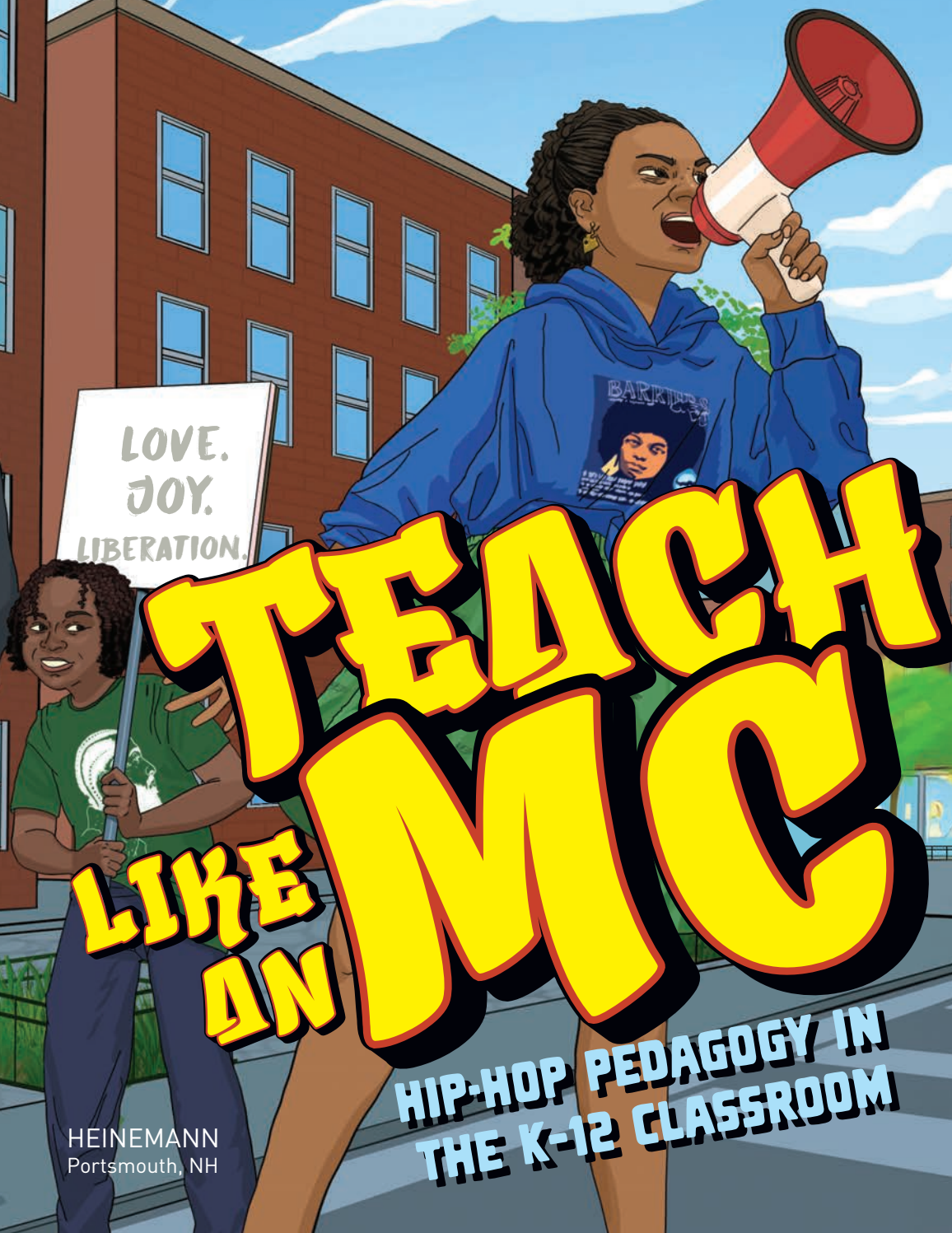


EDMUND ADJAPONG



TEACH MC

LIKE
AN

HIP-HOP PEDAGOGY IN
THE K-12 CLASSROOM

HEINEMANN
Portsmouth, NH

Heinemann

145 Maplewood Avenue, Suite 300
Portsmouth, NH 03801
www.heinemann.com

© 2025 by Edmund Adjapong

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying or recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without prior written permission unless such copying is expressly permitted by federal copyright law.

Requests for permission to reproduce any part of the work or queries regarding subsidiary rights licensing should be submitted through our website at <https://www.heinemann.com>.

Heinemann's authors have devoted their careers to developing the unique content in their works, and their written expression is protected by copyright law. You may not adapt, reuse, translate, or copy portions of their works and post on third-party lesson-sharing websites, whether for-profit or not-for-profit.

Acknowledgments: Stebbins Ave. & Westchester Ave., Bronx © Joe Conzo Archives 2024; Elizabeth Eckford © Will Counts/The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/AP Images; Archaeology of Self Racial Literacy Development Model © Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz; Grandmaster Caz © Joe Conzo Archives 2024; Graffiti artist Cornbread © Johnny Nunez/WireImage/Getty Images; Wildstyle graffiti © Nikita Kapustin/Alamy; stencil graffiti © AnnetteMason/Stockimo/Alamy; bubble letter graffiti © kiyopayo/Adobe; block letter graffiti © PCJones/Alamy; *Reaching Out* © 2021 City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program/DISTORT & Gabe Tiberino, 3221 Kensington Avenue. Photo by Steve Weinik; *Cecil B. Moore Philadelphia Freedom Fighters* © 2021 City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program / Felix St. Fort & Gabe Tiberino, 2201 College Avenue. Photo by Steve Weinik; *We Did That* © 2021 City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program / Letisha Bindu & Symone Salib, 13th & Arch Streets. Photo by Steve Weinik. *DEF* mural © S.E.T.H.; *Unity, Black Is Beautiful, Try II be the best version of yourself* © Robert Owusu III/iieyevuew.com; Zulu Nation patch Courtesy Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025930865

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
ISBN-13: 978-0-325-17085-5
1 2 3 4 5 VP 29 28 27 26 25

