Analysing a concept as a research practice: Concept analysis, according to Walker and Avant using social dance as an example

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Abstract

Based on a critical reflection using conceptual analysis methods and drawing from the lecture “L’Anàlisi de Concepte, segons Walker & Avant” given as part of a research seminar of the Research Group in Education, Heritage and Intermedia Arts (GREPAI) in November 2023, this method of narrative analysis aims to adopt an exploratory approach to the literature on dance. It was used to analyse the concept of social dance, which is the key part of the researcher’s study, developed within the framework of the interuniversity doctoral programme in Art and Education at the University of Girona. It concludes that concept analysis is a method of practical application that contributes to deepening, innovating, and generating knowledge of dance.
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Keywords
Concept Analysis, Concept, Social Dance, Dance, Research

Resumo
Partindo de uma reflexão crítica através da metodologia de análise conceptual e na sequência da conferência "L’Anàlisi de Concepte, segons Walker & Avant" realizada no âmbito do Seminário de Investigação do Grupo de Investigação em Educação, Património e Artes Intermédias GREPAI em Novembro 2023, este método de análise narrativa é apresentado com o objetivo de expor uma abordagem exploratória da literatura em torno da dança. Este método foi aplicado para analisar o conceito de Dança Social. A Dança Social é a peça-chave do estudo da investigadora que está a ser desenvolvido no âmbito do Doutoramento Interuniversitário em Arte e Educação da Universidade de Girona. Conclui-se que a análise de conceito é um método de aplicação prática que contribui para aprofundar, inovar e gerar conhecimento em torno da dança.

Palavras-chave
Análise de Conceito, Conceito, Dança Social, Dança, Pesquisa

Introduction
Article generated from the lecture “L’Anàlisi de Concepte, segons Walker & Avant” given on 16 November 2023 in the Sala de Graus of the Faculty of Education and Psychology of University of Girona in a research seminar of the Research Group in Education, Heritage and Intermediate Arts (GREPAI).

When embarking on research, one crucial aspect is the literature search: testing the theories that support it, creating a theoretical framework, and delving into the literature that aids in understanding the search underway. Exploring the literature, researchers connect concepts, identify ideas related to theirs, and examine ideas that may be completely different to confirm the hypotheses we formulate at the beginning of their research. Initially, we draw from assorted studies, analysing everything before developing our research idea, including any ongoing investigations on the preconceived idea we want to develop. It is also important to seek narrative review to accompany the inquiry process, and to understand the types of methodologies that can be applied: whether instruments are needed to validate our study, whether the idea needs to be tested on a sample group or, conversely, whether our sample needs to be compared with a control group, etc.

The research evolves as we refine our inquiries. It may involve a qualitative method, a quantitative method, or a mixed method. In the case of dance, there are studies reflecting all three of these. Depending on the focus and objective, we explore one or more methods. Analysis is useful when concepts are already present in the literature (Walker & Avant, 2011), but seek more comprehensive knowledge, thus requiring a separate examination of all the information to consolidate and enhance their understanding of that specific concept.

In this particular case, the concept of Social Dance is analysed through the concept analysis of Walker and Avant. It is decided to use this method after searching different ones such as scoping review, systematic review, overview of reviews, rapid reviews, but concept analysis has been better suited to the type of analysis that was intended to be carried out with the social dance. However, working with this method has been complex on many occasions, but at the same time this complexity has meant that the understanding and re-
liability of the method have been key to arriving at its evidence.

This article does not detail the specifics of Social Dance research: the analyses, the results, or the conclusions. All this more analytical part will appear shortly in an international article in the Kepes Magazine. Instead, it examines the methodology used to work with a concept closely related to dance, why concept analysis according to Walker and Avant was chosen, how this proposed method was implemented, and why it is considered important to continue developing it to formulate theory and clarify concepts surrounding dance.

Methods for Discerning Narrative, Literature

Systematic reviews, scoping reviews, and narrative reviews are different approaches to or types of literature review. Narrative review has an exclusively qualitative focus. According to Ruiz-Pérez and Petrova (2019), either narrative review or scoping review can be used to analyse concepts. The latter is more complex; for example, it is advisable to register it in advance and undergo validation by peers, which poses challenges in terms of resource allocation. However, both narrative and scoping reviews have implications for future research.

