Camilla Greene, Connecticut

Hip-Hop: A Crucial Addition to the Curriculum

The insights of both my student friends and their author/professor allies have transformed me from someone who disliked hip-hop music and the culture that produces it, to a hip-hop novice embracing the beat, the message and the power of this complex art form.

Spreading the Word

If we espouse the belief that each student must be able to read for understanding, think critically, problem solve and reason; if we espouse a focus on developing the literacy skills of each student; and if we choose to engage marginalized students who are our most reluctant readers, then we need to incorporate hip-hop into our curriculum as a valid form of written, linguistic, and aesthetic art. Analysis of hip-hop, both critical and affirming, must become an integral part of our classrooms.

There has been much discussion around the notion of critical pedagogy. I propose that critical pedagogy is that learning that goes to the heart of our students’ identity, the study of difference, and the study of racism. Hip-hop is the vehicle, the critical pedagogy, with the ability to engage all students, particularly poor urban African American males, and I must add all youth since hip-hop has become a global phenomenon, if only we are willing to acknowledge its powerful potential.

Our Task

The challenge in using hip-hop as a medium for analysis is two fold. First of all, most educators of all colors working in urban high schools are not familiar with hip-hop, and what little they do know repulse them. Second, hip-hop is complex. It is not readily decipherable. As with a Toni Morrison novel, one must work to understand the text and its plethora of meanings and interpretations. It is in our best interest and in the best interest of those of us who wish to engage poor, young, black urban youth to refuse to be deceived by the image of hip-hop that is promoted. We must do our homework and research for ourselves the power, complexities, and engaging literacy of hip-hop music and its culture. We must inform and reeducate ourselves so that we can turn previous hip-hop curriculum that is simultaneously engaging and academically rigorous for poor black urban males. Once we have engaged the poor, black urban males in embracing an academically rigorous curriculum that will lead to success in school and in life, it then behooves us to use the same curriculum to engage all of American youth. I propose that hip-hop has become a global phenomenon which bridges all cultures and all continents in ways that no other art form has.

Among the excellent resources I’ve found to assist us in connecting the study of hip-hop to the development of literacy skills for reluctant and struggling readers, the following two stand out:

1. Dr. Alfred Tatum’s Teachings Leading to Black Adolescent Males (See “It is not Rocket Science”, Connections, Winter 2006)
2. Dr. Imani Perry’s Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop.

Chapter 5 “8-Boy’s, Players, and Preachers: Reading Masculinity” describes the juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane and the complexity in Hip Hop artistic expressions. For example, Dr. Perry explains, in ‘Get Down’ Craig Mack rhymes:

In ‘Get Down’ Craig Mack rhymes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reign</th>
<th>Reign forever</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rain</td>
<td>Rain like bad weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reign</td>
<td>Reign like whoever never</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A beautiful, heart that’s in town

Leavin’ bodies in the ground

Using the homophone reign/reign, he puts a multiplicity of rhymes in the oral space of his self-identification. His “reign” (continued on page 20)
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There has been much discussion around the notion of critical pedagogy. I propose that critical pedagogy is that learning that goes to the heart of a culture’s lived experience in whatever format it is manifested. Critical pedagogy for poor African American males in our public schools must be an academically rigorous curriculum that is simultaneously engaging and academically rigorous for poor black urban males. Once we have engaged the poor, black urban males in embracing the beat, the message and the power of hip-hop culture, to a hip-hop novice from someone who disliked hip-hop music and its culture, the medium for analysis is two fold. First of all, most educators of all colors working in urban high schools are not familiar with hip-hop, and what little they do know repulse them. Second, hip-hop is complex. It is not readily decipherable. As with a Toni Morrison novel, we must work to understand the text and its plethora of meanings and interpretations. It is in our best interest and in the best interest of those of us who wish to engage poor, young, black urban youth to refuse to be deceived by the image of hip-hop that is promoted. We must do our homework and research for ourselves the power, complexities, and engaging literacy of hip-hop music and its culture. We must inform and reeducate ourselves so that we can in turn provide a hip-hop curriculum that will lead to success in school and in life, it then behooves us to use the same curriculum to engage all of American youth. I propose that hip-hop has become a global phenomenon which bridges all cultures and all continents in ways that no other art form has.

