

Fun4Sets Day

Agile Set Dance learning concept for more dancing fun through relaxed dance flow

How can we get more people interested in Irish set dancing? How can we lower the barriers for newcomers and retain them for longer?

These questions are not only on the minds of set dance teachers, but also of participants in weekly dance classes. After all, as we know, it takes at least eight people for a full set, and it is even more fun the more there are. To answer these questions, it is useful to take a step back and put oneself in the shoes of newcomers to weekly dance classes or regular set dance workshops.

Recalling the first few hours of one's own driving lessons at motoring school can be helpful. It is very likely that many people will then remember what suddenly flashed through their minds: which foot do I put on which pedal and when, how quickly do I have to let go and at the same time shift into the right gear in order to drive off without stalling the engine? How do I get into a gap in the flowing traffic without colliding or causing a traffic jam? Which traffic sign did I miss as I was looking at the speedometer?

Fortunately, in driving school you had your driving instructor. At the beginning, the instructor didn't immediately guide you into difficult traffic situations, and after a few driving lessons, you managed to pick up the many driving skills at the right time.

Little room for the needs of individuals

In Irish set dancing, however, a fresh newcomer or a dancer with initial experience is unlikely to enjoy such individual instruction. If things go well, the newcomer dances a few times with the instructor; if things go badly, he or she dances in the set with someone similarly inexperienced.

The challenge of the complexity of unfamiliar dance steps, the sequence of movements in the house around, the house inside, the swing, the handling in the wheelbarrow, etc., is not always easy. This can overwhelm the newcomer, especially when different dances with all their figures follow each other in the same class and are hardly repeated.

The situation is similar in set dance workshops. As a rule, either rarely danced, interesting set dance gems are on the programme or newly composed sets. The latter frequently have very interesting, beautiful figures, but are often characterised by more complex movements.

“Standard“ sets are rather rare in workshops, but they are danced quite often in the céilithe. And practicing basic dance-movements is not generally included in workshops.

Many sets leaving short impressions

As a set dancer with many years experience, you get to know several sets during a usual workshop weekend. As a newcomer, however, you are amazed by the abundance of new figures. You may have only just learned the basic movements to some extent, but now you have to combine them with many new movement sequences of the presented sets and dance them again. In addition, at many workshops individual figures of a new set or the set as a whole are only very rarely repeated. This can easily give newcomers the impression that they just have to dance as many sets as possible - time and practice will somehow sort it out so that they will be able to do it all one day. Or one retreats because it is too much of a challenge.

But when you focus on learning and dancing many new sets - whether at dance classes or at the usual workshops - the effect can be that unfavourable dance habits can easily creep in because

no one systematically pays attention to them. And you yourself become less and less aware of them over time. Because - if you have stuck with it - you have somehow come to terms with it, somehow got through the sets and céilithe, so that you find your own dance skill quite acceptable.

Not learning from mistakes

In workshops with many participants, unfavourable dance habits are hardly noticeable, because the dance teacher can only devote very limited attention to individual dancers. In weekly dance classes it is not much different. Here the dance teacher may have a little more opportunity to notice and deal with unfavourable dance habits. But then there are the more experienced dancers who would like to experience a kind of little céilí during the weekly dance meeting because they understandably enjoy dancing. The dance instructor is in a bit of a bind and can therefore only devote a small amount of time to individual dancers.

Expecting helpful tips from one's own dance partner will only work to a limited extent, unless ideally one dares to repeatedly ask specifically for them. And that is understandable from both points of view: after all, you don't want to be seen as ignorant, incapable of learning or as a know-it-all either. In our culture, dealing with mistakes is unfortunately not so easy and self-evident, even in other contexts outside of dancing - although it is actually through mistakes that one can learn the most.

So if one tries to look at the regular set dance classes and the usual workshops from the point of view of a set dance newcomer, one could conclude that there is hardly any opportunity to learn the basics of set dancing systematically, but that it is left to the newcomer's own trial-and-error method to somehow make progress.

New learning concept: »Less is more«

We would like to contrast this situation with a thesis:

Newcomers and dancers with their first Irish set dance experiences are more likely to stick with it and develop dancing ease and joy more quickly if they are systematically taught the basics of helpful posture, practical dance skills and ways to remember the sets more easily.

We propose a new concept to complement conventional set dance classes as well as usual workshops, where so far, the focus has been on getting to know many new sets.



The new workshop concept uses the insights of an agile approach with quick learning from mistakes and builds on three pillars:

- only one set is taught,
- with sufficient repetition and
- constructive, respectful feedback.

We call this concept "**Fun4Sets**", which is meant to express the special benefits:

More dance joy through relaxation and dance flow. Enable dancing sets without any calling.

With this concept, not only complete set dance beginners and newcomers with first set dance experience can be better addressed, but it can also be very useful for more experienced dancers. This is because it helps both to prevent unfavourable dance habits from becoming entrenched and also to break these habits.