Grant and Booth (2009) identified 14 different types of literature reviews, all following the SALSA (Search, Appraisal, Synthesis, and Analysis) analytical framework. They include critical review, literature review, mapping review/systematic review, meta-analysis, mixed studies review/mixed methods review, overview, qualitative systematic review/qualitative evidence synthesis, rapid review, scoping review, state-of-the-art review, systematic review, systematized review, and umbrella review (Grant & Booth, 2009, pp. 94-95).

Goris (2015) provides a classification of reviews based on the categorizations of Grant and Booth (2009), with two additional classifications: Cronin’s (2008) – traditional or narrative review, systematic literature review, meta-analysis, and meta-synthesis – and Whitemore’s et al. (2014) – integrative review, systematic review, meta-analysis, qualitative synthesis, scoping review, umbrella review, mixed methods review and RE-AIM review (with five indicators: reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation, and maintenance). The result is a classification of the types of reviews into “narrativa, integradora, panorámica, análisis conceptual, sistemática, sistematizada, revisión de revisiones o paraguas, realista” (Goris, 2015, p. 7).

While conducting my doctoral research in the Interuniversity Doctoral Programme in Arts and Education at the University of Girona, questions arose about how to obtain information about the concept of Social Dance and the two terms that comprise it. What exactly does Social Dance mean? Can it even be defined? “Las palabaras construyen la realidad y una pregunta u otra conduce a realidades diferentes. Analizar el contenido de los conceptos permite evaluar los prejuicios detrás de ellos” (Alaminos & Alaminos-Fernández, 2021, p. 51).

This led to a multitude of issues, including the need for a narrative or literary search, the reasons behind it, and its importance and purpose. Subsequent questions focused on whether it was necessary to analyse the concept and what concept analysis entails. In other words, what is concept analysis, and can it be used in the type of literature analysis I am conducting, or is there a more effective method?

According to Hernández-Sampieri (2018), literature is useful for detecting fundamental concepts and providing ideas about methodological approaches to analyse, read, and interpret results. These approaches are based on previous studies, detection processes, data collection, etc. This is how this investigation begins. Additionally, our must adhere to the ethical principle of non-subjectivity when analysing data, remembering that literature review is always interpretative because researchers analyse and evaluate that data. As explained by Sierra-Bravo (2001), the objectivity of researchers within subjectivity comes into play when they are involved in the process.

Narrative analysis expands the scope of the study while leading us to avoid desviaciones (Hernández-Sampieri, 2018, p. 71) from the initial premise of our
Research but redirecting us to delve further. To achieve our purpose, we can use original articles (primary sources) as well as meta-analysis articles (secondary sources). We can search, always with scientific rigour, in databases, virtual libraries, etc. Subsequently, we conduct an initial analytical review of the literature through using both inclusion and exclusion selection criteria. From this point, the information is classified by research type according to the analysis method of the study. In Social Dance, the concept or case presented in this article, the methodology is clearly qualitative, with the literature presented in a flowchart derived from the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Page et al., 2021). The flowchart reflects how the concepts of Dance and Social encompass numerous articles in the literature, and after applying selection criteria, such as including articles indexed and open-access articles, and eliminating duplicates, personal dissertations, etc., a smaller number of articles remain where the concept of Social Dance is incorporated, and concept analysis starts. In this case, more than a million articles were found in search engines, electronic libraries, and databases. After applying the selection criteria, the sample was reduced to 39 articles. The sample of articles where social dance is discussed is spread across different countries: 20.52% from the US; followed by the UK and Brazil with 12.83% of articles from each country; 7.69% both Australia and Spain; 5.13% Germany, Argentina, Canada, and Colombia; and with 2.56% Mexico, Ghana, Portugal, Finland, Greece, Serbia, and Romania.

