

[serTA Workshop – Sunday 17th March 2024](#)

Keep your class moving with music

[Presenter – Ken Martlew](#)

Rose Kreloff reported: After lunch, the subject of Ken's presentation was "Keep your class moving with music". Ken feels that currently, class warmups are too long, and there is too much talking and walking. He acknowledged that this was a controversial view. He illustrated each element of his talk by dancing and calling himself and asking the class to dance to his called instruction. Ken produced a detailed handout for the presentation which was distributed to the group.

NB serTA held a previous workshop given by a physiotherapist who is also a qualified RSCDS Teacher, Lynda Hughes in March 2022. This included the benefits of and examples for warmups – you may wish to read this report too. It can be found in our website library, below this report.

Below is Ken's handout:

Scottish Country Dance runs on music. The music starts playing, feet start tapping, it's a powerful call to dance.

Historically, SCD usually described as energetic, often wild and furious (cf. Tam o' Shanter)

Things have changed – today

Drop in on Ballet, Yoga, Pilates, Zumba, Gym, classes etc. – all are doing their thing.

Drop in on a typical SCD class – probably all are standing still with teacher talking, or people walking. *They are unlikely to be dancing!*

SCD runs on music, it's not an extra

Musician should be playing, and dancers dancing, most of the time, at least 75%. It is often less than 10%! (*useful time for musician to catch up on emails – but not what he is paid to do!*)

What is going on when we are not dancing?

1. Warm-ups
2. Lots of talking
3. Lots of walking

So, to KEEP DANCING in your class

1. Cut irrelevant items – is your fancy warm-up any better than doing a dance?
2. Don't stand talking - demonstrate, then dance everything possible (easy-dance is fine), *no walking*.
3. Dance *everything*, using music.

If no live music, one can count rhythmically "One and 2 and..." etc to save time,

or call rhythmic mantras

or mixture of both.

Remote control indispensable for recorded music. Several options – another topic!

1. **WARM-UPS** can take up half an hour. May be 40 minutes into lesson before anyone dances. ***How has the RSCDS got locked into this idea that fancy exercises do it any better than dancing? I have found no evidence to support it.***

Facts about warm-ups:

1. Physical performance much better
2. Risk of injury less
3. Sports warm-up should start with gentle version of expected exercise, gradually increase to full workload with a sweat running in half an hour minimum.
4. Swollen ankles common in elderly. It takes at least ½ hour brisk exercise to clear (detectable swelling means already 1 litre of extra fluid in leg; exercise can multiply this by 10, i.e. 20Kg of additional resistance to brisk movement!).

No published formal studies show that fancy warm-ups work any better than dancing (start gently)

From my own experience of many years as a GP / osteopath at dances:

No extra injuries seen at **dances** where no-one warms up

Demonstrations – only time in SCD where full performance is needed straight off – yet proper warm-up rarely happens – the Dem is often after a meal and 2 hours of speeches! Nevertheless, significant injuries rare.

Minus of fancy warm-ups:

1. Often insufficiently warming
2. They can waste a lot of time explaining
3. If you *don't* explain and the movements are unfamiliar, they present serious risk of injury to cold limbs (*the only bad injury I have personally had from SCD was a muscle tear from an unfamiliar warm-up movement – it took a year to recover.*)
4. Walking is NOT working the muscle groups needed for dancing. Hip turnout and dancing with heels off the ground introduces a whole other framework.
5. Elderly need time to relieve swollen feet – ½ hour of increasingly vigorous exercise needed. Easy dance does this, fancy warm-ups barely touch it.
6. A Pilates class may be good for general fitness, but not relevant to SCD, and much better/safer with a Pilates-trained teacher
7. **Visual and muscle memory is of walking not dancing!** – walking leads to being flat-footed/ into the ground, no spring, no turnout. ***Walking becomes the perceived norm.***

Plus of fancy warm-ups: – are there any?

2. TALKING:

a) USE LEAST NUMBER OF WORDS FOR ANY EXPLANATION:

No-one can take in more than a few

1. Don't stand talking - demonstrate, then dance everything possible (easy-dance is fine).
2. Use the simplest tense – eg “First couple turn and cast”, *not* “First couple is going to turn and cast”. *Avoid the Future Imperfect tense!*
3. Use only the correct title of a formation – *no explanation* – eg “Turn corners and partner” *not* “1st couple is going to turn first corners by the right, then partner by the left , then turn second corners by the right ,then cross left to second place.”
4. Don't confuse your basic instruction with *any* unnecessary words such as TP's, jokes, asides, additional description. ***The point of a named figure is that it is one memory chunk***, along with all the TP's. See what happens when the formation is danced, then teach on it. If your demonstrations are good, the dancers will instinctively copy a lot of detail without your having to teach it.

3. WALKING

- a. **Visual and muscle memory (both much more powerful than words) is walking not dancing!** – leads to being flat-footed/ into the ground, no spring, no turnout. ***Walking becomes the perceived norm.***
- b. **The rhythm** is wrong – especially for strathspey.
- c. **The phrasing** is wrong.
- d. It doesn't train the relevant muscles or general fitness.
- e. **Music is the driver for dance, walking doesn't respond** in the same way.
- f. **Teachers are losing musical connection and skills.**

DON'T STAND TALKING - DEMONSTRATE, THEN DANCE.

“What you see” memory = 10 x better than verbal memory

“What you do” memory = 8 x “ “ “ “

Combine both by dancing ?30 x “ “ “

Helen Russell ***“If you are talking, they or you should be moving”***

When I first MC'd, my wife (a ballet teacher and a physiotherapist) told me ***“Cut the number of words you say to a tenth; when you have got used to that, cut it by another tenth...”***. I think many MCs would benefit from this advice!

