elements of ballroom Latin dance and Argentine tango. Quite astounding.

Flavours of Salsa

The way salsa is danced varies significantly depending where you're from and how you've learnt it. In the main, salseros from different backgrounds **can still dance** with each other, at least at a basic level. British salsa is primarily anchored around the back basic, turns are executed on the second beat after a "wind-up" movement on beat one and are biased anticlockwise. North American salsa is built around the latin basic and many early combinations contain turns to the right. Salsa from the Caribbean and Latin America is presented more commonly as a walk, resulting in a much more circular in movement and the turns being slower. Within this are the main stereotypes of the Cuban and Colombian style, that is having an action that digs deeper into the floor or one that travels lighter above it respectively.

Before we lose our sense of perspective, these generalisations are mean to demonstrate the **richness** of the dance, not to typecast. Bear in mind that individual styles also vary within regions, so adopting a "definitive" style of salsa and trying to squeeze your students into it would be an amusingly futile gesture.

The problem with learning

People born and raised in a Latin American culture **acquire** salsa in a passive learning process; through constant immersion. It is my opinion that they come to understand the dance differently: as a series of walks instead of individual moves.

For those who are not fortunate enough to have this opportunity (like myself), we have to **learn** it instead. As mentioned before, early learning tends to occur best in a structure. To this end you will often find salsa being taught as a series of steps and moves because it is more meaningful to the student. But at some point, a different teaching angle should be used to offer the student an opportunity to look at the dance through a native dancer's eyes, thereby offering the student the best of both worlds. Often the final process is not carried out, either because its importance is overlooked, or because it is easier for the teacher to carry on in the old manner regardless.

A little comment about leading and following

Social dancing in couples is mainly a phenomenon of Western European culture. By social dance I mean one that has structure but is not executed in the form of routines *i.e.* basic rules which once understood allows two individuals to dance together and flexibly determine their choreography, even if they had never met before. This demands that each move element of the dance possess a **unique identifying start signal**. Initiation of the signal and compliance with it results in the co-ordinated execution of the move element by both partners.

When a couple takes to the dance floor, both partners cannot initiate at the same time, neither can they both comply. Therefore one partner initiates and the other complies. This is known as leading and following respectively. Traditionally the lead role has been assumed by men and the following by women, although this has begun to change: where women are forced to lead due to a dearth of men, and because the social roles of both genders are being redefined.

The lead (known as *la marca* meaning "the mark" in Argentine Tango) for a move can take a variety of forms, usually presenting itself as a change in **pressure** (increase/decrease) at the points of partner contact, or in the **body position** of the leader relative to the follower. The most elegant leads are clear and considerate to the follower without being obvious to the casual on-looker. The challenge to the follower, in choosing to comply with the signal, is in finding ways of self-expression whilst dancing within its constraints.

Consequently salsa demands the abilities of lead and follow of its dancers in order for it to be executed on our latterday club floors in a social context.

Basic skills of a salsa dancer

Here we consider a hierarchy more specific to that of a salsa dancer. The transition from non-dancer to competent dancer requires the development of a number of skills and those listed below arguably form the core of dance ability. **Some** examples of what they do and how their interact are given:

Floor relations

describe how your feet and the rest of your body **interact** with the floor *e.g.* using foot placement to find a suitable place on the floor to form a stable base, onto which you can then move your weight. It influences body-part coordination and dance strength.

Balance

is the positioning and timing of weight during **movement** or when **static**. Good control influences your "time on the foot" *i.e.* how much time you have available to dance.

Posture

is the manner in which different parts of the body are held relative to each other. It determines how much **space** you create for yourself and your partner to dance in. It influences your balance and placement.

Timing

determines the speed with which you execute your motions. An absence of speed results in a lack of motion (stillness), also another aspect of timing. **Timing affects everything!**

Body-part coordination

is how different parts of the body move relative to each other in space and time. It influences posture, lead/follow. (Note: although timing and body-part control combine to give body part co-ordination, the latter term has been used because it is easier to understand.)