Methods of Concept Analysis

Before delving into concept analysis, it is necessary to understand that "Cuando se inicia un análisis conceptual se debe tener en cuenta que el concepto que se analiza debe ser relevante para la práctica y la disciplina" (Goris, 2015, p. 9). Additionally, it is important to know why concepts should be analysed. The answer clarifies that which leads to imprecision (Weathers, McCarthy & Coffey, 2016) and gets to the essence of what we are defining, the idea we are contemplating to give meaning to the terms we use, ultimately generating a specific concept. Clarifying the scope of concepts also promotes understanding, in order to recognize and define them (McEwen & Wills, 2018), creating a foundation for the current moment and for future definitions, which can include operational definitions of the concept itself.

"El lenguaje es complejo y contextual y el significado de las palabras va cambiando de forma continua en función del contexto o de los grupos profesionales que lo utilizan" (Goris, 2015, p. 9). Therefore, concepts evolve, and concept analysis identifies fundamental meanings and correct concepts, guiding and facilitating the research process (Cianelli & Ferrer, 2001).

According to Rodríguez-Acelas and Cañón-Montañez (2015, p. 880): "El análisis conceptual es una etapa relevante... No requiere la participación de pacientes, ni otros profesionales, sino la pericia, conocimientos y juicio del investigador para llevar a cabo su implementación bajo un estricto rigor metodológico".

Concept analysis focuses on elucidating the meaning of the terms within concepts. What is explained by a concept? The concept is defined by its use, representation and relationship with other concepts, whether in research, theory development or practice. In the context of studying and analysing literature, concept analysis allows us to formulate the meaning of the concept related to the field in which it operates and the peculiarities it presents.

Evolution from Linguistic Analysis to Wilsonian Analysis, Conceptual Analysis, and Concept Analysis

The conceptual analysis used in this article refers to the concept analysis developed by Walker and Avant between 1983 and 1988. Regarding the authorship history and background, John Wilson developed a process in 1963 to concretize concepts, improving communication and the understanding of scientific words (McEwen & Wills, 2018). According to Chilean sociologist Carlos Ruiz (2023), Wilson developed this method using the philosophy of analysis developed by Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose research was conducted between 1930 and 1950: "Muchos han reconocido que
Analysing a concept as a research practice: Concept analysis, according to Walker and Avant using social dance as an example

Under the umbrella of concept analysis, various authors have developed similar methods, including “Walker and Avant (2011), Morse (1995), Rodgers (2000), Schwartz-Barcott and Kim (2000), Meleis (2012), Penrod and Hupcey (2005)” as cited in McEwen & Wills, 2018, p. 88). The Walker and Avant concept analysis method provides a way to generate theory directly linked to the concept. With this method, knowledge is forged, contents are refined, and research is encouraged (Rodrigo-Pedrosa & Fontanella, 2021).

But what does each new author contribute to concept analysis? Each of them brings improvements, adding changes while reinforcing previous procedures. During the research on the concept analysis of Social Dance, the concept analysis was mainly identified primarily in the field of nursing. Very few references were found in the social field, and none in the artistic field.

Cianelli and Ferrer (2001), refers to the concept analysis as the Wilsonian method, after the social scientist who developed it. They categorize other authors based on the stages of method development and the new intentions each one brings. In this way, they present the following overview: Wilson’s method consists of 11 stages and provides the framework for concept analysis; Walker and Avant’s method has eight stages and includes the critical attributes of a concept; Rodgers’ evolutionary method consists of five stages and identifies concepts as “contextual, dynamic, and modifiable”, according to their use and application; the theoretical-causal validity method includes six stages and determines causality in the application of the concept; the simultaneous concept analysis method consists of eight stages and analyses more than one variable; Schwartz-Barcott and Kim’s hybrid concept analysis model, also called concept development or concept development and analysis, contains three stages that link theoretical analysis and empirical observation; Chinn and Kramer’s method consists of five stages and produces tentative definitions to verify the existence of a concept in concrete practice.