In March 2023, the concept was realised as a workshop at the German Irish Set Dancers in Neumarkt. The basic idea of "Fun4Sets" is suitable for smaller groups of weekly dance meetings as well as for workshops with several sets of dancers. The Neumarkt workshop was planned for a specific number of participants including an invitation to interested new dancers.



The new format was developed by Muiris Woulfe, an experienced Irish Set Dance Teacher, who brought in the didactic importance of individual feedback, the focus on only one practice set as well as the teaching content, together with Marian Mihelic and Susanne Stachel, the Neumarkt dance instructors and organisers of the "Fun4Sets" premiere. The latter conceived and worked out the individual elements of the learning sessions, the schedule and the didactic accompanying material, which was then made available to all participants as handouts for downloading. Kathleen Toepel from Berlin strengthened the team of "collegial observers and advisors"; local dancers complemented the demonstration team that presented the individual figures of the set.

Agile principles, practical implementation and learning

From the perspective of the instructing dance teacher and the organiser, who must provide the appropriate framework conditions, the "Fun4Sets" concept takes up agile elements of modern management methods (cf. "Management 3.0"¹).

Specifically, Muiris explained tips of basic dance movements in the morning and afternoon workshop using the selected exercise set (Mazurka), which was demonstrated by a demonstration team. By repeatedly practicing each figure and receiving diverse feedback from the "collegial

advisors“ (who were rotated through the dancer sets), the participants consolidated dance knowledge, dance postures and dance skills, so that all figures of the set could finally be danced through non-stop completely without calling. Finally, a céilí followed in the late afternoon with many more opportunities to transfer what had been learned to other sets and to apply it with greater confidence; the practice set was of course part of the céilí.

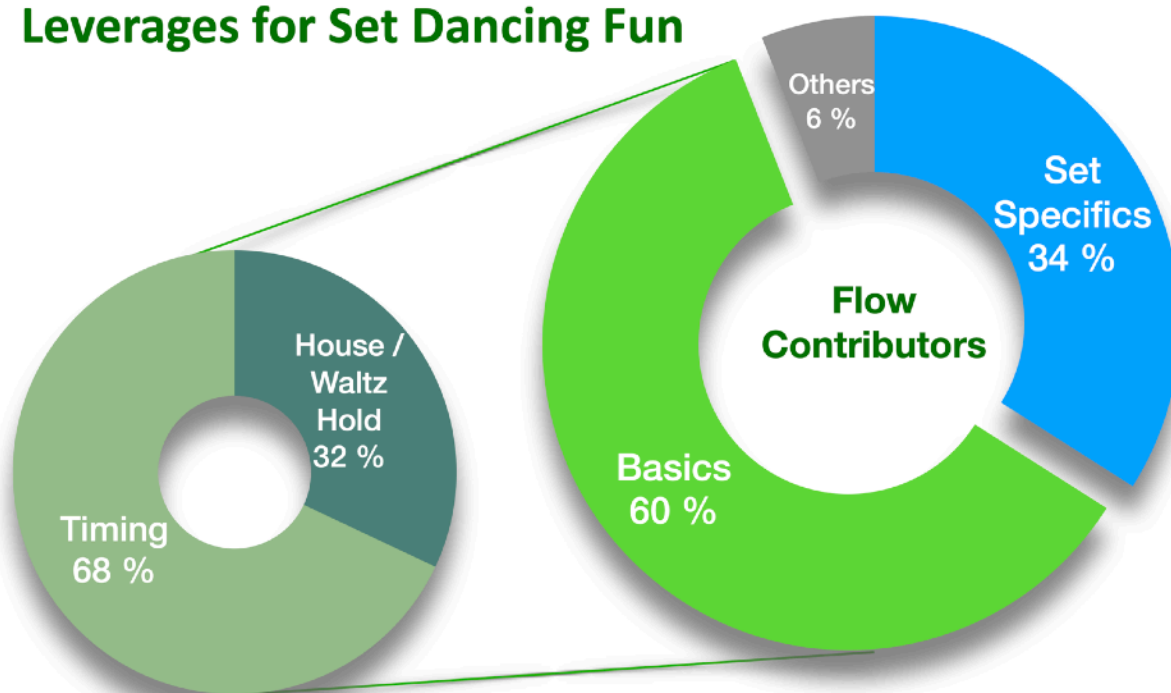
The experience with four dancer sets and a total of around 40 active participants of the Fun4Sets premiere led to an agile further development of the original concept. The basis for this was the completed feedback forms of the participants, as well as around 200 written feedback notes that the "collegial advisory team" had made on whiteboards during the workshop.

These valuable insights made it possible to further develop the concept to make it even more useful for complete beginners as well as for more experienced dancers. In this regard, the details of the observed unfavourable dance practices, which often limit dance relaxation and flow, were particularly valuable.