Dancing strength

is the **regulation** and use of **energy** provided by yourself or your partner. It includes the ability to exert, absorb and redirect force. It influences balance, posture and timing.

Observation

is as important to develop in students as it is in teachers. It provides feedback to the dancer as to the state of progression. Extremely important in **partnership** and **floorcraft**.

Musicality

is the ability to interpret music. The **potential** for musical expressiveness does increase as the dancer becomes more competent in other skills. The **actual** level is a function of inherent ability, method of teaching and personal inclination.

Developing skills

A well considered teaching programme should, at any stage, encourage the development of a number of skills, and still appear simple to the student at the same time.

The teaching structure currently implemented has four levels, although this is flexible. It would not be realistic to expect all your students to have the same degree of enthusiasm. With this in mind, the structure aims to produce individuals who, at the end of **level three**, should have some form of:

> **timing** - keeping time to most songs,
> **footwork** - using basic step patterns, and describe salsa as walks,
> **partnership** - observation, leading and/or following, partner empathy,
> **dance vocabulary** - execute basic turns in small combinations,
> **understanding** - be aware of and have experienced different kinds of salsa.

The end result should be a person who is reasonably confident and competent on a salsa dance floor. The sole purpose of level four is to extend the dance ability of those who have stayed on, to this end there is no fixed content. Its flexibility is its weakness and its strength. It requires a reasonably well developed teacher to understand what content to teach, but that decision and the manner in which it is taught is also up to him/her.

It is more important to understand the **principles** behind why the levels are as they are, rather than knowing the contents that illustrate them. So, the principles are:

Level One

The primary audience is the complete beginner.

i.   They must come away from the lesson feeling that they can dance salsa, no matter how basic it is. Even if it is only one step.

ii   They must also feel that they have attained a state of independence. Although this is usually taken as said by any good teacher, it is especially important at the first stage. First impressions count, and by doing this you indicate that you start as you mean to go on.

Level Two

The primary audience should have at least a rudimentary ability of co-ordinating their limbs to time.

Making salsa dancing look easy by equating it as something they already do *i.e.* walking. Dance is often portrayed as being mainly about footwork, hence novices spend most of their time looking at their feet, afraid to step on their partner's toes. Teaching it as a natural action they possess (walk) frees them up from observing their feet, so they are more able to enjoy the dance, and work on the basic skills.

Level Three

The target audience should be able to hold time well, have a more flexible concept of footwork, and be slightly observant in partnership.

i.   Stretch their ability to move and co-ordinate their limbs: get them thinking and moving quicker.

ii.   Stressing the importance of observation and partnership using lead and follow: partner sense and responsiveness.

iii.   Awareness of some different flavours of salsa.

        (*e.g.* lime and coriander, fruity mango, original red hot.)

Level Four

The target audience should be capable of partnership. They should possess a dance vocabulary of fundamental modules that they can execute.

i.   Teaching them how to make better use of what they already know.

ii.   Show how to create and extend their own dance vocabulary.

Format of detailed level description

Each level is explained in more detail in the ensuing pages. The layout has sections on:

Primary aims

What are the principal objectives of the level?

These are detailed from both a student's and a teacher's perspective.

Contents

How do we illustrate the principles of the primary objective?

Any material that achieves the aims of the level, and fits in with the other levels can be used. This lends a degree of flexibility for the teacher to exploit.

Comments

Describes the rationale, advantages and/or disadvantages of the primary objectives and content.

Secondary aims

What other less major principles can be investigated should time and ability permit?

These "icing on the cake" objectives, are present to help you tailor your teaching to the individual more effectively.

Step description

A short description of the content is provided where applicable. These notes are intended just as reminders, not to learn off (describing an action before it is seen is generally meaningless).

