

Successful Experiences using the 12 Week Condensed Teaching Method

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For the past 3 years, the Western Squares Square Dance Club in Calgary, Alberta, Canada has been running the 12 week lesson program. This program was introduced by Tim Mariner and Bill Harrison several years ago at the CALLERLAB Convention. I (Lorne Smith) felt there was a lot of merit in this program so I presented this revised teaching program to the Western Squares Square Dance Club and they bought into it. The program was introduced to this primarily solo club to aid in encouraging a second entry point into the square dance club. The Western Squares is a club that conducts a split program on a weekly basis. For the first hour and one half the caller (Lorne Smith) teaches the condensed 12 week method and then for the remainder of the evening the club dances the Mainstream program. This program is very similar to the Sustainable 50 that was presented at the CALLERLAB 2018 Convention.

Some of the pros we see for using this program are:

1. A shorter commitment time for the students (12-15 sessions)
2. It fits today's society better because of the shorter number of lessons.
3. The end result closely fits with the traditional square dance program.
4. The caller gets into the regular square dance choreography early in the lesson process (ie. Session #2 has Lead RT. & LT., Veers, Trades) rather than the basic circle and star type material that is traditionally taught at the beginning of the lesson program.
5. This program also allows the club to have 2 entry points, September and January. There is the option for a third starting point in early spring. The club has not tried this option yet.
6. The caller teaches the moves in families which helps the student to better understand each call, such as circulates (couples, ends, centers, girls, boys, column, and all 8).
7. The "angel dancers" find this program more interesting as they are more engaged in the lessons.
8. The calls that can be step-cued can be introduced later in the program and are done at a much quicker pace. This is because the students are now better at taking commands with little teaching time. For example, material such as: Heads pass thru, separate around one to a line or walk and dodge are easily added.
9. If a student has to drop out for some reason (ie. lengthy illness or vacation), that person can rejoin within a few short weeks or months rather than waiting a whole year.

Some of the challenges of this program include:

1. Not all calls on the Basic/Mainstream program can be taught in this shorter time frame. To get around this I introduce the rest of the program during the dances. As in any teach program, adjustments are required to be made because of individual abilities and circumstances.
2. Because it is only a 12-15 week lesson program good attendance is more desirable.
3. Additional advertising/promotion for each lesson start-up is required.
4. Integration into the Mainstream dance community may be a little bumpy because some of the top end calls and low frequency calls have not yet been taught. However, in our area we are predominantly a Mainstream dancing area with lots of entry level dances for new grads to attend.

In conclusion, to date, this club has retained close to 90% of the dancers who have gone through this teaching program. Since they are amalgamated into the main body of the club at an early stage, compared to the traditional teach program, they are out visiting and honing their dance skills more quickly. The key to any successful teach program is the advertising and promotion that goes into drawing new dancers to the activity. As such, we are encouraging the Western Square Dance Club to commit more resources to this endeavour so that both entry points can graduate a successful group of dancers.