Building Hip-Hop Music Educators

Personal Reflections on Rap Songwriting in the Classroom

Ethan Hein and Toni Blackman

Abstract *In order to prepare preservice music education students to engage with Hip-Hop in their classrooms, it is not enough for them to learn it as subject matter. We argue that Hip-Hop educators should also be active creative participants in the music. Learning by creating original beats and verses fosters personal expression, growth, and transformation, along with engagement in larger social and political issues. Writing and producing rap songs forces music education students to confront issues of identity formation, cultural appropriation, and the politics of race, class, and gender. As an antiauthoritarian street music, Hip-Hop fits uncomfortably in formal institutions. Hip-Hop music educators must be prepared to create "brave spaces" that can be used to confront harsh and caustic language, depictions of violent and antisocial behavior, and general defiance of authority and convention.*

Introduction

How should university-level music education programs address and include Hip-Hop? How should they prepare preservice music teachers to engage the music and its culture? And why is it important that they do so? We address these questions using examples from our experiences teaching Hip-Hop songwriting and production. We begin by introducing our own approaches to learning and teaching the music. We then define Hip-Hop music education as a specialized form of culturally relevant pedagogy, and we discuss its potential as a tool for both personal and societal development. We also ask what our responsibilities are as educators when teaching Hip-Hop; for example, how should we handle problematic or offensive rap lyrics? Finally, we argue that to be a Hip-Hop music educator, that is, a teacher of Hip-Hop in music education, it is not

enough to have second-hand subject matter expertise; educators must be active creative participants in Hip-Hop culture.

Before Hip-Hop music educators can identify practical approaches to teaching Hip-Hop, we believe that they must first ask how to do so without doing violence to the music and its meanings, and indeed, whether such a thing is even possible. As an antiauthoritarian street music, Hip-Hop fits uncomfortably in formal institutions. To create a welcoming environment for Hip-Hop, universities must enact larger changes to the culture of their music education programs, to challenge their white racial frame and general aversion to political controversy. Hip-Hop music educators must be prepared to create "brave spaces" in order to confront harsh and caustic language, depictions of violent and antisocial behavior, and general defiance of authority and convention.

In the following, we present an overview of our teaching practices so as to provide concrete illustrations of our larger themes. Ethan Hein teaches music technology, songwriting, and music theory in universities in the United States and online. Toni Blackman teaches rap songwriting and improvisation in a variety of institutional, informal, and private settings around the world (including as a guest in Ethan's classes.) Ethan is white, and while he listened to rap as a child, he did not begin to create music in a Hip-Hop idiom until adulthood. Toni is Black and has been an active emcee and songwriter since she was a teenager.

Our Approaches to Teaching Hip-Hop in Music Education

About Toni Blackman

Toni Blackman is one of the world's foremost Hip-Hop educators. She is the first Hip-Hop Cultural Envoy with the U.S. Department of State, and has traveled to forty-six countries to give talks and perform in that capacity. Beginning in 2000, Toni began touring Africa with the State Department's American Cultural Specialist program. She was the first Hip-Hop artist to be hired by the program, and, according to Mark Katz, she "changed the course of US cultural diplomacy" (Katz 2019: 32). Toni has been a teaching artist for a variety of other institutions as well, ranging from the Soros Foundation to local community groups. She has been a practicing emcee for several decades and specializes

in the demanding practice of freestyling, that is, improvising rap songs in the moment.

Toni's Teaching Practice

Toni's practice draws extensively on ideas and approaches used in music therapy. She urges artists and arts teachers (not just musicians and music teachers) to focus on their mental health so that they are emotionally resilient, can manage anxiety and failure, and can model these same qualities for students. Toni presents freestyle rap as a method for building authentic confidence that comes from the soul, and to access greater vulnerability and creativity. Her approach to teaching freestyling is premised on the belief that if you are in the right frame of mind, feeling centered and connected and confident, then the music will flow effortlessly out of you.

Toni's goal in her workshops is to help participants "get open." Getting open means being fully connected to yourself, experiencing unity between your conscious and unconscious mind, living in the present moment, and not worrying about the past or future. It also means being open to the energy of the other people in the room. Toni encourages getting open by putting her participants "on a vibe," a heightened mental state shared among a group of people. The vibe is fostered by music, but is mostly a function of social and emotional connections. Creating a vibe is a necessary precursor to successful music creation. It is also the desired effect of Hip-Hop on listeners and dancers.