Level One

Primary aims

Students:

i.   Must perceive that they have the basic WHOLE story. They must go away thinking that they know what salsa is about.

ii.   Must perceive that they can re-enact the content of the lesson without the aid of a teacher. They should go away being able to do at least one thing, and feel that it is within their own power to attain proficiency.

Teachers:

iii.   The first state of independence must be reached.

iv.   Content must be flexibly geared toward a broad range of ability.

v.   Content should be achievable yet challenging.

Contents

Any number of six basic foot patterns (there are more, but they not described here):

side to side	**back basic**	
latin basic	**turning basic**	plus one for North American salsa
cross basic	**cucaracha**	**single right turn** (optional, see page 37)

Linking the basics together, flexibly.

Recognising the beats and counting themselves into time.

Performing these patterns to time, solo then partnered, up to real-life tempo

Comments

It provides an early structure that beginners can learn in. This takes the form of convenient groups of steps with labels attached. Students can estimate for themselves where their goals are and their rate of progression. A disadvantage is that learning in step fashion freezes their perception of dance as a series of "steps and moves".

Secondary aims

i.   Start developing lead and follow, especially in the turning basic and latin basic.

ii.   Encourage changes in orientation. Introduces flexibility and more variety.
       More empowerment of the student to take control (and a little more brainwork).

Teaching Focus	Practice	Purpose / Teaching Point(s)
Basic footwork.	**Side-to-side**.	Simplest foundation step to learn.
		Side-close-side-(clap/tap).
	Back basic.	British salsa foundation basic.
		Back-and-together.
	Turning basic, a.k.a. hand to hand.	Teaches a change in orientation and hand hold.
		Back basic turning the body.
	Latin basic, known in New York as the basic time-step.	American salsa foundation basic. Commonly left foot forward and right foot back, because of off-set partnership.
	Cross basic. (I call it Zorba's basic) the travelling version is preferred because it is more useful in level three.	Hybrid of back basic and side-to-side. Compact version: *Back-cross-close-(clap/tap).* Travelling version: *Back-cross-**side**-(clap/tap).*
	Cucaracha, means cockroach (possibly stamping thereof).	Requires good weight transfer. *Side-replace-together-(clap/tap).* *Wobble-wobble-close-(clap/tap).*
Step linking(solo).	**Chaining the basics** using lead's start position.	Change when weight is on right leg, ready to step to the left.
	Adding one basic at a time.	Sets achievable goals and makes it easier for the student to assess their progression.
	Changing between the basics at **lead's discretion**.	Develops lead and follow, but only if you've taught them how.

Start position (or ready position).

The basic convention in Britain is that the lead's first step is taken with the left leg, the lady's first step is taken with the right leg. Therefore the basic start position is: *lead's weight on right leg ready to step to left, lady's weight on left leg ready to step to right.*

The solo step transitions are taught using the lead's because:

i.   it makes their life slightly easier, they need all the help they can get because they'll have to lead later.

ii.   it is usually easier to teach from the lead role, especially with respect to turn combinations.

Teaching Focus	Practice	Purpose / Teaching Point(s)
Recognising beats and moving to time.	**Use a downstroke of the hand to signal beat one.**	Demonstrating that they can hear the beats.
	Basic steps with **hand claps**.	Claps are optional and are helpful in keeping time, as an accent, fill silences, promote interactivity.
	Footfall must coincide with the beat. Use available percussion markers *e.g.* the double beat of the fourth count.	Make the link between what they hear and when they move. *Imagine that the floor is the drum and your feet are playing the beat.*
Partnered dancing.	**Partnered basics**.	Lady's basics are a mirror image of lead's, except latin basic (point of symmetry).
Note: In both types of hold, the hold will break during the turning basic.	**Two-handed hold.** Basic steps with transitions. Usually the first hold that is taught but is harder to lead with.	Creates more room for turn combinations, lessens invasion of personal space. *lead's fingers horizontal, lady's hands over the top, waist height.*
	Standard close hold. Basic steps with transitions. In standard hold, the picture arm is lead's left and lady's right.	*Lead's right hand around lady's back, Lady's left hand on lead's right shoulder. Picture arm hands about shoulder level. both partners' hips and feet offset to their left by half a hip-width.*
Step linking (partnered).	Linking the basics using **mirrored action**.	Basic transitions are via the partnered start position: lead stepping to left and lady stepping to right
Draw attention to accent/highlight on the fourth beat.	**Side-to-side with taps.**	Using a light tap highlight *side-close-side-**tap*** NOT *side-close-side-**close***
	Basics with **highlights**.	There many possible highlights: taps (light and digs), kicks, pauses, *etc.*

