



Puttin' on the Dance Session Notes

“Promoting Youth Participation”

with: Max Newman

Transcribed by: Judy Hawkins

[amplifications from memory are in square brackets]

Max started contra dancing in Alaska, which is where he's from. At Harvard, in Boston, he ran a contra dance there once each semester; students only, about 200 to 400 people show up. Since he left, it has become a tradition perceived as being one “since forever.”

He spent a year and a half as an intern with CDSS focusing on youth participation.

His goal for this session: a brain dump of what he's been thinking about for the past two years.

Of session participants, two people organize dances at colleges.

Why [focus on youth participation?]

- continuity – passing on the tradition
- community: diversity and fun
- spreading the seeds of dancing on a larger scale – dissemination
- life and liveliness

Young [dancers as distinct from] New: overlap and non-overlap of considerations; young dancers have some specific considerations: peer group – attitudes, technology, dance style

Definition of young: 35 and under [discussion in the group:] not having started a family [creates a considerably dividing line]

Anecdotal correlation of dances that have young dancers:

- music/calling “good/exciting”
- younger musicians and callers, (which can be in tension with “good/exciting” due to lower skill levels compared with more seasoned musicians and callers)
- “that's my friend up there”

There is a lot of competition [other things to do out in the world]

How to keep young[/new] dancers, [especially those who] get “addicted” to the dance

- some effect/correlation where peers are involved with organizing
- musicians/callers [who are young] are more visible [than organizers] and are thus seen as leaders

but also: exciting older musicians can be very attractive to the younger set

[In the context of college life, especially] one-off events can be exciting just for being one-off [the effect of uniqueness] [putting your regular dance] FLYERS at [such an event can be effective]

college students respond better when you are there in front of them. Outreach [is important:] go to them.

[Another approach to bringing young folks into the dance is] driving folks to a distant event [such as] the Flurry

Schools don't want to be seen as a “target audience” [so one approach is to] become part of their events – for instance, take the dance to the sports award banquet.

[Another question is] how do I take advantage of when a specially interested person shows up – [issues around] ridesharing

Pricing a dance [can be a very important consideration; a typical structure might be:]

- youth pricing at a lower level
 - under 18
 - college age
 - post college youth

this can be hard to do – by age? By using student id's?

[Discussion in the group about] Sliding scale – it averages out

Sliding scale of \$5 to \$10 averages out at \$8 [and makes the dance] a community event [feels more inclusive when no one is checking personal data]

Youth Dance Weekend charges \$90 minimum, \$130 is what it costs per person, \$150 [upper end of the scale] Transparency is really nice [people really like knowing the ins and outs of the finances].

Bussing in students for free.

Atlanta ID Model – group of 5 [students with id's] gets in for half price

Over-welcoming is a problem: need sensitivity

There's something valuable about charging even as little as a dollar [non-free things have more value]

[Part of the value of having someone taking money] Greeting at the door is as much a part of it as taking money – drawing people into the group; [giving information] such as directing people to the bathroom.

[Having a] diversity of people [at the dance] is welcoming

Location Times Three! Being near --

- public transit
- college

but [dances are] not so lucky, usually – rides – online ride technology [has turned out] not very satisfactory.

Rehoboth area dance: a big map with numbers that key to a list with contact information.

Designating a visible, social, trustworthy person as the rideshare hub – connecting people for rides – this provides Internet security – helps manage getting congenial rides with people who are comfortable with each other

[Transparency] Pie chart showing how money gets spent – artists, hall, reserve; [showing how amounts are affected by] group size [how many dancers in an evening]

Timing of the dance -- Thursday night is the “hidden weekend” -- [young people] aren't giving up a party night. A dance that ends at 10 is more attractive because they can go do other stuff afterwards...

In NYC, the diner concept – doing something after the event -- Will Cruise organized

counter-cultural trips to diners – this draws people in by [the process of] figuring out who's going and calling ahead to the diner to warn them how many people are going to show up

[Also, an]ice cream social after a dance [can be attractive.]

Advertising

- A nice looking Website helps more than flyers -- if you want a professional looking website, hire a professional
- Facebook is awesome – find someone [young] who lives there – a great younger person volunteer opportunity
- flyers – really neat flyers maybe – but not very effective
- young people already coming to the dance – let them know you would value it if they brought a group

Descriptions are often tedious and ineffective – it's exciting – weird and whacky -- live music -- “ants pants contra dance” [someone's term for their publicity!] -- links to videos online [especially effective]

Music and Calling – younger participation

- active effort seeking out and encouraging them
- willingness to endure the growing pains
- young people will come to see their friend perform
- having one or two slots for new callers during the evening

Boards – [inviting young people to join]

The Forgotten Youth – Children – we've really been talking about 18 to 35 --

[Children are an especially important provider of] continuity [passing on the tradition]
Chrissy Fowler's [view of running a dance] not a separate family dance.

At Chrissy Fowler's dance, the hour before the dance it's a family dance with an allcomers band sitting at the back of the hall so the regular band can set up on the stage.

Closing

Assessment – lots of geographic difference – broadly generalized – lots of youth

participation in the Northeast and Atlantic Seaboard; pockets of youth dancing in Seattle, Fairbanks, Santa Cruz; other areas don't have [a significant participation of youth].

Resources

Ethan Hazzard-Watkins How-To startup kit

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