Toni's freestyle workshops take the form of a cypher, a circle of Hip-Hop improvisers. Participants in a cypher take turns performing, and each one picks up immediately after the previous one leaves off, to keep the flow steady. The cypher is simultaneously a competition and a community. Acceptance into this community is less a matter of technical ability, and more a matter of willingness to step into the circle, to tell your story, and to demonstrate your uniqueness. The cypher is emblematic of what Thomas Turino (2008) describes as participatory performance. In such performances, the audience/artist distinction is blurry or nonexistent; everyone listens, and everyone performs.

Toni brings cypher participants into the right frame of mind using exercises drawn from meditation practices, improv comedy, and theater games. One such exercise is a simple alphabet game. The first person in the circle lists all the words they can think of starting with A. Then the next person lists all the words they can think of starting with B, and so on. The point is not to compete

to get the most words, but rather, to establish flow from one person to the next. As soon as a participant hesitates, the next person is supposed to jump right in without needing prompting. There is no beat playing, and no pressure to make sense or say anything profound, and yet, sometimes the word lists can make for strangely effective lyrics. For example, one workshop participant came up with "mother, monster, martyr, maker," which would be a powerful lyric in and of itself.

Another exercise is to have participants rap introductions: say who they are and what they do, without a beat but having things rhyme. Toni likes to do the introduction exercise at every cypher, even if it is the same group of participants as the last time, because everyone will (ideally) have grown since then. A similar low-pressure exercise is to have everyone freestyle spoken word poetry off a prompt, like the word "summer." If participants get stuck or run out of ideas, then they simply pause and conclude: "… summer." Toni coaches performers to speak as if their words are profound and brilliant, and to keep an open, loose stance, with no locked body positions. These exercises have the "yes and" ethos of improvisational comedians (Halpern et al. 1994). After an hour of such exercises, Toni can put on a beat, and even first-time emcees find that they are able to come up with surprisingly strong rhymes on the fly.

Toni's teaching approach is premised on the idea that people rap best in a flow state: not self-conscious or "in their head," neither bored nor anxious, but connected and present. Without being in a flow state, it is possible to write music and lyrics that are clever, well crafted, and impressive. However, this music will not really grab listeners, because they will sense its underlying disconnection and anxiety. If the music is created in a state of flow, on the other hand, then it will place listeners in a similar state.

About Ethan Hein

Ethan Hein teaches music technology, songwriting, and music theory at New York University, the New School, Montclair State University, and Western Illinois University. He came to academia after spending fifteen years playing rock, country, jazz, and funk guitar and producing various kinds of electronic music. As an adolescent, he belonged to a category identified by Jo Saunders (2010) as a "disengaged alternative musician," whose creative goals and tastes were incompatible with the formal music education opportunities available to him. When Ethan began teaching music technology, songwriting, and music theory,

he wanted to use a culturally relevant approach that centers students' preferred music styles.

Ethan received a valuable confidence lesson during Toni's keynote address at the 2017 IMPACT Conference at New York University. As she does in all of her presentations, she concluded her talk by freestyling a verse, and she asked for a volunteer from the audience to do a beat for her. It was early in the morning, and no one raised their hand, so Ethan finally raised his. He had been beatboxing in private for a few years, but he had never done it for an audience. Toni's shamanistic affect emboldened him, however. He climbed up onstage and beatboxed the Funky Drummer beat, and she conducted him in and out while she did her verse. Performing with Toni felt as easy and casual for Ethan as if they were just casually hanging out together.

Ethan's Teaching Practice

Ethan organizes his university-level music production classes around creative prompts that encourage students to develop individual voices that they can use to express their own ideas and thoughts (Kuhn/Hein 2021). While purely technical exercises have some value, the best and most culturally authentic way to practice using digital music production tools is to make original songs or tracks. By the end of a course, students should have a portfolio of music that they have produced and are proud of. The word "portfolio" may be a little too formal for students' tastes, though; they may prefer to call their collection of songs an album, an EP, a playlist, or a mixtape.