Level Two

Primary objective

Students:

i.   A clear perception of progression, building on the previous content, is necessary.

ii.   Begin to understand the dance as a walk, more akin to that of acquired dance. Portraying it as something easier provides better chance for relaxation and enjoyment *i.e.* giving the student time to dance.

Teachers:

iii. Freeing up the dance movement.

iv.   Work on timing and partner awareness: observation, energy, lead/follow, partner distance.

Illustrated by

Linear walks to time: forward, backward, to side, with turning steps.

Rueda style, all partnered, without and then to time: circular motion with low-stress turns.

Leading/following and hand changes with Halo system turns.

Mixture of linear and circular motion at will to alleviate dizziness.

Comments

Partnership skills *e.g.* partner observation, partner distance, lead and follow, are often neglected or left to develop passively. Rueda addresses these earlier, emphasising its priority in dancing. The groundwork for creativity is made by beginning the understanding of move elements that build combinations.

A potential problem is that students may find it difficult to assess progress because of the looser structure.

Secondary objectives

Demonstrating some permutations and combinations (and move variation clustering), to stimulate experimentation and creativity. Remember to stress safety.

The Rueda Style

Rueda is a Spanish word literally meaning wheel or circle. The rueda style of dancing hails from the Latin American Spanish phrase "hacer una rueda con el/ella", which translates into English as "to circle around him/her". The phrase is used to describe the manner in which partners would dance in circles around each other when courting.

The basic circle

Partner one

Axis •

Partner two

The dancers begin opposite each other and move themselves in the same direction (*e.g.* lead's left, lady's left) to time, maintaining a consistent partner distance, thereby describing a circle on the dance floor. Changes of direction are initiated by either partner.

Hand-holds, if used, can be single or double-handed in any combination, with a handshake or butterfly grip. The hand-hold would be kept on the axis usually at waist to shoulder level between the partnership, unless initiating a turn (more of that later). A close hold can be used while keeping the axis in the centre of the hold, however ladies might find it difficult to initiate changes in certain directions. With the basic circle, both partners have nearly equal opportunity to initiate (except in close hold), hence the diagram does not distinguish between leader and follower.
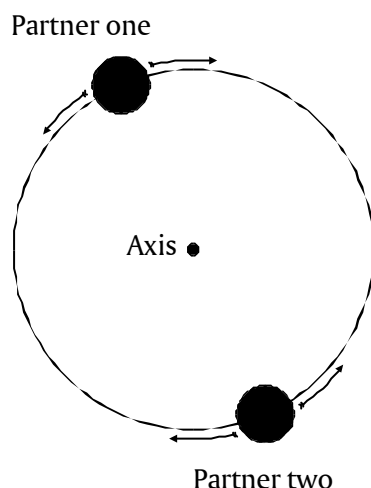
Rueda with turns

Usually turns for either partner are initiated by the lead and can be in either direction. If the halo method is used (see page 39), the first clue of a coming turn could be a raise of the hand(s) up the axis to above crown height. Then, the lady will either feel the lead for a turn, or the lead will turn him/herself. In the latter case, the lead should try to maintain the hands on the axis as much as possible. The lady would then be unlikely to feel extraneous force on the hands and mistake it for a lead to turn.