4500906282

Editor: Louisa Irele

Production: Vicki Kasabian

Permissions: Erika Kane

Author photograph: Esston Benjamin

Cover and text designs: Suzanne Heiser

Cover and interior illustrations: Robert "THIIIRD" Owusu III

Typesetting: Kim Arney

Manufacturing: Jaime Spaulding

CONTENTS

FOREWORD by Gloria Ladson-Billings xiii

INTRODUCTION I Got a Story to Tell xvii

UNDERSTANDING HIP-HOP CULTURE AND PEDAGOGY 1

Understanding Asset-Based and Culturally Competent Pedagogies 3

What Does It Mean to Be Culturally Responsive? 5

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 5

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy 6

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy 7

What Is Hip-Hop Pedagogy? 10

Hip-Hop as Love 12

Hip-Hop as Joy 14

Hip-Hop as Liberation 17

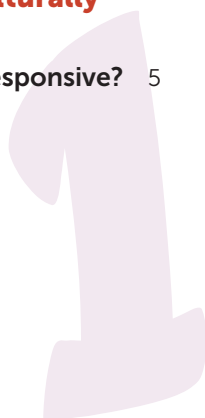
Why Hip-Hop Pedagogy? 19

Hip-Hop Identities and Funds of Knowledge 21

Strengthening Ties with Students Through Hip-Hop 23

A Hip-Hop History 24

Exploring Your Hip-Hop Identity 29



UNDERSTANDING AMERICAN HISTORICAL CONTEXT TO BECOME A HIP-HOP EDUCATOR 33

The Entrenched Legacy of Slavery 35

Jim Crow: An American Racial Segregation Campaign 40

Brown v. Board of Education 42

The Journey of Becoming: From Awareness to Advocacy 46

Racial Literacy Development in the Context of Hip-Hop 47

Racial Literacy Development Components 48

Developing Your Teacher Identity and Embracing Hip-Hop in Education 52

American Socialization and Implicit Bias in Teaching 53

Interrogating Educator's Positionality 58

THE MC 65

The History of the Master of Ceremonies 66

The Evolution of the MC 68

MC as the Master of Content 74

Know Yourself 77

Know Your Power 78

Remain Persistent 78

Remain Authentic 79

Learning to Listen and Not to Judge 80

Listening and Responding to Students 81

The Cogenerative Dialogue 84

Co-Teaching: Students as MCs 85

Identifying Student MCs 86

GRAFFITI 91

The History of Graffiti Art 92

Graffiti Art as a Response to Social Inequality 93

Designated Spaces for Expression 98

Student Reflective Spaces 99

Environmental Design 99

Student Art Galleries 100

Graffiti Art as Culture in Education 100

Leveraging Art in the Classroom: A Social Constructivist Approach 102

Encourage Critical Thinking Through Art 104

Critical Reflections and Discussions of Works of Art 104

Gain Authentic and Deeper Understanding of Students 106

Storytelling Through Art 108

Graffiti as Community Art 109

Community Engagement 112

Collaborative Projects 114

Community Partner Art Initiatives 115

Collaborative Murals 117

Considerations for Utilizing Graffiti Through Hip-Hop Pedagogy 117

KNOWLEDGE OF SELF 121

The History of Knowledge of Self 122

Hip-Hop as a Tool to Support Student Identity Development 126

The Practice of Knowledge of Self in Hip-Hop 132

Developing Students' Critical Consciousness Through Hip-Hop and Pedagogy 135

Critical Action in the Classroom 139

Hip-Hop Is Too Problematic for the Classroom 142

THE DJ 145

The History of the DJ 146

The Power and Potential of Emulating the DJ in the Classroom 148

Emulating the DJ in the Classroom Through Student-Curated Playlists 149

The DJ and the Innovation of the Turntables 152

Reimagining the Teacher as DJ and Student as Producer 153

Considerations for Educators Leveraging

Digital Tools in the Classroom 163

Class Social Media Accounts 164

BREAKDANCING 167

The History of Breakdancing 168

Hip-Hop Dance as Joy and Liberation 170

Hip-Hop and Kinesthetic Learning 172

Benefits of Kinesthetic Learning 173

Strategies to Promote Physical Movement and Learning 175

Movement Breaks 175

Role-Playing 178

Card Sorting 181

CONCLUSION You Got a Story to Tell 183

Protecting Your Mental 185

Find Your Community 186

Small Wins Jar 186

Self-Compassion 187

Self-Care 188

AFTERWORD by Christopher Emdin 190

REFERENCES 195

FOREWORD

GLORIA LADSON-BILLINGS

I write this foreword during one of my favorite times of year . . . springtime. The grass has turned green, the trees are in bloom, and I am spending my afternoons digging in flower beds and pots as I transplant young seedlings of tomatoes, herbs, and flowers. Planting makes me think of what we as teachers do. We receive tender seedlings at various stages of growth. Some already have strong sturdy roots. Some are barely hanging on and need careful attention, good soil, watering, and fertilizing. No gardener worth their green thumbs would consider a plant *bad*! No, good gardeners look at every plant as a living thing with potential to flourish and grow. No good gardener would presume every plant needs exactly the same thing. Some of those plants will have weeds crop up around them and attempt to choke them out. Some will be inadvertently planted too close to rocky soil and will struggle to push its roots past those rocks. But, before long with careful tending and cultivation, those plants will produce a good crop.

In this volume, *Teach Like an MC: Hip-Hop Pedagogy in the K–12 Classroom*, Edmund Adjapong is using what every great teacher uses—their passion to fuel teaching and learning in their classrooms. Edmund explains how vital hip-hop was to his journey as a learner and uses it as a way to organize his teaching. The beauty of his approach is not that he is demanding everyone deploy hip-hop as a strategy for teaching and learning. For those who know hip-hop, there are at least four roles artists can assume—MC, DJ, breakdancer, and graffiti artist. Taken

together an outstanding hip-hop crew produces knowledge. Edmund Adjapong argues that teachers should take on the role of MC. The hip-hop MC orchestrates the performance. They work to pull together the performance and make sure others participate and contribute in ways that best showcase their strengths. In many ways, the MC is the director and responsible for keeping things moving. The teacher who is a hip-hop MC is akin to an orchestral conductor. While they do not actually “perform” they ensure that everyone is following the score and participates in ways that help the group flow.

The teacher who teaches like an MC demonstrates why following one’s passion is the key to engaged teaching and learning. Imagine a teacher whose passion is baseball. She might serve as the manager or coach. She could organize her entire classroom around helping students to improve their batting average or working toward a lower ERA. Students could follow a favorite player and use baseball trading cards to learn statistics, geography, and read and write sports columns. Or, what if a teacher has a passion for European classical music? He could serve as a conductor. He could expose students to the musical styles of composers and students can choose to follow a specific composer. They can organize their year into a symphony where each quarter is a movement. Students can learn the terminology and the aspects of symphonic performances. Perhaps students can even attend a symphony. Another teacher may have a passion for cooking. Much of what students do can be around the culinary arts. Students can start by identifying their favorite meal and the teacher can plan for students to cook that meal by year’s end. Throughout the year students can learn culinary terms and equipment. Parents might participate by coming to class to do a cooking demonstration. Readers may recall a scene from the film *Stand and Deliver* featuring the work of mathematics teacher Jaime Escalante where he shows up in class with an apron, a chef’s cap on his head, and a cleaver in his hand. He starts by loudly chopping an apple. Mr. Escalante used something fairly common to draw students into the mathematics class.

As a teacher educator, each week I would ask prospective teachers to come up with a metaphor for teaching. In the beginning, students came up with fairly typical responses—teacher as coach, teacher as

firefighter, or teacher as parent. But as the semester wore on and students spent more time in classrooms, they began to refine their metaphors. Now I was hearing things like teacher as builder or teacher as project manager. The teacher candidates were beginning to draw from their previous work and experiences to see how teaching and its complexity could be seen as an enterprise that drew from a variety of skills and abilities. One of my favorite metaphors came from a student who seemed to struggle each week with how he would characterize teaching. He initially stuck with the more generic metaphors, but I could tell he found them unsatisfying. One day he approached me as I was walking to my car. "Professor, I think I have my metaphor!" "Well, what is it?" I asked. "Teacher as farmer! You have to till the soil, plant the seeds, do the weeding and pruning, but there are conditions and circumstances you cannot anticipate. Sometimes you get a great harvest but sometimes you may experience crop failure." I listened with interest as he excitedly detailed his understanding of teaching and his role as the teacher-farmer. I recognized that the metaphor excited him because he had a rural background. He understood farming because he grew up on a farm. Farming was one of his passions.

My own passion has always been music—all kinds of music. I grew up in a neighborhood that was home to two of the world's greatest musicians—one European Classical and the other jazz—Andre Watts and McCoy Tyner. These great musicians fueled my passion. My life is surrounded by music but early on in my teaching career I found myself attempting to conform to the norms of traditional teaching. I woke up each morning to music. I played music in the car on my drive to school. I turned on the radio in my classroom. But as soon as the bell rang, I turned off the radio! One day, because I was running late, I did not turn off the radio before the students entered the room. I rushed to turn it off and a student said, "Don't turn that off, I like that song!" I realized that I had been keeping my passion outside of the classroom. How could I expect students to enjoy and engage in a classroom to which I failed to bring my whole self? The very next day I brought in a stereo system and a stack of vinyl records. I started each class period with some music as students entered the room. During quiet times I played softer music. I started taking student requests and played the

music they wanted at various portions of the class period. I introduced the students to multiple genres of music—rhythm and blues, country western, European classical, pop, Broadway show tunes, and some world or international music. While this volume focuses on teaching like an MC, I guess I could say I was teaching like a DJ!

The point of this volume is that if we are to practice culturally relevant or culturally sustaining pedagogies, we have to be authentic and show up in classrooms as whole people. Far too many of our students are trapped in classrooms with people who are “representatives” of themselves, not their true, authentic selves. These “representatives” rarely show human emotion. They are never really happy or sad or angry. They are cardboard examples of themselves, and students may fail to engage since they are unsure of the person with whom they are interacting.