It is a constructivist axiom that music students work best when they feel like they are making something of value. Alex Ruthmann (2006) argued that the best curriculum activities derive from real-world activities, ideally retaining the essential values of the original. The objects and operations of the adapted activity should be genuine instances of the original activity, however simplified. Classroom music and "real" music should be one and the same whenever possible. Digital production is ideally suited to this goal, since student productions can sound quite legitimately "real."

For beginner-level students, the most profound change brought on by the advent of the digital audio workstation as a medium is how it encourages naive experimentation. The computer gives students immediate auditory feedback for their every move, so trial and error is a practical way to approach learning and creation. Songs on the radio are increasingly likely to be produced by musicians who learned their craft by sitting in front of the computer and figuring

everything out by ear. As Adam Bell put it, "purchasers of computers are purchasers of an education" (Bell 2018: 207). The main service that teachers can offer young producers is to save them tedious effort, by directing their playful experimentation more efficiently.

One of the best ways to scaffold creativity in the digital studio is to give students raw material to work with, so they are not paralyzed by the terror of a blank screen. Every DAW comes with a library of royalty-free loops, and some of these loops have featured in well-known songs. For example, the beat in Rihanna's Grammy-winning hit "Umbrella" (2007) is a GarageBand loop called "Vintage Funk Kit 03" (Sorcinelli 2016). Third-party loop libraries are available as well, for example from Splice.com.

Digital audio tools also make it possible to create music by sampling and remixing existing tracks. Sampling is an aesthetic choice consistent with the history and values of the Hip-Hop and electronic dance music communities, an exercise of intellectual, social, and artistic power. Through sampling, fans can enter into a conversation with their favorite recordings and use their visceral familiarity to create intertextual reference and shocks of recognition. Looping a sample does not only refer to the original; it creates new musical meaning as well. The loop repeatedly juxtaposes the end of a phrase with its beginning. "After only a few repetitions, this juxtaposition, along with the largely arbitrary musical patterns it creates, begins to take on an air of inevitability. It begins to gather a compositional weight that far exceeds its original significance" (Schloss 2014: 137). This way, familiar recordings can be made strange, and, then, through repetition, strange sounds can be made familiar.

Sampling copyrighted songs is more complicated, morally and legally, than using royalty-free loops, but this very complication makes sampling a culturally significant act. Simply knowing that sampling is possible changes the experience of listening to music—listeners can attain "DJ consciousness" (Sinnreich 2010: 202), a state of alertness to the creative possibilities of every recording, rather than hearing them simply as consumer products to be passively listened to.

What Is Hip-Hop Music Education?

We organize our understanding of Hip-Hop music education around two central themes: Hip-Hop as a subject matter, and Hip-Hop as a value system. Music educators should know the subject matter as a matter of cultural rele-

vance and inclusion. Hip-Hop values have significance that extends far beyond classes in music technology, songwriting, or popular/commercial music. It is possible to approach any musical subject or activity using Hip-Hop values: to investigate its potential for expressive sampling and remixing; to seek out its freshness and realness; and to ask how it might be repurposed for youth self-expression. Embracing Hip-Hop values also involves an ethical commitment to understanding the music's social and political contexts, particularly with regard to the history of American race relations. Here, again, we should not limit this engagement to Hip-Hop: music educators should consider these same issues in whatever we do.

Our work is informed by social identity theory (Lamont/Hargreaves 2019), the idea that young people form their identities by exploring various possible social selves, and by forming different configurations of ingroups and outgroups. Expressions of taste are crucial markers of adolescent ingroup and outgroup status. Music listening and creation is a crucial tool for identity building, because it offers a space to try on identities and group memberships in a low-consequence setting. Young people also use music as a way to give voice or outlet to complex individual emotions. "Music is the playground and the kingdom of young people, in which they can shout and be silly, be fragile and search to understand themselves, and identify their own, personal, choices" (Saarikallio 2019: 92). The process of identity formation is a tumultuous one, and adolescents rely heavily on music to regulate multiple affect dimensions simultaneously: emotions, moods, motivational impulses, stress responses, and arousal (Baltazar 2019). Young people rely on music to release or control difficult emotions, and this can be literally lifesaving (Campbell et al. 2007). Even in less extreme situations, music is an essential emotional support.