Of course, this would be a good time for the lady to assist the lead through a turn, or to hijack the initiative altogether...
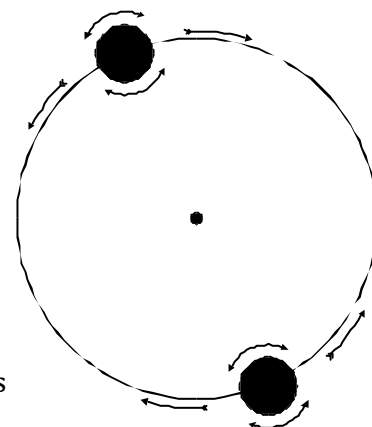
Orientation

Mention must also be made of the direction that the partners face relative to each other and the circle they describe. Hold, anatomy and good partnership allowing, each partner can choose or be led to face: into or away from the centre of the circle; along or against the direction of movement.

Take for example, partners positioned shoulder to shoulder, facing the same direction, with one moving forward and the other one backward. To dance the rueda, the axis would be between their shoulders (you'll have to draw this one).

Timing

It is of little consequence how many bars or phrases of music it would take for a partnership to complete one circle, or a turn (so long as the lead was timed as such). Indeed the rueda style accommodates both fast turns as well as slower ones similar in nature to that found in the merengue from the Dominican Republic.

Permutations and combinations

Once the elements of the rueda style are understood, A large number of combinations can be explored. We'll look at an rough number of variations (in brackets) of some elements.

The sample elements are: direction of the circle [2], types of hold [total (9): none, close, single-handed (4), double-handed (3)], orientation [2: considering into and away from the axis only], direction of turn [2]. Other elements like the height of hold, and whether the hands are released and regained during turns are left out.

That would leave us with nearly 72 ways of executing one manoeuvre alone (analogy: there are twenty-six letters in the English alphabet, and how many words exist?). It's actually less than seventy-two because we aren't comprised of universal joints, nor have we mastered the ability of rendering our bodies insubstantial at will. A pity, that.

In short, fostering an understanding of the individual elements of the rueda, their manner of execution, the way they link together, and a willingness to experiment creatively (and safely) can engender the creation of a vast number of combinations, rendering dancers less dependent upon move-based learning.

Prime requisites and advantages

A naturalised sense of salsa timing, being able to walk (which most of us can do, and in any direction) to time, and being observant of the partner with respect to sight and touch are the main requirements for executing the rueda style.

It makes students independent from move-based learning, builds on their sense of partner empathy, and portrays the lady's role as an active one; facets commonly neglected in the current teaching of salsa.

Level Three

Primary objective

Students:

i.   Promote the awareness of different kinds of salsa.

ii.   Importance of giving or being receptive to a lead, and how it can be used to distinguish between the different kinds of salsa.

Teachers:

iii.   Accurate footwork and better balance.

iv.   Quicker movement: feet and co-ordination with limbs.

v.   Clustering by variation-based teaching.

vi.   Greater dance strength.

Illustrated by

More dance vocabulary:

1.   British: cuddlehold, breakthrough, *etc.* variations.

2.   American: cross-body lead, single right turn, simple turn combinations.

3.   Rueda: elements and formation of turn combinations.

Conversion between linear and circular movements.

Comments

Highlight the major difference between leads for circular motion in the British system (with preparatory backward lead/move), and Rueda (with forward lead). The cross-body lead provides the key to American combinations.

Secondary objectives

i.   Teaching the lead how to make life easier for the lady *e.g.* by moving against the turn, releasing the tightness of the turn, position body out of the way, being early out of his spin *etc.*

ii.   Understanding how much space a move takes up, and how to change it.