Stop talking, demonstrate, dance.

TEACHER'S CERTIFICATE

What it is:

Exam requires a candidate to **demonstrate their toolbox of SCD knowledge and skills**. eg 5 TP's for each step or formation. A lot to cover in half an hour.

Role play involved – eg one moment teaching “basics”, then teaching a polished formation with all TP's as for a “demonstration class”. – eg introduce Pas-de-Basque, then teach poussette

Ability to create/follow detailed **Teaching Plan**

Usually completely dependent on having mostly **competent dancers as stooges**.

What it isn't:

It is *not* a template for a class you would teach at home. Confusing the two causes many problems.

Generally far too slow, pernickety and tedious

Musician often redundant most of the class

React to the class you have on the night, only teach what they can learn

Get on with some dancing!

Live Music

Musician can follow every step

Many teachers today unfamiliar with how to use a musician

Recorded music has delay in operation, sometimes better call rhythmically

MC-ing

Same principles apply, but everyone so used to walking, hard to change.

Cut every unnecessary word – no parentheses, TP's, explanations -

What you see is ten times more memorable than a description

So, put the **best** dancers at the top of the set, ***not the beginners*** (even to walk it)!

If an inexperienced couple lead from 1st place, the other dancers, including the expert couple standing bored in 4th place, will subconsciously copy the poor example seen.

If experts lead from the top, everyone has a better chance to take in how it should go, and it wastes far less time.

Instead of walking simple figures, why not dance them? Eg:

“1s and 2s dance rights and lefts; GO!” Put the music on, or count rhythmically

Classes –

What you hear, you forget

What you see is ten times more memorable than what you hear

What you do, you understand

Cut the talking to a minimum and walk NOTHING!

Advantages:

1. If you watch lots of *walking*, it will become the norm
“ “ “ “ “ *dancing*, that will. “ “ “
2. Demonstrate with rhythmic mantra followed by dance is a much quicker, and much more effective, way of learning. Get through far more, and more thoroughly.
3. Very helpful to have competent accomplice, especially for more complicated formations or dances:
4. It makes it a dance class, not a chatroom, Pilates class or a hiking club!
5. It preserves the SCD skills and patterns that we love.
6. You can't hope to interest youngsters unless there is this level of exercise. They won't come to stand around!

Disadvantages

1. The teacher needs to be a competent dancer and fit enough to demonstrate
2. There is now a universal expectation to walk everything
3. Some dancers may not have the stamina to dance much, if at all. This raises the question of whether one is running an SCD event, or a social club for the elderly!
4. There is a case for quick walk-throughs at a social dance. The dancers need that bit of respite, and the negative image of walking is soon replaced with dancing.
5. The appetite for complicated dances which take a lot of learning has replaced the small repertoire of readily accessible dances that used to be SCD.

My message is that all this walking and talking we now have is killing off SCD.

Get on with the dance!



Contrasting calls for “The Duke of Perth”

VERSION 1	VERSION 2
The next dance is going to be the very popular reel “The Duke of Perth”. We are going to need four couple sets , but it is a three couple dance, repeating twice each couple. Find a partner and come into sets.	Make up four-couple sets for “the Duke of Perth”.
The dance we are now going to do is called “The Duke of Perth”. Of course, most of you know it, so we don’t really need to walk it. However, there may be some who are not so familiar, so maybe we should walk it. Is there anyone who would like to come to the top? Otherwise you could always watch from fourth place if you are not sure.	“The Duke of Perth”, for 3 couples in a 4-couple set.
To start with, first couple are going to turn by the right hand in two bars; they are then going to cast one place. Next they are going to turn with the left hand once round and a bit further, so that they are facing first corners. Make sure you finish in a nice diagonal line, back-to-back.	First couple turn and cast, turn left to face first corners.
Then first couple are going to turn their first corners with the right hand in two bars, then they are going to turn their partner by the left hand quickly all the way round and a bit further to finish facing their second corners. Make sure again that you are in a nice diagonal line, back-to-back. First couple are then going to turn their second corners; next they are going to turn their partners three quarters round to face second corners again, instead of crossing to second place as they might do more often.	Turn corners and partner.
Next the first couple are going to set to their second corners, then they are going to turn them with both hands all the way round. Notice that this is a quick turn, and they may need to steal a bit to get round – although some teachers would say this this is not quite correct. They finish facing second corners. They set to second corners, and maybe stealing a bit of time again, they turn them and, not needing to go as far, they finish on the sidelines between their corners, facing first corner again.	Set to and turn corners, followed by reels of three on opposite sides. In the last two bars first couple cross right back to their own sides, ready to start again.
First couple are then going to dance. A reel of three on opposite in six bars, starting by giving left shoulders to first corners. Corners need to finish in their places in only six bars, so that first couple can cross back to their own sides in second place. First couple then start again from second place.	
WORD COUNT: 474	WORD COUNT: 65
474/65= 7.3 times as much as blue version	65/474 = 14% of red version

Summary

1. Use music all the time.
2. Cut every unnecessary word from your instructions
3. Use the *standard expression* for each formation, no extra words (*it's a single memory chunk!*)
4. Cut all walking
5. Demonstrate everything, join in the dancing
6. Put the best dancers as 1st couples, *never* the newbies – we learn what we see 10 times better than what we are told
7. Consider using more easy dances

Final question – do you want a Scottish Dance Class, or an Elderly Persons Social Group?

Ken Martlew, March 2024