

NYU's Hip-Hop and Pedagogy Initiative

*International, Multi-cultural, Cultural, Gender,
LGBTQ, Spirituality, Disability and related category*

Richard Chavolla

Director, Center for Multicultural Education and Programs

Marcella Runell Hall

Associate Director, Center for Multicultural Education and Programs

Executive Summary

Recognizing New York University's mission of public service and the Division of Student Affairs hallmarks of learning, diversity, and community, the Center for Multicultural Education and Programs (aka, the Center) created the Hip-Hop and Pedagogy Initiative in the fall of 2007. The Initiative began after a successful Welcome Week Event focused on hip-hop and education, and later grew into a working pedagogy group comprised of NYU faculty, administrators and staff, which eventually included community based non-profit leaders, graduate and undergraduate students. The Initiative serves as an umbrella for the NYU community for hip-hop programming and events, and offers cutting edge resources and referrals for academic based hip-hop courses and trainings.

The breadth of student learning and addressing critical campus needs through this initiative prove ingeniously expansive. As can be expected, the diversity of students that are drawn to, contribute to, and benefit from the many expressions of the Hip-Hop and Pedagogy Initiative serve as an example of the truly intercultural experiences we wish to provide in education. At any given program or in any given classroom of the Initiative, you will find students of all social identities, representing the full spectrum of experiences and communities related to socio-economic class, race, gender, sexual orientation, religious faith, language and much more, with a continuous intersection of these identities in intentional modes of intellectual exploration and communication. Students of all ages, previously unmotivated by the conventional teaching techniques and not reaching their full academic potential have been inspired by this innovative pedagogy that stimulates new ways of thinking that lead to improvements in overall institutional climate.

This Initiative has allowed the Center to collaborate on many high profile and powerful events over the course of the last year including film screenings, performances, and conferences, all while working with NYU schools and departments, ranging from the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development to the Tisch School of the Arts, and from the Admissions Office to Residential Education.

At a time when university professionals search for technological resources, curriculum, applicable research and methodological approaches that meet the diverse learning styles of students in a rapidly modernizing world, the Hip-Hop and Pedagogy Initiative draws from the most contemporary of art and intellectual forms familiar to so many young people. Consequently, the Center, through this Initiative, has worked with countless students who have become deeply engaged with the essential concepts and skills of a wide range of disciplines such as writing, history, art, public speaking and technology/new media through the creative platforms that hip-hop culture so creatively offers.

The result is that faculty and administrators integrate their scholarship into course curriculum and programming that leads to demonstrable learning outcomes that students attest to in assessment after assessment. Finally, the intricate and deep web of interrelationships built through the support of the Hip-Hop and Pedagogy Initiative, along with the generation of innovative tools for the implementation of incredibly creative thought, insures a truly sustainable legacy at the university.

Program Description

As evidence of the positive impact hip-hop has on student learning and success, it is estimated that over three hundred classes on hip-hop are being offered at colleges and universities throughout the United States and abroad, including the University of California–Berkeley, Stanford University, the University of Michigan, Yale University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, New York University, Princeton University, the University of Massachusetts, and Columbia University. In 1991, Howard University became the first university to bring hip-hop to the academy through a student run conference. Currently there are hip-hop archives at both Harvard and Stanford Universities. Carleton College in Minnesota will soon offer hip-hop studies as a minor, as will Howard University. In August 2006, in Chemnitz, Germany, the inaugural *Hip-Hop Meets Academia* conference was held drawing hundreds of scholars, activists and artists from around the world. Last year the University of Wisconsin–Madison, through the Office of Multicultural Programs, established a comprehensive four-year interdisciplinary living-learning program focused explicitly on the study of hip-hop culture. So it is no surprise that New York University, which boasts a long tradition of hip-hop scholarship (former faculty include Tricia Rose, Robin Kelley, and Nelson George) added to this academic tradition by creating a dynamic new “Hip-Hop and Pedagogy Initiative” through the Center for Multicultural Education and Programs (aka, “the Center”) in the Division of Student Affairs. Evaluations consistently demonstrate the powerful contributions the various applications of this initiative make toward student learning and success at NYU (see the “Assessment” section of this submission).

The Hip-Hop and Pedagogy Initiative speaks to the mission of NYU in regards to being “a private university within the public service” and to the Division of Student Affairs hallmarks of advancing diversity, learning and community. Specifically, this initiative has created a powerful and organic connection with many community entities such as the Hip-Hop Theatre Festival, public school educators, the Afro-Latino Forum, the Schomburg Center for Research in Harlem, and Urban Word NYC. Additionally, the Initiative has provided numerous opportunities for New York area high school students to attend events and become informed about college. Institutionally, in relation to diversity, learning, and community, this initiative has created a renewed sense of pride and connectedness among NYU students across traditional boundaries. The Initiative has proven beneficial, educational, and compelling to those previously unfamiliar with the field, while simultaneously offering much needed affirmation to those students who feel underrepresented at NYU because of their social identities and somewhat marginalized by the existing curriculum.