Adolescents around the world use Hip-Hop to build their emotional and social selves, particularly in racially or economically marginalized communities. Hip-Hop is a cultural space that "allows for the development of a privileged everyday life to those who do not have one" (Schneider 2011: 5). A middle school student in Chicago describes the experience of participating in a songwriting and production program: "At first I didn't really like my voice because it didn't sound like the radio but now I like hearing my voice so much. It's like addictive to me to hear my thoughts real loud in the speakers. I feel alive and worth something" (quoted from Evans 2019: 28). Andrea Frisch-Hara describes Hip-Hop as potentially functioning as a "musical transitional object" (2012: 18), a symbolic anchor point that young people can use to support a sense of safety within

themselves. The process of music-making is a proving ground for growth and development. Producers and emcees practice "maintaining agency, developing identity, regulating mood, and working through individuation and group belonging challenges" (Viega 2013: 14). While any kind of music creation can potentially support adolescents in their developmental work, Hip-Hop has some unique features that make it especially useful. It is a lingua franca of alienated youth (Wright 2021: 321), widely heard and enjoyed. Its embrace of sampling and remixing enable young people to critically repurpose the products of commercial popular culture for their own expressive ends. Finally, its irreverent stance and preference for emotional directness encourages openness.

Rap is not simply a collection of techniques; it is inseparable from the emcee's own voice and experiences. To support rap songwriting, music educators must help young people learn to assert their voice in the world. This ability is useful not just for emcees, but for songwriters of any kind. Our vision of the ideal music educator is a person who is strong enough to help students confront their feelings of inadequacy and incompletion. Toni likes to tell students that they can acquire discipline and understanding through training, but that they will acquire self-actualization through creation. Rap both demands self-confidence and builds it. In order to become proficient, emcees must overcome their fear of being judged by others. "Emcee" originally meant "master of ceremonies," and emcees need to be able to lead a room.

Improvisation is an especially useful method for developing an emcee's confidence. Toni's own emcee practice was profoundly influenced by learning about the free jazz movement in a college jazz history course. The chaos of Cecil Taylor and Ornette Coleman's group improvisation would seem far removed from the steady grooves of Hip-Hop, but the philosophical similarities are more profound than the differences. As Valerie Wilmer (1977) puts it, the freedom of improvisation is the "birthright" of Black musicians, not in the sense of genetic inheritance, but rather in the sense of shared cultural heritage. Improvisation has been at the heart of Toni's Hip-Hop practice since her childhood, and it continues to be central to her identity as an artist and educator. Ethan does not have Toni's mastery of Hip-Hop improvisation, but he has had parallel experiences playing jazz and funk, and they are similarly central to his musical identity. Improvisation was not part of Ethan's upbringing; it is a competence that he had to develop slowly over many years. After developing it in his musical life, he found that he was able to effortlessly improvise in his teaching practice as well. Improvisation is a valuable technique in a variety of musical styles, but we find that it is most meaningful (and most challenging) in

the Hip-Hop context. Many more students can readily engage with (and judge) a rap flow than a bebop saxophone solo. In-the-moment creative practice has been personally transformative for us, and we hope to give our students the opportunity to have similarly transformative experiences.

Education should prepare students to be informed and responsible citizens. Because popular music is both culturally significant and ideologically contested, its study can be a site of contesting and developing democratic virtues (Bowman 2004: 39). Hip-Hop education affords the opportunity to teach cultural competence, "students' deep understanding of their culture of origin, coupled with fluency in at least one additional culture" (Ladson-Billings 2015: 415). For white students, cultural competence entails learning to recognize their culture as one among many, and not as the sole or universal "right" way of being. We do not mean to imply that Hip-Hop represents the cultural origins of all minoritized students, but it does speak to many of them. If music education is able to make space for Hip-Hop, then we are hopeful that doors will open for the musical expressions of other marginalized groups as well.

