**Some Thoughts on Teaching.** When asked to write something for the Magazine, I did consider discussing [mathematics and SCD](https://homepages.ecs.vuw.ac.nz/~downey/society.pdf), such as [this article](https://homepages.ecs.vuw.ac.nz/~downey/society.pdf). My [home page](https://homepages.ecs.vuw.ac.nz/~downey/) has lots of SCD links including some [radio interviews](https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/ourchangingworld/audio/2018667030/mathematician-wins-top-science-award) which included SCD.

In the end, I was led to reflect on my 25 years of teaching. Though I have taught classes at many levels, the majority of my teaching has been as a sole tutor at a club of mixed abilities, and ages. Travelling around, this seems fairly typical of the SCD tutor experience, so maybe my thoughts might be helpful.

*Traditional music* is the core for me. Those early books had fabulous tunes. When I construct a programme for a formal dance, one of my main considerations will be the musical structure of the programme. Where to put pipe marches, where to put strong Strathspeys, where to put the exciting reels, etc? It is a social occasion. It needs an approachable programme with great tunes and a only small number of more challenging dances.

For teaching, whilst Johnsonville Club has a database of 4,000 recordings going back from this year to digitized 78’s, I often find myself using Jimmy Shand, Jim Macleod, Stan Hamilton, etc, as they have penetrating clarity. I try to impart how to use all of the music (-,2,3) to enable flow.

My theory is that most of the difficulties the dancers have are caused by poor phrasing. (This is particularly true of geometric figures where the dancers must dance to a position or dance a shape: e.g. the third person in a reel of three, the lack of passing left shoulders in a reel of four, etc) When should the dancer *attack*, and when to *hold back*? I try to emphasise *really listening* to the music and understanding the phrasing. How each dancer’s phrasing affects that of the others. (I often say ``remember it is a team sport’’.) There has been a bit of a tendency in modern dances to essentially follow a track without the need to vary phrasing, and I believe that this is unfortunate for the development of *dancing* which I see as my goal as a tutor.

*Restructuring for change.* In 2012, we noticed that our membership had dropped badly to about 20 members. Things needed to be done. This involved a combined effort from the club, and change patterns which had worked for years. We decided to run beginners’ classes for the first 4 weeks each year before the season. Then I structured the club nights so as to encourage beginners, but still had teaching for experienced. Many experienced club members come along to help for the early part, supporting the new dancers.

My approach is to have an annual teaching programme where I gradually introduce formations and steps in a slow structured way. On club nights, beginners the first 1 ½-2 hours, the experienced arrive for the last hour with the beginners and then have their own hour for themselves. I end with a challenging dance for very experienced.). This schedule is for the first half of the year, new dancers leaving around supper at 9.00. Later we integrate the group for the whole night. This year, I did 3 weeks using only skip change and simple formations, week 4 allemande and Strathspey travelling and setting, week 6 Pas de Basque, week 9 reels of three, reels of four on week 12. For the experienced, each year I pick on something to extend them and really work on before the season of formals comes along. This year it was Espagnole, and the Rose Progression, and last year all round poussette, tourbillon, and complex entry reels. I have step practice, certainly for the first few months; and formation practice. We have 1 or 2 *briefing* dances (1 for all, 1 experienced) pre-posted in the newsletter.

You might wonder how you can do this and maintain an interesting and fresh programme. Easy. There are *many* great dances with basic formations. For example, this year our first [Tartan Night](https://www.johnsonvillescd.org.nz/news/2021-event-reviews/) (aimed at beginners) was full of variety, with only one (experienced only) dance with reels.

*Rationale.* Dancers need to *experience success* to be happy. The club supports this approach wonderfully. They truly welcome new dancers. I think sometimes SCD groups give lip service to supporting new dancers, but we don’t give them a really encouraging environment. A consequence of my approach is that I *only* use dances from upcoming programmes *when they* *fit into a structured programme*. Too often, I have seen some poor beginner thrown into a sink or swim situation where they are thrown from tourbillon to spurtle; often caused by the necessity to ``covering the dances’’ from an upcoming ball.

*A team effort.* This approach can only work if the whole club agrees to support it. My bit is only *one part* of recruitment and retention. We introduced many things with the aim of building a *community*: Weekly newsletters (Where my column discusses what we did and what we will be doing. We have other columns.), summer ceilidh, midwinter feast/ceilidh, live music nights, consistent branding, [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/JohnsonvilleDanceScottish/), [web site](https://www.johnsonvillescd.org.nz/), etc. See the [Johnsonville Site](https://www.johnsonvillescd.org.nz/), and the 2018 articles for [recruitment and retention](https://www.johnsonvillescd.org.nz/2018/05/15/recruitment-retention-new-dancers/). It is also really important to understand what the group is trying to achieve. Whilst some fit the traditional mould, many Johnsonville dancers will never go to Summer School or be technique dancers. They love the dancing and come with enthusiasm each week.

*Success.* We now have around 60 members. We aim to gain a set each year of new dancers. There are surely many other approaches which might succeed. But, given we have only one tutor (I am hoping for more soon!) ours seemed to be the only feasible one. I hope some of these ideas might be useful.

*Epilogue.* SCD a wonderful and rewarding hobby. My wife and I have found the SCD community welcoming worldwide. A wonderful tribute to the RSCDS. I hope the tradition continues.