Teach Like an MC is a clarion call for full and authentic engagement in the classroom. It is beseeching teachers to be fully present and involved in the lives of their students. While everyone will not necessarily appropriate the hip-hop metaphor, every teacher should work to find the passion that will allow them to connect with students in meaningful ways as previously described. *Teaching Like an MC* challenges teachers to bring energy and excitement to the classroom. This is not about trying to “entertain” students but rather to engage them in their own teaching and learning. It is about using learning theories that are tried and tested—moving students from the familiar to new learning, or what psychologists call, starting with “prior knowledge.”

Teach Like an MC is wonderfully compatible with culturally relevant pedagogy. Beyond what some might see as the “fun” of being in a class with this type of teacher, the real goal is to foster students’ learning, develop their cultural competence, and encourage their sociopolitical or critical consciousness. These goals should be present in every classroom and the teacher who teaches like an MC will recognize this right away.

—Gloria Ladson-Billings
Professor Emerita
University of Wisconsin—Madison



Understanding Hip-Hop Culture and Pedagogy

Most students in schools today feel a need for transformative pedagogies. For decades, education policy-makers and stakeholders have worked toward crafting policies that will improve the rates of achievement in public schools across the nation. Unfortunately, many of the nation's attempts to reform education have fallen short of the intended outcomes. The most recent education reform policies, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), have received harsh criticism from educators and have had the most direct impact on how our classrooms operate today.

From 2002 to 2015, NCLB held schools and, in particular, teachers accountable for the achievement of students and heavily emphasized standardized assessments that masked the truth behind why schools were failing: lack of engaging and relevant curriculum and pedagogy (Gay 2007; Guisbond 2012). The Every Student Succeeds

Act (ESSA), implemented in 2015 as a response to counter the negative implications of NCLB, required states to adopt new and “challenging” academic standards in reading, math, and science, also known as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). While the CCSS was initially viewed as an opportunity for schools to innovate and move away from a top-down, one-size-fits-all solution to low academic performance, it also came with a new set of high-stakes Common Core testing for students.

Scholars argue that the hyper-emphasis on standardized testing over the last few decades has shifted the focus away from effective classroom pedagogy that engages students and makes them curious about the content (Au 2007; Hamilton et al. 2007). Teachers now focus most of their instruction on preparing students for standardized exams, which often includes test-prep lessons where students find themselves practicing test questions out of booklets, as opposed to learning content through culturally relevant approaches to instruction and curricula that connects new understandings to students’ lived experiences. In addition to an overemphasis on high-stakes testing, schools nationwide face a number of challenges that have been cited to negatively impact student achievement, including limited resources (Baker and Di Carlo 2020), teacher shortages (Anderson 2023), lack of racial diversity among teachers (Rucinski 2023), lack of culturally relevant pedagogical knowledge (Underwood and Mensah 2018), and inequitable school discipline policies (Carter Andrews, and Gutwein 2020), to name a few. Schools across the nation are struggling to find ways to create learning experiences that are truly catered to the needs and interests of students.

As my own story shows, these challenges, however, aren’t new. Historically, schools have not been an inviting space for students, as they don’t reflect students’ cultures and are absent of student’s voices. Consequently, lack of student voice and culture leads to a decrease interest in learning. Therefore, there is a need to provide school communities with effective teaching and learning frameworks that extend beyond testing culture.

UNDERSTANDING ASSET-BASED AND CULTURALLY COMPETENT PEDAGOGIES

Studies have shown that educators often underestimate the academic potential of students of color (Cherng 2017; Ferguson 2003; McKown and Weinstein 2008). These educators typically set lower expectations for students of color and view their cultural differences as obstacles and barriers rather than as beneficial to learning. In response to this deficit view of students of color, educational experts have devised various teaching methods collectively known as asset-based pedagogies. Asset-based pedagogies are approaches to teaching that embrace and integrate the cultural identities and personal experiences of students as key elements of effective teaching. Well-known examples of asset-based pedagogies are culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and culturally sustaining pedagogy. These approaches to teaching share a common theme as they prioritize the knowledge and perspectives of communities that have historically been marginalized in educational settings (Figure 1–1).

Asset-Based and Culturally Competent Pedagogies	Definition	Seminal Text
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	Pedagogical practices that help students become academically successful, cultivate cultural competence, and develop critical consciousness.	Ladson-Billings, G. 1995. "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy." <i>American Educational Research Journal</i> 32 (3): 465–491.

Continues

Continued from previous page

Asset-Based and Culturally Competent Pedagogies	Definition	Seminal Text
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It assumes that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more quickly and thoroughly (Gay 2002).	Gay, G. 2002. "Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching." <i>Journal of Teacher Education</i> 53 (2): 106–116.
Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy	Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) is a critical framework for centering and sustaining Indigenous, Black, Latinx, Asian, and Pacific Islander communities as these memberships necessarily intersect with gender and sexuality, dis/ability, class, language, land, and more.	Alim, H. S., D. Paris, and C. P. Wong. 2020. "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: A Critical Framework for Centering Communities." In <i>Handbook of the Cultural Foundations of Learning</i> , edited by N. S. Nasir, C. D. Lee, R. Pea, and M. McKinney de Royston, 261–276. New York: Routledge.
Hip-Hop Pedagogy	Hip-hop pedagogy is an approach to teaching that encourages educators to gain authentic understandings of their students' cultures and develop their own personal critical consciousness and that of their students while incorporating hip-hop's creative elements and sensibilities in teaching practices and curricula choices.	

Figure 1–1 • A Breakdown of Asset-Based Culturally Competent Pedagogies

What Does It Mean to Be Culturally Responsive?

Many educators and scholars use the terms *culturally responsive*, *culturally relevant*, and *culturally sustaining* interchangeably to communicate a range of ideas that highlight the value of respecting and honoring students’ cultures across educational contexts. The three theories of practice have similar aims to support the academic achievement of students of diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and racial backgrounds through teaching practices that affirm the various components that make up students’ identities. Elements of all three pedagogies can be found in hip-hop pedagogy (Figure 1–2).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy was conceptualized by Gloria Ladson-Billings through her extensive research in schools with Black educators, where she sought to redefine narratives around Black student achievement as well as counteract deficit views of Black youth. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is defined as a “theoretical model

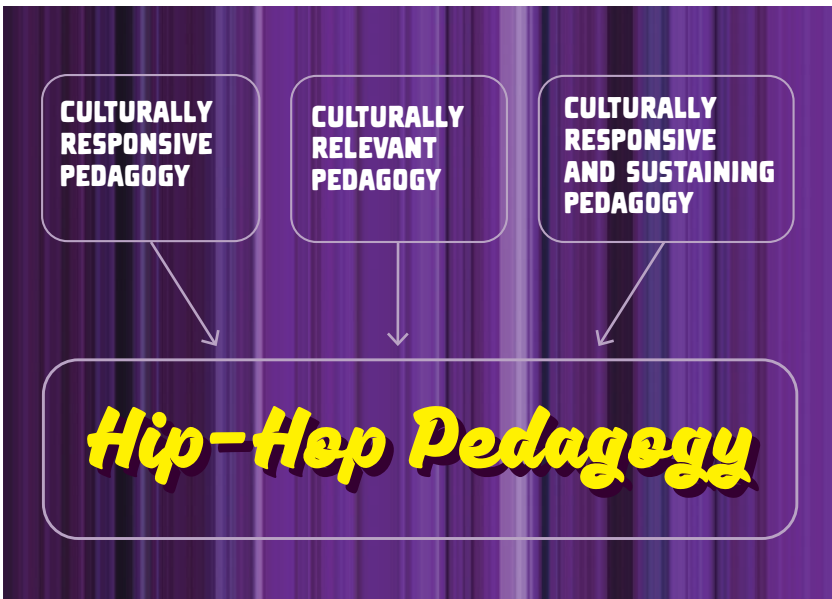


Figure 1–2 • Asset-based pedagogies that inform hip-hop pedagogy

that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (Ladson-Billings 1995, 469). A teacher employing culturally relevant pedagogy operates under the belief that students from every racial, ethnic, and cultural background are capable of academic success. This approach to teaching recognizes that students can exhibit their cultural competence in a variety of ways, which should be privileged in the classroom. Further, a culturally relevant teacher is aware and encourages students to be aware and critical of both societal and educational systems that perpetuate injustices (Ladson-Billings 1995). Ladson-Billings stresses the significance of the teacher–student relationship and the importance of teachers understanding and acknowledging that the diverse identities of their students significantly influence their educational experience. Therefore, culturally relevant teaching is a way to “empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (1994, 18).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy was conceptualized by Geneva Gay (2018) as she advocated for a “paradigmatic shift in the pedagogy used with non-middle-class, non–European American students in U.S. schools” (25). Culturally responsive teaching is defined as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (36). Gay highlights that culturally responsive teaching “filters curriculum, content, and teaching strategies through their cultural frames of reference to make the content more personally meaningful and easier to master,” which traditional instructional ideologies fail to do for students of diverse backgrounds (32). Further, Gay argues that culturally responsive pedagogy is inherently “radical because it makes explicit the previously implicit role of culture in teaching and learning, and it insists that educational institutions accept the legitimacy and

