Tips for Teaching Ice Dancing Through Basic Skills

Donna Schoon, PSA Master Rated Coach

Teaching dance in a group situation can be very challenging but also very rewarding. The ideal way to have a dance class would be utilizing the full ice surface. There are times that you may only have a section of ice like other Basic Skills classes. In this setting you need to break down all the elements of different dances and teach them individually. With the patterns now in the record book, the skater can then put the elements on the pattern in a dance or public session.

The Basic Skills dance classes seem to have an equal number of adults and children. By keeping the class moving there is less chance of conversations and goofing around to disrupt the class. Everyone must feel like they are making progress and learning new elements in each class. This keeps everyone challenged and eager to learn. Since the introduction of the solo test track, it is easier to keep young girls interested in dance.

Ideally, the skater should complete at least Basic 5 or 6 to be able to understand what is being taught in the dance class. The biggest problem I’ve seen with the beginning dance student is the lack of edges. Sometimes this is due to poor equipment, but other times it is due to the inexperience and lack of confidence of the skater. Every dance class should start out with a review of correct stroking, paying attention to correct use of the blade (avoiding toe pushing). From this, move on to outside swing rolls and then to inside. It is very important to explain the timing of dances. Starting with the count of six will get them ready for the Dutch Waltz. Consecutive progressives will help standardize the timing. Putting on the music will help them understand timing and make doing the elements a lot more fun.

When the skaters learn all of the elements of the dance, for example the Dutch Waltz, then we put the steps on the pattern. Make sure to stress to the skater that it takes time and lots of repetition to remember the order of the steps. It will really help by taking time to explain how to read the pattern in the record book. They can then walk through the steps at home. Once the steps and timing are understandable, introduce the music for that particular dance. Since partners are always a premium, try to use some of your dance competitors to volunteer their time partnering the class skaters. This helps the class and makes the competitor feel special for helping.

The rewards in teaching a dance class come as you see the skaters coming to dance sessions to practice, signing up for the next level of dance, and then asking for private lessons to supplement their class. Once they learn the Dutch Waltz they can’t wait to learn the Canasta Tango and onward. As your class grows, you may be splitting the class with another instructor to keep the interest going. Remember to pass out the badges for the dance levels (Dance 1-6) and about Basic Skills Competitions in your area. These are great opportunities for your class to show everyone how well they are doing.

This is just the beginning. Children as well as adults can progress toward main stream USFSA testing and competitions. They can pass the different levels to qualify in either partner or solo dance. Remember to praise even the smallest step. Everyone has to start somewhere and everyone can learn to dance!