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Free Your Mind and Your Practice Will Follow: Exploring Hip-Hop Habits of Mind as a Practice of Educational Freedom

Toby S. Jenkins

Abstract

In this article, I critically dissect hip-hop habits of mind as a professional way of thinking, being, and doing (knowing, speaking and behaving) and explain how these habits hold critical literacy and cultural literacy benefits for students and educators. The goal of this project was to identify and name hip-hop habits of mind and to explore how educators view them as professionally life-giving practices. In exploring the nature of hip-hop culture, themes such as freedom of thought, flexibility, truth-telling, creativity, authenticity, confidence, braggadocio, uninhibited voice, unrestricted movement, community, honor, integrity, and cultural efficacy were discussed and organized as the Hip-Hop Mindset framework. This framework consists of the habits, values, and practices that promote cultural efficacy and critical social action within hip-hop culture.

Keywords

Hip-hop habits of mind, ways of knowing, hip-hop values

Hip-hop education scholarship often explores how educators can better serve, reach, and engage students; more effectively teach students; and create educational environments that honor student cultures (Love “Anti-Black State Violence, Classroom Edition,” *Hip Hop’s Li’l Sistas Speak*; Petchauer; Emdin; Adjapong and Emdin; Kelly “Listening Differently”). This scholarship is significant and extremely impactful; however, additional hip-hop education scholarship situating educators, rather than students, in the center of change is needed. Understanding hip-hop not only as a pedagogical tool to “reach” students, but also as a professional mindset for educators expands the understanding of hip-hop’s transformative capacity. Such scholarship explores critical questions about the focus and scope of social justice in education and contributes to the rich base of cultural asset and cultural wealth literature offering authentic, critical, and affirming literacies of traditionally minoritized cultures and communities (Yosso; Gonzalez et al.).

The goal of this project was to identify and name hip-hop habits of mind and to explore how educators whose work is centered in these habits view the habits as professionally life-giving. Hip-hop habits of mind are hip-hop educators’ professional ways of thinking, being, and doing (knowing, speaking and behaving). In exploring

the nature of hip-hop culture with hip-hop educators, habits of mind unfolded such as: freedom of thought, flexibility, truth-telling, creativity, authenticity, confidence, braggadocio, uninhibited voice, unrestricted movement, community, honor, integrity, and cultural efficacy. These habits hold critical literacy and cultural literacy benefits for both students and educators and are discussed in this article as the “Hip-Hop Mindset” framework. The Hip-Hop Mindset framework developed from research with hip-hop educators who narrated how they prepare students and approach, lead, and move in the profession. Taken together, these habits, values, and practices promote cultural efficacy and critical social action in hip-hop culture and schools.

Let Me Blow Your Mind: Hip Hop as Cultural Education

Hip-hop emerged as an academic field of study in the 1990s (Rose). The early years focused primarily on documenting the history of hip-hop music and understanding the larger pillars of the music culture (breakdancing, emceeing, djing, fashion, and knowledge of self). This scholarship was conducted primarily by historians and sociologists (Chang and Herc; Rose). The exploration of hip-hop culture in education began about 20 years ago with Greg Dimitriadis’ publication of the first book-length ethnographic study of young people and their use of hip-hop culture, *Performing Identity/Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice*. A plethora of hip-hop education scholarship has followed, most of which has centered on the use of hip-hop in classrooms (Morrell; Stovall; Runell and Diaz; Emdin; Hill and Petchauer; Kelly “Listening Differently”; Kelly “I am not Jasmine; I am Aladdin”; Love *Hip Hop’s Li’l Sistas Speak*; Petchauer; Endsley; Jenkins et al.; Richardson; Bradley). This scholarship has confirmed several positive learning outcomes of hip-hop in education: greater student engagement, increased caring about the subject matter, deeper personal commitment, greater levels of complex thinking, and higher personal development and learning impacts. Scholars also took up hip-hop as a topic of study, interrogating it as a venue through which oppressed people could interpret, resist, talk back, and reframe social language and understanding of their cultures.

Adjapong and Emdin note much of the existing research on hip-hop in education has focused on hip-hop based education (HHBE). Hip-hop based education has been written about since the early 2000s by scholars such as Marc Lamont Hill, Emery Petchauer, and others. Adjapong and Emdin draw their understanding of HHBE from collective work and explain it as incorporating hip-hop into school-based curricula through music and rhymes with the intent to teach subject matter. This practice often takes place in English Language Arts classes. Adjapong and Emdin distinguish hip-hop pedagogy from HHBE, explaining hip-hop pedagogy as the “art and science of using hip-hop as a teaching approach” (67). Petchauer also explains that the difference between HHBE and hip-hop pedagogy centers around hip-hop pedagogy’s focus on the overall hip-hop aesthetic experience:

As the most recent thread of scholarship on hip-hop, the aesthetic forms of hip-hop and their implications on learning and learning environments are ripe areas of research. Specifically, how can the habits of body and mind

within hip-hop support or harm educational goals and processes? Strangely, many researchers who recognize the damaging role that corporate media has had on hip-hop have been culturally irresponsible through the same practice: separating rap from the rest of hip-hop for the sake of analysis. Because hip-hop is conceptualized as a set of interrelated practices with common aesthetics such as sampling (Hoch, 2006; Potter, 1995; Shusterman, 2000), this line of research will hold more promise if researchers look at hip-hop holistically with practices in connection with one another rather than divorce them from one another. Studies that hold to this principle are better equipped to pinpoint the kinds of hip-hop pedagogies discussed above and the habits that educators might desire to cultivate in students. (965)

In this article, I do not focus on how to diversify the curriculum by including hip-hop as a genre of study, a method of knowledge acquisition, or a pedagogical approach. Rather, I explore hip-hop as a cultural way of being that impacts all aspects of how an educator or student participates, interacts, leads, and performs in any professional setting. Educational institutions from elementary through college, teach more than subjects. They also teach “ways of being.” Through reward systems, discipline policies, institutional value statements/handbooks and verbal messages and cues, educational institutions clearly identify what is considered to be appropriate ways of thinking, behaving, and performing (for both students and educators). These standards are all influenced by societal ideals and cultures, which, as discussed earlier, are most typically white-normed. Broad cultural ideas about how being “professional,” being “a good student,” or being “well-behaved,” are not normed on minoritized cultures, but rather on dominant ones. Even within important and valuable efforts to transform educational practices like school discipline policies, cultural hegemony can have wide influence. For example, in the use of social-emotional learning strategies (SEL), some experts find problems with defining and identifying “appropriate” behavior. Some scholars noted the “end-goal” often is steeped in white cultural norms of a good student being quiet, conforming, and cooperative (Caven 1). So even efforts to transform how minoritized students are treated in schools still fall prey to racist ideas about how a “successful” student should ultimately speak, act, or present.