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2. Dr. Imani Perry’s Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop.

Chapter 5: “B-Boys, Players, and Preachers: Hip Hop artistic expressions. For example, Dr. Perry explains, in ‘Get Down’ Craig Mack rhymes:“

**In Fall 2006**

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Chapter 5: “B-Boys, Players, and Preachers: Hip Hop artistic expressions. For example, Dr. Perry explains, in ‘Get Down’ Craig Mack rhymes: “In Fall 2006”

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**Our Task**

The challenge in using hip-hop as a
Hip-Hop... (continued from page 19)

and one of the facilitators of the first CFG training in Houston, co-facilitated with Donna Reid and Tim Martinell. Thirty-five area coaches participated in a full-day program that allowed for people to reconnect with each other as well as reconnect with the work. The morning session included Connections, a text rendering of “Am I willing to reclaim time to think?” by Margaret Wheatley, a Chalk Talk with the prompts “What role do CFGs play in your professional life?” and “What barriers and obstacles do you face?”, and an introduction to Discourse I and II.

The afternoon session of the CFG Reunion focused on the dilemma “How do we build capacity to deepen and sustain CFG work in Houston?” By combining the language patterns of Chalk Talk and Charette, the participants not only practiced asking questions and surfacing assumptions, but took ownership of the dilemma and offered solutions.

As a result of that roundtable event, CFG facilitators in Houston are changing the model used for supporting CFG coaches. Instead of offering a series of stand-alone clinics throughout the year, we will sponsor CFGs for coaches, both new and experienced, where they can bring their own coaching dilemmas and build relationships with critical friends from across the region.

Reforming Schools Summer Institute

The Houston A+ Challenge also nurtures CFG habits such as collaboration and reflection by hosting the Reforming Schools Summer Institute (RSSI). During this annual institute, almost 400 teachers, administrators, parents, and community members gather for two days in July for new learning in seminars as well as smaller home groups or learning communities. Facilitated mostly by experienced CFG coaches, these learning communities model how to build professional relationships.

One participant summed up his RSSI experience this way: “I learned that change (reform) must come from within. Whether the focus of that change is a school district, a campus, a department, a lesson, or a student’s own achievement, no expert can walk in and say, ‘Here is your answer.’ Instead, change is a process initiated and followed through by the stakeholders themselves.”

The 2006 RSSI featured keynote addresses from Tony Wagner, author of Change Leadership and George Thompson from the Schlechty Center, which recently published Working on the Work. (continued on page 22)

Changing the Work... (continued from page 8)

How do the decisions and actions of a school principal determine the degree to which a faculty chooses to work collaboratively? In my work with administrators and their staffs in a large urban district, I’ve seen firsthand two very different approaches. These principals’ stories give life to the research observations of author Warren Bennis, who said, “Management is getting people to do what needs to be done. Leadership is getting people to want to do what needs to be done. Managers push. Leaders pull. Managers command. Leaders communicate.”

In one school (fictitiously named Parktown), I watched teachers make a tremendous shift: they began opening their doors and breaking down their isolation, and co-teaching, examining student work and sharing teaching practice.

Meanwhile, in another school (fictitiously named Brighton) less than 5 miles away, the teachers expressed a sense of fragmentation and continuing isolation as they struggled to reorganize into small learning communities and implement new lesson designs in English and algebra classes.

At Parktown School, the English department spent most of this past school year piloting three sets of standards-based designed lessons, taking notes on their implementation of the curriculum and on the modifications they made to meet students’ needs. In October, these teachers started out demonstrating strong resistance to the use of the teaching units that were provided to them. Despite their resistance within a few months, they had begun examining students’ work, initially alone or in very small groups with the literacy coach and their colleagues. They began to ask for feedback and ideas for revision to the consultants who had designed the units.

The school’s second-year principal listened to their concerns, discussed the units and shared teachers’ feedback with district personnel, and supported the literacy coach in her work with the teachers in the English department. In mid-January, the literacy coach became one of the first in the district to begin consistently co-teaching the lessons with a colleague, planning and reflecting on both the process and progress together. The principal, an assistant principal, and the coach offered the teachers additional paid time to meet together to collaboratively improve and co-teach on the shared lessons. Perhaps most important, the teachers all backed off when the teachers resisted the opportunity to work together.

