Avoiding the "Culture Vulture" Paradigm: Constructing an Ethical Hip-Hop Curriculum

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In the introductory matter to *That's the Joint: The Hip-hop Studies Reader* (one of a very small number of commonly used Hip-hop textbooks), scholars Mark Anthony Neal and Murray Forman identify a critical debate in Hip-hop pedagogy: the validity of Hip-hop music and culture as a subject of academic study.[1] Neal points out the myriad ways in which academics and cultural critics have attacked Hip-hop's legitimacy in the classroom, both by challenging its validity as an appropriate topic for coursework and by assuming that academics either reinforce negative stereotypes or ignore its cultural context altogether. Forman looks to the other side of the debate, the critiques leveled at academia by Hip-hop's self-appointed leaders, who have long resisted scholarly and academic appropriation of Hip-hop's cultural products because of their personal and professional agendas. On the occasion of the second edition of this textbook, Forman cast a retrospective glance at this debate and concluded: "the struggle remains as to how to properly position the study of hip-hop culture—in all of its wild, unruly, and complicated forms—within the academy without sacrificing scholarly rigor or imposing an elitist and unrealistic academic canon."[2] Indeed, there is a persistent divide between actual practitioners

1. While the term "Hip-hop" is now usually hyphenated, scholars have yet to reach consensus on its capitalization. We choose to capitalize it out of respect for our Hip-hop elders who do likewise.

2. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal, *That's the Joint: The Hip-hop Studies Reader,* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2–3. The first publication of this reader in 2004 marked a significant moment in Hip-hop scholarship: enough critical work had been published to allow Forman and Neal to choose some of the best extant essays for their collection. For *JMHP* readers who are unfamiliar with the growing body of Hip-hop scholarship, we suggest the following sources as a starting point: Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005); Jim Fricke and Charlie Ahearn, *Yes Yes Y'all: The Experience Music Project Oral History of Hip-hop's First Decade* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 2002); Mark Katz, *Groove Music: The Art and Culture of the DJ* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); William Eric Perkins, ed., *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays in Rap Music and Hip hop Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH: University Press

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of Hip-hop culture and the academics who study the phenomenon from afar, and increasing distrust on the part of Hip-hop insiders of the scholars who "use" the culture with little deference to those who *live in* the culture. A number of "old-school" Hip-hop practitioners have begun to produce their own historical texts to counter what they see as scholarly profiteering and cultural free-loading. So deep is the disdain that those who use Hip-hop culture for personal scholarly gain have come to be known pejoratively as "Culture Vultures."[3] A handful of academics have also begun to insist on a holistic teaching approach to better represent the multivalent nature of Hip-hop aesthetics. As Christopher Tinson and Carolos REC McBride argue, for example, "at this stage, scholars whose lens of critical and social inquiry is Hip Hop and who possess academic privilege have a particular duty to reflect the multifariousness and breadth of Hip Hop experience, from the popular to the political."[4]

In response to this debate, and in the hopes that academics can avoid the "culture vulture" paradigm, this paper argues for praxial Hip-hop pedagogy and maps its ethical challenges with the goal of fostering a broader, self-reflexive discourse among academics who teach about rap music and Hip-hop culture at colleges and universities. We advocate for three pedagogical practices that honor the living nature of Hip-hop culture: the incorporation of established, "old-school" perspectives, often assisted by cultural elders; embeddedness in local community; and engagement in creative praxis. Each section of this essay will describe the ethical challenges introduced above in more detail, and will offer concrete examples of the Hip-hop pedagogy practices we use in our own classrooms.

Given that authenticity is central to authority in Hip-hop, we offer the following brief statements to explain our connections to Hip-hop and the general nature of our Hip-hop courses. From 2004–2014, Felicia M. Miyakawa was on the faculty at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), where she taught courses in both "art" and "popular" musics. She offered a Hip-hop course on six occasions at MTSU. The class was cross-listed for upper-division and graduate students, and usually enrolled twenty-five to forty students. The course was typically taken as a guided elective. Between 2006 and 2013, Richard Mook studied, practiced, and documented Hip-hop culture in the Greater Phoenix

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of New England, 1994); Joseph G. Schloss, *Foundation: B-Boys, B-Girls, and Hip-hop Culture in New York* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Joseph G. Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004).

3. Our earliest record of this term is by Jorge "Popmaster Fabel" Pabon, who has been particularly active in constructing counter-narratives of Hip-hop culture and its origins. See Facebook Event page for "Apache Line: From Gangs to Hip Hop Denver Screening" (http://www.facebook.com/events/117505334995194/), April 19, 2011.

4. Christopher M. Tinson and Carlos REC McBride, "Introduction to Special Issue: Hip Hop, Critical Pedagogy, and Radical Education in a Time of Crisis," *Radical Teacher* 97 (2013): 6.

area. He taught graduate and undergraduate courses on the history and aesthetics of Hip-hop, for both music majors and non-music majors, at Arizona State University (ASU). From 2009 to 2013 he and Melissa Britt led the curricular development of a four-year program in Urban Movement Practices in the ASU School of Dance.