Algunos de los métodos son más conocidos y utilizados en la práctica, como es el caso del Método de Walker & Avant que a su vez hace parte de una de las etapas del Método de Análisis Simultaneo de Conceptos, recientemente otro de los métodos que ha tenido acogida es el Método Evolucionario de Rodgers. Con todo, estas metodologías son muy parecidas y con una finalidad en común, encontrar los atributos, consecuentes y antecedentes, en ese sentido, los investigadores se apoyan en la revisión integrativa de la literatura, su propósito es el establecimiento de criterios bien definidos sobre la recolección de datos, análisis y presentación de los resultados, que permita sintetizar el conocimiento sobre determinado tema. (Rodríguez-Acelas & Cañón-Montañez, 2015, p. 880)

To conclude this section on the evolution from Wilsonian analysis to conceptual analysis and concept analysis, it is important to note that, according to Rodríguez-Acelas and Cañón-Montañez (2015), there is a series of steps that are always followed regardless of the type of concept analysis used. These steps can be broken down as follows: pose an initial question; predefine the criteria for selecting the documentation to be analysed; ensure the representativeness of all selected material; conduct an in-depth analysis of all the material; understand how to interpret the result of the analysis; transparently communicate the interpretation of those results.

Concept Analysis Method According to Walker and Avant

The concept analysis method according to Walker and Avant is based on a structure that is easily applicable (Cianelli & Ferrer, 2001). This structure consists of eight phases or stages: 1. Select the concept to analyse; 2. Determine the objectives or purposes of the analysis; 3. Identify the uses of the concept; 4. Determine the attributes that define the concept; 5. Identify a model case; 6. Identify additional cases: borderline
In these stages, three key terms are worth highlighting: the concept itself and the uses and attributes of the concept. Alvarez and Martínez-Olmo (2014) explains concepts that are rational constructs manifested in such a way that they explain and interpret what happens or is exposed: "(...) para que sean científicos, debe existir acuerdo básico acerca de lo que designan, estar definidos con precisión y pertenecer a alguna teoría que, como contexto denotativo, orienta semánticamente su significado y lo hace relevante (Ander-Egg, 1980)" (Alvarez & Martínez-Olmo, 2014, p. 5). As Velarde-Mayol (1993) emphasizes in his study on the concept through the work of Saint Thomas Aquinas, "el concepto no es un por lo cual se ve la cosa, sino un en el cual se la ve" (Velarde-Mayol, 1993, p. 260). This statement is closely linked to the use and attribute of the concept, two of the key terms in conceptual analysis. The use is defined as the tangible and intangible space where the concept is applied, ranging from the type of collective or group to which it is directed to the type of physical space where the concept occurs. The attribute is defined as the characteristics that the concept has, features that make it unique and distinct from other concepts, which is why one concept can never be confused with another. Among the attributes, and within the Walker and Avant concept analysis, critical attributes are highlighted – those without which the concept would not exist. Therefore, optimizing and referring to Velarde-Mayol’s study (1993), the concept is not what is carried out but where and with whom it is carried out.

Walker and Avant in Rew et al. (2005), in response to letters to the editor, explain that “no strategy is going to supply all the needs for theory construction that may arise. (...) The theorist needs to determine what the current status of the knowledge base is, before selecting a strategy for use” (Rew et al., 2005, p. 11). For these researchers, conducting the analysis of a concept, in their field of nursing, is the procedure to investigate, responding to a significant objective of contributing to disciplinary growth. This argument is applicable to any speciality, and here it is given as an example for research on dance.

Explanation of the Eight Steps of walker and Avant’s Concept Analysis using social dance as an example

1. Select the concept to analyse (Walker & Avant, 2011).

In agreement with Cianelli and Ferrer (2001), this stage is the most decisive as it marks the beginning of the development of concept analysis. It must be a concept useful in the field in which it is developed, and it can originate from theory or practice (Sánchez & Chepo, 2022; Walker & Avant, 2011). In the case of the concept of Social Dance, after a thorough examination of the articles, a series of defining items were determined based on the analysis of the definitions found in each of the selected articles. Some definitions are cited as examples:

A differentiation is needed between the effects on the individual when the activity of “dancing” is enjoyed as a dancer within different dance domains (e.g., professional/“high-art” type of dance, erotic dance, religious dance, club dancing, Dance Movement Therapy (DMT), and what is commonly known as hobby, recreational or social dance. (Christensen et al., 2021, p. 1)

(...) se propone una expansión del concepto de danza que incluye la estética de la discapacidad y se plantea la percepción de las diferencias asociadas con las discapacidades como fuentes potenciales de material artístico. (Brozas-Polo, 2013, pp. 36-37)

According to paper, elaborated by Sanderson (2007) on the arts, social inclusion and social class, places the results of an empirical research study (when considering the case of dance) on the relationship between the social class factor and young people’s perceptions of dance within the context of initiatives of British gov-
2. Determine the objectives or purposes of the analysis (Walker & Avant, 2011).