Using community-created and derived cultures as not only an instructional tool, but also as a cultural mindset in education can be potentially transformative if educators authentically understand, value, and embrace these mindsets in their own lives. When educators understand hip-hop as a cultural mindset not determined by in/ability to rhyme, breakdance, or spin records, they can appreciate how everyone can benefit from a Hip-Hop Mindset. This appreciation does not involve copying hip-hop folkways; rather, the appreciation is about learning to consciously adopt ways to move through life boldly and culturally. Understanding hip-hop culture as a mindset requires educators to also understand the central and important function of criticality in hip-hop. The sense of urgency to say what needs to be said, do what needs to be done, and become who one dreams to become is strong within hip-hop. There is no time to wait, slow down, be mild, or mannered when trying to navigate through oppression.

Hip-hop culture and all of its elements (emceeing, djing, breakdancing, fashion, and knowledge of self) never were meant to be venues to help minoritized people conform and assimilate into larger society. The culture and its elements were created with the intent of being different, dancing differently, dressing differently, playing records backwards, and obtaining the knowledge of forbidden truths and histories (KRS-One 5). These concepts can be broadened to include generally having a different mindset, a different way of reading society and how to function in it. The messages and deeper forms of understanding derived from the perspectives, actions, and behaviors of hip-hop community members can be seen as a social justice possibility because they build cultural efficacy among communities that have historically been culturally miseducated. Educational researchers who have studied how students experience hip-hop cultural environments and programs have found these initiatives often strengthen student cultural efficacy [positive feelings about one's culture; strong understanding of the components, values, and structures of one's culture] (Jenkins *My Culture, My Color, My Self; Love Hip Hop's L'il Sisters Speak*, "Anti-Black State Violence"; Hill and Petchauer; Endsley).

Illuminating the importance of cultural education has become an important aspect of hip-hop research that connects its educational outcomes to other disciplines like ethnic and cultural studies. In the late nineteen-nineties, Manning Marable, a noted ethnic and historical studies scholar, offered an important explanation of the central role of culture in the lives of oppressed people:

For the oppressed, the central and overriding question was one of identity: who are we as a people, what is our cultural heritage, what values or ideals can we share with other groups to enrich society as a whole, and what do we have a right to expect from the state and civil society? Within explorations of culture resides the kernel of an oppressed group's consciousness. (43)

A new vision of leading, teaching, knowledge production, and the physical parameters of campus is needed in education (Rautins and Ibrahim 24; Boyer 10). Based on extensive studies of first generation, low-income college students, Jehangir (15) suggests educational strategies such as the movement towards critical pedagogy (exploring race, class, gender and power); re-constructionist multicultural education (transforming the whole of the educational process); and learning communities (collaborative and cooperative learning tied to a shared living experience) offer important inroads towards change. These educational frameworks are important in the way they focus on the content, structure, and purpose of education. Beyond educational programs that solely help students navigate the terrains of the school, these theories speak to helping students to navigate their sense of self, place, and social belonging both inside and outside of the educational institution. This type of learning not only illuminates the personal lived experience, but also provides a deeper understanding of the plight and circumstances facing their cultural community at large.

To live and know oppression and struggle is one thing, to be provided an opportunity to understand its roots, reasons it persists, and brainstorm possible solutions transforms one's lived experience into critical academic capital and cultural knowl-

edge in the classroom. Students' opinions of themselves, their families, and their communities are influenced by the education they receive; and their ability to critically "read" (interpret, evaluate, and understand) both their cultural experience and the ways in which the larger society systematically manipulates their experiences, can be sharpened in critically dynamic classrooms.

In the book, *Hear Our Truths: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood*, Ruth Nicole Brown documents and analyzes her community-based work with Black girls. Brown intentionally and explicitly centers the voices of the girls in the research project (their poetry, music, stories, and conversations) to help readers understand how Black girls experience, understand, and make sense of their lived experience. By sharing their critical reflections on social issues, their community experiences, and their cultural histories, Brown clearly illustrates the intellectual gifts of the youth who participate in the program, "Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths" (SOLHOT). One of the most enduring messages in the book is its demand for educators to embrace the importance of collective memory within educational settings. In this case, collective memory involves creating learning experiences that encourage students to remember their histories and life experiences and educators to remember their past experiences with girlhood or boyhood. This concept is applicable beyond this one initiative and can relate to the teaching of culture, race, gender, class, or social justice in the classroom. Making time to remember all of our histories and experiences, and to critically reflect on how these memories, cultural wisdoms, and ways of knowing intersect with the present world can be an important form of critical literacy development.

Research Background

In "Framing and Reviewing Hip-Hop Educational Research," Petchauer categorizes hip-hop research into three strands of *focus*: hip-hop education (hip-hop in classroom practice or curricula); hip-hop identities (how youth identity development intersects with hip-hop educational experiences); and hip-hop aesthetic forms ("ways of doing or habits of mind"). The current project falls in the hip-hop aesthetic form strand as the goal was to pull together a framework of the Hip-Hop Mindset. Petchauer offers examples from his research to better explain what hip-hop aesthetics actually looks like in practice:

. . . conceptualizing hip-hop not as a text to be analyzed or included in a curriculum but rather as a set of aesthetic practices containing and producing situated ways of doing (and being) constitutes a third strand in the literature . . . For one participant, sampling from various news sources and different classes to complete assignments was "in the spirit of hip-hop." Other participants consciously sampled the experiences of other students and friends to conceptualize education and navigate institutions, which is a form of sampled consciousness (Karimi, 2006). The study also illustrated how some hip-hop collegians navigated educational institutions that they saw as part of a hegemonic system that could compromise some of their ideals that were derived from hip-hop. These ideals included a graffiti-derived belief that one

should not have to spend money to create art and a rap-derived critical consciousness (Freire, 2002) according to which participants questioned meta-narratives and viewed institutions of higher education as containing insufficient representations of knowledge and the world. (961)

At the heart of my epistemological ambitions in this work is the desire to better understand and honor the ways of knowing, being, and doing found in many hip-hop communities. Achieving this understanding is a difficult task because it is almost impossible to demonstrate absolute cause and effect between how one thinks, how they approach practice, and their involvement in hip-hop (Petchauer 948). The reality is people flow in and out of various communities and experiences. To tease out whether observations of attitudes, actions, and approaches is a Black or Latinx American hip-hop cultural legacy, a deeper rooted African cultural legacy, or just a personality characteristic is challenging. Therefore, I do not attempt to make such a call. I unapologetically defer to the voices of the hip-hop community.

