



South East Region Teachers Association

Elements in planning a technique class

Dave Hall

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Reporter: Esther Wilkinson

The one-day SERTA workshop held in Woodford Green in April, which was led by Dave Hall, focused on the elements of planning a technique class.

Dave started us off with a warm-up, during which he introduced us to several exercises aimed at encouraging dancers to listen to the music and to move with and respond to it. He explained the importance of choosing appropriate music for exercises and formation practice, and of counting correctly over the music. With the latter in mind, he provided us with some excellent examples, both during the warm-up and later on in the day, of helpful and unhelpful counting, emphasising the fact that different counting methods need to be used for different steps and tempi. He stressed, too, that the teacher needs to be very clear about the music that they want, particularly when working with a musician.

Following the warm-up, we looked at stretching and a few simple exercises to practise and improve some of the basic elements of Scottish country dancing: foot positions, handing, posture, and body weight/alignment prior to any change in direction. We also considered a few of the problems which can arise in the execution of

steps, and how teachers can help a class to overcome these problems. We looked at, for example, travelling using pas de Basque, lengthening/shortening skip-change-of-step, travelling backwards (as in “advance and retire”), and how to increase the “dip” in strathspey steps.

We then moved on to tackle the combination of the above with teamwork and correct phrasing. Dave strongly advocated the use of shapes and patterns in teaching, particularly when individual (and sometimes tricky) formations need to be broken down so that they are understandable by a class. The formations which he had selected for us to concentrate upon included Poussettes, the Tournée, the Spurtle, Rights and lefts for two, three and four couples, Set and petronella in tandem and the Quadruple figure of eight. During the session members of the class were encouraged to share their own ideas and methods for teaching these and other formations, which provoked some lively and very interesting discussion.

The last part of the session was spent looking at methods of teaching more complex dances, including the build-up to a dance and the identification and mitigation of any potential

pitfalls. Where a dance includes a formation with a modification, Dave encouraged us always to teach the basic formation before embarking upon the modified version. He also highlighted the importance of lining up the sets across as well as up and down the hall, thereby providing the class with the maximum number of geographical reference points and opportunities for covering.

As a trainee teacher of Scottish country dancing (I was working towards Units 2 and 3 of the Teacher’s Certificate at the time), I found the workshop incredibly valuable, and on behalf of all those who attended I would like to extend a huge thank you to Dave for making it fun, interesting and informative, and to Barbara Manning for the fabulous musical accompaniment.

Esther Wilkinson

