



## South East Region Teachers Association

### TEACHING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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**September 2011**

Reporter: Ann Other

Marilyn has unique 24 years continuous experience of teaching children from 5 years to adulthood, and is also a Children's Medal Test Assessor.

Her inspiring and informative talk was divided into 3 parts.

1. TEACHING AN AFTER SCHOOL CLUB – Typically 5/6 year olds for 1 ¼ hours, which includes 5 minutes at the beginning and end getting changed.

Such a class can be initiated with a letter to the Head Teacher of a local Infants School explaining the historical and cultural aspects of SCD, as well as the exercise and skills benefits.

1.1 Establish a routine as the children come to the class.

Change or remove shoes, jumpers off in tidy piles of clothes, visit toilet before starting, remove drink from school bag and place in designated area to be sipped only when the teacher dictates. Children then stand in a line facing the front with feet in 1st position. (Children will always remember to do this, and endeavour to be ready first.) Practise this routine at the start of every class.

1.2 Listen to jig time music. Clap 8, and jump 8. Then progress to clap 8 (4 bars) and jump 4 slow (4 bars). Always demonstrate everything you require the children to do. Teach rhythm, using clapping to help.

1.3 Show slip step and jumps, starting with making a line. The children will tend to bunch when lining up, and need training to leave gaps by leaving a space for an imaginary child. Then all face sideways, and all slip down 8, jump 4, counting in time to the music.

Repeat as necessary. Children find it hard to dance in a straight line, and will collide. Again tell them to leave a space for an imaginary child in front of them.

1.4 Show skip change.

Initially call it a gallop on the right, then on the left. Progress to a hop/ gallop, which is called a skip change. Get them to try a few times. Some will get it, some will not, but praise them.

1.5 Practise making a longwise set. Sets are the same size as adult sets.

Take hands on the sides with arms in a 'W' position and leaving space between each child for an imaginary child. Show the boys' side and girls' side. If girls are required to dance as boys reassure them that the next time they will dance on the girls' side. Choose their partners so no one is left out.

Teach bow and curtsy to initial chord.

1.6 Make up easy dances with fun titles like *Dinosaur Jig, The Friendship Circle, and Fairy Ring etc.*

Introduce a dance, give them a choice of titles, and let them choose. In a mixed class, make sure they're not all "girlie" titles. Practice each 8 bars before putting whole dance together.

During a 1 ¼ hour session aim to do 4 dances, and repeat these for a couple of weeks before adding new dances. Aim to improve arms,

size of set, friendship, choosing their partners so no-one is left out. Every week practice steps, formations, spacing, bows and curtseys and dances with praise and corrections.

### 1.7 Move on to 1,2,3 step (pas de basque) in reel time.

Kids will use the wrong foot, so put child's outdoor shoe beside right foot and teach this jumping over the shoe.

### 1.8 Making a circle

Tell the child who is dancing boy and who is girl. Boys have girls on the side of the hand they write with. For left handers this is on the side of the hand that they don't use for writing.

### 1.9 Order of introducing new formations –

- Circle 8 left, jump or clap 4, repeat to the right. Wait a few weeks before doing circle round and back. Use knuckle to knuckle to stop them pulling each other over.
- Chasing in longwise sets; girls round boys then vice versa. Start singly, then all.
- Slipping in lines – 2 hands with partner.
- Figure of 8 round partner and corner in a big circle, then on the sides in a longwise set, then 1st cpl between 2nd, 2nd cpl between 1st.
- Rights and Lefts in a square set (easier). Then in a longwise set.
- Hands across, 2 facing 2. Then in a longwise set.

1.10 Take care with choice of music. A good clear beat is much easier to dance to, and ensure the tempo is right. Too slow children will say is boring – too fast and steps will suffer.

1.11 If you need to talk to the children sit them on the floor with a space between each child, so that they cannot touch each other, or fidget.

Drip feed information over the weeks e.g. RSCDS and the Queen's involvement.

1.12 Grab the children's interest with an animated face, giving them things to work for, and make the classes exciting and enjoyable. Show everything and limit talking.