Teaching Focus	Practice	Purpose / Teaching Point(s)
British foundation figures. These figures are the simplest in terms of arm co-ordination. They are also common elements of more complex turn combinations. **Note:** unless mentioned otherwise, information is presented from lead's point of view. **Note:** "breakthrough" refers to the release of the lead's right hand allowing the lady to break through the hold. For convenience, moves 2 & 3 will be called lady's breakthrough and lead's breakthrough respectively.	**1. Arm wrap into cuddle hold, right.** Begins with two-handed hold: lady's right hand in lead's left. Lead turns lady using anti-clockwise halo, while holding onto lady's left hand with right at waist level. Lady's footwork is back-pivot-back, starting right leg, lead does a cross basic to the left around the lady.	There are two ways of entering this figure: from linear motion *e.g.* level one basics or straight line walks, or when circular motion has already been established. The lead that the lady should feel will reflect this. From lady's point of view: **Linear.** lady should be led to step backward (R) on count one, forward (L) pivoting to left on count two, and backwards (R) on count three. The amount of pivot, and the size of the last backward step is determined by lead.
	2. Arm wrap into cuddle hold, right, with lady's breakthrough. As (1) above, but lead releases the lady's left hand. Right hand continues to maintain contact with lady across the small of the back, to the left elbow and down the forearm to the left hand to re-establish two-handed hold.	**Circular (rueda).** lady should be led to execute three forward turning steps to the left. The amount and speed of turn, and size of steps depend on lead. Hence from the linear, the lead is backward on the first count. From the circular the lead is forward. Teach the arms first, then the legs, then put them both together.
	3. Arm wrap into cuddle hold, left, with lead's breakthrough. As (2) above, but lead adopt lady's movements and lady adopt lead's.	The lady's breakthrough and lead's breakthrough are commonly danced alternating with each other.
Hint: when in doubt, *i.e.* when you've lost it, resume the start and pick things up again.	**4. Man's (lead's) turn.** As lead's breakthrough, but from single-hand hold: lady's right in lead's left. Leads just have to ensure that their right arm goes over their left arm during the turn to avoid trapping it.	
	5. Figure eight. As (1), except leads lift both hands up to trace the halo.	Leads should keep both hands together, and allow the lady's hands to move within the hand hold.

Teaching Focus	Practice	Purpose / Teaching Point(s)
North American foundation figures. **Note:** the CBL follows salsa phrasing, being danced over two bars. Therefore counts 1-8 will be used. Counts 4 & 8 are held or highlighted.	**Basic cross-body lead (CBL).** **First bar** (leg,count): **Lady.** back (R,1), forward (L,2), forward (R,3). **Lead.** forward (L,1), back (R,2), turning body to left, side or cross behind (L,3). At the end of the first bar, lady should be in front of and facing towards lead's left. **Second bar** (leg,count): **Lady.** forward (L,5) turning body to left, side (R,6), back (L,7). **Lead.** step-in-place with complete transfer of weight (R,5) turning left to face partner, forward (L,6), forward (R,7). At the end of the second bar, both partners should end up facing each other. Normally a close hold is used at the start, but other holds can also apply.	The CBL can indicate that a North American turn combination could be coming up. Lady tends to move in a straight line, therefore lead should use steps on counts 2 & 3 to move the body out of the way. This is usually achieved by leads executing a diagonally backward step (R,2). Lady: first four steps done in-line (counts 1,2,3,5). Pivot to left on ball of left foot, reaching around with the inside edge of the right foot and transferring weight onto it (count 6). Lead: ensure proper weight transfer to the respective legs on counts 3 & 4. *Imagine the body of the lead as a door with the hinge on the lead's right. The CBL opens the door for the lady,*
Note: when one partner executes a SRT, the other partner does a back basic with the right leg.	**Single right turn (SRT).** (Derived from the latin basic.) step forward (L,1) then turn body to face right (90°). Turn right again (90°) and step forward (R,2), Pivot to right (180°) on ball of right foot, closing and transferring weight at the end (L,3).	Allow the feet to assist the turns by: keeping knees relaxed, heels off the floor, and pivoting/moving on the balls of the feet. Heels lower at the end of count 3. The right foot should occupy the same spot of floor throughout the turn.
	Alternate turn combination. a.k.a. she turns-he turns-she turns. Lady executes a SRT, then lead executes SRT, then lady SRT. Lead swaps lady's hand behind lead's back.	If a simple SRT (or alternate turn combination) is to be used after a CBL, then: the CBL should end in single-hand hold, lady's right in lead's left hand, with enough partner distance to accommodate turns.