The Hip-Hop and Pedagogy Initiative has fostered an organized and mutually beneficial relationship with faculty across schools, departments, and disciplines. Co-sponsorship with academic schools and student affairs departments on over 30 events and classes in the past three semesters since its inception, has resulted in shared resources, collaborative course development and team teaching, joint funding opportunities, and sustainable academic partnerships. A few of the partners include the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development; the Tisch School of the Arts; the College of Arts and Sciences; the Department of Latino Studies; the Department of Africana Studies; and the Asian/Pacific/American Institute. Furthermore, the Hip-Hop and Pedagogy Initiative has created new partnerships and rejuvenated historic partnerships with a variety of student affairs counterparts such as the Admissions Office, the Wasserman Center for Career Services, the Department of Residential Education, the Office of LGBT Student Services, the Student Resource Center, the Office for International Students and Scholars, and the Office of Student Activities in support of the successful events listed below. Finally, with its originality and creativity, the Hip-Hop and Pedagogy Initiative has captured the interest of many

other constituents such as senior leadership and administrators, alumni, development officers, and performing arts administrators. The following is a partial list of events and classes made possible by these collaborations:

2007-2008:

- Welcome Week Panel on Hip-Hop and Education
- Working Pedagogy Group (on-going)
- Co-sponsorship of the Tisch Hip-Hop Theater Lab course
- Urban Word/Steinhardt School of Preemptive Education Teacher training institute
- Screening and discussion of *Masizakhe*, an international hip-hop film about South Africa co-sponsored with the Hip-Hop Theater Initiative
- Consultation to the Residential Education hip-hop culture living-learning exploration floor
- Book release party for the feminist fiction inspired hip-hop curricula, *Conscious Women Rock the Page* (SisterOutsider, 2008)
- Social Justice Forum, Hip-Hop, Arts and Activism, with the Office of Student Activities
- Faculty-Graduate Dinner Series featuring hip-hop scholars and faculty members David Kirkland, Ella Turrene, and Daniel Banks

Fall 2008-present:

- Welcome Week: Poetry Slam, and *On the Outs* screening (co-sponsored by the Student Resource Center)
- Urban Word/Steinhardt School of Preemptive Education Teacher training institute
- Groundbreaking partnership with the NYC Hip-Hop Theater Festival
 - *the break/s* 4-night residency, co-sponsored with Skirball Center for Performing Arts
 - Youth Day at *the break/s* (co-sponsored with NYU Undergraduate Admissions Office)
 - Afro-Latino Forum: Black on Both Sides, Hip-Hop Latinos (co-sponsored with Latino Studies, Africana Studies and Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture)
 - *Planet B-Boy* Premier, co-sponsored with Asian Pacific American Institute
 - *The Voices Remix* featuring the work of Howard Zinn read by Suheir Hammad, Michael Rappaport, Tim Robbins, Black Thought of the Roots (co-sponsored with Pride Month, Residential Education)

Upcoming Hip-Hop Pedagogy Initiative events include the following:

- Hip-Hop in Darfur event, with the Office of International Students and Scholar
- Civic Engagement Camp, with the Office of Student Activities featuring the award winning documentarians who created *Bling* (film about diamond industry in Africa)
- Consultation on Hip-Hop Archive at Bobst Library

Outcomes are cited in the assessment section of this submission; and the quote below provides testimony typical of the whole. Highlighted here are the potentials for learning, collaboration and the meeting of critical student needs through this creative initiative:

“As evidenced this past year, in part by the collaboration between the Center for Multicultural Education and Programs and NYU's Skirball Center for the Performing Arts, hip-hop culture has a growing place in higher education and in the lives of our students. I believe the Hip-Hop and Pedagogy Initiative creates a much needed source of energy to connect and inspire students from diverse backgrounds and fields of study. The collaboration between the Center and NYU Skirball Center for the New York premiere of Marc Bamuthi Joseph's *the break/s* was one of the most successful events in the past five years in terms of generating student interest and participation.”

-Michael Harrington, Director, Skirball Center for the Performing Arts

Embedded and woven throughout the Hip Hop and Pedagogy Initiative are the innovative use of technology and the application of the most contemporary research. Virtually every performance, classroom activity, and workshop is multi-media and practitioners use sophisticated technological skills to connect their creative process and exchange research with colleagues globally. The mutually overlapping network of scholars and learners developing and advancing hip-hop pedagogy, curriculum, and methodology is quite astounding and could be possible only with employing technology. The many faculty and student affairs partners in the Initiative both exploit and add to this network through their scholarship, publications, and programming, and the Center serves as a guide and a clearinghouse for these efforts at NYU.

Finally, as illustrated repeatedly in this description, the Hip-Hop and Pedagogy Initiative has built a solid foundation of university and community partners, a constantly growing body of scholarship and an ethos of mutual respect and collaboration that results in a sustainable model.

