BASIC TEACHING SKILLS

Elements:
1. The Needs of your Class
2. Dance Analysis
3. Lesson Planning
4. Class Management
5. Use of Voice, particularly in rhythmic counting and coaching
6. How to Re-cap
7. Dance Programmes and MC skills
8. Selection of Music
9. Working with a Musician
10. Warm up and cool down
11. How to break down the basic steps for teaching to beginners
12. Guidance on teaching basic formations
13. How to build up the elements of a dance and put it together
14. Self-Evaluation

Outline of the Elements

1. The Needs of your Class.

Classes vary greatly in nature, age group and skill levels. Often, a class will contain dancers of varying age and experience. Try to assess what their needs are, what level of technical challenge or dance complexity they can cope with and what their physical, social and emotional needs may be so, you can try to vary your lessons within these parameters; a mixture of challenge may be necessary to satisfy everyone. A beginners' class of university students will require a different programme and a different approach from a class of more mature and experienced dancers. Some groups may regard themselves as a social class, but even that provides opportunity for teaching and learning. Consider what your class wants and needs and reflect that in your choice of teaching materials and in your approach to teaching.

2. Dance Analysis

Whichever dances are chosen for a class, dance analysis will clarify many aspects of the lesson planning, such as steps, skills exercises, main formations, tricky transitions, **teaching points** and arrangement of dancers on the floor.

Dance analysis can operate at several levels. At its most rigorous, it will comprise of:

- The number of bars, type of music, time signature and number couples required. (e.g. 32 bar reel (4/4) for 3 couples)
- The different steps used.
- Where any stepping up or down occurs.
- The method of progression.
- Any changes of step within 8 bar phrases.
- Any changes of step between 8 bar phrases, including between ending first time through and starting second time through.
- Any changes of foot for dancing and supporting couples.
- Phrasing of the main formations.
- Any other potential technical difficulties e.g. transition between formations or difficulties in phrasing from a particular position.
- Any notes in the Manual about the dance.

At its most basic level, it is about identifying the places in a dance where mistakes or bad dancing are likely to occur. Once these places have been identified, careful lesson planning and inclusion of relevant teaching points will enable the teacher to pre-empt any confusion.

3. Lesson Planning

Many different templates are available. A variety should be discussed. The most important point is that, whatever the format, the document must be easy for the individual teacher to use and the content must be relevant to the class members being taught.

4. Class Management

Different parts of the lesson will require different arrangements of dancers on the floor. If step practice is the norm, a variety of orientations and groupings add interest to the teaching. During steps and skills, aim to keep as many people moving as possible. For example, two-couple formations should be practised in two-couple sets before moving to 3 couple sets to build the whole dance. During the teaching of dances, the teacher is best placed to encourage mixing, sociability and ensuring no-one is left-out, or dances at the foot of the hall all evening.

5. Use of Voice.

The voice must be clear and audible, which can be difficult in some spaces. Practising voice projection will add to teaching skills.

The voice is particularly important in rhythmic counting, rhythmic coaching and in transmitting pace and enthusiasm. Rhythmic counting is not as hard as it first appears and is a great help to dancers when there is no live music.

6. How to Re-cap

Concise and fluent re-capping, rather than reading the instructions from the book, keeps the pace of the lesson going and is much more readily absorbed by the dancers.

7. Dance Programmes and MC skills

Teachers/leaders of groups may often find themselves creating dance programmes and acting as MC for a ball or social dance. The ability to select a programme, give re-caps, manage a room full of dancers and relate to a band are some of the required skills.

8. Selection of Music

If the original tune for a dance is not available, teachers need to be able to select an appropriate replacement from their CD library. Consideration must be given to the style of the dance and the nature of the original tune. It would be inappropriate to use a slow air for really strong strathspeys, e.g. 'Bonnie Ina Campbell', or 'The Moment of Truth.'

9. Working with a Musician

Many teachers who use recorded music have no experience of working with a musician and have to learn how to cue the music…"Ready…and" and how to use the music more frequently than one can with recorded music. Using only eight bars of music at a time and being able to vary the tempo are some of the other benefits.

10. Warm up and cool down

Teachers at every level need a sound knowledge of the basic principles of warming up and cooling down in order to avoid injury to the dancers. Teachers need to be able to deliver appropriate exercises in correct alignment.

11. How to break down the basic steps for teaching to beginners.

Basic foot positions and rhythmic coaching with suitable words, e.g. 'hop, step, close, step' should be explored for the five main steps.

12. Guidance on teaching basic formations.

Practice in rhythmic coaching with suitable words, which aid the phrasing of the main formations, should be undertaken.

13. How to put the dance together.

The basic concepts of dealing with main formations and tricky transitions first, then "walk and talk" method, building up the dance at a pace appropriate for your particular class.

14. Self Evaluation

Encourage review of each lesson. Four quick questions can identify good points, not so good points and help to set future targets.
- What was good about my lesson?
- What didn't work so well?
- Why didn't it work well?
- What will I do differently next time?