Level Four

You can expect students to be capable of dancing in partnerships, with rudimentary mastery of timing, partnership skills, and possess a small vocabulary of essential moves.

Objectives

Most inexperienced students equate an extensive dance vocabulary with mastery. A good collection of moves "made earlier" is a useful tool in providing a context for demonstrating principles of skills. However, this perception can be detrimental in the long-term, since most people, in concentrating on acquiring more moves, fail to revisit and revise their basic steps and techniques regularly.

The on-going challenge that exists for all teachers, is in increasing the skill levels of the students whilst preserving or augmenting motivation; building a strong basic foundation, simultaneously catering to the wants of the students.

There are so many aspects to work on, and all of them interrelated, that the real task lies in choosing the techniques/practices that illustrate them most appropriately and implementing them in a lesson.

Sample aspects

Observation
leading / following
floorcraft

Co-ordination
different timings of arms and legs
splitting movements of arms and legs

Different action
individual styles: smooth, contrast
body part isolation
styles of dance movement: Colombian, Cuban

Timing
syncopation
targeting sections of a beat
ballroom two, street two

Footwork / balance / responsiveness
speed of movement
accuracy of foot/body placement
understanding the use of energy
both partners ready on third beat

Perception
modularity
variation clustering
target-driven dancing

Creativity

Safety and protection
your feet
your partner

Musicality
your dance space

Teaching Focus	Practice	Purpose / Teaching Point(s)
Solo techniques.	**Forward steps with heel leads then contrasting with toe leads.**	Effects on step size and safety. *Toe leads safer on slippery floors.*
	Backward steps, all toe leads.	Safety on the dance floor *Place the toe down then control the descent of the heel.*
Partner techniques.	**Changing hands during turns.** Also includes releasing hands and taking them up with the same or different hand.	Encourages arm movement independent of leg movement. Particularly useful in combinations where hands are changed frequently, and in rueda.
	Dancing with partner without sight (basics, turn combinations).	Develops other senses of observation. Frees up the eyes for floorcraft.
Note: Dancing the merengue is a great way of practising hand changes.	**All basic steps, partnered. flat palm to flat palm,** contact maintained at all times. Turning basic with both palms in contact with partner is great for lower body isolation.	Limits partner distance, encourages individual movement. *Palms at shoulder height, elbows bent and low.*
Turn technique. **Note:** the leg bearing all the weight is the supporting leg, and the other one is the picture leg.	**Turns from start position.** If weight is on right leg, then begin practise by turning in the same direction (*i.e.* right). Begin by executing quarter turns. At the end of the turn, picture foot should be drawn in ankle to ankle, digging the side of ball into the floor as a brake. Repeat, increasing the degree of turn as required, in the reverse direction, and on the other leg.	Supporting leg: weight forward on ball (not on toes) knee relaxed (not locked). *Raise the heel with the knee* Picture leg: extended to side, fully relaxed (knee and ankle would "droop"), floor contact only with the outside edge of ball. *Spin flat, hips kept at the same level* Flexing the knee provides two points for the control of weight: the knee and hip, as compared to locking the knee which provides only one: the hip.
Leading turns.	**The HALO method.** Hand hold and method of leading a turn or series of spins. Ideally used in conjunction with the other turn techniques.	Lead's hand(s) at crown height in front of lady's forehead. Imagine the lady wearing a halo, and trace the hands along it. Lady forms little hooks with her fingers, lead uses two fingers (like a pistol) fitting into the hooks, to turn the lady.