Pedagogical Precedents and Debates

The existence of widely used textbooks such as *That's the Joint* reveals not only a growing bounty of Hip-hop scholarship, but also increasing scholarly engagement with Hip-hop pedagogy. Existing scholarship about Hip-hop pedagogy documents two primary modes of engagement with this culture. The most common is using Hip-hop as a framework for teaching other topics, such as making use of rap's rhyme schemes, flow, and literary devices to teach literacy; appropriating Hip-hop's battle ethic to teach critical debate skills in a sociology class; or assigning Hip-hop based projects that teach leadership skills.[5] Other scholar-teachers attempt to integrate Hip-hop culture more broadly within current educational theory. A. A. Akom, for example, has proposed a new form of teaching praxis called Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy, an approach inspired by the politically conscious, praxis-based teaching model of Paulo Freire.[6] Christopher M. Tinson and Carlos REC McBride likewise see political potential in Hip-hop pedagogy: "Hip-hop Studies lie at the intersection of politics and education, and thus play a unique role in reviving political education inside and outside of the classroom. Schools and college educators . . . have to act strategically to transform these spaces into sites of growth, inspiration, and critical knowing and find ways to incorporate radical histories in their pedagogy."[7] In short, scholars to date find value in Hip-hop pedagogy because of (1) what Hip-hop

5. These approaches are summarized by Marcelina Runell Hall in "Education in a Hip-Hop Nation: Our Identity, Politics, and Pedagogy" (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 2011), 110–11. For additional examples, see Jared A. Ball, "Hip-hop Fight Club: Radical Theory, Education, and Practice in and Beyond the Classroom," *Radical Teacher* 97 (Fall 2013): 50–59; Marc Lamont Hill, *Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life: Hip-hop Pedagogy and the Politics of Identity* (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 2009); Marc Lamont Hill, *Schooling Hip-hop: Expanding Hip-hop Based Education Across the Curriculum* (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 2013); Suzi Parker and Sarah Fuss, "Bringing Hip-hop to Education in a Meaningful Way," *takepart* (November 20, 2013), available at http://www.takepart.com/article/2013/11/20/hip-hop-education-sam-seidel; Samuel Steinberg Seidel, "Hip-hop Pedagogy, School Design, and Leadership," *UNBoxed: A Journal of Adult Learning in Schools* 4 (2009), available at http://www.hightechhigh.org/unboxed/issue4/remixing_education/; and David Stovall, "We Can Relate: Hip-hop Culture, Critical Pedagogy, and the Secondary Classroom," *Urban Education* 41 (2006): 585–602.

6. A. A. Akom, "Critical Hip hop Pedagogy as a Form of Liberatory Praxis," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 42, no. 1 (2009): 52–66.

7. Tinson and McBride, "Introduction," 3.

as a tool can teach us about other subjects or (2) the way in which studying Hip-hop culture can radicalize students into broader civic engagement.

Hip-hop has also flourished in the academy as its own subject of study, with many universities offering dedicated courses or at least courses that give significant space to study of Hip-hop music.[8] Initially, however, Hip-hop courses in the academy focused to excess on examining rap lyrics and their musical settings, while neglecting the rich traditions of dance, DJing, graffiti, and freestyle rapping that are also integral to the culture.[9] In so doing, educators fetishized a fixed artistic product, recreating the commodification of Hip-hop culture that began in 1979 with the commercial success of "Rapper's Delight" by the Sugar Hill Gang.[10] The commodification of rap brought Hip-hop art into mainstream America, but also obscured Hip-hop cultural spaces and many of its founding artists. Further, it transferred ownership, profits, and representational authority of Hip-hop culture from a nested assembly of local, human communities to a profit-driven corporate community with few strings attached. Most of the artists who were deeply involved and invested in the creation of this powerful aesthetic have yet to see a proportional return on their investment in any form, though some manage to get respect. For those who were integral to the development of Hip-hop culture and its artistic elements but were later denied the benefits of rap's commercial success, aesthetic pedagogy represents a scholarly endorsement of these injustices. In short, focusing strictly on the "aesthetic" aspects of finished cultural products both de-legitimizes university Hip-hop courses in the eyes of those who originated the culture and robs students of the opportunity to experience this culture in its fullness.

More recently, teaching professors have incorporated other Hip-hop elements into their teaching, creating what Emery Petchauer has termed an "aesthetic turn" informed by Ethnomusicology and Performance Studies in postsecondary Hip-hop instruction. He notes in particular a new attention

8. Harvard University's Hip-hop Archive keeps a running list of courses about Hip-hop and Hip-hop-related topics offered by colleges and universities in the United States. See http://hiphoparchive.org/university/courses.

9. Emery Petchauer, *Hip-Hop Culture in College Students' Lives: Elements, Embodiment, and Higher Edutainment* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 4–6.