Hip-Hop's tradition of sampling, remixing, quotation, and signifying comprise a worthy toolkit for speaking back to and critiquing commercial culture. However, mainstream rap songs are themselves a product of commercial culture, and they should be the object of critique as well, particularly when they communicate negative messages about crime, drugs, or misogyny. This makes it all the more urgent for educators both to explore the form's liberatory potential and to mitigate its sometimes antisocial content. Tricia Rose (versusdebates 2012) blames commercial pressures for emphasizing Hip-Hop's most socially destructive aspects, and for suppressing its consciousness-raising aspects. Toni agrees, and she therefore impatiently dismisses the idea that music is "just entertainment." Hip-Hop itself is a valuable tool for critical thought, because its vocabulary is so familiar, and because it can be created using inexpensive and accessible tools such as digital audio workstation software, mobile apps, synthesizers, drum machines, and samplers. However, Hip-Hop is also frequently problematic, so young people need to take a critical stance toward it, the same way they should be critical toward every aspect of mass culture.

As part of a critical approach to Hip-Hop culture, we urge music educators to examine the deficit narratives surrounding rap. Both Hip-Hop fans and detractors repeat the cliché that young people in the Bronx began rapping over sampled beats because they were too deprived to be able to play "real" instru-

ments (see, e.g., Remington 2000). This narrative is complicated by the fact that samplers and turntables were more expensive than "real" instruments in the early days of Hip-Hop. More to the point, sampling is a form of cultural wealth, not poverty. We can attest to the sense of empowerment that comes with the ability to use the products of the commercial music industry as raw material for our own expression.

Analyzing popular music is valuable for developing students' ability to be responsible citizens, because doing so can

> develop the kind of critical awareness that makes people less vulnerable to totalizing (universalizing, or totalitarian) thought, to capitalism's voracious need for willing consumers, or to the potent semiotic forces at work in the musics that now pervade almost every aspect of everyday life. (Bowman 2004: 39)

When presented with well-produced and catchy pop songs that promote antisocial attitudes, students need to be able to recognize what makes such songs so compelling, while still resisting their harmful messages.

Since we cannot teach everything, music educators must make choices about inclusion and exclusion, and those choices are inherently political. We believe that as long as music education is going to be political, then the politics should be antiracist and decolonized (Hein/Abrahams 2022). It is not enough to include Hip-Hop in the curriculum for "diversity," or as a special topic during Black History Month. Nor should we add a class on antiracism to the music education curriculum. We believe that it is necessary to thread radical inclusiveness throughout everything we do. White students in particular need to understand Hip-Hop to be an outgrowth of Black American culture, not simply a consumer product to be enjoyed out of context. However, conversations about race and class are not automatically constructive or beneficial; educators must handle them with care.

How Do We Teach Hip-Hop Responsibly?

Hip-Hop education is a specialized version of culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 2015), which uses "the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay 2000: 29). The

meanings of music derive as much from its social context as from its content (Elliott/Silverman 2015). Hip-Hop educators must find a way to maintain the positive delineations of students' music in the social context of school. This challenge is not only a matter of curriculum design; it requires educators to rethink the social roles and relationships in the classroom as well.

In their survey of "Hip-Hop academicization," Johan Söderman and Ove Sernhede (2016) describe an effort by university scholars to advance the use of Hip-Hop culture as a pedagogy, with the goal of highlighting and empowering marginalized people. The authors also examine the risks of Hip-Hop academicization: that including Hip-Hop as a diversity move may keep it safely marginalized; that the demands of street authenticity are directly at odds with the norms of academic prestige; and that inviting less-privileged students into Hip-Hop pedagogical spaces will shut them out of the opportunity to climb the social hierarchy.

If students are to be meaningfully creative, then they must maintain the freedom to be their authentic selves. We can understand authenticity to be a "plausible narrative of the self" that enables us to struggle against external social pressures (Spicer 2011). The word "authenticity" derives etymologically from the Greek "authentes," meaning both "one who acts with authority" and "made by one's own hand." Its usage has evolved to mean freedom from outside influence, resistance to the dominant culture and institutions, or a more general sense of rootedness and genuineness. In this last sense, authenticity is synonymous with Hip-Hop's norm of keeping it real. Students' desire for authority over their creative selves is likely to conflict with school authority.

