

Get Real!

Safe Street Dance Practice and Injury Prevention in hip-hop dance styles



Dancer/ teacher: Fred Realness
Photographer: Erika T Bergere

Fred Folkes implores all hip hop dance teachers to take responsibility and teach safe, structured dance classes with an emphasis on leading a healthy lifestyle

Fred Realness is one of the leading popping and locking teachers in the UK, he has previously worked in the fitness industry for 19 years as a personal trainer and gym instructor specialising in core stability as well as teaching swimming. Fred has a passion for teaching correct technique and advising street dancers on strength and conditioning exercises to improve health and safety in dance. He has worked extensively with pioneers such as Greg Campbell JR from the lockers, and runs lectures on safe dance practice and injury prevention for hip-hop dance, for companies such as Breakin' Convention and Urban Strides. Here he shares some thoughts on staying fit, healthy and injury free while practicing these demanding dance styles.

As street dance moves into a new era, being taught in schools, universities and receiving more exposure through the media, the need for dancers and teachers to understand the importance of safe dance practice and injury prevention has become vital for the longevity of the styles and the health and safety of the dancer. The days of insufficient warm up, incorrect technique and not truly understanding the benefits of a structured conditioning program for the given style must come to an end. The time has come for pioneers and teachers alike to take responsibility when teaching and to seek out the right information to deliver a safer and more structured dance lesson with progressive strength and conditioning exercises as part of it. Students should be confident that they will be encouraged to lead a healthier lifestyle in order to become successful. If we as teachers incorporate the basic formula for optimum fitness including the five areas of skill, speed, stamina, strength and suppleness, structured into the class, this, as well as having the correct information on nutrition will be an excellent start.

By **Fred Folkes AKA Fred Realness**,
Dance Teacher and Trainer

For many years street dance classes have been based on choreography and have lacked deep insight into the history of the dance style taught. Teachers must remember that the history of the style as well as history of themselves must be passed on, with an insight into injuries sustained during their dance career. If this information is not discussed then the dancer starts off on the wrong foot and will be at risk of suffering the same problems.

Leg popping and the knee structure

In the dance style of popping the term 'snapping your legs back' has been used for many years. Using this terminology whilst teaching could encourage students to forcefully lock the knee joint, which could cause the knee joint to hyperextend. After talking extensively with the creators and pioneers of the dance I have come to realise that the technique does not require the dancer to lock into the knee joint, which could cause damage to the cruciate ligament and the surrounding structures. When the correct technique is used the dancer uses the leg that the bodyweight is on and should extend and release just before full extension of the joint. When taught and practiced correctly the dancer can develop power without any risk of injury. The correct teacher training and drills to master this technique are vital and it is essential that all teachers who teach this style are aware of the dangers of teaching incorrect leg popping drills.

The importance of strength and conditioning

Exercises such as squats, split squats and lunges can be used to strengthen the glutes, thighs and calf muscles. Plyometric exercises can also help to develop explosive power in the thighs and strengthen the muscles and tendons in the lower legs. Core strength and stability exercises can also be used to improve balance and coordination. Incorporating strength and conditioning exercises into street dance classes will help build strength and protect the knees, ankles and hips, and should be encouraged in street dance classes.

To conclude

After spending the last four years teaching Safe Dance Practice and Injury Prevention, I have trained poppers, lockers, b-boys and house dancers. I have come to the conclusion that the importance of strength training and stretching is not being taught and bad habits are common practice. Teachers may believe that strength and conditioning is not their responsibility but as in the ballet and contemporary world, strength and conditioning plays an integral role in performance, longevity and the health and safety of the dancer. ■

Fred Realness can be contacted at:
fred.realness@gmail.com

 www.therealness.biz