Ijeoma Oluo's words concerning acknowledging issues of race are relevant when exploring the presence of a phenomenon and its influence on a situation or person. Olua notes:

It is about race if a person of color thinks it's about race ... Our lived experiences shape us, how we interact with the world. And how we live in the world. And our experiences are valid. Because we do not experience the world with only part of ourselves, we cannot leave our racial identity at the door. And so, if a person of color says that something is about race, it is—because regardless of the details, regardless of whether or not you can connect the dots from the outside, their racial identity is a part of them and it is interacting with the situation. (15)

Following Oluo's (5) logic, I rely on the voices of the hip-hop community because their identity within the community is part of them. In this case, these behaviors and ideologies I define as a "Hip-Hop Mindset" can be attributed to hip-hop if those who experience it interpret it as hip-hop. If the participants in this project assign hip-hop to part of their identity, then it is hip-hop because they are feeling or sensing an interaction occurring between their behavior, attitudes, thoughts, or values and their identity within hip-hop culture. Participants could have easily attributed their actions and behaviors to just being a part of their personality, "That's just who I am. I am a confident person." However, when asked, "How does hip-hop culture influence how you show up in the world?" participants responded with characteristics like "being bold" "having confidence" and "valuing creativity". These responses suggest participants link various experiences, histories, and concrete memories centered in hip-hop participation to how and why they now embody those characteristics as professionals.

Methodology

As a result of choosing to place a heavy weight on the voice of participants, I used portraiture to drive the overall methodological approach for this project (Law-

rence-Lightfoot and Davis). Portraiture combines science and art to paint a holistic picture of an experience or phenomenon. It shares in the traditions and values of phenomenology, but it expands the boundaries of the methodology by combining empirical and aesthetic description in its focus on the convergence of narrative and analysis and in its explicit recognition of the use of self as the primary research instrument for documenting and interpreting the perspectives and experiences of the people and the cultures being studied (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis). Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, the creator of this method of inquiry, offers the following description:

Portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life. Portraits seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions, their authority, knowledge, and wisdom. (5)

The value portraiture places on an interdisciplinary approach to research, in many ways, is also a value for the idea of the holistic researcher as portraiture allows a researcher to integrate all of their personal and professional interests, talents, and modes of expression into the work. In this regard, as a researcher, I am able to more fully present how I view and analyze the world as an educator, arts administrator, and hip-hop cultural group member. As an artistic methodological form, portraiture demands the researcher cross those boundaries that often separate the researcher from the subject matter and breakdown other boundaries that constrain research into strict, limited concepts of “rigor.”

Portraiture places value on the authenticity of the research rather than issues of validity or reliability. The researcher’s aim is to authentically represent the experiences, lives, and stories shared by the participants in the study. Whether or not multiple audiences will share the same experience is not a concern. Portraiture affirms every lived experience matters and offers us insight. Another critical component of portraiture is its focus on goodness. A propensity towards goodness does not mean portraits must only focus on positive aspects of a topic, nor does it mean information must be presented in a positive light. Rather, goodness refers to the refusal to be driven by past research tendencies to focus on failure and deficiency. Much research on ethnically diverse students is dominated by pathology. Some of my own early research also followed this path: what are the problems, what practices don’t work, what alienates students, why students leave. Within the realm of hip-hop research, much of the scholarship is generally positive and affirming, but hip-hop is not yet viewed as such in the larger society. Broader societal opinions of hip-hop often are negative and deficit driven, as shared by the educators interviewed in this project. In my many years of writing about hip-hop culture, there is always a push back to include criticisms of the music, videos and lyrics. While it is important to have full, balanced discussions of hip-hop that communicate both the love for and criticisms of the music; it is also important to allow the culture to be more than beats and rhymes. The rich layers of the culture shaped by the hip-hop community provide access for people to experi-

ence hip-hop culture through poetry, art, dance, film, non-profit management experiences, etc. Critically dissecting and analyzing these layers does not always require a discussion about music lyrics. Therefore, portraiture is best suited for this study as it shifts the focus to discovering the inherent good in the people, institutions, or concepts studied and explores how the people who experience the phenomenon (hip-hop culture) define or interpret goodness.

Data Collection and Analysis

The conclusions at the core of this project are interwoven and centered in data collection and analysis across three studies.

In Study 1, I explored how young adults defined culture and viewed its utility in their lives (*Jenkins My Culture, My Color, My Self*). This study involved the analysis of semi-structured group and individual interviews with 153 college students across four states and an analysis of their accompanying “cultural self-portraits.” Cultural self-portraits were short narrative, life-writing pieces outlining participants’ cultural stories. Overwhelmingly, hip-hop was a part of the story many young adults told of their lives.

In Study 2, I focused on hip-hip environments (*Jenkins “A Beautiful Mind”*). This study was an immersive study of places outside of traditional educational institutions that convened or curated hip-hop experiences. My goal was to observe hip-hop educational environments to better understand the aspects of the culture that were so engaging to youth and young adults (and its implications for educational institutions). This collective case study included extensive time completing community-based observations coupled with semi-structured group interviews (*Jenkins “A Beautiful Mind”*).

