

Callerlab 2017
Tuesday - April 11, 2017
9:00 a.m. Breakout Sessions - Shore Up Your Foundation
Gary Felton

Teaching Philosophy and Constraints

Philosophy

Each group you work with has its own personality. Some groups are very easy going and others want continuous challenges. Teaching a class for a group should take the groups personality into account. At the same time, you, the caller, also have some personality traits to consider. Do you demand perfection in execution, styling, and timing? A few years (decades?) ago, it was not unheard of for a caller to teach the calls and those that got it succeeded and the rest fell by the wayside. The opposite of this is teaching and re-teaching until everyone has the call well in hand. Most of us probably fall somewhere in between these two extremes. How does where your personality sits between these two extremes mesh with the group you are teaching for? Perhaps by now you see that this is not about my philosophy, but rather yours. Have you thought about a philosophy for your class? Have you written it down or discussed it with someone in square dancing that you trust? I want to be able to explain and discuss my philosophy to others.

In terms of learning, you have to know what “well enough” means in terms of dancing to the music, executing calls, etiquette, styling so that you can constantly assess when your dancers have learned something well enough to tackle something new.

Constraints

On top of the philosophy, there are constraints you have to work within. Here are some examples: class time is 90 minutes/week, the club wants the class finished by March 15, your community has very socially-active class members and they will miss one class every 5-6 weeks (not all at the same time of course), and the list of things that can get in the way of learning goes on.

Set yourself up for success by discussing your philosophy and the impacts of constraints with class/club leaders or the whole club. Develop an understanding of how you and they can address constraints and agree on an approach. This up-front discussion can head off conflicts later.

With a philosophy and an understanding of your constraints, you have the tools to make decisions about what you teach, how you teach, and you can explain why you make the decisions you do.