According to Céspedes (2021), the purpose of the analysis is to understand the concept through narrative evaluation of the literature. From there, the goal is to deepen and broaden its understanding, supported by the articles included in the selection, following the criteria of inclusion and exclusion.

3. Identify the uses of the concept (Walker & Avant, 2011).

The use or uses of the concept are related to the context or situation in which they occur. If there were a question regarding the use of the concept, the inquiry would be: how is it used? In line with Cianelli and Ferrer (2001), the uses of the concept are not limited only to the area under investigation, but should also include other areas. For example, in the research around the concept of Social Dance, the inquiry was not solely focused on the social or artistic aspects; it also extended the search to contexts in the medical, educational, recreational areas, etc.: “If it is limited (…), bias is introduced into the understanding of the nature of the concept” (Cianelli & Ferrer, 2001, p. 50). Following this informative line, Alaminos and Alaminos-Fernández (2021) explain that the division between disciplines “is an institutionalized form of knowledge control” (p.17), generating a fragmented and therefore incomplete view, contributing to misinterpretation. Therefore, the broader the scope, the deeper the analysis. In the case of the concept of Social Dance, 19 uses are classified from the in-depth examination of selected articles. These uses are later streamlined into seven categories, directly related to the context of Social Dance. As examples, some uses of the analysed articles are identified in their titles: “Tool and support for socially vulnerable groups” (Iranzo et al., 2022, p. 29); “Support neural mechanisms” (Amro, 2023, p. 1); “Are key features for rehabilitating balance impairments” (Hackney & Bennett, 2014, p. 18); “In Portugal, dance as a curricular component of Physical Education (…) in the direction from subjective to objective (traditional) prioritizing the acquisition of abilities and techniques of forms of dance from the 3rd cycle (social dances, traditional Portuguese dances, aerobics)” (Alves et al., 2017, p. 498).

4. Determine the attributes that define the concept (Walker & Avant, 2011).

This field is one of the most crucial in concept analysis. Attributes are qualities of the concept. These qualities explain why a specific concept exists. In relation to attributes, Walker and Avant identify those that are repeated across various sources and label them as defining attributes. Defining attributes specify the concept. Simultaneously, Walker and Avant designate critical attributes as those that frame the main characteristics of the concept. Without critical attributes, the concept loses its sense of being. Attributes are defined and supported by stages 5 and 6, both the model and additional cases, and they are refined as the analysis process unfolds. In the case of the social dance concept, 17 attributes are classified from the in-depth examination of selected articles. These attributes are subsequently reduced to eight, to streamline their handling, which are directly related to the characteristics of Social Dance. As an example, some attributes of the analysed articles are noted: “actividad ritual” (Oyuela,
Analysing a concept as a research practice: Concept analysis, according to Walker and Avant using social dance as an example

5. Identify a model case (Walker & Avant, 2011).

Simplifying the identification of a model case, this stage essentially states that for the concept to exist, the model case must exhibit all the critical attributes listed in the concept itself. According to Walker and Avant (2011): “it is an efficient strategy for achieving a body of knowledge about a phenomenon.” (p. 106). Regarding the definition of a model case, they explain that the outlined definition may differ from other authors; for example, in 1995 Fawcett identified a model case with a paradigm. With the description provided by Walker and Avant to identify a model case, the model case is a paradigmatic model; hence, it is a complete example. The model case can emerge when the critical attributes of the concept have been identified, or conversely, it can be generated before these critical attributes have been determined, serving as an initiatory moment in the research. This latter scenario usually occurs when a concept is familiar. Using the model case helps in understanding the meaning of the concept.