In Study 3, the current project, I began with the intent of pulling together my previous articles, books, and experiences with hip-hop in order to generate new understanding from collective work. Beyond my time as an academic researcher and professor, I spent a decade as an arts administrator and cultural curator. As a university cultural center director, I planned many hip-hop events from large-scale 20,000-person audience concerts, to academic hip-hop symposiums, to intimate spoken word lounges. So, I also bring a lens to the work as a cultural curator, which is important because I cannot forget what I have seen while in that role. As a cultural curator, I worked with young adults (hip-hop lovers); rappers, poets, dancers (hip-hop artists); managers (hip-hop executives); and researchers/writers (hip-hop scholars). The commonalities I have seen across these groups also drives my interest in better understanding their shared habits of mind. To ensure a contemporary read of the topic, I added new forms of data and information. I conducted a new literature review, particularly focusing on books written by hip-hop artists. I also analyzed series-length hip-hop documentaries (for access to the perspectives of major artists who I could not interview). I conducted a lyrical analysis of 40 hip-hop songs to map hip-hop language to beliefs, perspectives, and values. Finally, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with 15 hip-hop educators and scholars-educators who are prominently known for their work in hip-

hop. Purposive sampling was used to identify and contact educators who have garnered public recognition for their work and have specifically aligned their professional practice with hip-hop culture. Each interviewee was provided an opportunity to revise, restate, and re-check their final interview to ensure accuracy and authenticity (member check).

The Hip-Hop Mindset

Hip-hop culture has been documented and understood to be more than just the music that frames its foundation. The populations of people who identify with this culture and comprise what has now become multiple generations of hip-hop are also made up of more than artists. Hip-hop culture is embedded in the professional acumen of educators, community leaders, and various other professionals, all of whom make up the hip-hop community. Through the research that informed this project, nine hip-hop driven values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors emerged. I refer to these themes as “practices.” A practice is defined as, “a way of doing something” or “the application of an idea or belief” (Merriam-Webster). These clusters and practices, which form the Hip-Hop Mindset Framework are organized below in Table 1.

Table 1
The Hip-Hop Mindset Framework

Mindset Cluster	Approach
Practice 1	Authenticity/Integrity
Practice 2	Creativity/Originality
Practice 3	Ingenuity/Cultural Efficacy
Mindset Cluster	Drive
Practice 4	Hunger
Practice 5	Competitiveness
Practice 6	Honor
Mindset Cluster	Posture
Practice 7	Confidence
Practice 8	Claiming Space
Practice 9	Commanding Attention

Approach

The first mindset cluster is approach. Approach involves three practices: (1) Authenticity/Integrity, (2) Creativity, and (3) Ingenuity/Cultural Efficacy.

Authenticity/Integrity: Authenticity/Integrity concerns representing oneself or community in a way that is real, clear and true. Hip-hop communities hold cultural

group members accountable and expect them to show up as their full selves, not a watered-down version to please others. Authenticity emerging as a theme was not a surprise. I vividly remember how heavy the pressure to “represent” was when I was growing up as a teen in the late eighties. Michael Benitez, Vice President for Diversity & Inclusion at Metropolitan State University of Denver, explains how authenticity continues to hold relevance for him in his current professional life:

When I see people lean on assimilation, lean on losing oneself to get opportunity, that often signifies a willingness to throw others under the bus. [It means they don’t value] solidarity and looking out for one another, which results in individual interest as opposed to collective effort. Assimilation isn’t an individual act. You have to throw shade on your whole community to assimilate. So, that means your colleagues, staff members, students who identify with your culture or race. When you deny yourself, you are also denying all of them. They get sacrificed and thrown under bus in the process.

Hip-hop’s emphasis on authenticity is an important act of racial liberation. In so many spaces, ethnically diverse communities are pushed, harassed, and bullied into being something other than themselves. Willian Bowles, a high school teacher in South Carolina, offers personal insight:

I believe in not being apologetic for who I am. I am at a school where I’m like one of three African American males there. I am not apologetic for who I am because they accept everybody else’s normal. So, I be who I am. I be who I am and I dare somebody to say something about it. It’s a way that they need to see us. You need to see me live and in color. So, students can know that it’s okay to be themselves. I use African American language everywhere in my classroom. I let my students know that I speak African-American language and by doing that I am saying to them, “I want you to be who you are.” I need them to feel comfortable with me and I need them to feel comfortable with themselves. And the only way that we can feel comfortable with each other is if we could communicate effectively—not in a foreign language that makes us feel less than.

The culture of authenticity within hip-hop can be appreciated not so much as a *pressure* to keep it real, but rather a *permission* to keep it real: to claim the community; to honor one’s mother tongue; to be loyal to the crew; to name one’s experience; and to speak one’s truth. For people who do not identify with the music or culture, cultural authenticity may not be connected to hip-hop. As shared earlier, the Hip-Hop Mindset is not about copying hip-hop behaviors. Rather, the Hip-Hop Mindset is beneficial simply by how it gives a person the permission to be themselves. *Authenticity/Integrity* is a Hip-Hop Mindset that can be adopted, regardless of whether a person identifies with the culture. Hip-hop culture is on the other side of racial assimilation. It does not gently nudge hip-hop community members to be authentic; it gives a sense of urgency the community demands accountability.

Creativity: For this project, I interviewed 15 elite hip-hop educators. According to

the *Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods* (Jupp 85), elite interviewing is the use of interviewing to study those at the top of any system whether its sport, academia, religion, etc. All of the professionals I interviewed have achieved various forms of success, whether it is personal freedom and accomplishment, recognition in the field, or a solid professional reputation. One of the first questions I asked each of them was, “How does hip-hop culture show up in your professional life?” All 15 participants talked about creativity. Many shared being original and/or unique is critical in hip-hop and a major goal in their own careers. There is a value for innovating—being able to transform or remix something old into something new. There is a popular saying that hip-hop is about flipping something out of nothing. However, a deep examination of what hip-hop communities have been able to create indicates this statement is not quite true. As Andre Perry, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institute asserts, “Something doesn’t come from nothing. The question is do you see value in what most people see as meager? Do you see utility in what others would disregard as useless?” (134). Some people are able to read their world (their community, their life experience, their family) differently. It is a different type of cultural literacy, a literacy of cultural abundance and resistance. The young people who created hip-hop did not look at their lives and see useless junk. They looked past society’s negative labels and saw their own talents and skills and created their own opportunities. The creative mind in hip-hop could turn a piece of cardboard into a dance floor and a record player into a music instrument. Hip-hop minds are always working to stand out, to be different, and to contribute their own unique flavor. This is a different measure of successful practice than meeting the standards and effectively doing the same things others are doing.

