

Guidance Notes on Running a Scottish Country Dance Class

Helpful hints on preparing and running a SCD class

Although thorough preparation and planning form the basis of good teaching, if time is short a detailed review of the dances you plan to teach is a vital minimum requirement.

Keep the class interested and aim for social enjoyment first and perfection later through encouraging a desire to improve.

Never be complacent about your own standard of dancing and teaching, but aim for continuous improvement by watching and listening to others. Remember, even a less experienced teacher or dancer may be able to give you some ideas on a better approach to your work.

In the early stages of teaching it can seem helpful to copy someone else's teaching methods. However it is important to develop your own individual style and allow your own personality to emerge.

Consider all formations from a teaching viewpoint, not just a dancing one. Search constantly for an approach to instruction which is easily understood.

Teach through as many senses as possible e.g. hearing, seeing, feeling the movement etc. In relation to the sense of hearing, your voice should be audible, clear, pleasant and interesting.

It should also be expressive of the movement to be performed. You can coach effectively by using your voice rhythmically as the class walks or dances. Use variations in tone, speed etc.

In relation to the sense of seeing, learners are helped by good demonstration, so spend time deciding where and when to demonstrate and therefore time is saved, interest is maintained and the lesson has better pace.

The feeling of movement is achieved by allowing the class to practise the formations and repeat them in a variety of dances. Remember the aim is not to teach a dance or dances but to teaching dancing. Whether the class remembers a dance is of little importance but it is important that they become familiar with all the formations and movements, as only then will they feel at ease and be able to cope with any dance presented to them.

Be patient and understanding with your class and avoid lengthy explanations. It is better to "show" than to describe. Walk the movement while you talk. Say a little, then allow the class to try, give some more information and retain their current interest. Remember, concentration soon fades when you have been standing for long periods.

Make good use of your music. If you rely on recorded music, time should be spent selecting suitable tunes for step practice and skills exercises. It is also important to spend time listening and comparing alternative recordings for the same dance, in order to choose the one best suited to that particular class. If you are lucky enough to have a musician, make sure he or she knows that he/she is a valuable member of the class. Ask them to talk about

the music being played, about the history, or its relationship to the dance being taught. At the end of the session thank them publicly for their contribution and hard work.

Observation: train your eye to spot faults quickly. This can be achieved by watching people dance, looking for faults and considering how you could coach an improvement. Obviously you need to be discreet and keep those private observations to yourself, unless it's your own class under scrutiny.

Praise is a powerful motivator. Remember to give praise where it is deserved and encouragement when it is required.

Never be afraid to admit you have made a mistake. Ensure that you do not make too many, by preparing your work as thoroughly as possible. If you do make a mistake, learn from it.

You will be an excellent advertisement for Scottish country dancing if your own time-keeping, posture and appearance are always exemplary. However, you will be a truly wonderful ambassador, if, in addition to these virtues you are unfailingly tactful, kind, helpful and good humoured!

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