Hip-Hop... (continued from page 19)

Indicates wealth and inherited importance. Yet he also proves elemental and powerful like rain from the heavens. Rain as an image is both ordinary and holy because it defies human control, gives life, and yet forms an integral part of everyday existence. Craig Mack comes into the music community from a position of authority, as a sheriff and through the strength of his groove, defeating all challenges...

Hip-hop and its concomitant culture expose us to the underbelly of the poor urban experience. Hip-hop presents, explains, and unapologetically exposes the lived experiences of urban east coast and west coast youth and their families and their communities. It is through these lived experiences portrayed in their raw form that we are able to measure the success of our students. The engaging music, rhythms and beats that engage us. Hip-hop music expresses a complex dichotomy research which simultaneously speaks of love and hate; the high and low of human existence; the sacred and the profane. In spite of our annoyance with the many ways in which the lyrics and gestures of the rappers, Hip-hop dancers, “MCers” and “DJers” and other players and creators of the hip-hop culture and its music assault our sensibilities, in just as many ways the beat and the rhythm and the lyrics compel us and hold us in awe.

As an “old head,” in hip-hop jargon, I am proud of my roots. I am proud of my history. I am proud of the works that I’ve created and the lessons that I’ve learned. I am proud of the struggles that I’ve faced and the triumphs that I’ve achieved. I am proud of the wisdom that reach across generations that I am a part of everyday existence. Craig Mack comes into the music community from a position of authority, as a sheriff and through the strength of his groove, defeating all challenges...

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 classroom, or a student’s own achievement, no one 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 Reclaiming Minds, and a variety of presenters on the implementation of designed lessons in algebra; the large school into small learning communities; isolation as they struggled to reorganize into small learning communities and implement new lesson designs in English and algebra classes.

A Tale of Two Schools, or The Role of a Principal in a Collaborative Culture

Debbi Laidley, California

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...
Connections
Fall 2006

out the work (or not).

to make sure that there was a sense of ownership
it seemed that in the fervor to get “the right things”
approaches. They consistently communicated a
development and to well-grounded research-based
his administrative staff put forth tremendous efforts
the right things for the students. The principal and
added reorganization at the end of each school
all faculty members to participate in monthly CFG
work is being implemented: the principal requires
or to examining student learning data in
resistant to using protocols for looking at student
staff and the administrators had been trained as
he “should not even think about coaching anyone”
Resistance to the reforms was widespread and
Some staff members were
sitting months of work developing trust among

(continued from page 5)

A Tale of Two Schools...
(continued from page 5)

The framework below from Ulrich, Zenger and
Smallwood, Results-Based Leadership, may offer
some insights:

What do successful leaders do?
- Summary of Leadership Attribute Frameworks
  - Set Direction (vision … future)
  - Demonstrate Personal Character (habits, integrity, trust, analytical thinking)
  - Mobilize Individual Commitment (engage others, share power)
  - Engender Organizational Capacity (build teams, manage teams)

At Parktown, the principal set direction by
communicating a clear focus on the importance of
examining data, and students and staff were encouraged to inform and
improve instructional practices and decision making,
including her own. She mobilized individual commitment by celebrating innovation and effort,
and giving people the space and the confidence to take the initiative to make their own improvements.
She demonstrated personal character and habits of leadership by analyzing data, including student work,
as one of many tools to provide needed information, and by encouraging others to challenge
and question the data along with her. These conversations about what’s going on with our efforts for our students were conducted formally in
faculty meetings, and informally in the hallways.
Additionally, the fact that their principal dedicated
much of his time to learn right along with the faculty delivering

cellules were: the Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

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So far, both schools have been successful in
their efforts to foster collaborative learning
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NSRF’s Living History is a series of interviews with
members about our past, present and our
hopes for the future. In this issue we hear from
Heidi Vosekas, NSRF National Center Coordinator,
as she shares her story with Peggy Silva of New Hampshire for Connections.