Ingenuity/Cultural Efficacy: Ingenuity concerns being clever and inventive. It is tied to the idea of cultural efficacy because before young people can develop inventions, they first must believe in their ingenuity and culture. As shared earlier, cultural efficacy is an optimistic belief in, appreciation for and respect of one’s culture and the people in it (Jenkins *My Culture, My Color, My Self* 58). So many formal institutions within American society (education system, criminal justice system, religious institutions, etc.) continue to teach racially minoritized communities they are not enough. Hip-hop culture responds not by shrinking away in self-doubt, but by amplifying hip-hop communities’ cultural ways of being and doing. When society’s intellectual production (books, media, educational curricula) devalued Black and Brown voices, the hip-hop community answered by creating a movement wherein young people embody all the qualities society hated in them. Hip-hop took neighborhoods that had been economically destroyed by racist redlining and business development practices and transformed them into famous cultural landmarks in the public imagination.

Housing projects like the Marcy Houses and Queensbridge Houses were not spaces of shame because rappers claimed these communities as home, giving a sense of cultural pride to those who lived there. The hip-hop cultural response to a society that portrayed Black and Brown youth as unintelligent was to get paid millions of dollars for a career that required them to write and speak. Hip-hop artists do not whisper their thoughts; they project their voice and scream their emotions at society. A Hip-

Hop Mindset means not depleting one's cultural joy or shrinking away from telling the truth to fit in within white cultural spaces.

Educators with a Hip-Hop Mindset give themselves permission to do what is just and right. Educators should not have to ask permission to fight something like racism. Hip-hop culture reminds educators of their strength, endurance, and ingenuity and pushes them to invent unique paths, find new ways to view obstacles, create change and new strategies of resistance; and remain committed to their students, cultures, and communities. When I asked interview participants for one word that best described hip-hop culture, Bettina Love answered indomitable. "You can try to knock us out, baby, but we have an indomitable spirit. You can come with all you've got to trip us up. We're still going to figure it out. Ingenuity to the core."

Drive

The second mindset cluster is drive. Drive involves three practices: (1) Hunger, (2) Competitiveness, and (3) Honor & Kinship.

Hunger: People can be hungry for a lot of things—hungry for job opportunities, hungry for social change, hungry to make a difference, hungry to make a mark in the world. Hunger in hip-hop is about being very keenly aware of an opportunity, to work hard for the opportunity, and to acknowledge one's shine while doing great things. It is important to stress the word hunger brings with it particularly important sensibilities. Describing someone as hungry calls forth a different impression than describing someone as motivated. There is a sense of urgency that comes with hunger. A person who is motivated to eat might wait in line, a person who is hungry or starving might cause a scene. Andre Perry explains it perfectly:

There's a level of hunger that I think is quintessentially hip-hop. I want it like a hungry rapper. I want to get on. I think that's a universal feeling of "wanting to get on." All kinds of people know what it is to seek opportunity. But that idea was introduced to me largely through hip-hop. There is this intense desire to get an opportunity—to get on the stage, to get a record deal, to get in a magazine, to be known and to be recognized. And it's not just for the fame, but to literally be seen and heard. It's about having a level of importance and impact. It can come off as being ambitious, braggadocios or even flamboyant at times. But if you're in hip-hop, you know, that's what we are all searching for, validation, each and every one of us.

Whether it is through the lyrics penned by artists, the curricula created by educators, or the community programs developed by nonprofit leaders, hip-hop community members are acknowledging young people are ambitious, skilled, talented, and intelligent. Similarly, education systems need to acknowledge and recognize different forms of academic and professional ambition and performance. Too often education systems want students to study subject matter the system chooses, participate in activities the system creates, achieve standards the system sets, and meet these goals while following rules of conduct and behavior the system establishes. Often these

rules of conduct privilege cultures of quiet. But what if one's ethnic culture is not quiet? What if the process of working, achieving, and grinding is an active, lively, vocal, and energetic experience in the cultural community? Consider the difference between a lively family dinner gathering and a quiet, structured formal dinner. Just because a person is too uncomfortable to eat in certain settings does not mean they are not hungry. Educational settings can feel restrictive for both students and educators. Superintendent Baron Davis affirms the need to push against cultures that restrict bold ways of being:

Hip-hop's history gives you the sense that in order for you to be heard, you've got to be loud. I'm a superintendent. So of course, I know there are a lot of spaces where young people are told not to be loud. But hip-hop gives me a different, philosophical understanding of loudness. When you play your hip-hop music, it doesn't sound the same when it's low. It doesn't have the same energy when it's played low. It has to have a certain decimal level in order for it to even sound right. So that's how I feel professionally. Sometimes you've got to have a boldness about your work.

How might educators achieve if they were allowed to let loose and be culturally free without being viewed as too much—too loud, too rowdy, too active? Crystal End-sley, Associate Professor of Africana Studies at John Jay College of Criminal Justice shares:

Hip-hop taught me that it's okay to be a lot. I get called "intense" sometimes . . . I think of Missy [Elliott] and how she's fearless. She is fearless with it. She's so secure in who she is or at least she presents that way. Growing up watching her, I was like—oh, okay, this is a way to move in the world. Just extra bold.

Hip-hop community members want to feel totally and completely alive throughout the entire process—setting the goal, working towards the goal, and achieving the goal. This aliveness requires the field of education to make space for the vivacious, expressive, lively, energetic, hungry spirit that has always been a part of African cultural sensibilities (Boutte et al.; Boutte "And How Are the Children?"; Asante; King).

