

TEACHING SKILLS – CHILDREN

Course syllabus

These guidelines are provided for use by an experienced teacher in order to help deliver a course to support Scottish Country Dancers who are interested in teaching children or young people. They may contain useful information, but they are not intended as a self-help document.

Teaching young children can be a challenge as they expect results quickly and have a very good memory. They need careful class management and know very quickly if the person running the class is not 'in charge'. Maintaining discipline and teaching the enjoyment of dancing is something that needs to be developed over time. Dancing is a very structured activity and it develops spatial awareness, self-control, self-discipline, teamwork and healthy living. Be prepared to give positive encouragement and aim for high standards!

BASIC ELEMENTS – OVERVIEW

1. The needs of the class
2. Class management
 - a) Warm-up
 - b) Steps
 - c) Formations
 - d) Dances
3. Use of voice, particularly in rhythmic counting and coaching
4. Selection of music
5. Working with a musician and using recorded music

BASIC ELEMENTS – DETAILED

1. The needs of your class

- Be encouraging
- Make it fun
- Be positive and welcoming
- Speak to parents / teachers about any concerns

Classes differ greatly in nature and skills levels. Often a class will contain dancers with varying age and experience. Be aware that children may have different social and emotional needs. Ensure you have up to date information on RSCDS policy and procedures for the protection of young persons and vulnerable adults. Summary Cards are available from the RSCDS office if needed.

2. Class Management

(a) Warm-up

- Ensure activities are age appropriate.
- Consideration might be given to using upbeat Ceilidh or non-traditional music in this section. You may want to play games to run off excess energy. You can incorporate clapping, counting, singing games e.g. Looby Loo and “tag” games like Catch the Tail. Incorporate them into skip change and pas de basque to make the steps fun. Children could make up their games here! See Appendix II
- Foot positions: 1st 2nd 3rd 4th positions along with foot stretching and pointing toes; some pliés.

(b) Step Practice (individually or with partners)

There are various ways in managing this – in a circle; diagonally across the room; up and down the room. Break down the steps with rhythmic coaching and suitable words, and use rhythmic coaching for all steps, e.g. skip change - 'hop, step, close, step'

- Skip change - jig time
- Pas de basque - reel time (you can use ceilidh music to teach pas de basque using 4/4 rhythm)
- Slip step - jig time
- Strathspey travelling and setting - 'step, close, step, pull through'

Try to keep all dancers moving as much as possible.

(c) Formations

Arrange the class in sets of couples according to the number required for the formation you are teaching, e.g. two couple sets for rights and lefts; two couple sets for four hands round and back in a circle; three couple sets for six hands round and back in a circle.

(d) Dance Resources

Jigs & Reels, which was launched at the Scottish Learning Festival in September 2012, is a book of progressive dances for children and young people. Containing 25 country dances and 5 'party dances', photographs and diagrams, a DVD and two CDs, it is an easily accessible resource, intended to provide teachers with a progressive programme and fits well into the Curriculum for Excellence. It is available from the RSCDS office or from the Society's online shop.

Incorporate formations in published RSCDS dances. Children may like to make up dances from the formations already taught and show them to the rest of the class.

3. Use of Voice

- The voice must be clear and audible, which can be difficult in some spaces.
- Don't be afraid to walk around the hall.

- The voice is particularly important in counting in time to the music and coaching rhythmically as the children are dancing, eg skip change – ‘hop, step, close, step’ or pas de basque – ‘spring, beat, beat’.

4. Selection of Music

- Children and beginner dancers need the music slightly faster till balance and strength are built up.
- Some tunes are better than others for step practice, e.g. a jig that is suitable for both skip change and slip step is Cumberland Reel; for pas de basque is Petronella.

5. Working with a musician, and recorded music – not many are lucky enough to have a musician

- Learn how to cue the music and bring in the musician by introducing 'ready and' and how to use the music for eight bars of music at a time.
- If using recorded music, there are CD's available with only 8, 16, 24 and 32 bars at a time, also 16 bars from slow to normal speed so that the children can always work with music.
- Equipment with variable speed is extremely helpful, eg Coomber; Portasound.

6. Guidance on teaching basic formations

Show, walk and dance formations

- The teacher takes the place of the first man or woman's place to show the formation;
- The teacher stands in the best position where he/she can observe the dancers while they walk/dance the formation;
- Make sure all the children walk and dance the formation from 1st, 2nd and/or 3rd position;
- Join the formations taught in 16 bar phrases, e.g. circle or four hands round and back followed by right hands across back to place;
- Teach a number of basic formations before using them in dances, e.g. circles; right hands across and back; rights and lefts; casting; figures of eight; and lead down the middle and up.
- Children need structure, challenge and motivation. Scottish Country Dancing is first and foremost for fun and enjoyment.