A somewhat surprising result of the evaluation was that only one third of all observations were specific to the Mazurka practice set, while around two third were applicable to virtually all sets. Of the latter, two thirds were related to timing and one third to the "house inside / house around" including the waltz hold.

One approach that could be derived from this is: *Spend much more time on basic skills instead of focusing on set figures alone.*

Leverages for Set Dancing Fun



© Marian Mihelic • www.setdance.me | Results from n=197 dancing observations at the „Fun4Sets“ premiere

The feedback questionnaires completed by the participants resulted in a quite favourable overall assessment of the "Fun4Sets Day" premiere, despite the unusual approach with many repetitions, and although newcomers and completely inexperienced people were in the minority among the participants, and several long-time dancers with a lot of experience in classical set dance workshops were also present.

On a graded scale, the overall impression of the Fun4Sets Day was rated "very good" or "good" by 94% of all respondents (68% "very good", 26% "good").

Satisfaction with the "Fun4Sets Day" was determined with the standardised 11-step NPS scale²⁾ and resulted in the quite good NPS value²⁾ of 56 for the willingness to recommend "Fun4Sets".

The analysis of the participant feedback revealed several approaches derived from the following optimisation questions:

»How might we...

- provide more activity for the dancers throughout?
- present and perform the practice set
 - as memorable as possible?
 - convey it in such a way that dancers remember the figures more easily?
- carry out the right number of repetitions?«

With the implementation of these improvements, the "Fun4Sets" concept will soon be realised again, namely within the framework of a three-day weekend workshop at another, larger set dance group in Germany - this time, however, without a restriction on the number of participants.

Conclusions

Based on previous experience, we believe that the „Fun4Sets“ learning concept can fill a gap because it enables participants to develop greater dance enjoyment more quickly and easily through more relaxed dancing and more harmonious dance flow.

This is made possible as

- sufficient time is given to practice basic set dancing postures and skills,
- participants are given practical pointers to help them expand their own set knowledge, and
- immediate learning success is made tangible by dancing the practice set without calling.

The bottom line is that applying these principles in weekly dance classes and workshops can also lower the barriers to entry for interested set dance newcomers and increase their retention.

Those who would like to learn more about the „Fun4Sets“ concept from the authors or share their own experiences with other concepts can do so either by emailing Fun4Sets@setdance.me, by posting on the website (<https://wp.me/pbrA14-1ov>) or by posting on the Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/setdance.me>).

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Fun4Sets Day Irish Set Dance
Neumarkt
25. März 2023

Feedback

Wir möchten den Nutzen unseres neuen Workshops für Teilnehmer stetig verbessern. Mit der Beantwortung folgender Fragen hilfst Du uns dabei.

Am besten ausfüllen, kurz bevor Du gehst und einfach in die Box am Ausgang einwerfen. Danke!

Bewertung von 😊 = sehr überzeugend bis 😞 = sollte dringend verbessert werden und mit jeder Abstufung dazwischen

😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊 😊

1. Gesamteindruck des Fun4Sets Days

2. Learning Sessions

Die Lehrmethode insgesamt	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Üben nur an 1 Set (Mazurka)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mündliche Erklärungen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vorführungen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feedbacks an Teilnehmer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Häufigkeit der Wiederholungen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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Anzahl der Teilnehmer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Footnotes

1) The "Fun4Sets" concept picks up elements of agile Management 3.0 basic principles and translates them with the following measures:

- **Energize People**

Self-motivation

- Offer a quick sense of achievement
- Opportunity for iterative consolidation of the newly learned
- Dance without requiring calling

- **Empower Teams**

Delegation to a team with "collegial advice"

- Learn from experienced people
- Use the perspectives of several observers

- **Align Constraints**

Identify and consciously tackle hurdles

- Mixing the dancer groups
- Rotate the advisors through all the dancing groups

- **Develop Competence**

Communicate dance knowledge

- Mnemonics for sets
- Repeating sets

- **Grow Structure**

Pareto principle

- Achieve 80% of the perfect result with 20% effort
(restriction to a few basic leverages)
- Application to other sets

- **Improve Everything**

Respectful feedback in both directions

- from "collegial advisors" to dancers
- Positive reinforcement: What was good?
- Constructive tips: How can something be improved?
- from participants to dance teacher & organiser

2) NPS stands for "Net Promoter Score", a standard indicator in the field of customer satisfaction. It is based on the measurement of customers' likelihood of recommendation on an 11-point scale with the poles "very likely" and "very unlikely". The NPS is calculated via the difference of those who indicate the two highest recommendation probabilities (= promoters) minus those who indicate their recommendation probability with one of the seven lowest probability scale points (= detractors).

According to this, there were 78% promoters and 22% detractors among the participants of the "Fun4Sets-Day" premiere, which results in the quite good NPS value of 56.

All photos and illustrations : Marian Mihelic