By March, the tone of the Parktown teachers’ interactions had begun to change. They brought student work to professional development meetings and shared experiences with colleagues from other district schools. They provided district staff with samples of revisions they’d made to the lessons. With the additional coaches’ resources they had used to augment the designs, they were able to provide necessary scaffolding for students; and copies of entries from their reflection journals. In June, the principal participated fully in two days of professional development along with the teachers. She and the literacy coach joined the classroom teachers in writing, sharing, and revising their reflection journals. By the end of the second day, the principal approached district leaders with their request: “We’d like to come in for a full day of planning, a week after school is out, before people leave town for vacations and before some of us start teaching summer school. Is the funding still available?”

A few miles away, Brighton School’s veteran principal juggled the demands of multiple initiatives required by the central district: conversion of the large school into small learning communities; implementation of designed lessons in algebra; and incorporation of required reforms that... (continued on page 18)
NSRF's Living History... (continued from page 7)

• School people, working together, can make real and lasting improvements in their own schools;
• Teachers and administrators must help each other turn theories into practice and standards into actual student learning;
• The key to this effort is the development of a "learning community" based on public, collaborative examination of both adult and student work;
• To create this community, practitioners need high-quality training and sustained support.

The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.

adopted June 2001

The National School Reform Faculty is rooted in four beliefs:

The combination of the growing work of our Centers of Activity in Seattle and Portland with the incredible location promises to create a truly memorable event. With educators from across the nation, we will work in ways our CFGs do to deepen our skills, press for insights, and find the courage in community to ensure that our work reflects our mission to foster educational and social equity. This year’s Winter Meeting will provide a structure to support varying entry points to the work of NSRF, as well as topic- based home groups allowing participants to delve deeply into an area of interest.

Since 1995, the Annual NSRF Winter Meeting has been a source of renewal for thousands of educators, providing time to think and inquire, and a space for courageous work to take root. We invite you to grow with us in our tradition of adult learning in the service of student achievement.

Scholarships for Winter Meeting

Each year, NSRF keeps a commitment to providing scholarships for Winter Meeting participants. If you would like to attend the Winter Meeting and are in need of a full or partial scholarship, particularly if you are a classroom teacher, please contact the National Center at 812.330.2702 to apply. If you are able to contribute to the scholarship fund, please contact our Development Office at 812.334.8179.

2nd Annual NSRF Research Forum

There is a deep and growing interest in research related to the work of NSRF, CFGs, and other efforts to create learning communities within schools. This one day forum, held on January 24th provides an opportunity to share what you have learned as a researcher or practitioner and learn from others about the work of NSRF, CFGs, or other activities related to the building of intentional learning communities in schools. If you are interested in attending or presenting, please visit our web site at www.nsrfharmony.org/wm_research.html.

NSRF Centers Council Meeting

The Centers Council Meeting is open to all people involved in the work of NSRF who want to share the successes, challenges, and dilemmas related to the work of their NSRF Center of Activity. Join us on January 28th to share your learning, raise issues, and co-construct our collective work as a national organization.

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What participants have to say:

“I’ve experienced transformation and community like nothing else.”

“Fantastic. [The Annual] NSRF [Winter Meeting] is not a sit and get kind of conference. It is truly about getting people to have meaningful conversations.”

“My [Annual NSRF Winter Meeting] home group was one of the greatest professional experiences of my life.”

“I grew, I gained confidence, I’m excited about the possibilities!”

“This has been the most powerful three days of my educator life!”

Meeting Elements:

• Topic-Based Home Groups
• Keynote Address
• Reception
• Open Space Technology

Location:

Shenandoah Seattle Hotel
1400 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98101
206.321.9000

Sleeping Rooms:

Single/Double $139/night
Mention NSRF Winter Meeting for group rate.
Rate available until 12/30/06

Fees:

$390 Winter Meeting
$100 Research Forum
No fee - Centers Council Meeting
Register now and we’ll bill you later!

Registration:

Registration is online at www.nsrfharmony.org/wintermeeting.html or, you may register by phone at 812.330.2702