10. A similar "aesthetic" approach prevails in most current music history survey courses, which focus on products, usually compositions, preserved in either sound or score format. By studying cultural artifacts and reading about contemporaneous cultural values, students come to appreciate these works in modern contexts. When applied to Hip-hop culture, the philosophical and effectual weaknesses of aesthetic pedagogy are compounded by significant ethical problems. For the philosophical justifications for this "aesthetic" approach to teaching music history, see James Vincent Maiello, "Toward an Extention of Regelski's Praxial Philosophy of Music Education into Music History Pedagogy," this *Journal* 4, no. 1 (2013): 71–108, http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/85/127. For Regelski's response, see "Music and the Teaching of Music History as Praxis: A Reply to James Maiello," this *Journal* 4, no. 1 (2013): 109–136, http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/100/128/.

to "grounded expressions of hip-hop in local spaces."[11] While we applaud the increased attention being given to teaching about Hip-hop and the growing sensitivity to local spaces and practices, we see little discussion of how best to bridge the two by engaging students in culturally grounded artistic creation. Such an approach raises important ethical questions about how to navigate power relationships between Hip-hop practitioners inside and outside the academy. The first productive step, in our experience, is to invite the participation of respected community elders.

Respect for the "Old-School": or, Process over Product

In preparation for a spring 2011 Denver showing of his documentary *Apache Line: From Gangs to Hip Hop*, Fabel offered on a Facebook event page dedicated to this event the following explanation of why he made the film:

> I'm tired of seeing these "Johnny come lately" suckers jumping on the bandwagon and doing documentaries and films on a culture that many of us real heads lived and died for! It's time we control and own our history and how it's told and represented! Most of these culture vultures don't give back to our community. Support the work done by the true pioneers and legends of NYC's urban and Hip Hop culture![12]

Some Hip-hop practitioners have managed to convert their skills into academic teaching gigs. Fabel, for example, teaches dance at New York University; legendary DJ and founder of the Universal Zulu Nation, Afrika Bambaataa, is a visiting scholar at Cornell University. Other established artists such as ?uestlove (of the The Roots) and Apple Juice Kid (a North-Carolina based DJ/producer), who may not qualify as "old-school" artists but still garner respect, are taking on visiting positions at universities as well.[13]

Increasingly, academics who teach Hip-hop are heeding the call to involve the cultural elders in their courses. We—Mook and Miyakawa—have both taken advantage of Fabel's willingness to teach by inviting him to our campus for brief residencies. In the fall of 2010, for example, Fabel (and his wife Christie Z-Pabon, who is a significant Hip-hop promoter herself and organizes DJ battles around the world) came to Miyakawa's campus for a three-day residency. While on campus, Fabel gave a guest lecture about Latina/os in Hip-hop

11. Petchauer, *Hip-Hop Culture*, 3–6.

12. Popmaster Fabel, "Apache Line."

13. This phenomenon recently prompted musicologist Mark Katz to write a guest advice column on breaking into the academy aimed at music industry professionals. See Mark Katz, "So You Want to be a Rock and Roll Professor?," *ReverbNation* (December 10, 2012), available at http://blog.reverbnation.com/2012/12/10/so-you-want-to-be-a-rock-n-roll-professor/.

to Miyakawa's Hip-hop Music and Culture Class; led a dance clinic for students and community members who wished to learn "popping" from one of the originators of the dance style;[14] and moderated a screening and discussion of his film *Apache Line: From Gangs to Hip-hop*, which was open to the public.

More recently, Fabel and Christie visited Mook's campus as part of Home in the Desert: Hip-hop Oasis, a collaborative project funded by the National Endowment for the Arts that brought together youths from the Boys and Girls Club of Metropolitan Phoenix; nationally recognized artists; and university faculty and students to create Hip-hop music, lyrics, and dance about lived experiences of the desert.[15] Fabel's presence connected the local Hip-hop community to the deep history of this cultural tradition through direct creative practice in workshops; generous participation in classes; a screening of *Apache Line* at a Hip-hop cultural center in Phoenix; and DJing and MCing at two public events during the visit, one of which featured a regional DMC scratch DJ competition organized by Christie Z-Pabon.

Fabel's visits to our campuses and communities offered more than an "old school" perspective. We purposefully involved him directly in the creative process as teacher, facilitator, and performer. Inviting Fabel to teach foundational skills and join our cyphers (freestyle rhyming sessions, discussed further below) offered our students and youth partners a more direct generational link to Hip-hop history that, as ethnomusicologist and Hip-hop scholar Joseph Schloss has noted, is a crucial marker of status in one's individual Hip-hop identity.[16] Fabel's participation as an elder not only made the Hip-hop Oasis project more recognizable to others in the Phoenix Hip-hop community, but also demonstrated to members of that community that we, though inside the Ivory Tower, recognize and respect the cultural values of their community and their understanding of history. This would not have been the case had we invited Fabel as only a "talking head," panelist, or narrator.