viability of ethnic-group cultures in improving learning outcomes” (32). Ultimately, it argues that culture is essential to effective instruction, and educational institutions must acknowledge and privilege students’ cultures to support and improve student learning outcomes.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy was conceptualized by Django Paris and Samy Alim and “is a critical educational framework that seeks to recognize, sustain, and center the cultural practices, identities, and knowledge of diverse communities, particularly those historically marginalized by systemic inequalities” (Alim, Paris, and Wong 2020, 261). This framework serves as an extension of previously discussed asset-based pedagogies, such as culturally relevant pedagogy, to explicitly articulate and advocate for the sustenance of systemically marginalized communities and students’ diverse identities within the school community. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy is an approach to instruction that recognizes that culture is a dynamic set of values, beliefs, and practices that varies across students’ social identities (including, but not limited to, race, gender, sexuality, disability, socioeconomic status, and geographical location) and should be sustained by school communities. “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy advocates for an educational approach that not only acknowledges centuries of oppression and domination but also draws on the resilience, resistance, and revolutionary spirit of marginalized communities. This pedagogy emphasizes the importance of sustaining and revitalizing cultural [and linguistic] practices and beliefs as acts of resistance against racialized white terror and oppression” (262). The aim of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy is to “transform education into a space that sustains and nurtures the lifeways and potentials of all communities, particularly those that have been historically marginalized and oppressed” (262).

Overall, Culturally Relevant, Responsive, and Sustaining Pedagogies each present a nuanced approach to education, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging and integrating students’ diverse cultural backgrounds into the learning environment and instruction.

While Culturally Relevant Pedagogy focuses on affirming students' cultural identities, academic rigor of student curricula, and challenging institutional inequities, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy centers on adapting teaching methods to match the cultural contexts of diverse students, thereby enhancing their learning experience. Finally, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy extends these concepts by actively sustaining and revitalizing the cultural practices of historically marginalized communities. Collectively, asset-based pedagogies emphasize a shift in traditional educational paradigms, moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach to one that is deeply rooted in cultural empathy, responsiveness, sustainability, and liberatory practices. They highlight the necessity of creating educational spaces that are not only inclusive but also liberatory, where both educators and students critique society through their expanded understandings of political, social, and historical knowledge while fostering an environment where all students can thrive both academically and personally.

ARE YOU A CULTURALLY COMPETENT EDUCATOR?

Directions: On the following page are competencies of a culturally competent educator. Self-assess with your own practices in mind and return to these competencies periodically to see which areas you hope to develop further.

- Which of these competencies do you need to develop?
- What steps will you take as an educator to become increasingly culturally competent?
- Set an intention around an identified competency you'd like to focus and improve on while engaging with this book.

Indicators of a Culturally Competent Educator

INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION
Cultural Competence and Awareness	Understand students' various cultural backgrounds and how these influence students' learning experiences and identities.
Cultural Sustenance and Advocacy	Actively work to sustain and celebrate the cultural practices and identities of all students, especially those from historically marginalized communities.
Student-Centered Approach	Prioritize the unique needs and backgrounds of each student, fostering an environment where diverse perspectives and learning styles are valued.
Inclusive Curriculum Design	Develop and implement a curriculum that reflects the diversity of cultures and experiences of students.
Resilience and Resistance Emphasis	Incorporate and highlight the stories of resilience and resistance from marginalized communities into curricula.
Empowerment and Advocacy Skills	Empower students to affirm their cultural identities and advocate for themselves in challenging systemic inequities within and outside the classroom.

Continues

Continued from previous page

INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION
Adaptability in Teaching Methods	Adapt teaching styles to align with the cultural contexts and learning styles of diverse students.
Collaborate with Families and Local Community	Collaborate with families and local community members to situate learning in the context of the local community. See yourself as a member of the community.
The competencies in this chart describe qualities of an educator who is ready to dive into hip-hop pedagogy work. To successfully engage in hip-hop pedagogy, you must know yourself well. You must be aware of your areas of strength and your areas that need improvement.	

WHAT IS HIP-HOP PEDAGOGY?

Hip-hop pedagogy is informed by and builds upon the frameworks of culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies. From culturally relevant pedagogy, hip-hop pedagogy encourages educators to develop their personal critical consciousness as well as their students' critical consciousness. From culturally responsive pedagogy, hip-hop pedagogy encourages educators to see and value hip-hop culture as a youth culture that students participate in and one that empowers young people globally. From culturally sustaining pedagogy, hip-hop pedagogy encourages educators and school communities to leverage the essential elements of hip-hop culture as teaching approaches to

create curricula that encourage students to engage and utilize hip-hop culture and sensibilities to make sense of content and the world around them.

Hip-hop pedagogy encourages you to gain an authentic understanding of hip-hop culture, and as a result, supports you in developing the critical consciousness necessary to understand how your students participate and engage in their identified cultures. Educators, thus, become more understanding and aware of other marginalized groups, empowering educators to leverage student cultures in an authentic and engaging manner. I define hip-hop pedagogy as a teaching approach that motivates educators to authentically understand their students' cultural backgrounds and cultivate both their own and their students' critical consciousness. This method integrates the creative elements (knowledge of self, MC, graffiti, DJ, and breakdancing) and sensibilities of hip-hop into educational practices and curriculum decisions. Throughout this text, you will uncover the history of each creative element and its connection to teaching and learning. Hip-hop pedagogy encourages educators and school communities to privilege hip-hop culture and sensibilities within academic spaces to sustain students' connection to Black culture and utilize ways of engagement that are informed by hip-hop culture. Hip-hop pedagogy is not only for Black and students from diverse backgrounds. Hip-hop pedagogy is not only about the incorporation of hip-hop music in the classroom. The goal of utilizing hip-hop pedagogy is to invite students to develop a connection with content while leveraging their culture, realities, and experiences to reach them on their cultural turf.

What can hip-hop teach school communities about youth empowerment and learning? How is hip-hop culture different from hip-hop music? To start, hip-hop pedagogy is anchored in the five creative elements of hip-hop, which include MC, graffiti art, breakdancing, DJ, and knowledge of self, and thus is a grander phenomenon than its musical output. Young people who consume and identify as part of hip-hop culture engage in hip-hop's creative elements in their everyday lives. Thus, hip-hop pedagogy acts as a vehicle to incorporate youth culture into the daily instruction of all content areas with the goal of creating opportunities for all students to creatively engage and access content.

Is it hip-hop or hip hop?

Within hip-hop culture, the spelling and presentation of the term “hip-hop” have often varied, influenced by the culture’s informal and creative nature. Early pioneers, artists, and writers in hip-hop culture often played with language, spelling, and typography, which led to variations in how “hip-hop or hip hop” has been written over the years. However, the presence of the hyphen has been relatively consistent in foundational hip-hop texts and popular cultural artifacts. While the non-hyphenated form has become more relevant in academic spaces, as some argue, “hip-hop” refers to commercialized and product-based representations of the culture. I argue that using the hyphen is seen as a way to honor hip-hop’s origins and its interconnected elements, highlighting the unity between its artistic forms and cultural significance. Debating the presentation of the term “hip-hop” can overshadow the deeper and more meaningful work of interrogating and uplifting the culture through research, education, and artistic expression. Language evolves organically within communities, and trying to impose rigid standards on a term like “hip-hop,” which is rooted in fluidity and creativity, can risk missing the essence of what the culture stands for.

