

# Streetdance Report



## Streetdance as a Catalyst for Participation

*"Ohh ! Mama said we would be straight A kids (c'mon), If we did our homework, like we knew those songs..."*  
*Missy Elliott, Back in the Day (Feat Jay Z)*

### Key Outcomes & Challenges:

#### Empowerment:

Through the action research programme undertaken by Nike in partnership with Sport Action Zone and Waterloo Arts Network it has been clearly established that streetdance and hip hop dance can be extremely powerful tools for:

- Engaging young women from disadvantaged BEM groups in physical activity
- Increasing self-esteem and motivation within target group
- Increasing achievement within school
- Providing consistency and regularity for young women used to continued change
- Providing positive female role models
- Creating a gateway to increasing participation in other arts and cultural opportunities
- Challenging negative images of women in streetdance and hip hop

#### How?

This has been achieved by developing a model of working which integrates a number of different strands of activity concurrently. This includes:

- FREE community & after school dance classes
- School empowerment days – utilising female hip hop dance & sports professionals to inspire young women, address issues of self image, body consciousness and media images
- A Street Dance Summer School
- Regular & varied performance opportunities for participants
- Additional cultural opportunities such as film making at the NFT, involvement in the B-Supreme Festival and trips on BA London Eye
- Development partnerships with other arts, sports, education & community providers
- On going formal and informal consultation with dance teachers, participants, community, education & arts providers

#### Prevailing Preconceptions:

*"...a lot of it is about respect and teaching the young people respect, not disrespect."*  
*Laura Brown, Head of PE Lilian Baylis Technology Schools*

However it has also been identified that these dance forms are currently being underused by mainstream education and arts providers and this is in part due to negative preconceptions about streetdance primarily due to concerns about:

- the highly sexual nature of some dance moves as promoted in the media and music videos
- perceived sexual and aggressive nature of lyrics expressed by some commercial hip hop and reggae artists
- perceptions that streetdance and hip hop dance are always performed to the style of music outlined above
- lack of knowledge of the history and heritage of streetdance and hip hop dance amongst many mainstream providers
- a perceived lack of discipline and training amongst streetdance instructors

- a belief in some quarters that streetdance / hip hop dance is an undeveloped art form and will not challenge young women creatively or personally

#### **Preconceptions or Prejudice?:**

- It is difficult to dismiss issues about the provocative nature of some street dance due to the large number of explicit images presented by the media and copied by young women within the school and community setting.
- Over 30 education, community and arts professionals were engaged in the development of this programme all of whom had at some point encountered performances by young street dancers which they had considered inappropriate.
- Furthermore evaluation has also identified a small group of young women who have decided not to participate in classes as the style of dancing taught is not considered "sexy" enough.

#### **Threat or Opportunity?:**

- This should not undermine the significant opportunity presented to utilise streetdance / hip hop dance as a key tool for the engagement of young women but instead should act to demonstrate the need to challenge this negative stereotyping.
- Particularly as a significant number of those professionals consulted were not streetdance or hip hop experts and the popularity of the art form within the target group of disadvantaged BEM women continues to rise.
- Equally lack of formal investment in training for streetdance teachers and in education around the history and heritage of streetdance and hip hop dance only serves to reinforce negative aspects.
- Complaints about streetdance teachers lacking in professional discipline or creative depth seem unfair when there are seemingly limited opportunities for formal training and development in street dance / hip hop dance post 16 years old.
- It is also perhaps the boom in interest and demand for streetdance that has meant there is such a wide variation in the quality of instruction and creative interpretations.