14. "Popping" is a form of dance beloved by b-boys and b-girls. According to Joseph Schloss, popping is "a West Coast dance form that uses sharp, rhythmic muscle contractions to punctuate large, sweeping circular motions and was primarily performed to the sound of synthesizer-based funk music." See Schloss, *Foundation*, 60. For a discussion and video examples of popping, see "Dancing to His Own Beat," a brief documentary featuring Popmaster Fabel, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_G14Y_4A68.

15. By exploring metaphorical connections between Hip-hop and desert adaptations (e.g., light, heat, survival in a harsh environment, etc.), we generated new artistic visions of desert life that reached beyond Hollywood clichés. This project was also funded by the ASU Institute for Humanities Research.

16. Schloss, *Foundation*, 128.

Step Into the (Local) Cypher

The central role of community in our courses synecdochically reflects the importance of community in Hip-hop more generally. As described above, Fabel (like most others who participate in our programs) is more than a "guest" in our classroom, and we more than "hosts"; we collaborate as members of a community, albeit one in constant flux. This community ownership of Hip-hop culture extends to the participation of local artists without any formal university affiliation. Our relationships with local artists rest on the principle that we, as university professors, do not have any special claim to this culture or its history. We do not pretend to "school" our guests, or even our students necessarily. Rather, we recognize the value of Hip-hop knowledge and use our positions to provide artists and our local Hip-hop communities with access to universities and their resources. Such embeddedness is not new and can take many forms; we offer the following as examples in the hopes of provoking creative responses. (Note: in order to avoid awkward shifts of subject in the following paragraphs, we have separated our experiences.)

Miyakawa's experiences

In my class, engagement with the local Hip-hop community extends to making music with that community. For my fall 2012 version of this class, I set aside two days as local artist showcases and then invited local artists to join us. For the first of these showcase days I began with an open invitation to the local community funneled through a former student, Joshua Smotherman, who ran a number of local blogs and Hip-hop websites; makes beats; rhymes; and worked as a middleman in the area, helping artists with particular needs find each other. In other words, he knew everyone. He also happened to be an alumnus of my Hip-hop course and was eager to give back. I left the details of the invitation to his discretion and he produced nine panelists (including himself), all willing to share with my class the particulars of "making it" in the Nashville/Middle Tennessee Hip-hop scene. We held the panel on November 30, 2012, and within twenty-four hours Smotherman had produced a podcast of the session to document the ephemeral but fabulous conversation.[17] Most of the class was a discussion, but the class ended with a cypher, a freestyle rhyming session in which local artists and members of my class participated.[18]

The cypher is a sacred space of ritual and creativity in Hip-hop. B-boys battle in cyphers—large circles—openly joining the middle of the circle when

17. The blog/podcast can be found at Middle Tennessee Music's blog: http://www.midtnmusic.com/indie-music-mania-middle-tennessee-music-podcast-episode-8/#L6YJYUCsPh0T6tXx.01.

18. The cypher is available as a video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOzDsaq7VzA.

the music moves them to dance.[19] MCs hone their improvisatory skills in similar spaces, jumping into the middle of a physical and musical space when the spirit bids them rhyme. In my class, the cypher became a refuge and creative wellspring. Throughout the semester, when the going got tough we dropped a beat and formed a cypher. Long before our guest panelists joined our class, my students felt comfortable in our class cyphers. Admittedly, they felt different pressures when our guests joined us. Some of my students, hungry to join the business, saw this (rightly) as an opportunity to impress people with local connections. (Indeed, many phone numbers were swapped before the end of class and a few students negotiated internships.) But our visiting artists were equally eager to share their skills, recognizing the significance a cypher can hold in cementing the bonds of a particular community. I suggested we begin class with a cypher, but one of the guests—187 Blitz—demurred, claiming "the spirit isn't right yet." By the end of class, Blitz felt the spirit, an engineer started a groove on the classroom Steinway, a singer found a beat on some cabinets, and the cypher was on. An important element of the cypher is total participation/musicking: no one simply watches. Only a handful of my students rhymed, but the students cheered each other on, bounced with pleasure, reacted to witty one-liners, clapped to keep the beat, and participated with whole bodies.

The first time I taught my Hip-hop class at MTSU (in fall 2005), I witnessed the benefits these connections bring not only to my students, but also to the university in general. At the end of that semester, one of my students developed an initiative that he took to MTSU's signature archive, the Center for Popular Music (then directed by Paul F. Wells). Building on the new relationships he established after being introduced to local artists in my class, this student proposed a project in which he would document the local Hip-hop community. Armed with a video camera and basic fieldwork skills, he worked on this project for several months, resulting in a small collection of interviews and performance ephemera now housed in the CPM. Those in the local Hip-hop community who were part of this project were delighted to discover that academia took their creative work seriously. The CPM was pleased to document the local culture. In short, creating and maintaining ties with the local Hip-hop community benefits all involved.