A vivacious classroom allows the freedom and flexibility for a noisier environment, for students to speak in their mother tongue or cultural language, and for participation to be unrehearsed, uncoordinated, and extemporaneous. In his work focused on "ratchetdemics," Christopher Emdin (as cited by Bump) offers an idea of what such a vivacious classroom experience might look like:

Black and brown students who may be loud, or who may speak in slang and colloquialisms and relate more to hip hop than Hemingway, are taught from an early age that their "ratchet selves from the 'hood" must be opposed to their academic, intellectual selves, he said. ('Ratchet' is a hip-hop term derived from wretched that can mean loud, nasty or cool among other things, depending on context.) ... It's a theory Emdin, a self-proclaimed "ratchademic," calls "Reality Pedagogy" and in it he asks educators of black children

to consider adopting the style of the preacher in a black church — playful and soulful, with a tendency toward rhyme, storytelling and call-and-response (can I get an amen?). (Bump)

Competitiveness: Having high expectations and ambition to be the best is probably viewed as a core value at most schools and colleges. The question here is do those high expectations extend all students? Do those high expectations extend to all faculty? Are there high expectations of and a bright future expected of a first year, Latino male instructor? Is he allowed to pursue his own ambitions, in his own way? I ask these questions because his cultural path to blazing trails as a new educator might mean he brings a countenance thick with swag into the school building. Can he do that, or must he be mild and meek in order to be accepted?

The spirit of competition in a hip-hop cypher is simultaneously intense, intimidating, nerve-racking, exciting, inspiring, and life-giving. Participants walk away from the space not bruised or defeated, but hyped, joyful, happy, and determined to crush it next time, even if they messed up. Healthy competition is a great thing, but most professional institutions have not mastered the art of creating spaces for healthy competition. Yet, these spaces exist in hip-hop communities. In hip-hop cyphers, young people demonstrate how healthy competition gives them life. The competition gives them reasons to get better or to get up in the morning. It gives them a reason to come back into the space. Also, hip-hop culture helps educators see both they and their students need to feel the fire of competition and stop running away from it. The reality is everyone wants to be great—educators and students. However, a cultural shift is needed to allow our educational spaces to free, open and energetic, intense and competitive, and healthy to support the natural pursuit of greatness for all in the community. In some communities, “achievement” is not a quiet enterprise.

Honor & Kinship: Honor emerging as a Hip-Hop Mindset made me feel proud as a fan of the culture. Too often, hip-hop is painted as deviant and disrespectful. For ethics like generosity, respect, love and a welcoming spirit to emerge as essential practices within hip-hop culture is refreshing. Hip-hop has become such a global phenomenon because it attracts people to it rather than repelling people from it. Rather than making others outside of the culture feel limited or less than (not fresh, not cool, not dope, not down), hip-hop culture affirms the fresh, the cool, the dope, and the down for those in authentic proximity to hip-hop culture. Listeners feel fresh when vibing to a hip-hop song. The energy is contagious. Schools should adopt the honor and kinship promoted in hip-hop culture. Instead of making students feel self-conscious and less than with the implication that how they show up in school is not welcome (imposter syndrome), schools should affirm students’ identities and cultures and encourage students and educators to celebrate their abilities.

One of the most basic ways to understand honor in hip-hop is through the concept of respecting the mic (and thus the person on it). Being a listener in a hip-hop community is an active process. Listening also requires one to be a supporter and an

encourager and promotes honor and kinship in hip-hop communities. Crystal Leigh Endsley explains:

I'm a spoken word artist and the stage, in general, taught me about confidence. But those hip-hop rich spaces also taught me how to be an audience member too. It taught me that when someone else is on stage and they do something really well, to applaud them. To have a generous attitude. In hip-hop "behaving properly" when I'm not the one on stage, means giving the other performer the claps and response they need to feel good. Because as a performer you feed off of that. What gives you life when you're on the stage is the audience reaction. So, when you sit in the audience, you try to give that energy to other performers. Don't hold it back, don't save it for later. Keep that energy and focus on the stage and in the audience. And that applies in a real hands on way to regular life. If anyone in your life does something well or someone's having a really hard time, you show them real, vocal support. In an open mic, if a poet stumbles on their words, it's the audience that claps back up their confidence and gets them to start again. We've got to be that for our friends [students, colleague, supervisees]—being able to really embody support for people.

Behaving properly pulls into the familial and community ethic also present in hip-hop culture. Many of the educators interviewed for this project noted the importance of impacting the community through their work. As Tony Keith Jr., an independent scholar and activist notes, "Hip-hop is about asking yourself how can I make this accessible, make it plain? Let's make sure that the knowledge matters to the community." Community matters in hip-hop because there is a recognition of kinship and a sense of belonging to each other. Michael Benitez notes, "When you think about it from a literal standpoint, hip-hop requires a community ... you can't be the only one in the space. And the connectedness that happens when that community gathers—there's nothing like it." Hip-hop is the community life experience artists pull from to tell stories in their lyrics; it is the community's interests and passions that community organizers tap into when they create programs and interventions; it is the community's style and swagger designers pull from to create hip-hop fashion; it is the community's needs or experiences hip-hop scholars research and write to advance understanding and social change. The community is central to any form of hip-hop production. Therefore, researchers must explore whether the centrality of the community in the hearts and minds of educators. For Emery Petchauer, community is the foundation of his work:

I try to create educational spaces where students can see themselves as participants in the community rather than approaching community members as a kind of transaction. So, what does this have to do with hip-hop? I know from my experiences in hip-hop that when resources and assets are better connected, that changes the conditions and allows for really dope stuff to happen that you couldn't have imagined.

To better understand what Petchauer means by the idea of approaching community as a transaction in education, consider how community service or social justice initiatives are often approached as assignments, projects, extra-curricular experiences, but not as the collective responsibility of the educators and students in the school. If social justice were approached as a collective responsibility and core outcome (not just an idea to be studied or a project to experience), then achieving that goal would permeate throughout the institution.

Community asset mapping (McKnight and Kretzmann; Kerka) has long been offered forth as a viable practice by which educational institutions can begin to identify, value and better understand the assets (in the form of skills, knowledge, and expertise) available within their surrounding community. Tapping the local community as guest lectures, visiting scholars, master teachers, artists in residence, leadership trainers, or sites for experiential education and professional development situates the community as a powerful resource to help transform the school, rather than as a victim in need of the school's assistance. Aysha Upchurch, Lecturer and Director of HipHopX at Harvard University, explains hip-hop culture is what centers her sense of humanity:

Hip-hop also reminds me to believe in humanity—that humans actually want to gather together in love and in peace. I've been able to see people gathered. I've been gathered. I've gathered with people where there's no shared spoken tongue. We are all in a space together and while we can't even talk to each other, we can still vibe and feel each other. It helps me believe that evil is taught. In our natural state, we all want to two-step at the same time. So, it helps me remember that the rose-colored glasses that I want to wear, it's okay to put them on. I can believe in humanity. I've seen how hip-hop can bring us together. It reminds me to believe that humanity is not utterly unsalvageable. We want to gather and have joy and love.