#### **Conclusions:**

- The programme has clearly identified the empowerment potential of streetdance when handled sensitively and presented as an ongoing package of education & empowerment opportunities, although there is significantly more investment to be made in this area.
- The key challenge when using streetdance as a tool for empowerment is to contextualise the art form and provide clear boundaries and guidelines for teachers.
- Through the programme this has been addressed by ensuring that all teachers employed on the programme are conscious of the "appropriateness" of dance moves and music and to enable opportunities for contextualisation and education about hip hop & street dance through partnerships work with the NFT and Independence / B Supreme Festival.
- Finally consultation has clearly demonstrated the importance of regular performance opportunities for young women involved to ensure continued motivation and creative / skills progression for participants.



*1a. Girls from the Southside Crew performing a Carnival style Breakin' combination dance routine at the Thames Festival, September 2006. This class incorporates our youngest performers with ages ranging between 6-12yrs.*



*1b. Young women from the Archbishop Davidson's Institute Break Dance Masterclass take a trip on the BA London Eye for the first time. Attendance at the class had started to drop off - the trip on the Eye reconnected all 25 participants.*

## Overview of the Programme:

### Facts and Figures:

- **9 Community & After School Classes** have been delivered engaging over **200 participants** over the year
- **1 School Empowerment Day** involving **45 year 9 girls**... 2 hip hop dance professionals, 1 hip hop dj, 1 Vice Captain of the Women's English Rugby Team, 1 speaker from the National Film Theatre, 1 sports psychologist
- **8 performance showcases** for participants including a community dance day which involved **50 participants** drawn from all **9 community & after school classes**
- **1 summer school** involving **50 young women**
- **1 film with the NFT** about the life of Josephine Baker involving **15 young women** including **3 days workshops** in Lindy Hop
- **1 workshop** with the **B Supreme Festival** at the **Southbank Centre** involving **20 young women** working with Kymberlee Jay and Missy Elliott's choreographers to learn about the history of hip hop and what the industry is really like
- **1 trip on the BA London Eye** involving **25 year 11 girls** who had never been on it before!

### Most Successful Strand of the Community & Education Programme:

#### Schools Programme

*"I was sceptical about having street dance lessons to start with mainly because I didn't want the girls learning inappropriate dances and also I thought the moves would be quite simplistic and not challenging." Laura Brown, Head of PE, Lilian Bayliss Technology School (LBTS)*

### Key Achievements:

- Questionnaire responses from the School Empowerment Day demonstrate that 100% of participants felt more positive about participating in dance or sport after the event and 90% thought the event was "brilliant."
- Attendance at after school classes at LBTS has been consistently around 20 to 30 each week
- Participants in the above streetdance classes get an additional achievement grade for their PE report card which increases performance grades of girls who are less confident participating in traditional sports.
- The streetdance teacher employed through the programme to teach the after school class, has now been employed directly by the school to teach at Key Stage 4 after original reservations about the appropriateness of streetdance.
- The after school street dance classes are also used to incentivise discipline and attendance – any pupils misbehaving in class time or who have not attended during the day are not permitted to attend after school dance classes
- The street dance teacher reported at least one girl saying "I only came into school today so I could rehearse for our performance Miss"
- School teacher's knowledge and understanding of hip hop and street dance culture has been significantly improved through contact with B Supreme Festival, MTV trip and the school empowerment day. Particular reference was made by teachers to now appreciating the separate hip hop disciplines of popping, locking & breaking.
- In addition repeated references have been made to the significance of Kymberlee Jay as a positive and inspirational role model for young women at L.B.T.S.
- The after school classes have acted as recruitment for the community classes with a number of participants attending the community classes as a direct result of school based sessions.
- Conversely young women whose parents will not let them attend community classes as they consider streetdance inappropriate are allowed to attend classes linked to school activities.

- The school's programme has been particularly significant as it is completely new activity whereas the community programme has built on existing community & youth partnerships.
- The programme has received significant positive feedback within the education community and other schools approached last year but then reticent to get involved are now 100% committed to the programme having seen the success at LBTS. Four schools are now signed up for next year's programme, one paying directly for the after school class, with a fifth school demonstrating unsolicited interest.