Mook's experiences

One of the best examples of community embeddedness in my courses is the Urban Sol event series, which I organized and curated with Melissa Britt, my colleague in the ASU School of Dance, and a group of community partners. These free, public events combine battles for cash prizes, performances, open

19. For a discussion of the cypher as a b-boy space, see Chapter 5, "'In the Cypher': B-boy Spaces," in Schloss, *Foundation*.

cyphers, student projects, and research within the atmosphere of a park jam. (More information on the series is available at http://urbansol.asu.edu.) My students were deeply involved in the events at all levels, including handling artist paperwork, setting up and striking gear, filming, interviewing participants, battling, and performing.

The dance battle in November 2012 illustrates some of the ways that university courses can interface with Hip-hop communities and institutions in ways that benefit all of the parties involved. We organized this particular event in partnership with the Furious Styles Crew (FSC), one of the mainstays in the Phoenix Hip-hop scene. Each November the crew hosts an anniversary celebration lasting five days that draws affiliates, friends, and friendly rivals from across the United States to battle, enjoy performances, and party. We offered to host one evening of the anniversary, including a dance battle, live graffiti exposition, and spoken-word slam, at Civic Space Park in the center of Phoenix. Partnering with Urban Sol offered several benefits to FSC, including free access to a downtown venue, equipment and event support, a paid gig for some out--of-town affiliates, and additional audience exposure. For the Urban Sol series, the partnership with FSC provided an opportunity to support the Phoenix Hip-hop community, a ready-made roster of guest artists for our class meetings, enhanced audience turnout, and broader marketing exposure.

For students, this setting offered an opportunity to interact with numerous urban artists with diverse relationships to Hip-hop culture, from founding members of established crews to "house heads" who do not affiliate with Hip-hop at all, but enjoy watching stylistic fusion. A video from the first round of a two-on-two "open-styles" battle shows pairs of dancers competing together using any dance style (or fusion).[20] This example features eight dancers with a variety of positions in the community: two women from an Arizona urban dance fusion crew with a growing regional and national reputation; a pair of established local b-boys; two poppers visiting from Las Vegas for the FSC anniversary; and a pair of ASU students (trained in stepping and West African dance) attempting their first battle. The DJs for this event likewise brought a variety of institution and group affiliations to the mix: a well-known house DJ and venue owner warmed up the crowd before a Hip-hop DJ (also a b-boy) alternated rounds of this battle with a house DJ from Chicago.

At the following class meeting, students reflected on their experiences in writing and through discussion. Most shared that the event had challenged their assumptions about the race, class, and age demographics within Hip-hop, or the relationships between rivals in a battle (which can swing from deep fraternity before and after to near fratricide in the cypher). The discussion then

20. This video may be found at http://youtu.be/o2AH5iXcQF4.

shifted to the various identities and hierarchies asserted by the DJs and dancers during the battle:

> What did it mean, one student wondered, that one b-boy never stopped dancing, even when his time was up? Did other competitors find this obnoxious? Did this boldness relate somehow to his exceptionally colorful fashion choices? Did it explain, at least in part, his successful progress through the initial rounds of the battle?
>
> Why did one DJ keep playing remixes of big-band swing music? Is this his habit generally, was it a regional practice, or was it a choice for this all-styles battle in particular?

The class thus began to navigate important and at times subtle cultural distinctions within Hip-hop, and between Hip-hop and other urban subcultures, that would be difficult to invoke, let alone examine or analyze, in an academic discussion uninformed by community engagement. Furthermore, because the referent of this discussion was the community at Urban Sol that each student had personally experienced and to which he or she had contributed, each student had something at stake. Instead of waiting for a probing question from their professor, students shared their insights in response to each other, sometimes inspiring side conversations as the topic shifted. While some documentary films, secondary writings, and other static texts offer useful teaching opportunities, few could heat the room to such a rolling boil.

In both of the examples discussed above, we incorporated social structures from Hip-hop culture (the cypher and battle, respectively) into our curricula, creating hybrid spaces that were sanctioned by both a university and a Hip-hop community. Creating a home for Hip-hop within a university (and vice versa) shifted the discourse from separating "insiders" and "outsiders" (as often happens in panels and guest lectures) to sharing, struggling, and celebrating different artistic and social perspectives. Each occupant of these spaces, be they technically a "guest," "student," or "professor," could (and did) flow between new roles as a spectator, performer, videographer, and hype man, among others.

But there were also important differences in our experiences. For three years, Mook offered his seminar every semester and hosted at least one Urban Sol event per academic semester. Given the frequency of his course offering and performance events, Mook was better able to sustain ties with the local Hip-hop community. By contrast, Miyakawa was usually able to offer her Hip-hop class only in alternating fall semesters. Word of mouth about the course died down between offerings, and by the time the next iteration of the course came around, the local scene had drastically changed. Mook was also better able to tap into local and national resources for grant money related to what was current in his

community. Each time Miyakawa taught her course, she had to recreate ties with the local community and adapt to changes in local leadership, venues, and styles. Moreover, because of Mook's strong ties to the dance program at ASU and his own past dance experience, cypher-based cultural practice tended to involve more movement in his classroom. Miyakawa's class, by contrast, housed squarely in a School of Music with no ties to MTSU's small dance program, participated in cyphers constructed only of beats and rhymes.