Because the school context is by definition an inauthentic one for popular music, it is difficult for Hip-Hop educators to maintain authenticity (Parkinson/Smith 2015: 195). Lucy Green warns that teaching popular music inauthentically defeats the purpose of including it:

> If its authentic production and transmission practices are missing from the curriculum, and if we are unable to incorporate them into our teaching strategies, we will be dealing with a simulacrum, or a ghost of popular music in the classroom, and not the thing itself. (Green 2006: 107)

The challenge for Hip-Hop educators, then, is to create space in a formal curriculum for the informal and personal nature of Hip-Hop creativity.

In a study of Hip-Hop educators who work for the U.S. State Department (including Toni), Mark Katz (2019) found that they are often ambivalent about

being agents of a government whose policies they may disagree with. Some adopt a stance of subversive complicity, "in which a traditionally marginalized or subjugated group participates within an exploitative system in order to resist or reform a hegemonic power" (Katz 2019: 130). This stance is a pragmatic recognition that exploitation with partial benefits is better than exploitation without them. Perhaps the best that Hip-Hop educators can hope for is to accede to the authoritarian culture of school enough to be accepted, while still maintaining enough subversive autonomy to be able to represent the culture authentically.

We have a specific political agenda in our Hip-Hop education practice: to empower students to be critical thinkers and to advocate for themselves. Paulo Freire (2000) draws a distinction between authoritative educators, who show mastery of subject matter, ethics, and mentoring ability, with authoritarian educators, who drum knowledge into students without ethical considerations. Music education in the United States has an authoritarian history, as it is rooted in the "distinct yet overlapping cultures" of military bands, church choirs, and European classical orchestras (Cremata 2017: 66). Each of these cultures values perfection and uniformity, values that are at odds with the constructivist values of individuality, differentiation, and freedom.

Students who reject the authoritarian aspects of school music culture may do so overtly via classroom disruption, skipping class, or other misbehavior. But most students who find school music unappealing simply muddle through required classes and then opt not to enroll in available electives. Ethan and Toni both experienced versions of this resistance. Resistance theorists urge us to see such nonparticipation as a form of political opposition rather than mere apathy or disinterest:

> The concept of resistance […] depicts a mode of discourse that rejects traditional explanations of school failure and oppositional behavior and shifts the analysis of oppositional behavior from the theoretical terrains of functionalism and mainstream educational psychology to those of political science and sociology. […] [I]t has little to do with deviance and learned helplessness, but a great deal to do with moral and political indignation. (Giroux 1983: 289)

Skillful and culturally responsive music educators can overcome otherwise implacable school resistance. Martin Urbach, for example, has several particularly troubled and challenged students who only come to school to attend his classes.

Martin welcomes these students by taking a culturally responsive approach, and he encourages them to use music itself as a form of political resistance. He places a higher priority on his students' well-being than on imparting information to them.

We share Martin's commitment to an ethic of care for students. In Hip-Hop slang, to *school* someone means to teach them a lesson. This is the sense that Jay-Z uses in "Hello Brooklyn 2.0" (2007): "Like a mama, you birth me; Brooklyn, you nursed me; schooled me with hard knocks better than Berkeley." Del The Funky Homosapien equates schooling with punishment and shame in "Mistadobalina" (1991): "Teacher used to put me on a stump and then he schooled me." By contrast, to *build* in the Hip-Hop sense means to collaborate creatively. Building is not just a matter of creating a product; it is a process of learning from and about each other. Building in this sense is a collective process, not an individual one. Hip-Hop educators may work in schools, but they should not aim to school their students; they should work to foster the conditions for building.

Some of our friends and colleagues in the Hip-Hop world are skeptical about bringing the music into schools. There is a widespread fear that if we succeed, we will crush the life out of it. Besides, the music seems to be doing just fine without institutional support. We recognize the validity of these objections. Nevertheless, we can see several ways that schools can better support Hip-Hop culture. The commercial mainstream represents only a narrow slice of Hip-Hop as a culture and an art form, in the same way that Hollywood blockbusters represent only a small part of cinema, and airport bookstores represent only a small part of literature. Institutions such as schools can introduce students to voices from outside the mainstream, to more marginalized and experimental creators, and to the music's rich fifty-year history.

