

TOP 5 WAYS TO BOOST YOUR CLASS NUMBERS

by Christine Denny
Teacher, Choreographer & Tapatak Oz Syllabus Creator

1. MAKE SURE YOUR TAP TEACHER LOVES TAP

This may sound obvious, but you would be surprised at how many Dance Studio Principals reveal that their tap teacher does not really like tapping. They say things like “he really prefers teaching jazz” or “tap isn’t really our thing” or “we just offer tap because some children want to do it!” Well – is it any wonder numbers are low?

And one thing we guarantee is that if your tap teacher is not passionate and enthusiastic in the classroom, then this will rub off on your students and they will be unimpressed with their tap lessons.

So your number one priority is to find a tap teacher who genuinely LOVES TAP! If your tap teachers loves tap, then the students will too and they will want to come to TAP! Tap will become their favourite thing and then your TAP CLASSES will be up and running, with children in other genres thinking “wow – that looks like so much fun, I want to try it too”.

2. KEEP IT FRESH

If you or your staff are teaching old, boring and out-dated tapping, then your students are not going to be inspired. They want to feel current and in step with what is going on in the real world of tap. So – whether you are using a syllabus programme or freelance teachers – make sure that what they are teaching is modern and up to date and that all your guest teachers are in step with what is going on in the real world of tap.

Does this mean that you should only employ “young , hip teachers?”. No, it doesn’t – as experience and years of knowledge in knowing how to teach tap is invaluable. And the history of tap is really important to honour and acknowledge. But it means you should only employ people with real tapping skills, who also take an interest in what is current, whether they teach a more traditional style or a more modern/funky one.

What is important is that your staff are interested in, and following, what is current and sharing it with your students. They should know who the latest and greatest tappers are all over the world and should be mentioning these people to your students in class to inspire them to go check them out on You Tube etc etc.

Encouraging them to look at what is developing in the world of tap, is very important as tap is a very fluid art form and you need staff who are outward looking and willing to bring “what is new” into what they are doing too. They teach their thing for sure [as we all do] but inspiring the next generation has to include steering them towards innovation and what is current.



CHRISTINE DENNY

FEEDBACK: TAPATAK OZ'S TAP SYLLABUS

“The best investment I have put into our studio...I would be prepared to spend anywhere up to \$10,000 for this product...I just can’t speak highly enough of Tapatak Oz”

DOUGLAS MCFARLAND,
Director, Laycock St Dance

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3. TREAT YOUR TAP SERIOUSLY

Often times we find studios offering tap classes just because they think they should. Often the children only have half the time for their tap classes as allotted for jazz or classical ballet or contemporary. And if ever an extra rehearsal time is needed for a performance or show, then the tap class is the first one to be cancelled to make time for this extra rehearsal. This then sends a message to all the students and parents that tap is “not as important” as the other dance genres and an apathy for tap will run through the dance school. It comes from the top.

If the tap staff and dance studio do not treat “tap” as an equally important genre and invest as much time with it as the other dance forms – then the parents and students will not take it as seriously either. If you participate in classical ballet and contemporary competitions and/or examinations – then you need to also participate in the equivalent competitions, performances and examinations in tap. If you want tap to have the same participation rate as all other genres in your dance school – then you need to offer the same opportunities for students in tap classes. The same opportunities to perform and achieve, as in the other subjects you offer.

If you are going to perform at a local fair or on the TV for some reason, or at a corporate gig – then choose to present a tap number for a change. So often any performance opportunity or competition “fuss” is given over to contemporary or funk or classical ballet. This leaves the enthusiastic tap student feeling a little on the outside. Make a fuss of your tappers too and they will flock to class. The energy you give to your tap department is simply reflected back to you. It is as simple as that!

4. CREATE A HEAD OF TAP

Giving a member of your tap staff the title of ‘Head of The Tap Department’ can work wonders. Firstly, it gives that person an incentive to get the tap department going. Secondly, it gives the entire tap genre within your dance school a ‘nod of approval’. It says to your students and parents: “We care about tap, we value tap, we know tap has its own needs, technique and value and we support it”. Again, if you see the tapping at your studio as important so will everyone else. So create a Head of Tap and entrust them to create programmes within ‘their tap department’ to get more children interested. They might start a tap crew [audition only] which creates prestige. They might start an exam programme [to allow those children who want to, to move through the levels and get that sense of achievement, often reserved for classical ballet]. They may choreograph some really funky routines for your end of year show, that creates a buzz around the tapping. They may start entering routines in tap competitions and eisteddfods which again creates a buzz and pride in your tap department. Allow your staff and students to SHINE in tap and they will all love tapping along with you. Numbers grow and a real buzz exists around your tapping!



Above: Student from
ALL STARZ PERFORMING ARTS
(Sydney, Australia)

FEEDBACK: TAPATAK OZ'S SYLLABUS

“I love the focus on technique, rhythm and the use of accent, whilst also encouraging individuality and improvisation. It's such a unique and effective approach. The children love it and the syllabus has made me a better teacher and choreographer.”

Kieron Kulik, ALL STARZ
PERFORMING ARTS
(Sydney, Australia)

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5. EMPLOY DEDICATED TAP TEACHERS WITH A VISION

Too often tap teachers can come and go. And this does not help your tap department grow. Nothing will grow your numbers in TAP more than consistency. And this means consistency in your staff and consistency in the implementation of their vision. I have seen this so many times and it is so important. Of course it is great for your students to take class with “professional tappers”. Working performers from musicals and tap shows of various kinds. But these teachers will not usually have a ‘vision’ for your tap department and will drop you like a hotcake, when a performing opportunity arises. And when they drop you – the students get the message that “they are not important”. They also lose the consistency in their technical development, as a new teacher comes in to replace the old.

Having a consistent teacher year upon year, handling the technical development of your tap students is fundamental, so look for someone who actually loves to teach, as opposed to someone who is just “filling in the time” while they wait for another performing gig. Don’t get me wrong – we can all learn a vast amount from professional performers when they come to teach and their knowledge is unique and invaluable. But you can not beat someone who values teaching as a career, and has the tapping skills, as well as the dedication to inspire your students as their first priority.

So look for a great tapper. Someone who has a vision for your entire tap department and who is willing to put in the hard yards with your students. When interviewing a possible tap teacher I would ask:

- What is your vision for your classes here?
And what would you like to achieve with your classes?
- Who are your favourite tappers in the world today?
- Do you have any footage of you tapping anywhere?
Or can you show me some tapping now?
- Why do you want to teach tap for me?
- What do you love about tap?
- Where have you studied tap? With whom?
- What do you love about teaching?

If they cannot respond positively and interestingly to all these questions, then move on. Find someone who is passionate about teaching tap and is in it for the long haul.

So there you have your class boosting tips!

I hope this helps you grow your school with the strength and joy of tap.

– Christine Denny, Tapatak Oz - *The Total Tap Syllabus*



Above: Tap students from PLANET DANCE (Sydney, Australia)

FEEDBACK: TAPATAK OZ'S SYLLABUS

"I am thrilled to say that the syllabus has transformed tap in my school. The exams were so different to other syllabi and I loved the way they were conducted. What more can you ask for? Thank you Christine for helping me give tap a new boost in my school and I am over the moon with the results"

Jade Barnes, Principal
Planet Dance (Sydney, Aust.)

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