We also navigated the inside/outside dynamic of academics vs. local community in different ways. In Miyakawa's case, "insiders" in the local Hip-hop community came to a university campus to speak with "outsiders." (It could also be argued that the people who came to campus were "outsiders" amongst the university community, and shared their time with students who were "insiders" in the university community.) Mook's students left the university campus for their experiences, joining as "outsiders" in the communal experiences that local Hip-hop community members (the "insiders") had already arranged.

Key to the success of both experiences was a deep awareness of the power balance at stake in these interactions. Local Hip-hop "heads" may have come to Miyakawa's classroom, but the floor was theirs for the duration of the class. And Mook and his students deferred to cultural leaders when participating in local events. In short, both of us created spaces for artists to represent themselves through the live practice of Hip-hop culture in its community home, without imposing the requirement of explaining themselves verbally, in prose, from behind a skirted table.

Creative Praxis

During the interactions described above, both authors required students to leave the safety of their desk chairs and engage in the creative practice of Hip-hop; more often than not, these experiences happened as part of a cypher. Cyphers offer not only the possibility of community participation, but also engage the students in creative praxis, applying what they have learned about the products and processes of Hip-hop culture in real time. Creative praxis allows the students to access Hip-hop through physical memory. B-boys and b-girls identify in the community not only through their movements, but also through the stories of those movements, how and from whom they learned them, who originated them, and how the b-boy or b-girl has made that movement his or her own. Similarly, the emerging DJ who learns to loop a four-bar break beat on turntables, scratching and launching each iteration accurately, is placing a gestural tradition in his or her body. Moreover, DJs learn the origins of those gestures in Herc's "merry-go-round" and the innovations of Grand Wizard Theodore and Grandmaster Flash, all while being initiated into the

social ritual of digging for records, learning repertory, and training the ear to hear the potential for manipulation in recorded sound.

Creative praxis in Miyakawa's class

As Travis Stimeling and Mark Katz noted in a recent issue of this *Journal*, "courses exploring various popular music traditions offer particularly rich opportunities for the development of composition assignments and . . . such assignments can offer students a valuable opportunity to integrate historical inquiry and artistic expression."[21] Because of my proximity to Nashville, many of my students were already deeply invested in songwriting and production. A good number of my students were Recording Industry majors and had set up home studios in their closets, bathrooms, basements, etc.[22] I capitalized on this background knowledge by tasking the students with a group project that resulted in the composition of a new song. Although some of the details changed from year to year, the project generally resembled the assignment in the Appendix. I took for granted that my students had different skill levels (including students with no prior musical experience) and planned accordingly. Early in the semester I asked them to fill out a sign-up sheet that helped me to identify students with skills in MCing, songwriting, singing or playing an instrument, DJing, and production. I then created groups that contained either a DJ or producer as the anchor, adding other students to the group as lyricists, instrumentalists, and so on. The resulting groups were heterogeneous and balanced and produced songs that were consistently good or excellent. Each group was required to either record the song for playback in class or perform for the class live during our presentation period. The groups also needed to be ready to discuss their songwriting/collaboration process; the technology they used (if any); and the styles and traditions they imitated in their new song.

To illustrate the resulting products of this assignment, I have loaded two videos of student songs from fall 2012 to Vimeo.[23] Both groups were anchored by at least one student with production skills, but—as is often the case with these projects—the students decided amongst themselves who would build the track,

21. Travis D. Stimeling and Mark Katz, "Songwriting as Musicological Inquiry: Examples from the Popular Music Classroom," this *Journal* 2, no. 2 (2012): 133, http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/52/87.

22. Stimeling and Katz credit their students with similar skill sets. They note, for example, that students who take popular music courses "frequently bring a relatively strong, if unarticulated, working knowledge of popular music conventions to the course" ("Songwriting," 133). And, as they point out, the wide availability of low-cost recording equipment—including editing software and easy-to-use applications—has greatly encouraged the development of recording and technology skills.

23. These videos are available at https://vimeo.com/57458696 and https://vimeo.com/57937759.

not necessarily deferring to the student with more production experience. In the first video, for example, the track was built and produced in GarageBand by a graduate student who was skilled in songwriting and was studying musicology, but had not previously tried her hand at production. Both groups also had a single student with no previous musical experience. These students participated fully. In one case, an inexperienced student rhymed a verse, and in the other, the student posed in a role of mixtape DJ. The groups also took excellent advantage of the singers in their groups (in both cases, the female members of the groups). In short, the students collaborated not only by deferring to each other's strengths, but also by gamely trying new skills.

During the presentations, the students discussed how they chose samples, what technology they used to build their songs, how they shared the songwriting process, and from where they chose their sources of stylistic inspiration. The second group emulated a specific regional style—that of Houston—by making reference to popular lyrical tropes (cars; "candy" paint finishes for said cars; and a narcotic drink known as "drank" or "lean," constructed from promethazine-based cough syrup and a carbonated beverage such as Sprite); constructing a slow beat; and framing the song with a bass-voiced DJ acting in the role of a mixtape DJ, a mainstay in the Houston scene. The students also had the opportunity to illustrate their new facility with Hip-hop history. K-Rock (AKA Kara McLeland, an aspiring musicologist) of the first group, for example, honored the classic practices of dissing and boasting in her verse by praising her lyric writing skills at the expense of Sugar Hill Gang's song "Rapper's Delight," which—as my students learned in class—is peppered with "borrowed" rhymes.