Hip-Hop as Love

Hip-hop culture has been deeply intertwined with Black culture since its inception. It is an exemplar of the Black experience in America and has always highlighted the love and admiration that Black people have for their communities and culture. Hip-hop promotes love as a universal force that can unite people of all backgrounds and cultures. From its roots in the Bronx in the 1970s to its global influence today, hip-hop continues to serve as a powerful tool for expressing the struggles, triumphs, and multiplicities of Black communities around the world. Hip-hop has provided a platform for Black voices to be heard and has brought attention to important issues facing Black communities in mainstream America. Hip-hop artists have used their music to uplift their communities, inspire change, and celebrate their culture. Thus,

hip-hop has been a powerful tool for expressing love for Black communities and promoting unity and pride among Black people.

Hip-hop educators exemplify love in their classrooms by having high expectations for students at all times. Teachers form expectations of their students' achievements based on the knowledge they have of students, including (1) how students perform in class, (2) their previous grades, and (3) teachers' prejudices and/or stereotypes (implicit and explicit). The expectations that teachers have of their students have been shown to impact students' future achievement—this effect is recognized as the Pygmalion effect (Figure 1–3). The Pygmalion effect refers to “the effects of interpersonal expectancies, that is, the finding that what one person expects of another can come to serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy” (Rosenthal 2010, 1398). In other words, a teacher's high expectations can lead to higher academic performance of their students, and a teacher's low expectations can lead to low academic



Figure 1–3 • The Pygmalion effect can create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

performance of their students. Our beliefs about our students' abilities influence our actions toward students, which in turn impacts other's beliefs about themselves. A hip-hop pedagogy educator can understand and appreciate students' cultures and complex identities as assets for teaching and learning. Once we are genuinely able to appreciate who our students are and how they show up in our classrooms without wanting to change them, we are able to fully accept them without minimizing our expectations of what they are able to achieve. Rather, through love, educators can use their understanding of students to support them in gaining the skills, competencies, and knowledge that support students in becoming who and what they want to be.

Hip-Hop as Joy

Hip-hop, with its upbeat rhythms and lively beats, has always been synonymous with joy. Since its beginning, hip-hop culture provides opportunities and space where participants can be their authentic selves, experience belonging, and validation around shared experiences of marginalization. This space of joy, although not always protected, distinguishes authentic participants (those who engage by receiving the call of action against injustice) from those who are inauthentic (those who simply engage in hip-hop's joy). It must be made clear that although hip-hop preferences authenticity and the shared experience of marginalized people, due to its inclusive nature, it doesn't exclude those who have not yet gained authenticity for themselves or who do not come from a historically marginalized group. This is the power of the joy of hip-hop because it invites those who may be outsiders to join the group. Thus, what can make you inauthentic or authentic to hip-hop is what you choose to do with the joy that hip-hop offers its participants. I argue that participants who do not (and even those who do) identify as part of historically marginalized groups should use their privilege and access to critique, interrogate, and address injustice experienced by participants of the hip-hop community.

Hip-hop is that safe space where joy can be actualized for many youth and adults in a society that holds negative perceptions of

historically marginalized groups. In her book *Unearthing Joy*, Gholdy Muhammad (2023) explains that “joy is also related to advancing happiness by elevating beauty in humanity, as well as embracing truthful narratives and representations of diverse people of the world (including our students).” Hip-hop culture offers a space where historically marginalized groups see their lives and cultures represented in authentic and relatable ways. Through its music, dance, art, and fashion, hip-hop celebrates diverse backgrounds and experiences while fostering a sense of pride in identity. In our schools and classrooms, educators can leverage hip-hop as an approach to create opportunities and spaces for joy to be actualized. When hip-hop is effectively utilized across educational spaces, we can encourage young people to be their authentic selves, celebrate the diversity of students’ cultures and identities, and draw connections between content, curricula, and students while interrogating and countering inequities that contribute to the oppression of groups. This calls for a teacher’s ability to adapt to teaching methods that may require them to know the difference between hip-hop culture in the Bronx vs. hip-hop culture in Atlanta, acknowledging their differences and leveraging what’s most appropriate for student groups (Figure 1–4).

Similarly, hip-hop music offers artists the opportunity to share their stories and realities as counter-storytelling. Through counter-storytelling, artists communicate their experiences and reveal the often distorted or overlooked realities of historically oppressed groups. Hip-hop provides a platform for these communities to voice their authentic experiences, struggles, and aspirations. Many artists challenge social norms and address injustice in their music, offering narratives of resistance, empowerment, and calls to action. As a result, hip-hop serves as a contested space to be your authentic self, experience community, and advocate for social change, while enhancing a collective sense of purpose and a sense of empowerment. Leveraging hip-hop and youth culture across educational spaces, specifically through pedagogy and classroom instruction, can aid in creating school systems that truly reflect and honor the cultures and identities of students while fostering joy for learning through youth culture.

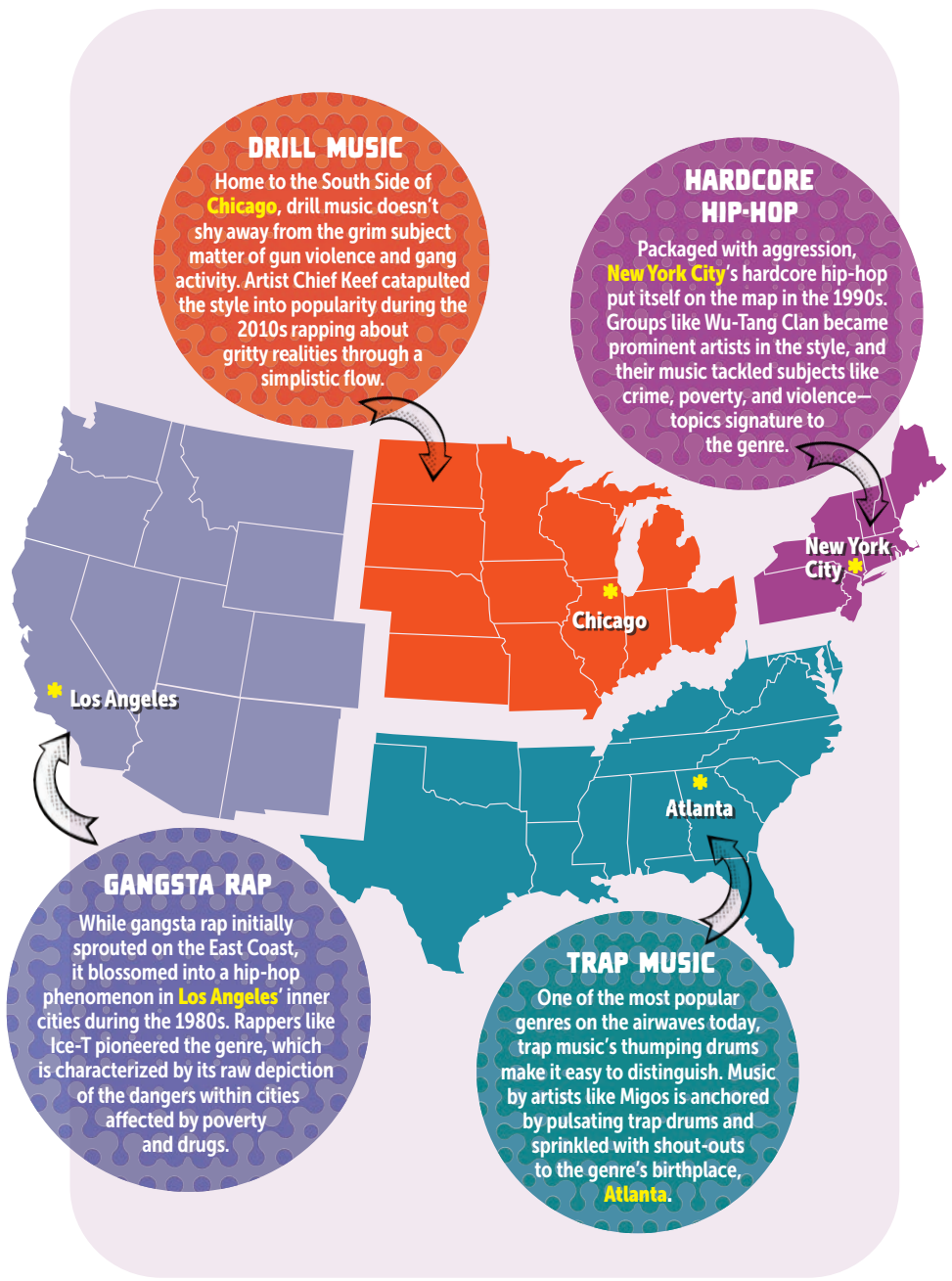


Figure 1—4 • Subgenres of hip-hop music and the geographic location that shaped them