Posture

The final mindset cluster is posture or one's presence within their professional space. The three practices related to posture are: (1) Confidence, (2) Claiming Space, and (3) Commanding Attention.

Confidence: Most often, confidence in hip-hop is interpreted as swag—an attitude of assuredness personified through the way a person presents or carries themselves. Edmund Adjapong, Assistant Professor of Education at Seton Hall University clearly sees how a Hip-Hop Mindset has influenced his beliefs and sense of professional confidence. A naturally quiet academic, embracing a braggadocious sense of self-worth has been the extra-support Adjapong needed to navigate culturally difficult spaces in higher education:

I think hip-hop gives me kind of a bravado attitude ... In order to be successful as an academic and in order to be successful in hip-hop, you have to be confident. So, in many ways you really have to have high self-awareness. You have to be aware of your talents and what makes you special—that's the

confidence. If you don't know who you are, then the world can depict or perceive you as other. They can make even you believe you don't belong. Knowing who you are allows you to also know that you deserve to be here. I think that has helped me a lot in academia. It's been really useful when I'm navigating spaces where I'm the only Black person ... or I'm the youngest person.

In his reflection, Adjapong describes how cultural confidence does more than promote achievement; it promotes functioning in intimidating spaces. Timothy Jones, independent scholar and community activist, explained the confidence he has inherited from hip-hop culture influences both his approach to work and ultimately his desire to keep working:

Some may view it as over-confidence, some may view it as arrogance, but one of the attitudes I get from hip-hop is knowing that I'm fearfully and wonderfully made. Knowing that there is something that makes me uniquely me. So, even if someone is doing the same thing that I'm doing, there's a way that I do it that's uniquely mine. And I pull that from hip-hop. I apply that to how I may design a workshop. I use that to encourage myself at times when I don't necessarily wake up feeling like I'm on top of my game or that I should still even be in the game.

Ian Levy, Assistant Professor of School Counseling at Manhattan College, noted the sense of acceptance he felt as a college student first trying his hand at hip-hop sealed the deal for him. He had found his cultural home. The love, welcome, and embrace he felt within the hip-hop cypher communities gave him the confidence and belonging educational institutions did not. Participating in hip-hop experiences helped Ian to overcome educational self-doubt, which is incredibly important because of the position he now holds. Many young people would never think a college professor would have had a rough time in high school. With "imposter syndrome" being such a pervasive and common experience in education for so many BIPOC students and educators (Tucker), confidence is a critically important mindset. And unapologetically displaying confidence (boasting, bragging, or talking noise) is a necessary act of resistance.

Claiming Space: Claiming space concerns entering, moving through, and transforming a space while exercising confidence in one's talent, skills, and ability. To claim space is to *own* the space. Toni Blackman, founder and executive director of Rhyme Like a Girl (RLAG), engages young women and girls in cultivating their craft as emcees from songwriting to relationship building to harnessing the power of their energy both on and off-stage. One of the many nuggets of wisdom Toni offers to the Hip-Hop Mindset conversation is the value for commanding attention and claiming space. She relates how the best emcee doesn't simply *instruct* the audience to move, rather they use their voice and their presence to *inspire* movement:

The audience will follow the rhythm and power of your voice—they will come closer to the stage, they will complete your verse, their bodies will sway in whatever direction you are swaying. You don't have to force it; they

move because they feel your energy. They sense your spirit. They respect your power.

Claiming space is about harnessing power. Who is teaching future or current BIPOC teachers the skill of harnessing the power of their own voice and energy? For BIPOC communities to harness their cultural power and to “own” space in an institution, there must be a different understanding of ownership. Ownership has nothing to do with real estate deeds or even leadership positions. It is not about who bought the building or who was appointed to run it. Andre Perry’s memory of witnessing one of his first hip-hop concerts provides a perfect example:

When I saw Run DMC perform during the Fresh Fest Tour in the eighties. And he goes through that whole intro, “There’s been a whole lot of people on this stage here tonight, but I want you to know one thing: This is MY house!” And when you think about that it’s like wow, he was claiming space. He was claiming space in front of thousands of people. And honestly, I try to claim space too, in the same way. I approach my work with the mindset that there’s been a whole lot of people before me and there might be people after me, but today this is MY house. I’m going to set the stage.

Run DMC did not own the stadium, and they were not the only artists performing that night. But yet, they claimed the arena as “their” house. They walked on stage with the intent to give the best performance ever given in that space. Moving beyond hip-hop and into sports, often sports fans may not remember the name of an arena, but they do remember historic games that were played there. They do remember the player’s name who gave the mind-blowing athletic performance. Adopting a cultural mindset that allows one to walk into work or school ready and willing to academically show out transforms culturally intimidating spaces.

Commanding Attention: Commanding attention is a nod to the performative aspect of most hip-hop production. Whether it is music, canvas art, spoken word, dance, or educational instruction, hip-hop culture demands an engaging approach to the work. Commanding attention is about having a dynamic and engaging presence and knowing how to move the community. Ian Levy directly names public speaking as a skill he has gotten from hip-hop, “Being able to grab the mic and speak in the moment, not having to memorize things or use notes is a skill that I have gotten from hip-hop. I’m able to trust that I can form and connect thoughts that flow together. I’m comfortable.” He goes on to discuss the ways hip-hop culture also gave him the permission to publicly express his full range of emotions in his work:

Being able to emote in front of people is another thing I get from hip-hop. Academia is really good at making you believe that you don’t need to be emotional and that you should be very scientific and objective. Hip-hop preaches the opposite. Hip-hop preaches we want to hear what you have to say, what you’ve been through, your pain and your happiness, everything. The range of your emotional experiences is demanded in hip-hop. And I’ve learned how to bring those emotional experiences to the stage. I say stage

but it might really be teaching class or giving a conference presentation. But I treat it like a performance, I really do. My mentor, Chris Emdin refers to it as being a “spitter.” What he is talking about is the way that you are able to get on the mic and speak in a really engaging way—to command attention. I think that’s necessary. That framing has been powerful for me because I bring that emcee energy into any space.

