



**FIRST STEP
DANCE**

(802) 598-6757

Kevin@FirstStepDance.com

How much technique?

When is the best time to introduce good dance technique? Should dance technique be taught during the very first lesson or class, or should it be taught later? The general consensus will probably be that technique should be taught as early as the students are capable of utilizing that technique.

If the first lesson is a half-hour drop-in lesson for a hundred people before the start of a dance, it will be impossible to cover more than “step here and turn to face there” with perhaps a small amount of time spent on what the lead will be for that step. In such a situation there just isn’t enough time to cover many details and still get the students moving to music, which is the goal of that kind of lesson.

But what if the first lesson is an hour long private and the student has indicated that they want to compete? Even in an hour private lesson an instructor probably won’t cover more than one or two patterns because the level of detail described will be much more in-depth. Each step and movement will be broken down into component parts before being danced slowly and well. Even then, not all aspects of good technique will be covered because many aspects of good movement depend on other pieces being performed well in order to work. Building a good dancer is a process of continual building and refinement.

More commonly, though, the first exposure that most students will have is in a group class that meets several times over successive weeks. The advantage of a situation like this - other than being cheaper for the students - is that the instructor gets to build on skill and technique from one week to the next. The disadvantages will be that not everyone will be at the same skill level, nor will they all learn at the same rate.

It has been said that in a group class situation the instructor should teach to the most advanced student. This will keep them interested and involved while challenging the slightly less advanced students. In this case, though, the least advanced students would likely be overwhelmed and might not return to class. A better choice would be to decide a minimum skill level that students need for beginning classes, and teach to that level. The less advanced students might need to repeat the class once or twice, and hopefully the advanced students would have additional, more challenging, classes available to them.

Regardless of what level of class, the instructor should always dance with good technique, even if they don’t specifically describe many aspects of what they are doing. It might also be useful to tone down certain technique during beginning classes so that



FIRST STEP
DANCE

(802) 598-6757

Kevin@FirstStepDance.com

the students can work on the basic pieces (like footwork and amount of turn, for example) before trying more advanced technique (like Cuban motion, rise and fall, contra body movement or sway, for example). By demonstrating more advanced technique, but not necessarily talking about it, the advanced students who notice the advanced technique will be able to emulate that technique while the less advanced students are working on what the instructor is specifically discussing.

Of course, dancing with advanced technique (even if toned down) in front of a group class, or with a private lesson student, might lead to students asking for details and clarification about that technique. Clearly, if the student is advanced enough to ask a question, they are advanced enough to understand at least part of the answer. Perhaps they won't be able to do everything that is necessary to execute the technique well, but by asking the question they are opening themselves up for additional learning.

Unfortunately, in a group class situation not everyone will have that same level of sophistication. In this situation the answer should be given, but briefly and with a promise to discuss it in more detail in future classes because some students will not be able to grasp the advanced technique and skills at that time. Those students who want to learn advanced skills will catch on eventually, though. Those people who think that they don't need to know the technique or skill and ignore the instructor (perhaps even talking amongst themselves and distracting the other students) won't understand the technique being taught anyway, so there isn't any point in discussing advanced technique in classes with large numbers of these people.

Especially in group classes with students of different levels of dance sophistication, discussion of technique and advanced skill should be kept at a level that is appropriate to the class. Teach certain aspects of technique from the beginning, and add on other aspects a little at a time, slowly refining all aspects of the dance as the students' progress. Dance instruction, especially dance technique, is about building a strong base, and layering more and more technique on as time goes by, while still building and practicing the basics of dance. Instructors should teach one layer of technique well enough that the students grasp the concepts and are able to practice, but not at a level that requires perfection and thereby discourages students.

It might be possible to arrange special classes for those students who want to learn technique without the distraction of the uninterested. Small group classes would allow the instructor to earn the same income as with a private lesson, but would spread that cost out over a larger number of students, thus decreasing their individual costs and making these technique classes more accessible to the dancing public.