We also believe that while the risks of institutionalizing Hip-Hop are real, the costs of not doing so are far greater. By excluding Hip-Hop from formal educational spaces, we send the message that our cultural institutions do not value it, and that it is implicitly either not important enough to merit inclusion, or of insufficient aesthetic quality. We did not study music in college because our preferred musics were either unavailable or openly disdained. How many would-be Hip-Hop music educators are being deterred from pursuing teaching credentials by similar attitudes?

American Hip-Hop artists who do want to obtain teaching credentials face severe institutional obstacles. Music teachers in the United States are drawn from a self-selecting population: participants in school ensembles, usually hav-

ing taken private lessons from early ages. In an ideal world, every Hip-Hop course would be taught by emcees and producers, but that world is remote from the one we live in. Few Hip-Hop musicians are willing or able to meet the Western classical music requirements, and few classical or jazz musicians are well-versed in Hip-Hop's creative methods.

Among all of the music education majors we have taught, there have been many rap lovers, but few emcees, producers or DJs. Hip-Hop and formal music education hardly ever make contact, and it will be some time before the split can be rectified. In the meantime, how should we prepare existing music education students to engage Hip-Hop responsibly? One answer is to bring people like Toni into the classroom whenever possible. But what should Hip-Hop outsiders do when there are no available culture bearers? The best we can suggest is that outsiders should be as informed and self-reflective as they can be.

Ethan's music education students are almost all Hip-Hop outsiders, and they feel significant anxiety about teaching it. For example, while they are eager to embrace rap songwriting as a method, they struggle with the question of whether or not to police student language. We ourselves both feel a responsibility to push back against casually profane and misogynistic language, though we both use profanity in our own casual speech. Hip-Hop uses vulgarity to express "disdain for established norms and rejection of what 'decent' adult culture declares is acceptable" (Taylor/Taylor 2007: 211). In other words, the offensiveness is the point. How could such deliberately unacceptable language exist in the censorious environment of school? Either we would have to present a sanitized version of the music, or school would have to become far less censorious. Even educators who are enthusiastic about Hip-Hop (ourselves included) find it difficult to bring caustic, sexually explicit and profane language into the classroom. The "dirtiest" forms of rap will be the last to find an institutional embrace. We might want to teach "For Free? (Interlude)" (2015) by Kendrick Lamar as the virtuosic musical work that it is, but its opening line is "Fuck you, motherfucker, you a ho-ass n***a." The song uses its harsh language in a complex spirit of irony, but it still uses it.

As an outspoken feminist, Toni has struggled with the male-dominated culture of rap throughout her career. There have been female emcees since rap's inception—Toni cites Sha-Rock of Funky Four Plus One as the first. But women have been consistently overlooked within Hip-Hop culture, and rap is broadly perceived to be intrinsically masculine. Toni has worked to create Hip-Hop spaces that are welcoming to women. For example, when she ran freestyle workshops in Washington, DC, she insisted that participants not use the

word "bitch," and forbade them to battle each other. In response, rap bloggers complained that she was "feminizing Hip-Hop." The implicit assumption that feminizing the art form is harmful to it speaks to the challenge that Toni has undertaken.

In some spaces, Toni forbids misogynistic language outright. In others, she allows it, but asks emcees whether they would speak that way to their grandmother or their little sister. Toni is concerned about the moral harms of profanity, but also the creative harms. She wants to make sure that emcees are not trying to hide unimaginative writing, or to avoid taking emotional risks. For example, she dislikes overuse of "motherfucker" in lyrics because she regards it as a lazy space-filler. She recognizes the word's satisfying rhythm and its internal rhyme. However, it is exactly for those reasons that she discourages emcees from using it. Toni wants to create congenial spaces for creativity, and in such spaces, she sees artistic laziness as being as destructive as hateful speech.