As Stimeling and Katz note, discussion of musical elements can be tricky, particularly for students with little previous musical experience.[24] The students hoped the music would speak for itself. Prompting them with guided questions was an important part of this discussion. The class presentation was also an opportunity for me to ask them about their experiences during the process of song creation. Inevitably, most of the students admitted that songwriting was more difficult than they had anticipated. But the students also greatly appreciated the project; for many, it was their favorite element of my Hip-hop course.

Creative praxis in Mook's class

The Urban Arts Ensemble was another hybrid creative space that I created with Melissa Britt in order to experiment with different interactions between musicians and dancers. (The video is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OleNoiJOjGI.) In a dark, open basement, dancers and musicians formed a ring, centered on a single light shining down on the floor. The cypher began with

24. Stimeling and Katz, "Songwriting," 136.

fifteen minutes of warm-up, which allowed the musicians to build a groove while the dancers stretched. We then began structured improvisations (they felt more like games) that varied according to the goals for that particular week.

In the example cited here, musicians were paired with dancers, and each pair traded four-measure phrases and then eight-measure phrases. The goal for both members of the pair was to establish a connection by responding to the other's performance. Often this worked reasonably well; sometimes an exercise failed; occasionally, it was brilliant. After one or two rounds of this exercise, the circle shrank, the group sat on the floor, and we reflected on the experience of the previous exercise, and our connections and communications with one another.

Creating this active, critical cypher in class, which I call "party-based pedagogy," has several advantages. First, it offers students an immediate experience of Hip-hop culture as a creative praxis, an important counterpoint to the commodified artifacts that dominate my students' experiences of Hip-hop on a daily basis. Second, it expects students to assert their identities in the cypher, by far the most fundamental aesthetic and artistic practice in Hip-hop. That experience can be especially liberating (and/or challenging) for conservatory-trained musicians, who are used to recreative iteration, as opposed to creative improvisation, and tend to carry in their bodies and psyches a tragic fear of "wrong" notes. Now the focus of a supportive and affirming group's attention, with no score to hide behind, my students gradually learned to look at their partner in the cypher, offer that person a musical idea, and then observe as the partner responds and the cypher affirms their work. The success of this approach hinged on the affirming social dynamics that Britt and I cultivated with great care.

Importantly, the Urban Arts Ensemble did more than simply recreate a club or battle ritual. As a hybrid space, it combined creative activity and experimentation with research and academic inquiry. All of our activities, even those on the computer screens, were video recorded from multiple angles and archived by Evan Tobias, my colleague in Music Education, to support both our research projects. Analysis of this archive has already offered new windows into what dancers from different backgrounds listen for in a particular track, for example, and new techniques for coordinating multiple artists during live production of dance music. Moreover, the ensemble has offered new and productive insights to our guest artists. As one reflected after the above exercise:

> This was a neat exercise for me because when I'm in the cypher there's all these thoughts going on like "what do I do next? What's going on? What's occurring? Do I look good? Am I done yet?" There's all these thoughts, right? And you're trying to get to this place of "shhh." But I didn't have time for that because I was trying to hear the song. I was trying to hear the instrument

> when it wasn't there anymore. So there was no space for being in the future or the past. That was really neat.

The final assessment in Urban Arts Ensemble was a group project. We divided the students into teams and asked each to develop an exercise for the Ensemble that would facilitate development of a particular skill. Students tested their ideas at one session in week 10, gathered feedback, then revised and re-tested them at the end of the semester. These exercises then joined a "library" of options for future semesters.

Both of these assignment types leverage the prior experiences of our students. Since Miyakawa taught in the shadow of Nashville at a university with a first-rate Recording Industry program that provided the majority of the students in her Hip-hop class, she could count on a majority of her students having songwriting, production, instrumental, and/or vocal skills. But the local Hip-hop scene was not rich in b-boys or b-girls, and graffiti writers were difficult to find. Mook's successful experiences with a local dance community would not have translated well in Miyakawa's environment.

Conversely, although Phoenix boasted an active Hip-hop dance scene, its production of Hip-hop music had been limited by nearby Los Angeles, which siphoned away many local artists who had developed the skills to work professionally. And most of the students in Mook's school of music, which was modeled on a traditional conservatory, had little fluency in popular music production techniques, history, or repertory. Mook therefore engaged with Hip-hop music production at a more basic level, while exploring cultural connections with dance and DJing in more detail.

