

Research Proposal

The “Problem” and its Setting or Context

Country line dancing is a type of group dance of the country-western dance genre. It consists of participants standing side by side in several rows, or lines, and completing a sequence of dance steps all at the same time. There are many different types of line dances and country line dancing has been a popular form of social country dancing for many years now.

Traditionally, one who desires to learn how to country line dance attends an instructor led group class. However, with the influx of “how-to” videos on YouTube and other online resources, people are foregoing traditional methods as they turn to the Web to learn new skills. One is left to wonder, then, which method (self paced online video tutorials or facilitated group instruction) is more effective in teaching line dancing and results in better retention and performance of the dance steps learned.

Clearly, a case can be made for each of the two methods. Self-directed techniques are built around the assumption that learners are unique; they are more engaged in the instructional experience when they can control their own learning (pacing, for example). On the other hand, traditional classes offer opportunities for social interaction, feedback and support that online learning cannot easily “match.” In essence, a group setting features exposure to richer content as learners watch others perform.

Our study, then, allows us to more rigorously explore the “online” vs. “facilitated” dynamic. Through a convenience sample we will obtain participants (who will range in age from 21 to 35) who will be organized into two groups. One group will participate in a facilitated group lesson of a line dance, and the other group will learn the same dance via an online video tutorial. Most participants have some experience in other forms of dancing, however their skill level in country line dancing range from no experience to beginner.

Results of the study have both theoretical and practical application. Practically speaking, dance instructors want to meet their clients’ preferences—which increasingly mean access to

the resources they can access at their leisure. Understanding how different training modalities affect actual performance and performance readiness/confidence can inform how instructors market/showcase their services.

Proposed Review of the Literature

The study is predicated on a review of the literature. Specifically, the team will conceptually explore different learning modalities relative to dance instruction and how others have investigated them. In particular, we are concerned with how self-directed video instruction compares with traditional instructor-led group classes.

We have tentatively identified three areas of special interest that will be researched:

- What are the characteristics of the various modalities that most affect performance?
- How is dance performance measured?
- In the absence of data relating directly to dance performance, is there another similar physical activity where performance can be measured and where the measurement technique can be extended to include dance?

Methodology

We plan to compare the results of two experimental groups, each with at least ten subjects: 1) Self-directed on-line dancing tutorial group; and 2) Instructor-facilitated dance class group. The independent variable will be the method of instruction and the dependent variable will be the dance performance. Days before the instruction, subjects will be asked to answer a knowledge assessment survey. After the instruction, they will be required to complete another questionnaire on their likes/ dislikes of the instructional methods.

The pre-assessment will help us match pairs of subjects as closely as possible with regards to their readiness to learn the dance steps. We will randomly assign subjects to either of the two treatment groups from the matched pairs.

The facilitated group lesson will take place at a local country western establishment that offers free line dance lessons. Those viewing the online tutorial will be individually accessing

the video on a computer in a yet to be determined location. Subjects in both groups will be instructed to take the lesson and practice the steps by following along. Other variables that will remain constant in both groups are lesson content (nine-step line dance) and time (45 minutes).

With the permission of all participants, their performance will be video recorded before, (during,) and after the lesson. The experimenters will rate the performance of the dance steps of each subject by watching the recordings.

We plan to develop a criterion-based instrument that objectively measures each participant’s performance. Dimensions may include amount of steps remembered accurately, right sequence, amount of deviations, and smoothness of transitions and full body movement. An experimenter’s expertise in this area will guide the development of the instruments.

Time-frame

ID	Task Name	Start	Finish	Feb 2010		Mar 2010			Apr 2010			May 2010						
				14/2	21/2	28/2	7/3	14/3	21/3	28/3	4/4	11/4	18/4	25/4	2/5	9/5	16/5	
1	Revise research proposal	2/12/2010	2/19/2010	■														
2	Complete literature review(Feb 26)	2/12/2010	2/26/2010	■														
3	Recruit study participants	2/26/2010	3/4/2010	■														
4	Prepare and test assessment instruments (March 8)	2/26/2010	3/8/2010	■														
5	Select and prepare instructional events & protocol	2/26/2010	3/15/2010	■														
6	Test technology (video and PCs)	3/16/2010	3/18/2010			■												
7	Conduct Group A (individual) sessions	3/11/2010	4/1/2010			■												
8	Conduct Group B (group) session	3/23/2010	3/23/2010			■												
9	Complete performance assessments	3/30/2010	4/16/2010			■												
10	Collect, analyze and interpret data	4/16/2010	4/23/2010						■									
11	Write preliminary conclusions & report (April 30)	4/23/2010	4/30/2010						■									
12	Complete final study report (May 17)	4/30/2010	5/17/2010									■						

Contextual Factors

Potential limitations for this research project include:

- Limited access to subjects - Ideally a study like this would include a sample size of at least 50 to be able to obtain more generalized data. Conducting tests of that size is just not feasible for our time frame and resources.
- Diminished capacity or mortality - Subjects' performance can be impacted by a number of external factors that are difficult to control such as general physical state, fatigue, recent sprains. An unforeseen personal circumstance can cause a participant to miss the class or to perform below par.
- Environmental factors - In the on-line environment there can be an equipment failure or loss of video quality causing irregularity in the lesson sequence. In the group lesson setting problems with lighting, distracting club noise, music and others' attitudes could contaminate results too. Because of this, location could be a limitation.

Research Qualifications

Robert Courtney is a retired aerospace engineer. He has earned a BS in Physics and an MBA and holds a teaching certificate in physics and geosciences. He is currently a graduate student at SDSU.

Aurora Velasco is an Equipment Systems Specialist at San Diego State University and in this role provides training to faculty on computer equipment usage. Aurora also has intermediate to advanced skills in many areas of dance, including country line dancing, and as such will be able to judge performance in these areas.

Millie Vilaplana has been a school psychologist for K-12 students in Mexico City, as well as human resources and development manager for a variety of manufacturing and high tech firms. Millie obtained the CPLP (Certified Professional in Learning and Performance) designation from ASTD-CI for 2008-2011; her area of expertise was measurement and evaluation.