Hip-Hop as Liberation

In addition to exemplifying joy, hip-hop has always been a powerful tool for liberation, giving voice to communities that have experienced systemic marginalization. Hip-hop offers a platform for individuals to express their realities and challenges and to interrogate and address social injustice. Through its creative elements, hip-hop has empowered countless people from all backgrounds to speak out against racism, poverty, police brutality, mass incarceration, and other forms of oppression. Hip-hop has played a pivotal role in the struggle for liberation and social justice for Black communities, in particular by inspiring individuals to take action and effect positive change. Hip-hop has served as the backdrop for all social movements where Black communities have advocated for justice and equality. For example, during the global Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 sparked by the deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmad Arbery, George Floyd, and others, many hip-hop artists released songs speaking out against police brutality. Many hip-hop figures took to the streets to protest or used their platforms to address injustice that harmed Black communities. Hip-hop artist Lil Baby released one of the most popular songs of 2020, “The Bigger Picture,” days after protesting in Atlanta. “The Bigger Picture,” which received two Grammy nominations, is a protest song that called for justice against police brutality in the United States and systemic racism. This song became one of the soundtracks during the protest, and it brought mainstream attention to the realities of police brutality and racism that Blacks face in the United States.

Further, hip-hop artists have been known to critique education systems. Au (2007) explains that “from the perspective of rap music, the discourse of education is largely dysfunctional when it comes to meeting the material, social, and cultural needs of African American youth.” Popular hip-hop artists such as Dead Prez, Jay-Z, and Kanye West are known to critique school systems through their personal experiences. In their song “They Schools,” Dead Prez critique American educational systems by suggesting that schools’ curricula praise Europeans and offer negative views of Africans and African descendants. This highlights

the lack of asset-based pedagogy that embraced and integrated the cultural identities and personal experiences of students. Hip-hop will always highlight and address injustices faced by the Black community. Through various mediums, including music, visual arts, dance, and technology, hip-hop, as a collective culture, acts against social injustice. The actions taken to raise awareness and dismantle oppressive systems are actions toward liberation. Hip-hop has a platform that reaches the masses.

Hip-hop exemplifies the power of liberation. It serves as a catalyst for positive social transformation. By integrating hip-hop into the curriculum, schools can provide students with an authentic platform to express their identities, experiences, and aspirations. Hip-hop educators not only embed hip-hop music into their curriculum, but they also support students in interacting with social change within and outside of their communities by creating projects and tasks that

call communities to action, as hip-hop culture does. By leveraging hip-hop, we can foster critical thinking in *all* students (regardless of background).

Additionally, it can bridge the gap between academic content and

students' lives, making learning more relevant

and engaging. By embracing hip-hop, schools not only recognize the cultural significance of this art form but also empower students to use their voices for advocacy and liberation.

Vibe Check

- What challenges might you face when incorporating hip-hop into your teaching?
- Do you have personal reservations about you or others leveraging hip-hop culture for educational purposes? If so, what are they?
- How might using hip-hop culture impact your teacher identity?

Hip-hop pedagogy encourages educators to recognize and highlight the brilliance, ingenuity, and creativity of hip-hop—a culture created by Black and historically marginalized communities—through curriculum choices and instructional decisions. Educators do not have to be experts in hip-hop culture, but they must work toward authentically understanding how their students engage and conceptualize hip-hop.

WHY HIP-HOP PEDAGOGY?

It's common for educators to fear judgment when engaging in teaching and learning practices that feel new or untraditional—especially those anchored in hip-hop culture. These fears may be grounded in negative perceptions of hip-hop culture, which reflect a lack of understanding of hip-hop—its ingenuity and connection to youth. These fears may be grounded in a belief that it is not an educator's responsibility to acknowledge their student's culture. These fears may be grounded in your interest in learning about your student's culture, but not knowing where to begin. At its core, hip-hop is a multimodal culture that provides various opportunities for participants to connect and engage with content. Depriving students of such learning experiences demonstrates a lack of understanding of your students and the responsive practices necessary for their achievement.

Hip-hop pedagogy is anchored in the creative elements of hip-hop, which is a cultural phenomenon that youth practice and engage in within their communities or access through media. Because hip-hop pedagogy is informed by hip-hop culture, it serves as both a culturally relevant way of engaging youth and as a way of incorporating multiple modalities within the instruction. Hip-hop pedagogy is beneficial for all students because it is derived from hip-hop culture, which naturally caters to every type of learner. Graffiti art activities allow students to make visual representations of concepts. The

MC inspired call-and-response provides an opportunity for students to aurally engage and learn concepts. Breakdancing activities provide students an opportunity to physically and kinesthetically move to gain a better understanding of science concepts. Thus, hip-hop pedagogy encourages visual, aural, reading/writing and kinesthetic learning styles (VARK) (Sankey, Birch, and Gardiner 2010). Fleming (2001) proposed that learners

have a preferred learning style, namely, visual, aural, read/write or kinesthetic (VARK), with many students (about 40 percent) being multi-modal (using a combination of these).

Hip-hop culture has impacted and empowered youth populations across the globe, especially

youth of under-represented groups, since its conception (Adjapong and Emdin 2015).

Recognizing how inclusive hip-hop culture is to a variety of multimodal learners, it is easy to understand why hip-hop as a culture has transcended many other cultures and

Vibe Check

As an educator yourself, you may worry about some or all of the following:

- What if I'm not familiar enough with hip-hop?
- What if my school administrators disagree with me including hip-hop informed practices in my classroom?
- What if parents are resistant to me incorporating hip-hop culture into my classroom?
- What if I don't know how to rap, dance, or do graffiti?
- What if I have too much content to cover and not enough time to incorporate these practices?

undoubtedly influences young people who serve as its chief participants. To incorporate youth culture in schools, we must not only look at how and what young people are engaging in outside of school spaces, but we must learn to value it. Once we as educators understand the rich history and utility of hip-hop culture, we can then begin to value hip-hop as a culture. We can interrogate how hip-hop influences groups of people and, thus, leverage it as a conduit to making schools and educational spaces culturally responsive and equitable. Utilizing hip-hop pedagogy can provide you, the educator, with an opportunity to focus more on the cultural understandings of the youth and the communities you serve.

Hip-Hop Identities and Funds of Knowledge

Hip-hop pedagogy is informed by a sociocultural framework that explores the concepts of culture and social capital as they relate to the experiences of young people who identify as part of hip-hop culture. Vygotsky states, “human activities take place in cultural context, [and] are mediated by language” (John-Steiner and Mahn 1996, 191). Vygotsky asserts that we are never free of cultural influences. Even when engaging in action alone, cultural influences shape our thoughts and behaviors. The ways students dress, the ways they talk, the ways they dance, and the media they consume, as well as other nonverbal forms of communication, are informed by the cultures they experience both inside and outside of school. Many students’ experiences outside of school are rooted in hip-hop culture (Emdin 2010). Once those practices are incorporated into teaching and learning, students are given the opportunity to engage in content as seamlessly as they would within their communities. I suggest bringing hip-hop culture into classrooms, not only by incorporating it into curricula but also by incorporating the culture into the ways in which teachers teach their students and into the overall school community. When classroom exchanges around content occur with the intentional use of hip-hop forms of communication,

students use their funds of knowledge to engage with content because it's reflective of who they are (Lave and Wenger 1991; John-Steiner and Mahn 1996). Being culturally relevant through Hip-Hop Pedagogy not only allows students to view themselves and a culture that they value as a part of the classroom, but over time, it can also encourage independent self-education of content since students will take increasing responsibility for their learning (Ladson-Billings 1995).