Schools do not police all offensive or controversial language. Vajra Watson (2013) points out that core curriculum texts are full of graphic violence, debauchery, sex, suicide, and, in the cases of Twain and Faulkner, the n-word spoken in anger. When Ethan first read D'Aulaire's *Book of Greek Myths* (1967) to his children, a classic from his own childhood, he was shocked to find brother-sister incest described in the opening chapter. "Inappropriate" language and content is a matter of cultural context. Young people are alive to contradictions and hypocrisies of this kind. As a young teaching artist from an inner-city background puts it:

> The problem is not the profanity. The problem is the source. The source is not the youth. We did not make this world, we were born into it just like every other poet, student, teacher, human being. And in many ways, it's a fucked up world! This is the environment that raised us so what kind of adult criticizes our attempt to release, reshape, and create our own identity? (quoted from Watson 2013: 400)

A profane reality demands profane expression. As an educator, Ethan has had to confront the question of how much his desire to protect young people from bad language is actually a desire to protect himself from it.

Among all the harsh words in common use in Hip-Hop, the n-word is the hardest point of contention. The fact that we are unwilling even to type out the word in full speaks to how sensitive it is. In any study of Hip-Hop, however, there is no avoiding the word. A Tribe Called Quest, a famously "conscious"

group, has a well-known song called "Sucka N***a" (1993). The song critiques the casual use of the n-word, but its hook also continually repeats it. White Hip-Hop fans like Ethan are witness to Black artists' and listeners' working through a complex and contradictory process of reclaiming the ugliest racial slur in the English language. It does not feel appropriate for white people to even listen in on this process, much less to participate in it. However, the alternative is to avert our gaze from Hip-Hop entirely, and that is equally unacceptable.

A Hip-Hop course will necessarily make its participants uncomfortable, as they confront issues of race, class and gender, and as they engage with caustic language. The movement to create "safe spaces" is a well-intentioned effort to support participants as they address controversial topics. However, majority-group participants too easily conflate safety with comfort, which defeats the purpose of hard conversations. Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens (2013) suggest that we reframe the ground rules of learning spaces to minimize harm rather than risk, creating brave spaces rather than trying to guarantee safe ones. We first heard the term "brave space" from Martin Urbach:

> In my kind of music education, [students'] choice of music that they bring will never be policed and censored. I have to be willing to do the labor of what it means to have an uncensored space. I have to help build the space so that it's a brave space. If we're listening to a song that is, like, deeply misogynistic, and a student is, like, "Stop that, that's hurtful," we can stop it, and I will be there to help open the wound and then heal it back together. (Personal communication 2018)

Martin is candid about his own stumbles as an educator, and he knows that hurt feelings are inevitable whenever real issues are on the table. His hope is that his classroom will be a space where he and his students can feel like they are struggling side by side, rather than against one another.

We have our own approaches to creating brave spaces, by modeling braveness ourselves. Toni regularly opens up to classrooms full of strangers about her personal struggles and tragedies. This is more of a growth area for Ethan, but whenever he is able to show vulnerability to students, they respond in kind.

Conclusion

We are passionate about Hip-Hop music education in part because we love the music itself, but mainly because when we invite the music into educational spaces, it brings with it so much else. Writing and performing rap songs and making beats puts us in touch with our own individual identities and perspectives, connects us with the other people in the room, and puts us face to face with large and difficult social issues.

Hip-Hop artists mainly learn through creating original music. We believe that producing beats and writing songs is the most effective method for preservice music teachers to learn Hip-Hop music as well. Learning in this way makes the technical aspects of the music more vivid and meaningful, and more importantly, the creative process also opens up opportunities for personal expression, growth, and transformation. Hip-Hop is not only an avenue of individual expression, however; it is an expression of cultural politics as well. The music is both hugely popular and contested in its meanings, making it a natural starting point for larger conversations about culture and identity. Writing and producing rap songs forces music education students to confront issues of identity formation, cultural appropriation, and the politics of race, class and gender. These issues are present in any act of music creation or performance, but Hip-Hop throws them into unusually stark relief.

Beyond the value of "art for art's sake," participation in music is a way to rehearse ways of being in the world, and to rehearse ways of being within oneself. Director-led ensembles teach students to be part of an organization, to follow direction, to subsume individuality into a collective, and to exercise discipline and focus. Hip-Hop prepares rappers and beatmakers to be part of small, ad hoc peer networks, to assert individuality, and to make the most of the resources at hand. If educators wish to prepare students to succeed in society as it is, playing in ensembles will serve them well. However, if we want students to imagine alternative ways of being, we believe that they will find more opportunities for doing so in approaches such as Hip-Hop music education that allow them to create music for themselves.

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