

Gangsta Rap in Everyday School Life

A Response to Furtwängler

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Unfortunately, I can only agree with Charlotte Furtwängler on most points, and I say unfortunately because, as a music teacher and active drummer in several rap bands, I am familiar with the dilemma. The subject of Hip-Hop, including rap, is greatly neglected in everyday school life, not to mention gangsta rap.

It's important, and practice shows, that gangsta rap should never be taught in isolation. If a colleague decides to address gangsta rap, as I have done several times, then the entire development of rap, or Hip-Hop, should be considered. For two reasons: first, the contents of gangsta rap can only be understood through a comprehensive understanding of Hip-Hop's history; and second, it allows students to be exposed to other subgenres of rap and to gain insight from it. Hip-Hop as a whole is so much more than gangsta rap. Many students are unaware of this and are then surprised, thrilled, and grateful when they are shown the diversity that rap and Hip-Hop have to offer.

There is thus no reason not to address Hip-Hop in an educational context, especially since Hip-Hop is by far the most extensive youth culture and thus necessarily belongs in music education. It's a pity that music education and especially textbooks have not yet recognized this and treat Hip-Hop, if at all, only very briefly.

Difficulties undoubtedly arise when addressing gangsta rap. Many lyrics contain themes that, at first glance, don't seem to belong in school. But I believe that these themes absolutely belong in the classroom, where we can discuss their content and critically engage with them. This can significantly foster tolerance, diversity, and acceptance.

One point that Furtwängler also mentions is authenticity. Of course, a music teacher can't teach rap and particularly gangsta rap authentically (though

being well-informed doesn't hurt). But that's not something they need to be able to do. Students don't expect that.

Regarding authenticity in gangsta rap, Furtwängler is correct in saying that there was a time when authenticity in rap played a significant role. However, today many so-called gangsta rappers openly admit that they are portraying a character and behave quite differently in "real" life. This is an important point in discussions with students. Another aspect is that many gangsta rappers who once especially emphasized authenticity now relativize much of their past, apologizing for lyrics and content, and they are releasing songs with entirely different messages. Often, these artists have always released songs that deal with completely different themes such as origin, poverty, family, and love.

Lastly, it's also important to place the content and lyrics in a temporal and social context.

I believe that if these points are considered and included in discussions and materials with students, then it's entirely possible to create differentiated and appropriate teaching materials and hold classroom discussions about gangsta rap.

I have had positive experiences addressing gangsta rap in lessons. Often, students, especially with English-speaking artists, are not aware of the content being conveyed. And even with artists who rap in German, the response to the question, "What is this actually about?" is frequently just a shrug.

Students are often unaware of the subject matter; when they listen to these songs, what matters is rather that the beat is hard or "cool," and that they listen to what is "cool" without actually finding it cool or questioning what that means. This underscores the importance of giving students a comprehensive overview of Hip-Hop. This way, many can also discover artists who have similarly cool beats and a similarly cool style of rapping, but whose content is much more relevant, socially critical, emotional, or just funny.

Regarding the use of textbooks, I can fully agree with Furtwängler's analysis. There is not a single textbook that adequately addresses the topic of Hip-Hop, let alone the topic of gangsta rap. Although there are apparently three textbooks that touch on this subject, they do so with omissions and, in some cases, inaccuracies! For example, the all too brief treatment of the group N.W.A requires a much more differentiated approach.

And the use of the song "Gangsta's Paradise" by Coolio as a representative song for gangsta rap also seems extremely questionable and simply out of place to me. It's really unfortunate that textbooks have not managed to provide ad-

equate material to this day (after fifty years of Hip-Hop!). This would certainly be something music educators would benefit from.

What is more valuable are works that appear outside of officially approved textbooks. One can mention *Rap@School* by Hannes Loh, for instance, or the magazine *Musik & Unterricht* (issue 144, “Hip-Hop&Rap”), or Samy Deluxe’s material for schools, “Dis wo ich herkomm” [This is where I’m from]. These contributions and issues treat Hip-Hop relatively comprehensively, and they don’t neglect the topic of gangsta rap but always place it in context and treat it as **one** part of Hip-Hop while, of course, critically examining it.

So to conclude: it’s high time that Hip-Hop finds its way into music education, and I can only encourage every music educator to dive into the subject and firmly integrate it into their curriculum. Because, in the end, Hip-Hop is the largest and most relevant youth culture and unquestionably belongs in contemporary music education.

