



South East Region Teachers Association

The Ways People Learn ... Rosemary Harvey Highland Steps in SCD ... Mervyn Short September 2017

Reporter: Stuart Kreloff

A fantastic start to the day was driving along Wellingtonia Avenue – home to 100+ Sequoia – their straight lines promised the same on the dance floor! The local hosting team had coffee and tea ready for the early arrivers. I helped bring out table and chairs for the opening session – it was a good warm-up activity.



Twenty-seven attendees came from: Warwickshire, Wales, Sussex, Surrey, Somerset, London, Hertfordshire, Hampshire, Essex, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire Jane Rose, chair of SERTA, thanked the Finchampstead ladies for opening up and setting out hot drinks.

Morning Session

THE DIFFERENT WAYS PEOPLE LEARN led by Rosemary Harvey

Jane Rose introduced Rosemary Harvey, a dancer and a former primary school teacher with 40+ years of experience. She aimed to share knowledge to raise awareness and aid reflective thoughts [i.e.

“Reflective Practitioner” – reviewing and assessing the teaching experience]

A brief PowerPoint presentation introduced:

VAK – Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic.

There is a neurological basis in the brain for learning:

V – Looking at a word stimulates the Visual Cortex,

A – Hearing a word stimulates the Left Hemisphere,

K – Writing a word uses the Motor Cortex

We sat at tables in amiable groups of five or six. A large number of traits were written on paper slips; our group task was to agree on assigning them to one of the **VAK** categories. Many were easy: “Thinks in pictures”, “Whispers to self while reading, may hum or sing while working”. Others were tougher: “Mind sometimes strays during verbal activities”, “Often a quick thinker”, “May assess people and situations by what ‘feels right’ “. It made us realise that learning is multi-faceted.

Rosemary asked us to complete a personal survey of 18 questions which was then scored into **VAK**. She noted that dancing teachers tended to have very ‘level’ scores, meaning that no one strength predominated. This applied to three teachers at my table; the other two were strongest in **Visual**, followed by **Kinaesthetic**, and **Auditory** was the lowest.

Rosemary noted that Remedial SENS [special educational needs] students are typically kinaesthetic. Touching, holding and/or leading also aids kinaesthetic learners. Auditory students benefit from coaching over the music. Rosemary also reminded us that “Learning is Fun” – “Make It Appealing”. This led into the final activity on the dance floor.

“How does it feel to be a Learner?”

Was a role playing exercise led by Alex Harvey acting as “Teacher”

Version 1 – The Teacher calls out the first 16 bars in “plain text” – spoken in a monotone, literal stating of the dance steps [rather than the formation names] and without noticing the dancers’ reaction – this is more suitable to auditory learners. As expected, this first attempt at dancing was extremely unsuccessful!

Version 2 – The Teacher called the first 16 bars again, but with more description –

eg “figure of eight halfway” rather than “dance up, cross over, cast off into second place” – this was significantly more successful.

Version 3 – The complete dance, again with more description; The Teacher observed while the dancers walked. This was the most successful version [but it was also the third attempt!]

We came away with an appreciation that people may have inherently different learning capabilities; one style does not fit all and teaching methods must be adapted to suit the learners. I thought a few more SCD-specific teaching techniques would have been useful but a “Reflective Practitioner” will try a method and then review the results.

Afternoon Session

HIGHLAND STEPS USED IN COUNTRY DANCING – Led by Mervyn Short with music by Judith Muir

There was a broad range of abilities among the attendees which became evident as the session progressed. The warm-up was designed to be aerobic as well as “joint-loosening”.

Mervyn reminded us to maintain posture by “keeping our ears over shoulders”.

Mervyn prepared two comprehensive handouts (both attached to this report) which were a four page Glossary – “[Steps for Dances](#) (using Highland steps)” covering Basic Terms, Basic Arm Positions, Strathspey, Reel and a single page of “[Dances using Highland Steps](#)”

I learned that five terms were very important:

“Prepare” – move down and then up

“Hop” – on one foot

“Step” – from one foot to another foot

“Assemble” – from one foot to land on both feet

“Disassemble” – from both feet to land on one foot

With great fluency and precision, Mervyn led us through 20+ steps, starting with the more familiar then advancing to more technical steps. Judith played appropriate music throughout:

Shedding step – where the knee should be well turned out to allow the kilt apron to be flat.

Highland Schottische, Glasgow Highlanders, Rocking, Bourée with derrière and devant.

Double Shake – this created laughter

Backstepping – this created more laughter

Whipping Turn – Paul Plummer suggested timing as “Tom, Tom, the Piper’s Son”

We then used the steps in four RSCDS dances:

Foursome Reel – Book 3, *Round About Hullachan* – Book 5, *Threesome Reel* – Book 6 & *Axum Reel* – Book 18. The handout suggests others.

Mervyn finished with stretching exercises and advice:

Achilles tendon – stretch both arms out front, hamstring stretch, pliés are useful.

As a dancer without highland experience, I found the session both impressive and overwhelming. In future, I shall concentrate on Glasgow Highlanders, shedding and rocking!