How does commanding attention connect to fields like education? There are many fields that require its professionals to perform on a daily basis; teaching is one of those professions. Educators at any level must possess the ability to hold the attention of an audience. Those who have the ability to move the crowd (through their speaking or actions), often excel. Those who take the performativity of teaching as serious as let’s say Beyoncé takes performing (innovative choreography, constant practice, dress rehearsals, mic checks) are probably able to capture students’ attention because they pay so much attention to their craft. Understanding the power of voice and showing up in one’s profession is critical. Andre Perry also firmly identified hip-hop as his source for developing his skills as a public scholar and educator:

The other thing [I get from hip-hop] is my movement in the world. I’m talking about my physical movements here. When I’m giving a presentation, I know how to get the crowd going and get the crowd hyped. I get that from hip-hop. I observed in hip-hop how emcees control the mic, how they control a stage, how they keep a crowd’s attention. So, you can’t have great content (important data) with a flow that is whack. No one will listen. You will lose people.

These are critical skillsets for any educator; however, these skills are not always a point of focus in educational training. Educators who want to engage Black and Brown students can start by not boring them. African Diasporic people come from a long cultural tradition that values strong oratory, vibrant expression, and lively movement. In other words, some cultures are inherently hype. Michael Benitez offers a wonderful summary of how commanding attention is so powerful as a cultural mindset. In his role as a university Vice President, the pressure to perform “professionalism” in very particular, white culturally normed ways is very real and very present in his career; but he relies on hip-hop culture to guide his professional approach:

I’d say the last skill I learned from hip-hop is stage presence or showmanship. You’ve got to see me in leadership team meetings. It’s really an interesting place because everybody’s learning. My colleagues are learning new ideas about what professionalism could like. They are learning new language and expressions. They are learning to relax and be free. Hip-hop influences how I do institution-wide listening sessions on my campus, how I teach, how I facilitate workshops. When you engage through a hip-hop lens, you truly draw participants and the audience in like drawing in a concert crowd—active engagement as part of the community. So, I’m always engaging a back and forth with the community-call and response. The campus community also knows, in those moments, that I’m truly listening and that I’m including

their voices. Honestly, it's not just including their voices, but it's also the acknowledgement of their feelings and how they are present in that space. The emcee needs the audience as much as the audience needs the emcee. It's like I am asking them, "Are you with me?" or better yet, "Holler if you hear me." I want them to get loud, not quiet in their response and feedback.

The bottom line is education must be enlivened in some way so that educators and students can be more energized by it.

Conclusion

This project has prompted me to consider what might happen if Hip-Hop Mindset practices were more broadly adopted by educators as a professional approach. I do not mean educators simply working to develop or support these practices among students by including hip-hop culture in educational settings. The inclusion of hip-hop culture needs to happen, but a Hip-Hop Mindset is about more than the inclusion of hip hop culture. Hip-Hop Mindset practices can inform how educators show up in their professional lives and allow space for them to grow and develop not only *what they do* in their schools or on their campuses, but also *who they are* in their schools or on their campuses. The cultural literacy the Hip-Hop Mindset provides about the nature of hip-hop—the ideologies, values, beliefs, practices, habits, and proclivities present among community members—helps educators (who have been urged to adopt hip-hop pedagogical approaches) to see and understand hip-hop as a culture more deeply. Hip-hop creates more than music and rhymes, it develops “ways of being” rooted in ethics of excellence. This work also affirms those professionals and educators who already show up hip-hop in all they do.

Situating hip-hop as a professional mindset and a critical form of professional development acknowledges historically-BIPOC cultural ways of knowing and being as viable success strategies. Hip-hop culture can historically be considered a BIPOC cultural form because it was created by BIPOC youth. While many BIPOC educators and students do not identify with hip-hop culture, there are many others who do. Love (*Hip Hop's Li'l Sistas Speak*), shares why a value for and embrace of hip-hop culture is necessary for the current generation of educators:

Our teaching force currently, and over the next ten to twenty years, is young and influenced by Hip Hop, no matter the teachers' race, gender, class or sexuality. Many Black and Brown students who enter into teaching will embody Hip Hop. Therefore, we need school officials to allow teachers to bring themselves and their culture into the classroom, so teachers and students feel culturally affirmed in their learning environments. (112)

Love describes the natural and organic approach already being used by many educators as an important social justice possibility that has yet to be broadly acknowledged or tapped within the larger educational institution. A Hip-Hop Mindset is not a cultural costume an educator can “put on.” It is a way of thinking or mode of being that requires looking inward to engage the process of becoming more authentic

through one's work. I share my personal stories in my interpretation of the research because we are all in this together. In the article, "We've Been Doing It Your Way Long Enough," the authors champion the idea of education being a syncretic process in which "human beings work together, drawing on multiple resources to co-construct and reinvent practices. These constructions are inherently complex and embody the contradictions and potential for learning by emphasizing the cultural richness of home and community practices typically characterized as deficient" (Baines et. al., 420).

They further expand this idea by suggesting that in our contemporary world, which is tied to so many years of educational oppression, educators cannot simply dive into doing something new. Rather they must engage in a critical form of practice that pushes them to not only add new perspectives, voices, and resources but also critically evaluate current resources, practices and structures for power differentials, contemporary ideologies of patriarchy, racism, anti-blackness, white supremacy, and cultural deficiency. In other words, educators cannot simply add a new practice—they must critically interrogate the whole of their practice. A critical part of interrogating the whole, must include the cultural mindsets educators bring to their work. Educators must move beyond identifying biases or internalized racist beliefs within their own cultural worldviews and shift their ideas about professional and academic ways of being.

The outcomes of this project, situate a Hip-Hop Mindset as more than a success mindset, but rather a mindset of cultural efficacy and cultural freedom. It posits hip-hop culture as a producer of important knowledge, skills, values and practices that can build important forms of cultural literacy (through its demand for cultural integrity and authenticity) and critical literacy (through its demand for truth telling and social critique). The Hip-Hop Mindset gives students and educators the permission to show up in life as their full, authentic cultural selves. This permission is a powerful act of social justice in an education system that has been trying to change BIPOC students and educators from its inception.

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