Learning dance through different modalities: visual vs. verbal models

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Key words: Dance, motor learning, visual observation, verbal instruction

Introduction

Observational learning is viewed as the major mode of movement learning (Hodges, Williams, Hayes & Breslin, 2007) and is therefore crucial in dance training. Evidence from practice suggests that explicit verbal instructions and movement descriptions play a major role in movement learning by supporting the understanding, internalising and simulating dance phrases. In this study, we investigate dancers' learning of movement phrases based on the exclusive and complementary use of visual demonstration and verbal instruction.

Methods

Eighteen students (age 18.4±1.0, 11 female) learned two dance phrases of similar length and complexity, one via visual observation of a video, the other one via a recorded verbal description. Each phrase was presented five times in one modality (visual or verbal). After short practice, the participant's performance of the phrase was recorded on video. Subsequently, the participant was presented two trials of the complementary modality, and the performance was recorded again. Two independent teachers rated the recorded performance trials (visual, visual+verbal, verbal, verbal+visual). Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were used to compare the averaged teacher ratings for the different demonstration conditions (visual, visual+verbal, verbal, verbal+visual) within each criterion (*accordance with the model*, *performance quality*) and for the two criteria within each demonstration condition.

Results

After learning the phrase from only one modality (visual or verbal), ratings of *performance quality* were significantly better than ratings for *accordance with the model* (visual: $Z=-3.53$, $p<.01$; verbal: $Z=-2.99$, $p<.001$). For *accordance with the model*, performance after learning only from verbal description was rated weaker than performance after all other learning conditions (verbal+visual: $Z=-3.72$, $p<.001$; visual: $Z=-3.62$, $p<.001$; visual+verbal: $Z=-3.68$, $p<.001$), whereas for *performance quality*, teacher ratings did not differ.

Discussion

The results corroborate assumptions regarding observational learning of movements in dance, but also suggest dissociation between exact execution of a model phrase and artistic quality of dance in the learning phase. Dancers' questionnaires and retention tests are currently being analysed to complement the findings of this study. We expect that the outcomes will contribute to our understanding of teaching and learning dance using different modes of movement presentation, yielding implications for teaching movement in dance.

Literatur

Hodges, N. J., Williams, A. M., Hayes, S. J., & Breslin, G. (2007). What is modelled during observational learning?. *Journal o Sports Sciences, 25*(5), 531-545.