- Aim for perfection, and only praise a child if this is earned.
- Give certificates at the end of the year.
- Invite parents to watch for the last 40 minutes of the last class.
- Find out when the School Fete is and ask if the children can show their dancing.
- Dress the children – tartan sashes with brooches for the girls; tartan trews and ties for the boys.

2. **TEACHING PRIVATE CHILDRENS' CLASSES** and introducing new children to existing classes.

2.1 Recruiting children for classes can be done with flyers in local libraries, word of mouth, local advertising, 'Bring a Friend' Sessions.

- Accept children from 4 ½ years old, using the same routine as the School Classes.
  - Beginners – 1 hour class; after 1 term 1 ½ hours; when ready 2 hours.
  - Have Pyramid classes – 1st and 2nd, 2nd and 3rd groups.
  - Pay fees by the term. (Come to an arrangement in hardship cases; reduction for more than 1 child from a family). Pay £1 for Junior RSCDS membership.
  - Check for medical/ behavioural problems.
  - Parents do not attend the classes
  - Stipulate times for a drink.
  - Teacher will require a CRB check
- 2.2 Class Content
- Always begin and end with an easy dance.
  - Vary step practice – corner to corner, up/down the room, singly, with a partner.
  - Correct faults weekly, and don't let bad habits develop.

- Encourage eye contact and staying level.
- Praise only when deserved and don't be afraid to criticize. Children thrive on trying to improve, and can be taught anything, which includes special needs children.
- Pair children with dancers who can help.
- Marilyn has always taught strathspey from 5 years of age. Some get it straight away; others do not, as with adults. There is a myth that teaching it too young will spoil their steps in adulthood. Do not let bad habits develop.

### 2.3. Music

- Children do not have to have music played faster. Give the same tempo as for adults.
- Correct tempo is important. Too fast and foot positions, rhythm and steps suffer. Skip change becomes too bouncy, and steps syncopated. Rhythm is lost.
- Too slow and dancing loses its spring, balance is lost, steps become heavy and children say the dance is boring. However they enjoy the same dance done up to speed.
- Get the children to identify the instruments being used in recorded music, and to understand the difference between reel and jig time.

### 2.4 Keep the children interested

- Teach Step Dancing and Country Dance Highland if possible. This gives variety to hold their interest and children love the challenge.
- Use circle, square and triangular sets as well as longwise.
- Introduce new formations, and improve on existing ones, while adding more.
- Encourage the writing of dances.
- Invite parents to watch at the end of term.
- Get displays for the competent dancers. The others will have to work harder to be in the team.

- Hold a Christmas Party and a Children's' Dance every year. Adults can come too.

## 2.5 RSCDS and Summer School

- Drip feed information, and pay £1 for junior membership.
- Get those who have attended Summer School to tell of their experiences.

## 3. TEACHING TEENAGERS UP TO UNIVERSITY AGE – 16 years and over.

- If children are kept interested with varied and enjoyable classes they will stay until University.
- Strong bonds will develop if children have danced together for many years. Marilyn's young dancers still keep in touch through university into marriage, being bridesmaids, and god-parents for each other.
- **Think bigger – more than just a weekly class**
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### 3.1 Ways of Keeping them interested.

- Displays
- Step dancing
- Attending Branch functions
- Running their own dance
- Parties and outings
- Present trophies.
- Use them in class to demonstrate
- Get them to write and try out dances
- Produce books of their dances.
- Help in taking the class of younger children
- Sometimes photocopy a tricky dance and get them to work it out for the next class.

## 4. PROBLEMS THAT MAY OCCUR

4.1 A child who is not “wholesome” and nobody wants to dance with them.

A. Speak to the parents, and partner with an understanding child.

4.2 Badly behaved child – “show-off”.

A. Put child in the centre of a circle, tell the class that “Johnnie” is now going to take the class. It works every time, and usually results in said child looking embarrassed. Tell “Johnnie” you expect good behaviour from now on. Praise them for something as soon as possible, as they have a need to be noticed. Also they need to save face so that the others don’t mock.

4.3 A “tell-tale” child.

A. A firm voice expressing that you do not want to hear tales. Then address the class as a whole and repeat.

4.4 A child without rhythm

A. All children can learn to dance in rhythm. Use words as they dance, and get the whole class to chant the words for the steps. Sometimes dance without music using just rhythmic words.