Two-year old Cecilia Campbell Vosekas raced
across the floor to blow out the candles on
NSRF’s 10th Anniversary cake, completely
convinced that the party was being held in her
honor. Cecilia has been an important visitor to the
Winter Meetings, in the company of her mom, Heidi, our National Center Coordinator. We wanted to bring
Heidi and Cecilia to the NSRF Winter Meeting to get to know her
work on behalf of NSRF National.

Please talk about your history with NSRF.

Since travel has always been my
primary goal, I never thought that I
would be working in my home
back in the Harmony School
from which I had graduated. I had
returned home after graduating from
Earlham College, a Quaker school
in Richmond, Indiana, and was
washing dishes in a restaurant when I learned
of a job at the National Center
as a data entry clerk in 1999.
Shortly after I arrived, my
temporary job evolved into a
chance to create a national center
for NSRF. I vividly remember the excite-
ment and enthusiasm with which our

corridors on a street corner in Bloomington!

During my junior year in high school, my mom
planned a kind of Swiss Family Robinson experi-
ence for my sister and me. I took study courses
from Harmony while camping in Jamaica for seven months. This experience changed the course of all
of our lives.

I built on this experience as a senior, designing
an independent study as my seniors-long service project. I studied German, then lived in Switzerland
and Austria for several months, implementing a
series of community service projects there.

Since my high school career
had afforded me so much international travel, I
decided to take a col-
lege semester in El Paso, Texas, studying border
issues. Harmony School
was a close-knit, self-
directed learning environment.

What is the work that is
most satisfying to you?

The organization comes to life when we begin
to plan the Winter Meeting. It is the time when
all the work we do coalesces into direct support
of our membership. We have conversations with
those planning the event for thousands of com-
mitted CFG coaches. We see the support we offer
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Camilla Greene, Connecticut

What do I as a middle class, baby boomer, African American female, former high school teacher of English, current NSRF National Facilitator and school coach from Brooklyn need to know and be able to do in order to interrupt the peremptory factors of race, class, and gender on the success of African American males in school and in life? That is the essential question I grapple with every day in my work and in my life. Grasping with that question engages me in forging difficult alliances across generations, across gender, across cultural differences, and it engages me in going to the heart of my own fears. For much of my teaching career, I have turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to hip-hop music. For years I have been put off, disgusted by the rhetoric, demeaning lyrics, and the condescending posturing that accompanies the hip-hop culture and those who create, sustain and market it. I conveniently blamed all the ills and/or lack of academic achievement of poor black males on THAT MUSIC! Over the last couple of years I have been enlightened by young African American males who have taken it upon themselves to “educate” me. First there were many long and difficult conversations about hip-hop. Then there were the times when I listened to certain hip-hop artists that they admired. They gave me six CDs containing their favorite hip-hop music. Listening to those CDs, with their politically conscious messages and positive black male affirmations, triggered the start of my self-reflective exploitation of hip-hop. But the turning point for me was when I had an opportunity to sit in on a hip-hop class at Drexel University conducted by Dr. James Patterson. During that class, a Socratic discussion focused on Dr. Gwendolyn Pough’s book Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere (2004), I noted the promise of the engaged, analytical minds of young black male students at work; I was forced to seriously reexamine my views about hip-hop.

In reflecting on both of 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. 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 a culture’s lived experience in whatever format it is manifested. Critical pedagogy for poor African American males disengaged in our high school classrooms and dubbed “releuctant readers” must deal with 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 might add all youth since hip-hop has become a global phenomenon, if only we are willing to acknowledge its powerful potential.

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 repulses 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. 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:

- Dr. Alfred Tatum’s Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males (See “It is not Rocket Science”, Connections, Winter 2006)
- Dr. Inmani Perry’s Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop. Chapter 5 “B-Boys, 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 every culture, there are songs that are passed down from mouth to ear. Hip-hop today is the new music that will be passed down…