

April 2021...Clyde Evans, Jr., an experienced hip-hop dancer and choreographer, has been teaching with Dancing Classrooms Philly since the Fall of 2019.

Clyde first learned about DCP from Teaching Artist Rhonda Moore, when they were working together on a project for the 2019 Fringe Festival. "Clyde came on board as an assistant choreographer for Mexican-born dance artist Mariana Arteaga's Uúmbal: Nomadic Choreography for Citizens. The project was a curated community dance project that involved residents of Philadelphia and surrounding communities," Rhonda said. "One of the main goals of Uúmbal was to create community amongst the diverse populations, both in ethnicity and age. From the moment Clyde entered the room and started working with the 75-member cast it was clear he possessed the qualities all Dancing Classrooms Teaching Artists should have: he is approachable, with positive body language and a way of speaking that does everything to encourage and lead anyone he encounters towards success. And, his dancing is impeccable, without making those he teaches feel any sort of inadequacy. I therefore urged him to become a DCP Teaching Artist."



Clyde began his DCP journey teaching at one school, but that quickly increased to 7 different schools. And though schools shut down not too long after he started due to the Covid-19 pandemic, that didn't stop his enthusiasm as a DCP Teaching Artist. "It was jarring to get shut down due to the pandemic when students were just getting to a place with their fellow classmates where walls were being broken down, and they were socially connecting with each other." He embraced the challenge of teaching virtually, though, and used his strengths to keep students engaged online. "I learned how to dance from watching television, and I also taught dance on television, so I understand the limitations of 2-D," Clyde said. "When I am teaching online, I might turn my body to the side, since you can't otherwise see the dance move if I'm only facing the camera. I will incorporate things like that into my teaching."

Clyde came to the United States from Trinidad when he was 8 years old. When his classmates made fun of his West Indian accent, he found a form of escape through dance. "I was able to fit in at my West Philadelphia school because of dance," he said. "One week they jeered at me because of my accent, but the next they applauded and cheered me because of my dancing." Movement was a bridge to fitting in, and that's what he hopes for his DCP students.

And in fact, Clyde has already witnessed that with his DCP students. At one of his schools, he had a student who came to school every day with extremely dirty clothes and skin. "It was in a poor neighborhood, but this particular situation was notable because none of the students wanted to partner with him," said Clyde. "That hit home with me because when I was a kid, my classmates stayed away from me because of my accent." Dancing, however, broke down that barrier for Clyde, and also broke down that barrier for his student, with whom Clyde partnered, which in turn showed the other students that it was fine for them to do the same. "I broke down the stigma, and I hope that experience sticks with him and guides him to better ones," he said. "The taste of acceptance is so rich, that I hope that students in those kinds of moments realize that there is hope, and that hopelessness is not something that is a steady, remaining, permanent thing. If you taste or experience a good thing, like I did when I was a kid, then maybe it will become the catalyst to search out more experiences like that, or serve as the inspiration to move beyond what you are currently experiencing in a difficult situation."

Dance definitely opened the door to many opportunities and experiences for Clyde. "One of my hopes is that through the DCP program, I can introduce my students to something where they feel like 'hey, this is a tool to allow me to interact with other people,' -- and that is a big deal, especially in inner cities." As a teenager, Clyde participated in the popular kid's television show *Dance Party USA*, on which he taught dance segments. That experience taught him how to use dance as a tool to engage and entertain. That ultimately led to him being a founding member of, and lead dancer in, Puremovement in 1991, a dance troupe that toured around the country and world for several years. He then founded [Chosen Dance Company](#) in 2001, and has been dancing and performing with that group since, including [appearances in Super Bowl commercials](#), on [BET's 106 & Park](#), and in many other commercials, movies, and music videos. "I was able to turn my hobby and something that I loved doing into a career, and here I am, still doing it, 30 years later. Dance really does open doors. It really does change things."

In addition to his work with DCP and Chosen Dance Company, Clyde is an Adjunct Professor at Drexel University and has worked as a Visiting Instructor at Wesleyan University. He is also working on a program called "Unity Across Communities" designed to bring



Teaching Artist Spotlight: Clyde Evans, Jr.

together people of the community, specifically in communities of color, with emergency medical services, police, and firefighters to get to know each other in non-confrontational settings so that when they are policed, the bridges have been built and will positively affect their interactions going forward.

By Talia Yellin Fisher