In order to effectively teach and engage students, educators must be able to make connections between the global community, the content area, and students' local community, which in many instances can be different from that of the teacher. To function within a given culture, a person draws on a set of skills and knowledge that have been historically and culturally developed. These skills are called *funds of knowledge*. Scholars encourage the use of the funds of knowledge framework to better engage students across content areas (Barton and Tan 2009; González, Moll, and Amanti 2005; Hammond 2001; Moje et al. 2004). Integrating funds of knowledge into classroom activities creates a richer and more highly scaffolded learning experience for students. When an educator takes a step back from being a master of content and becomes a learner of their students' culture, experiences, and realities, it provides them with a unique opportunity to gather appropriate resources that are reflective and representative of students' experiences to use in the classroom.

Given the popularity of the music genre, the reach of hip-hop culture is broad. We all engage with it in a variety of ways, whether deeply or passively, and, as a result, possess a hip-hop identity. Some of us engage in hip-hop sensibilities in our homes, with our families and communities—hip-hop as a way of life—while others have a deep consumer-based connection to hip-hop culture. Regardless of how they connect and engage in hip-hop culture, most of our students have developed a fund of knowledge that allows them to successfully engage within hip-hop culture. Hip-hop pedagogues tap into their students' funds of knowledge and make connections to content areas to provide students with a learning experience anchored in their students' culture.

STRENGTHENING TIES WITH STUDENTS THROUGH HIP-HOP

Additionally, utilizing a pedagogy in a classroom that is directly anchored in the realities of students allows for the formation of social ties among members of your classroom community. A “strong tie” connects “friends” who have a lot in common. On the other hand, “acquaintances” who do not have much in common that would normally connect them share “weak ties” (Easley and Kleinberg 2010). Students need both strong and weak ties. Krackhardt (1992) describes a “weak tie” as “a ‘local bridge’ to parts of the social system that are otherwise disconnected, and . . . is likely to provide new information from disparate parts of the system” (216). When educators use a form of teaching that is directly connected to the realities and experiences of their students, then “weak ties”—a local bridge, that connects the students to the teacher—are formed, and the educator will be able to provide new information to the student. The reverse is also true. In turn, the student will be able to provide new information (hip-hop content) to the educator. The implementation of hip-hop pedagogical approaches involves the process of learning and utilizing the complex nuances of communication in hip-hop, which shows a valuing of student culture and allows for the creation of “weak ties” between the students, content, and even the educator (Burt 2001).

So what does this mean for you if you have reservations about utilizing hip-hop pedagogy because you don’t feel you are hip-hop enough? It means that if you are enacting a pedagogy that is anchored in hip-hop, your classroom is serving as the catalyst to allow “weak ties” that already exist between you and your students to develop into “strong ties” over time. This means you are creating a space within the classroom where your students’ “strong ties” can be expressed. Coleman (1988) refers to these connections as dense, close-knit networks that facilitate trust and cooperative exchanges. Nurturing these networks between you and your students, as well as among your students, can allow for a positive exchange of content. They provide a space for

Bringing It All Together

It never hurts to brush up on hip-hop history, even if you are familiar. But, if you're ready to dive into exploring your hip-hop identity, move on to the next section.

you to authentically learn about the realities of your students so that your classroom can be a space where learning occurs for both you and your students.

Lastly, it is essential to note that although students will be able to share key information about themselves, their preferences, backgrounds, and authentic experiences, it does not

mean there is not work that is necessary for you, as the educator, to do on your own. This work includes having an understanding of hip-hop culture and history and remaining curious about hip-hop as it evolves.

A HIP-HOP HISTORY

Hip-hop is one of the most consumed genres of music in the world (Lynch 2018). However, many consumers of hip-hop music fail to recognize the rich history behind the birth of an innovative and progressive culture. Like many genres of contemporary music, hip-hop has roots in other musical genres, such as jazz, blues, rock, and funk, to name a few. Hip-hop, as we currently know it, was birthed in the Bronx, in the recreation room of an apartment building located at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue on August 11th, 1973, to be exact. Cindy Campbell, the mother of hip-hop, and Clive Campbell who is better known as DJ Kool Herc, the father of hip-hop, hosted a back-to-school party to generate income. This party brought the community together; young people and adults from the community all attended and DJ Kool Herc served as the DJ. Herc, a Jamaican native who moved to the Bronx as a child, was well known for spinning records in the community. He had a signature move as a DJ where he would find the break in a song, the moment when the vocals and most of the instruments that composed the beat would drop. Oftentimes during the break of a song, only the drums or bass line would be present, and DJ Kool Herc would prolong

this moment of the song for the crowds' enjoyment. At the time, his signature move was called the *merry-go-round*. Today, it's most commonly known as the *breakbeat*. DJ Kool Herc developed his technique of playing only the breakbeat through observation and noticing that the crowd mostly enjoyed that part of the song, especially dancers who would commonly perform their specialty moves during the break. The breakbeat allowed space for a blend of talents to be presented. In the summer of 1973, in front of a large crowd, DJ Kool Herc's, technique of playing the breakbeat began a grassroots musical revolution, which is known to have birthed hip-hop.

If we took a closer look at the birthplace of hip-hop, the Bronx, in the 1970s, the elders of the Bronx community would recall a time when poverty was catastrophic, and violence over turf reached its peak despite efforts by the New York Police Department to penetrate local gangs (Chang 2007). It is important to note that these gangs that have been noted for committing violent acts against one another were also responsible for creating and organizing social events to uplift their communities despite economic and social chal-

lenges. Hip-hop was created as a social and therapeutic outlet (Emdin et al. 2016) by and for Black and Latino youth, many of whom were either immigrants or first-generation Americans, in response to the effects of industrialization in the Bronx (Chang 2007; Rose 1994).

In the 1960s, the Bronx began to deteriorate as a response to increased challenges, including a steady rise in crime, a struggling economy, budget cuts to key social services such as the fire and police departments, and one of the largest construction projects that the Bronx borough has experienced (Gonzalez 2004). During the early

The Breakbeat

The "Amen Break" is perhaps the most famous drum break of all time. It was performed by Gregory Coleman in the 1969 song "Amen, Brother" by the American soul group the Winstons. The breakbeat occurs from 1:26 to 1:33—the moment when all instruments except for drums are present. Rap producers in the late 80s rediscovered the track and have sampled the drum beat on many hip-hop songs including NWA's "Straight Outta Compton."

1900s, the Bronx was planned to be a suburban community, one in which people could conveniently travel a short distance to their jobs in Manhattan; however, during the 1950s and 1960s, crime across New York City rose dramatically, particularly in relation to drugs. Poverty was an underlying issue affecting many New Yorkers, but while the entire city experienced an increase in crime and poverty, the Bronx was hit the hardest. The increased crime rate encouraged many community members to relocate, especially those who were affluent and had access to the resources to relocate, which caused a significant change in the community as many homes, buildings, and commercial property became vacant (Figure 1–5) (Gonzalez 2004).

Robert Moses, a very influential city planner responsible for the construction of many New York City landmarks, including many New York City bridges, tunnels, and highways, was New York City's Con-

struction Coordinator. Moses oversaw the development of the Cross Bronx Expressway. Popular thought was that this development would exacerbate the already devastating social and economic conditions of the Bronx and its community members. Caro (1974) suggests that the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway is responsible for the downfall of the Bronx. Thousands of families were displaced and forced to uproot from their homes to allow for bulldozers, plows, and other construction machinery to pave the way for the Cross Bronx Expressway. Crime continued to rise in the communities that surrounded



Figure 1–5 • Abandoned building and car in a vacant lot in the Bronx

the Cross Bronx Expressway, which caused residents and businesses to relocate, deserting many buildings and storefronts.