#### **Recommendations:**

- It was generally felt that the school empowerment day was a significant success but that the work should be extended over more than one day to ensure a longer term impact and to allow for key issues relating to identity and image to be explored more in depth.
- It was also thought that the connection between the empowerment day and the after school and community classes should be made clearer in future events.

#### **Least Successful Strand of Activity - Summer School**

##### **Limitations:**

- Attendance was much lower than anticipated although 50 young women participated over the four week period.
- Evaluation has demonstrated attendance was negatively affected by:
  - Potential participants concerns about personal safety due to a number of attacks / assaults on housing estates during the summer school period.
  - Limited availability of streetdance teachers which meant some lack of consistency in class provision, with a changing roster of teachers where it has been established participants like to build a trust relationship with a preferred teacher.
  - Competition from other summer school providers also delivering street dance classes – provision in Lambeth was substantially increased on previous years and all SAZ summer activities were impacted by this.
  - Young women's reticence to travel outside their known territory to a centralised location. This was particularly true of young women from Southwark who were unwilling to attend a venue in Lambeth.
  - Difficulty motivating young women attending term time classes to attend summer school as they were perceived as separate rather than linked activities despite cross over with teachers and youth workers.
  - The range of activities timetabled were considered confusing by some participants.
- The Summer School was also a significant undertaking from a management perspective and was very time intensive for Project Managers.

##### **Recommendations:**

- However the individual elements of the summer school, in particular trips to Laban and the NFT, were considered highly beneficial for participants and teachers.
- It is recommended in future that key elements of the summer school such as masterclasses by specialist teachers and trips to other cultural / dance providers should be integrated into the term time education and community programme and that participants should be signposted to summer activities delivered by other providers.
- This will also help with project management by providing a break in delivery of activities allowing for key development and planning time during August.



*1c. The Bruk Out Crew, winners of the summer Dance Festival performing in Manchester, September 2006. The competed with 9 dance crews across Lambeth and Southwark to take part in this performance opportunity. These girls are some of our most dedicated, regularly attend a minimum of two classes a week.*

## Outline of 2007 to 2008 Community & Education Programme

All partners and participants are keen for the programme to continue and to embed and consolidate relationships between the various community, education, and sports & arts partners involved in the programme. Significant development work has taken place over the last year and consultation has demonstrated that there are substantially more areas for development and investment in the street dance community.

However it has also been apparent that there needs to be a transparent framework for the delivery of the programme helping both effective project management and also reinforcing connections between the key delivery strands for participants & partners.

### Programme Strands:

The 2007 to 2008 programme will involve the following strands of activities. (For a full programme timetable see Appendix A.)

**Dance Classes** – continuing 8 community classes & 1 after school class. Extending schools classes to include the following 3 schools: Stockwell Park High, Harris Girls' Academy (formerly Waverley High School) and the Academy at Peckham. This includes the already established programme at Lilian Baylis Technology School.

**School Empowerment Days** – extending format from one day to three days as follows:

- **Introduction Day** – addressing issues of self image, confidence, team building through the medium of street dance. Days hosted by four schools listed above.
- **Pathways to Progression** – careers and training in dance hosted by Laban t.b.c. attended by year 9 girls from 4 schools.
- **Image & Identity Conference at the NFT** – a full day conference and discussion about women in streetdance and hip hop hosted by the NFT. Including critical approaches to representations of women in the media. Attended by pupils from all four schools.

**Performance Opportunities & Arts Partnerships** – deliver one community dance day and enable other performance opportunities through partnership with Breakin Convention, B Supreme Festival and Southwark Festival.

**Accreditation** – new strand of development in response to consultation including the development of a new Level 1 qualification in Street Dance / hip hop dance.

**Research and Development** – on going consultation & evaluation including assessing the viability of establishing networking / development opportunities for street dance teachers.

Charlotte Isaacs: Sport Action Zone

Sarah Cretch: Waterloo Arts and Events Network