

serTA Workshop – Sunday 17th March 2024

Teaching Children

Presenter – Deborah Draffin with support from Sarah Whillis

Musician – Ken Martlew

After registration, coffee and a welcome by Jane, the day began with a presentation on Teaching Children by Deborah Draffin

Background:

Deborah is an ex primary school teacher who has been teaching children for 27 years. She was a child dancer, with experience of ballet as well as Scottish Country Dancing.

Deborah teaches a children's class which has been supported financially and socially by a local SCD Club. Some current dancers are the children and grandchildren of previous members so there is a thread of continuity throughout the group. The children are generally of primary school age.

As well as teaching a weekly class, Deborah is also involved in one off events, such as festivals, teaching at local schools and for adult clubs.



How to begin teaching a step

Slip Step

Have the children clap to music. Then ask them to clap and count at the same time. Try this for 8 bars, then 16, then 32 bars.

Then add in a bounce on both feet – clap, count and bounce

Followed by clap, count and slip step for 4 bars, then clap on the spot for 4 bars. Repeat in the other direction. [this last exercise introduces the children to the fact that they need to change direction when dancing hands round].

Then try a circle, taking each part of the body in turn. First time, ensuring everyone keeps their head up, next time their arms in the correct position, time after that their feet dancing slip step and closing prior to dancing back to place

Tips:

Use the word “steps” rather than “bars”

Use the features of the room to indicate direction. Say “to the door”, to the clock” or “to the stage” [children may have difficulty distinguishing left from right]

Skip Change

Gallop on the right foot only for 8 steps, then 8 on the left foot. Repeat for 4, 2 and then 1 bar to achieve the skip change.

Repeat but introduce the hop

Pas de Basque

Have the children jump over a line on the floor, a piece of string, a rope or a shoe [or even an imaginary item such as a puddle].

Watch the rhythm of the heads moving up and down. Pair up a dancer who is performing the step correctly with one who is finding it a challenge.

Note: Some children find pas de basque very easy. For others it is a real challenge

Strathspey

There is a difference of opinion about the age to introduce this. Some teachers feel young children do not have the muscle strength to execute the step. Deborah suggests that children should begin by walking the step, and then introduce the pull through to change feet. The slight hop at the pull through will mean that children learn not to scrape their feet on the group. The exercise will teach the children the correct movement which they can perfect when their legs are strong enough.

Phrasing

Have the children count to 8. Then ask them to clap on bars 1 and 8 or 3 and 8 or any sequence of bars.

Repeat with eyes closed [this saves embarrassment if someone goes wrong]

How to teach some basic formations

Figure of 8

Draw an 8 shape in the air. Begin the 8 at different points – top, middle and bottom, Then draw it in the opposite direction.

Have the children skip a figure of 8 in the hall, following each other. Repeat from different start points.

Set up two lines of 3 chairs. Have the children dance around them, paying attention to covering. Practice to make sure they can do it in 8 bars.

Some basic dances

The Toblerone Triangle [not in Strathspey server or Scottish Country Dance Dictionary]

Aim: Practice figures of 8

3 dancers in a triangle shape

Bars 1-8 Dancer 1 – dance through 2 and 3 in a figure of 8, moving to their right

9-16 Dancer 2 repeat

17-24 Dancer 3 repeat

25-32 – All advance and retire, and move on two places round the triangle

Repeat sequence twice

Pick and Mix Promenade [not in Strathspey server or Scottish Country Dance Dictionary]

Aim: teach dancers to get back to the place they started from

4 dancers in a square shape

1-8 All advance and retire and repeat

9-16 1 and 3 dance anticlockwise and pick up 4 and 2 – dance on 2 places, leave 2 and 4 in diagonally opposite place. 1 and 3 dance back to their original place

17-24 2 and 4 repeat

25-32 All chase anticlockwise 8 bars

Tip: Have children imagine they start on a coloured spot. They have to get back to their original spot.

Domino 5 [published dance]

Aim: Practice right and left shoulder reels of 3



Using Teaching Aids

Tie a scarf on children's right hand – helpful with Cross Right hand

[this was demonstrated by having the class dance It's All Right (published dance)]. Note that some of our dancers found the scarves an unnecessary distraction.

General Tips

If there are not the correct number of dancers, mark the missing person's spot with a teddy or stuffed toy

If the dance proves too difficult for the dancers, just say "good attempt, we'll leave it for today and come back to it"

Understand that parents are under pressure to piece together a family timetable and that children may not be able to attend all sessions

Ask the children questions - "what makes a good dancer/good musician, how does this dance start, ask older children to devise a dance

Remind children that this is a team effort and everyone needs to help each other.

Always find something to praise, even if the dance goes wrong.

Use imagery as much as possible – casting could be "peeling a banana". Or a dance is a trifle – you can put the fruit, cake, jelly, cream in a different order in the bowl – in the same way as formations can be combined to make many different dances. Or a circle could be "a silver hoop". Use a Suitcase metaphor: Dance to fill the [suitcase] of 8 bars without overflowing it or closing it too soon.

Tell children that all Scottish dancers come with a factory setting – feet in 1st position!

Children love dances with "silly" names – "Children's Class Burns Night Breakfast Roly Poly Dance", Toblerone Triangle, The Marmalade Sandwich. They also like seeing their own name in a dance.

If a child does something particularly well, let them demonstrate it.

Should behaviour issues arise, explain that good manners are important in SCD. Suggest that the child sits out until ready to return. [Deborah says that behaviour issues are very rare in her class]

Working with special needs children

Talk to parents to understand the child's needs

Reassure parents that this is a safe non judgmental space

Safeguarding

Ensure teachers have a DBS certificate

Ensure class records include emergency contact numbers for parents/carers

Ensure everyone knows where the fire exits are.

Medal Tests

Children enjoy working towards a goal. Ensure the test is kept low profile to avoid stress to the children.

Publicity/How to attract new dancers

Word of mouth, Facebook, dancing at festivals, bring a friend session, contact schools directly to see if they would like to set up a class

Deborah handed out a list of resources for teaching children and beginners

See overleaf Working with Brownie and Guide groups

Working with Brownie and Guide groups

Sarah Willis then took over. She is an ex pupil of Deborah's and now has part one of her teaching certificate. She focussed on how to teach Brownie, guide and school groups, when the time may be limited. Her tips were:

Always work with the group leaders. Allow them to sort out any behavioural issues.

Use simple language and use gender neutral language [blue side, white side].

Dances such as Circassian Circle and The Flying Scotsman are excellent for such sessions.

Allow the children 15 minutes to make up a 32 bar dance. She gives each team of 4 couples a set of cards on which a selection of formations are written. The group has to decide on a name for the dance, its time signature, and the sequence of formations. Then the group has to dance it. This works very well. We tried this out ourselves which was greatly enjoyed.



Deborah, Sarah & Ken

Thanks were given to Deborah and Sarah for a most informative but fun session and also to Ken for his excellent accompaniment of the dancing.

Rose Kreloff