These additional cases contribute to specifying the components of the concept. Borderline Case: in this scenario, nearly all critical attributes are present, but one or more may be absent (Céspedes, 2021). While this case is inconsistent, it is useful because it helps understand critical attributes and, consequently, the concept (Walker & Avant, 2011). Related Case: this involves considering some critical attributes of the main concept in connected concepts. This case helps in understanding how the studied concept relates to similar concepts (Cianelli & Ferrer, 2001, p. 51). Related cases have different terms, and in research they need to be connected and identified: “It will also help readers determine what the constellation of surrounding concepts looks like” (Walker & Avant, 2011, p. 171). Opposite Case: this type of case does not define the concept being worked on and lacks the critical attributes of the developed concept (Sánchez & Chepo, 2022). According to Walker and Avant (2011) and Cianelli and Ferrer (2001), it aids exploration by reaffirming the concept with critical attributes because the opposite case lacks them and is excluded. Invented Case: according to Walker and Avant (2011), these cases are the furthest from the model case, though not always necessary. If the model case and the concept are adequately resolved, there is no need to generate an invented case. According to Gomes et al. (2019), it helps clarify the critical attributes of the concept. Illegitimate Case: this involves using the concept inappropriately, out of context (Gomes et al., 2019; Walker & Avant, 2011). According to Walker and Avant (2011), like the invented case, this type of case does not always have to be included in the concept analysis, with the difference that, in these cases, the concept is used erroneously.


Both antecedents and consequences are relevant when the concept exists, in other words, when the concept is applied. According to Walker and Avant, antecedents and consequences expose the social contexts where the concept is frequently applied and are useful for refining critical attributes. Antecedents occur before resorting to the concept, before it is posed, and consequences occur as a result of having implemented the concept; they are the outcome, the fruit of the concept.

Antecedents are particularly useful in helping the theorist identify underlying assumptions about the concept being studied. In our attachment example at the end of this chapter, you will see that one of the antecedents is...
Analysing a concept as a research practice: Concept analysis, according to Walker and Avant using social dance as an example

the ability to distinguish between internal and external stimuli. (...) consequences are useful in determining often-neglected ideas, variables, or relationships that may yield fruitful new research directions. (Walker & Avant, 2011, p.174)

To illustrate the concept of Social Dance: we conduct a hypothetical dance session with a group of Alzheimer’s patients. After the session, changes in the mobility of some participants are observed. In our hypothetical case, the antecedent is individuals with Alzheimer’s, the applied concept is Social Dance, and the consequence is the current state of the patients after the application of the Social Dance concept.


This is the final step in the concept analysis. Walker and Avant (2011) note that empirical referents and attributes are often the same, except when dealing with a complex concept that requires empirical referents to measure and identify its characteristics. Empirical referents are also useful for identifying or generating new measurement instruments linked to literature and narrative, in addition to providing observable data. In the case of social dance, the tests applied are generally linked to research from the field of medicine, such as the GDS (Geriatric Depression Scale), MoCA (Montreal Cognitive Assessment), MRI (magnetic resonance imaging), HADS-D (Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale—Depression), HMD (hidden mobility disabilities), and more.

Conclusions

As reported by other authors, concept analysis is a methodology that can be used in different disciplines, including social, anthropological, and artistic fields, not only in nursing where it is widely incorporated. Therefore, when dance takes centre stage in research, concept analysis is applied, among other analyses, to confirm or generate new theories, to clarify or advance the use of concepts, and to confirm or create new measurement tools.

In essence, for dance, and in this specific case, social dance, concept analysis facilitates studies, analyses, and evaluations, providing a collective discourse for theory and promoting progress in the conceptual field where dance is the core of research.

Declaration of Free and Informed Consent

The participants in the study were informed about the objectives, procedures, and publication of the results obtained, and agreed to participate by signing an informed consent form for their involvement.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Authors’ contributions

Conceptualization, M.I.D.; Formal Analysis, M.I.D.; Investigation, M.I.D.; Methodology, M.I.D.; Project administration, M.I.D.; Supervision, M.M.; Validation, M.M.; Visualization, M.M.; Writing – original draft, M.I.D.; and Writing – review & editing, M.I.D.

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