In the midst of this social and economic crisis that plagued the Bronx, hip-hop music and culture were born in an effort to build strong communal ties. Urban youth organized and attended block parties to escape their unfortunate realities. Block parties, like the one hosted by DJ Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, and the Ghetto Brothers (former street gang), created a space for young people in the Bronx to celebrate being young and free (Chang 2007). The power of music and camaraderie united Bronx youth, and “for the youth, the block party was the space of possibility” (Chang 2007).

Since its conception, hip-hop music has been and continues to be used as a tool to promote social justice.

Hip-hop was about community and provided opportunities for young people, adults, and elders

to gather, dance, and ultimately enjoy life re-

gardless of the harsh

realities that people in

the Bronx faced. In 1982,

the song perfectly entitled

“The Message,” by Grandmas-

ter Flash and the Furious Five

was released. “The Message”

was the first hip-hop song to

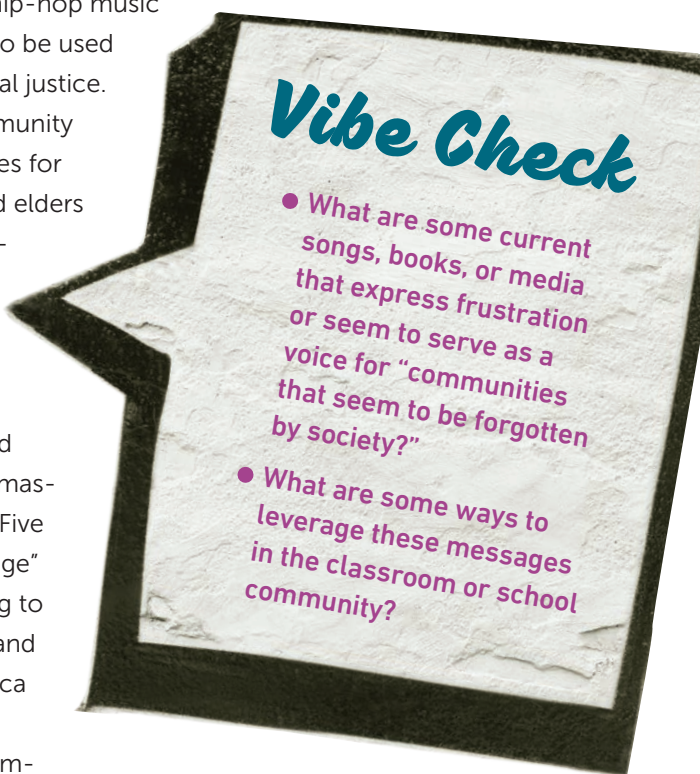
reach the television sets and

radios of suburban America

and it provided America

with imagery of urban com-

munities and the sense of frustration that people who lived in communities that seemed to be forgotten by society. At its core, hip-hop is a culture and genre of music that promotes social justice and provides an outlet for all to share their stories and experiences with the world.



HIP-HOP HISTORY—THE MESSAGE ACTIVITY

"The Message" by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, released in 1982, is a historic song in the history of hip-hop and a powerful social commentary. This song is distinguished for its narrative style and focus on inner-city life's struggles and injustices. The song delivers a series of vivid verses that depict life in the inner city. The lyrics are a raw and poignant portrayal of the poverty, violence, and despair that were everyday realities in many urban neighborhoods. "The Message" is often credited with shifting the focus of hip-hop from party-centric themes to more socially conscious material. It opened the door for future artists to explore a wider range of topics and emotions in their music, making it a cornerstone in the development of the genre.

Watch the music video for the song "The Message." Consider the following questions to support in developing your understanding of hip-hop as a social justice movement

1. What themes are presented in the song?
2. Whose experience is being highlighted in the song?
3. Are the themes presented in the song relevant today?

Recommended Books to Learn More About Hip-Hop History and Culture

- *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* by Jeff Chang
- *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop—and Why It Matters* by Tricia Rose
- *Decoded* by Jay-Z
- *Hip Hop America* by Nelson George
- *The Rap Yearbook: The Most Important Rap Song from Every Year Since 1979, Discussed, Debated, and Deconstructed* by Shea Serrano
- *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* by Tricia Rose

Exploring Your Hip-Hop Identity

Hip-hop culture extends far beyond the bounds of music, permeating various aspects of our daily lives. Hip-hop is everywhere in mainstream society as its aesthetics, sensibilities, and influence are disseminated and absorbed by a broad audience. As a result, engagement with hip-hop culture shapes aspects of all our identities. Most people, even those who perceive themselves as distant from hip-hop, consciously or subconsciously, cultivate a form of “hip-hop identity.” These identities exist on a spectrum, ranging from hip-hop spectators to hip-hop connoisseurs (Figure 1–6). They are not mutually exclusive and can overlap. Additionally, since our engagement with hip-hop culture can vary over time and context, our identities may shift accordingly. Hip-hop identities, like other identities, is dynamic.

Hip-Hop Spectator: This identity includes individuals who may not actively seek out hip-hop music or culture but may be unconsciously influenced by it through mainstream media and societal trends. They are exposed to hip-hop through popular culture. They might not identify strongly

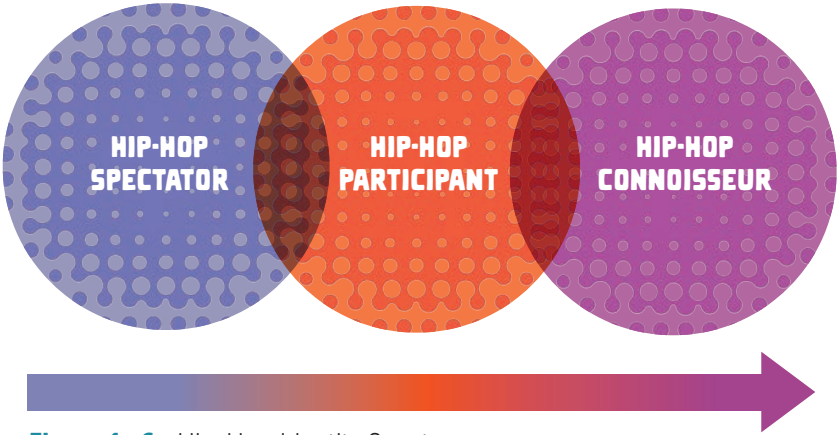


Figure 1–6 • Hip-Hop Identity Spectrum

with hip-hop culture or consider themselves fans. Hip-hop spectators may or may not recognize that hip-hop exists as a global phenomenon.

Hip-Hop Participant: This identity describes those who engage with hip-hop culture in a mainstream manner. A hip-hop participant might listen to hip-hop music regularly but may not necessarily delve deeply into the culture. Their engagement is centered around entertainment and enjoyment rather than a deep-seated cultural connection. They appreciate hip-hop as a popular music genre and are familiar with popular artists and hits but may lack an awareness of hip-hop history and/or cultural influences.

The Hip-Hop Connoisseur: This identity describes individuals who are deeply immersed in hip-hop culture. They are someone with a deep and extensive knowledge and appreciation of hip-hop culture and music. Identifying as a hip-hop connoisseur may involve recognizing an in-depth understanding and passion for various aspects of hip-hop culture. Hip-hop connoisseurs are often knowledgeable about the latest trends and news in the hip-hop community.

It's important to note that people from all backgrounds and with different interests can possess a hip-hop identity.

Hip-Hop Identity Reflection Questions

- Which of the hip-hop identities do you most identify with and why?
- Upon reflection of these hip-hop identity definitions, has your hip-hop identity shifted over time and in relationship to various contexts (geographic location, relationships, personal experiences, and so on)? How so?

YOUR ORIGIN HIP-HOP STORY ACTIVITY

Directions: Share your hip-hop story capturing a moment from your own life. Answer one or more of the prompts below.

- Describe your most memorable hip-hop experience.
- Describe the moment that you fell in love with hip-hop.
- Describe the moment when you realized hip-hop's influence.
- Describe the moment that you realized the educational potential of hip-hop.