It is worth noting that the assignments we designed engaged in creative praxis in different ways. Miyakawa's students worked for several weeks on a project that had a fixed beginning and ending date. They presented on the same day in class, but the creative process that led to the presentation happened asynchronously. The cyphers in her class, by contrast, were purely improvisatory, unscheduled, live moments of creative praxis. Likewise, Mook's "party-based pedagogy" approach highlighted the live nature of creative praxis. In the end, our assignment designs reflected the resources available to us. We encourage those who wish to teach a Hip-hop course to engage local assets and create a course that reflects the skills and experiences of the local Hip-hop community and of the students most likely to populate the class.

Concluding Thoughts

Our intent in advocating for the inclusion of old-school voices, community engagement, and creative praxis is not to erect barriers to scholarly engage-

ment with Hip-hop. These are not formal obligations to be fulfilled; rather, we argue that they have intrinsic value. Indeed, they are basic markers of value in Hip-hop culture as practiced both today and historically. Moreover, teaching Hip-hop using the principles we have argued for can help to bring out the best in academia by challenging and transcending our institutional boundaries and shifting the terms of our discourse. Loosening the grip of hierarchies based on academic rank (and/or class) creates room for new assertions of identity: a high school dropout can "school" a professor; a broke, homeless choreographer becomes a guiding light and inspiration; junior faculty become the anchors of an academic program. In our view, that process benefits us, our students, and the discipline of musicology.

While our primary purpose in writing this article is to generate discussion amongst academics teaching about (and thereby representing) Hip-hop culture, this essay might be of use in two ways to those teaching other musicological topics. First, some might choose to use aspects of Hip-hop culture to teach other topics, an approach theorized more fully in the Critical Hip-hop Pedagogy literature cited above. Second, our methods of engaging local communities and artists, incorporating old school voices, and engaging in praxis were designed to navigate issues of power, exploitation, and (mis)representation that extend far beyond Hip-hop to rock 'n' roll, house, jazz, bluegrass, and myriad other genres. If applied in courses on other topics, these methods could make music history more socially and practically relevant for students, faculty, and communities outside the academy.

APPENDIX: Miyakawa, Hip-hop Song Project

This semester we will be discussing a number of clearly identifiable historical and regional rap styles. For this project you will write a song based on one of these styles (your choice). You may collaborate on this project in any way you choose (you may also outsource), but all members of the group must be involved in the composition and performance of the song. To help you get started, think about the following:

- What kinds of lyrics are typical of the rap style you chose?
- What's the typical instrumentation of this style?
- Are there any beat patterns typical of this style?
- If there are quintessential performers in this style, what can you do in your song to emulate those performers?
- What resources (e.g., friends who play instruments, recording technology, etc.) do you have at your disposal?

- What are the musical strengths of each member of your group?
- Will you use live instruments or will you produce the sounds electronically?
- Will you need a producer?
- What do you want your song to be about?

Please respect your classmates and instructor and leave excessive expletives and offensive subjects for another time. Think PG-13. If in doubt, ask me first.

The Presentation

At the end of the semester, each group will give a class presentation. Each presentation should:

- feature a performance of the song (either live or recorded; if you record the song, please bring me a copy so I can share with everyone!);
- describe the rap style emulated in the new song;
- describe the compositional choices made during the songwriting process;
- and describe the collaboration process for the song's composition.

Grading Rubric

Group members: _____

Song title: _____

The Song

Lyrics	4. Successfully emulates a clearly identifiable Hip-hop style	3. Good understanding of but inconsistent emulation of a clear style	2. Some evidence of understanding and incorporation of clear style	1. No attempt to emulate a clear style
Music	4. Successfully emulates a clearly identifiable Hip-hop style	3. Good understanding of but inconsistent emulation of a clear style	2. Some evidence of understanding and incorporation of clear style	1. No attempt to emulate a clear style
Performers	4. All members of the group participated in the creation of the song	3. Most of the members of the group participated in the creation of the song	2. Only some of the group participated in the creation of the song	1. The song's creation was largely the work of a single group member

Total points: _____

Percentage out of 12: _____

The Presentation

Lyrics	4. The group clearly explained the lyrical content / theme and brought a copy of the lyrics for the instructor	3. Some (but less clear) explanation of lyrics; or clear explanation but no copy of lyrics for the instructor	2. Some explanation of the lyrics and no lyrics for the instructor	1. Poor explanation of the lyrics and no lyrics for the instructor
Music	4. Discussion of music clearly accounts for compositional choices and collaborative process	3. Discussion of music indicates some understanding of compositional process and collaboration, but little reflection	2. Brief, generalized discussion of the compositional process and collaboration	1. Little to no discussion of compositional process with little to no discussion of collaboration
Performers	4. All members of the group participated in the presentation	3. Most of the members of the group participated in the presentation	2. Only some of the group participated in presentation	1. Only one group member presented
Final Product	4. The song is either performed live or the group brought a finished recording (with a copy for the instructor)	3. The live or recorded performance is complete but not polished (or no recording is furnished to instructor)	2. The recording or performance is poorly rehearsed or poorly conceived	1. The final product is not complete or is disrespectful towards classmates or the instructor

Total points: _____

Percentage out of 16: _____