Teaching techniques

Cueing your students

When conducting parts of the lesson to time, you will need to provide your students with notice of changes **before** they are due to occur. This is often called **cueing** (and we're not talking snooker here). Two main instances when you would need to cue your students are:

i. **Counting them into time at the start**.
    The word "AND" is extremely powerful *e.g.* counting them in after four:
    1, 2, 3, AND (where the AND falls on beat four).
    "BEGIN" is another good one *e.g. 1, 2, BE-, GIN* (where the first syllable occurs on beat three and the second syllable on beat four).

ii. **Before an action is to take place**.
    Let us use switching between the basics in level one as an example: if you were about to change from the back basic to turning basic, you would need to warn your students at least one bar before the change was due; you would still be doing the back basic when saying "turning basic" (you would sometimes give more than one bar warning if you thought the class was having difficulty). Another example would be if you were teaching a turn combination. You would need to cue specific actions such as raising the hands, changing the holds, directions of movement *etc.* before they were due to occur.
    The time interval between the cues and their respective actions should be kept consistent; making it easier for the students to adapt to it. You can also develop phrases whose syllables coincide with the beats of the music (such as the "begin" cue).

Demonstrating a reflected view

When facing your students, your right is their left and *vice versa*. In the interests of clarity, you may have to demonstrate a move by travelling in the opposite direction *e.g.* in a side-to-side to the left, you would move to your right because that would be to the left from the student's point of view. A good teaching point for you is *to pretend that you are the student's image in a mirror*.

Hip-centric teaching

Much early dance instruction presents information by telling the student how to move their feet. There is a drawback to this method because it fails to encourage weight transfer actively. Using the **hip-centric** method the teacher gets the student to focus on moving his/her hip to the required location. It works on the premise that the leg connected to the

hip will travel and end up underneath the hip automatically (if it didn't the student would fall over). A step taken with the hip results in natural weight transfer. For the method to be successful, positive reinforcement as a persistent reminder is necessary. Hip-centric teaching is initially **more demanding on the teacher**, but often results in greater success with respect to encouraging commitment of weight.

The real world

Structured salsa lessons are supposed to make it easier to learn the dance, but it does not mean that what is learnt in the classroom transfers directly onto a club floor. Many dancers acknowledge the difference between a practice floor and a dance floor.

To handle the "unsafe" environment of a club, your students should be **observant**, capable of altering their **orientation** and **amount of space** they occupy by understanding the points of flexibility in their dance vocabulary. **Points of flexibility** refer to the places in a move or combination which can be altered to accommodate different circumstances. Exposure to a **spectrum of music** varying in tempo and clarity of percussion also help.

Being able to bridge the gap between these two environments is the difference between teaching salsa for academic purposes or for its use in the real world.

Musicography

1. Strong chachachá rhythm.
   Slower: *Mi media mitad* by Rey Ruiz.
   Quicker: *Soñando* by Erick.

2. 2-3 clave.
   Played: *Que mala corriente* by Son 14.
   Not played: *Pegaso* by The Latin Brothers.

3. 3-2 clave.
   Played: *Plaza Herrera* by Rubén Blades.
   Not played: *Amor mío* by Orquesta Pasión Juvenil.

4. Changing clave.
   Cali Pachanguero by Grupo Niche.
   Aïcha (Wolof version) by Africando.

5. Vocal improvising technique called **soneo**.
   Son Matamoros by Celia Cruz.

6. **Son** without brass.
   Chan chan by Compay Segundo.

7. **Charanga:** line-ups with flute and violin.
   Quien sabe sabe by Orquesta Aragón.

8. Pop and rap influences.
   Sueltame by Dark Latin Groove.

9. Accidental salsa.
   Nouveau Flamenco: *Mario Takes A Walk* by Jesse Cook.
   Ambient Music: *Thunder Cloud Mountain* by Raindance.
   Irish: *The Bonny Swans* by Loreena McKennitt.
   African: *Epuguzu* by Pierre Akendengue.