HELPERS

- Classes for **FAMILIES** and charge per family, not per child.
- Another parent, classroom assistant, older child to help is very useful.
- Usually children want to hold only their parent's hand – changing partners or dancing with a selection of people is not advisable.

GIRLS/BOYS

- Girls dance with girls, boys with boys.
- “Those facing the windows” etc. rather than girls/boys side

FORMATIONS

- **Circles** – the change of direction needs lots of work. Counting 1,2,3,4,5,6, slow down, stop – instead of to 8.
- Doing 8 slip steps down the room and 8 back is a good lead-in.
- Describe a 'W' for joined arms.
- **Wheels** – The change of hand and direction at the same time is hard.
- Stand in a circle facing clockwise, and dance 3 skip change, then turn towards the centre on 4 to face the other way, then 4 skip change anticlockwise.
- Do the same but stick an arm into the middle each time (CW right arm).
- Then divide into smaller groups of 3 or 4, and mention that they can touch hands.
- **A long cast off** – 'follow the leader' round the room to build up to following the person in front without overtaking.
- All face the top of the room before they cast.
- Cast round chairs.
- The top couple need to stop and make the arch, the second couple need to go **below** them before coming **up** under the arch.
- **RH and LH**– 'Bracelets' (made of plaited black elastic for the boys) to wear on right hands.
- Stand anywhere to practise RH and LH turns.

SETS

- One long set down the hall.
- A set of mats or masking tape to stand on, one for each position, which marks out the shape of the set.
- Use of teddies for 4th couple

MUSIC

- Count bars – clapping and tummy pats
- At the start, switch the music off after every couple had completed one turn.
- Let the music play on, but start at the beginning of the next 8 bar phrase.
- It doesn't matter whether it's at the right point of the music for that part of the dance.
- Use a 40 bar tune for a 32 bar dance, to give extra 8 bars recovery and catch up time if needed.

GENERAL

- Repetition is important and if something new isn't understood the first time, leave it and repeat the following week.
- Call instructions a couple of beats before they are required.
- A core nucleus of a few dances is good.
- Write down what has been done after every class, and try not to repeat exactly the same session during the term.
- After every dance, a cheer and a round of applause.
- Use other appropriate dance titles.

DISCIPLINE

- Signal for quiet – a 'shushing' stick.
- Rules for how the children come into the hall.
- Talk with the teacher as a group in a calm fashion before the class starts.
- Teacher's use of voice.
- Observation – position in the hall.
- Let the children have a '30 sec fidget'.

HOW TO ATTRACT AND KEEP CHILDREN

- Use a venue where there is a captive audience, e.g. in the school hall straight after school.
- Cut down the effort for parents – ask for opinions about time/place.
- Offer to do a workshop/no skill required Ceilidh session at an existing event such as a festival or open day, where there will be a captive audience.
- Hand out flyers at the end.
- A 'bring a friend' party for your class with some easy dances and a demonstration from the existing class, juice and biscuits, etc.
- Informal reward system.
- A 'request week' at the end of term or let someone each week choose their favourite dance.
- Have a kilted bear or something that everyone gets a turn to take home.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK

- Acknowledge good standard of behaviour/dancing.
- Class chooses who should be awarded a 'star' at the end of the lesson e.g. best pas de basque, working well with a partner, regular attendance, etc.
- Be aware that children are competitive and like to show their steps/formation/dance, or their own dance that they have created to the rest of the class.

WARM UP GAMES

Traffic Lights – Travel e.g. walk/skip looking for spaces avoiding others

- RED – Pas de basque or stay still with feet in 1st position
- AMBER – Slip step
- GREEN – Skip change
- Add other colours
- WHITE – Advance and retire
- BLUE – Hop and point

Musical Statues – Travel in time to the music. When music stops, stay still in a shape/with feet in 1st position/dance on the spot/find a partner.

Musical Circle – 2 Circles facing partner. Skip round to the right and when music stops, face a new partner - skip round each other/turn RH/slip step for 4 bars, etc.

“Go Home” Circle – One person on the outside who skips round and takes another by the hand. Skip together till teacher says “go home” – both run to their own place. First home starts again.

Rhythmic Circle – All seated and numbered. Establish a rhythmic movement e.g. L-R marching hands on knees. Number 1 starts and passes on the rhythm eg “number 1 to number 5”

- Variation – Stand and march with feet on the spot; clapping sequence.

Crusts and Crumbs – Side by side with partner. Try to be first to the side of the hall called.

Follow the Leader – In 2s, changing over the leader on command/after 8 skip change.

Number Game – Travel looking for spaces; form groups of the number called.

- Variation – Make a shape in the group eg circle/straight line/square.

Squirrels in the Trees – Half the children as squirrels, half as trees – in pairs holding hands in an arch with a squirrel underneath and others spaced between trees, and one fox. Trees are the dens, and the fox chases squirrels into a tree making the squirrel there left to be chased.