Visualising methods

Experienced people often take for granted things that to an outsider seem strange or incomprehensible. We don't choose to belittle things that seemed quite hard when we learnt. Our perception changes we are not conscious of some of the things we do, and ways we think.

The Learning Curve has several times discussed the physical skills that ringers develop and that become almost automatic for experienced ringers. This month we look at an aspect of mental skill - how we learn, and in particular how we visualise methods.

A method is an abstract thing. You can't touch it or see it. Nor can most of us hear it. We can certainly hear the result of ringing a method, and if we listen hard some of us might be able to work out what method it is, but few of us could claim to recognise much more than plain hunt by 'hearing' it like we would recognise a tune. So what is in our minds when we think 'Yorkshire' or 'Plain Bob'?

That's easy you might say, reaching for your diary and pointing to a page of numbers. But the numbers are not the method. In the middle of a peal you are still ringing Grandsire, but if you transcribed the sound into numbers you wouldn't get what is in the diary. The method is not about the numbers themselves, but about how they change - hence 'changeringing'. Ringing pedants ridicule the numbers themselves, but about how they transcribed the sound into numbers you wouldn't.

Our perception changes we are not conscious of things that seemed quite hard when we learnt. Rarely when solving a problem do we go back to the way we first solved it. Once we have learned how to do it, we use another way. Which way is best? The traditional blue line has stood the test of time but it is not the only way. Different people think in different ways, so if a technique works for you, use it. Have a look around at the others too though. They might lead you to some new insights.

A plain course starts and ends in rounds but the method itself repeats in a cycle, with bells starting at different points. You can't show this with a conventional line since it must start somewhere, normally 2nd or Tenor.

This concept is so important that The Tutors Handbook shows a picture of Plain Bob Doubles drawn on a cylinder. It gets the idea over but is not very practical because half of it is invisible round the back of the cylinder. You could draw it out on a strip of paper and glue the ends together but it would not be very practical to carry round in your pocket, and you still could not see it all at once.

Two people have recently been exploring ways round this. Jenny Cornwall experimented with drawing methods in a circular annulus, as shown in Figure 7. This example which shows Bob doubles with the Tenor covering.

Of course most of us don't ring all the bells, and ringing just one we feel more comfortable with that rather restricted view we call the blue line (after Snowdon's 1881 Diagrams) see Figures 4 & 5. The blue line is simpler but loses information; for example you can't see that the dodges fit together or that they come at the same time for everyone. You learn this separately.

Janet Lee, with her Circular Lines (RW 125) introduced the idea of a different colour for each lead, as in Figure 9. The colours she chose were intuitive for her but might not be for others. There is a standard colour code for numbers in electronics that some people might find more natural (as used for Malvern Link sallies).

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