

# **Hip-Hop Doesn't Need School, School needs Hip-Hop**

## **A Response to Hein and Blackman**

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*Michael Kröger*

Currently, there are very few institutionalized paths for education or further training in the field of pedagogy and Hip-Hop. As a result, in most music teachers' curricula, Hip-Hop often only appears as a brief topic within a broader unit, despite the fact that Hip-Hop is exceptionally suitable for a comprehensive approach to youth engagement. Hip-Hop belongs not only in the music classroom. Fully harnessing the cultural strengths of Hip-Hop—enabling students to engage with it both theoretically and practically, to cater to their interest in Hip-Hop while critically and constructively examining its multifaceted social and political dimensions—requires more than a mere unit. It needs an entire curriculum.

We established Germany's first "Hip-Hop Class" at the Ida-Ehre district school in Hamburg Eimsbüttel: here, Hip-Hop is an official subject (a "profile subject") for three years (grades 8 to 10), including academic grading on the students' report cards. Following the ethos of "each one teach one," the twenty-three students of one current tenth-grade class delve into the various elements of Hip-Hop culture both theoretically and practically, while also regularly collaborating with artists. Beyond teaching foundational values and addressing stereotypes and prejudices, the curriculum emphasizes personal development and the confident handling of one's strengths and weaknesses. In the years ahead, the Hip-Hop educational program at the Ida Ehre School will be expanded, allowing an increasing number of students to choose Hip-Hop as a subject. Similar plans exist for schools in Berlin and Cologne.

Hip-Hop doesn't need school; that much is clear. The concerns about the bureaucratization of Hip-Hop through educational frameworks and the po-

tential for distorting its cultural elements are legitimate. Yet, when considering whether schools need Hip-Hop, the answer is a resounding yes!

The academic exploration of Hip-Hop culture has less to do with the top-down dissemination of knowledge, as Hein and Blackman argue, and more with empowering students to develop their identities, encouraging them to speak out, engage, pose critical questions, and enter into conflicts with the aim of finding meaningful resolutions. It seeks to acquire a deep understanding of Hip-Hop culture and its elements and to apply this knowledge practically, both in social discourse and in discovering and leveraging personal strengths and talents. It's about building.

The greatest challenge for incorporating Hip-Hop into education, aside from its often clichéd portrayal in German mass media, is a lack of understanding of the culture, leading to educators' reluctance to confront Hip-Hop's challenging aspects. For instance, students' existing knowledge can force teachers to step out of their comfort zones and confront their own ignorance. The issue of language, including the use of swear words and discriminatory expressions, often leads to the avoidance of Hip-Hop in the classroom setting. Yet it is precisely at this juncture where I see the distinct approaches of "safe space" versus "brave space" come into play. To authentically and sustainably weave Hip-Hop into the educational fabric, it's imperative to embrace both concepts. This approach requires teachers and students alike to engage in, and even seek out, controversial discussions, thereby fostering personal growth and refining one's own identity within the safe confines of the school environment. Safety here should not be mistaken for mere comfort or triviality. After all, if not in the educational sphere, where else can young people learn to navigate conflicts? Without such critical exposure, how can they evolve into conscientious citizens, ready to advocate for their values and stand against injustices and discrimination?

So, what does it take to become a Hip-Hop educator? I argue that one crucial trait should unite aspiring Hip-Hop teachers with all passionate educators: a fervent love for their subject. Contrary to Hein and Blackman's view, I believe that Hip-Hop educators don't necessarily need to have active roots in the Hip-Hop scene, as long as their teaching synergizes with external expertise from the scene itself. This opens doors for teachers to discover new experiences alongside their students, who, in turn, benefit from the diverse perspectives of various outside artists and Hip-Hop experts. The foremost qualifications for a Hip-Hop educator, in my opinion, are thus the desire to take on this role and the readiness to tackle its challenges together with students. In our

school's Hip-Hop Class, we dedicate ourselves to collaboratively seeking solutions over competition, adopting a solution-focused mindset over a problem-focused one, and highlighting strengths by underscoring what we are doing right, rather than marking errors to show where we fall short.