Supplemental Information

- [NYU Today Article \(September 15, 2008\)](#)
- [Washington Square News article \(October 2, 2008\)](#)
- [NYC Hip-Hop Theatre Playbill article \(September 4, 2008\)](#)
- [Photos from Conscious Women Rock the Page \(Book Release Party\)](#)
- [Photos from Welcome Week 2008 Spoken Word/Slam Poetry Event](#)
- [Hip-Hop Theatre Lab Poster](#)
- [Hip-Hop Pacific Live Flyer](#)
- [The Message: 100 Life Lessons from Hip-Hops Greatest Songs Flyer](#)
- [PreEmptive Education: Language, Identity, and Power \(Training Flyer\)](#)
- [Democracy Indakar: Panel, Film Screening and Live Performance \(Flyer\)](#)

Assessment

While all events co-sponsored and produced under the Initiative have their own formal or informal assessment protocol, the following results were collected using an online tool sent out over various Center listservs during a 2-week period in the fall of 2008. The questions were sent to faculty, staff, students, and community partners and asked whether NYU should house a Hip-Hop and Pedagogy Initiative, as well as whether they had attended any of the Initiative events. Of 50 responses, all said, with a resounding “yes,” that there should be an Initiative, but for many different reasons. Provision of social identities was optional. The following is a representative sampling of that assessment data.

Student responses:

“I participated in the Hip Hop Theatre Lab last spring with NYU, and it was an essential part of my studies here. It was one of the only moments that I was able to see myself and my culture reflected in the curriculum. The Pedagogy Initiative is responsible for the Lab, and I thank them.”
-Crystal, junior, African-American/Caucasian

“As a part of the Hip Hop Theater Festival, there is a show entitled ‘Voices’ which features accomplished performers who read speeches delivered by oppressed or marginalized leaders throughout American history. When the speeches were read, I felt like I was actually part of their movement whether it be Civil Rights, Suffragists, Anti-War, etc. I hope that NYU can continue hosting this event because it really does have the power to change people's outlooks and lives.”
-Joshua, Junior, Black and Latin

“Attending the Voices Remix program has been my life's only encounter with Hip-Hop. It was also the one of the most moving events that I have been to in the past year. Honestly, I do not fully understand the hip-hop movement, but, but I do believe that our country is more fully beginning to recognize that not only WHAT we say matters, but also HOW we say it and that Hip Hop has/is/and will play any integral role in that.”
-Sarah, Graduate student, Steinhardt, rural, white Midwesterner

“Hip-hop now spans EVERY culture, regardless of ethnicity. It unites us all.”
-Jabari, Senior

“Hip-Hop Pedagogy...creates a new view of "activism" and opens up new outlets for people to be activists - art, writing, dance, song. The initiative also allows for Hip-Hop to be legitimized as a discipline and vehicle of social change.”
-Mark, Graduate student, Filipino-American

“As an RA I brought my residents to the poetry slam during Welcome Week and the break/s which were both a huge hit! I walked away with a great perspective and understanding and my freshmen residents really appreciated and enjoyed it and I think it helped start them on the right foot here at NYU.”
-Angelica, Senior

“I think seeing such events taking place on a campus like NYU, extremely white, extremely "elite" was a great experience because it allows students to expose themselves to different types of learning, learning that they otherwise would not encounter in the NYU bubble. Although I do not necessarily identify directly with hip-hop culture, I can certainly see the importance of

understanding hip-hop culture in a society dominated by hip-hop images that have become, in some ways, misrepresentations of their origins.”

-Fernando, 2nd Year Graduate Student

Faculty & Administrator Responses:

“To me, VOICES... would make an exceptional diversity orientation program. It has to be one of the best multicultural events that I have attended in recent years that left me with one of the most profound understandings - but also the greatest number of unanswered questions. What was very powerful to me was not just the content and delivery on stage, but more importantly, the audience reaction and sense of communal agreement and awareness - a true feeling that we are all in it together.”

-administrator, Student Affairs

“I attended the Voices event. It was fabulous to see such great student attendance. There was a diverse group of students from across the university. The speeches were brought to life by the talented actors and spoke directly to the energy and passion that the students brought with them. I've also participated in the Urban Word conference over the last few years... since Hip-Hop mirrors the culture of the current generation, it is important that institutions recognize and acknowledge the phenomenon and study its relevance.”

-professor

“Many of today's university students see hip-hop as the primary cultural expression of their generation, but do not have the occasion to talk about it in an analytical way. I was only able to attend the Afro-Latino symposium at the Schomburg Center, and it was fabulous. I will be able to transport some of the content, and the speakers, to my classroom.”

- professor

“The Hip-Hop and Pedagogy Initiative has crossed academic and student affairs boundaries in presenting a series of programs and experiences that speak to the current generation of students attending our university. The diversity of venues, lecture, learning community establishment, poetry reading, interactive theatre, and trips through our local laboratory (NYC), has given a new voice to learn about the on-going challenge of difference among others (age, race, gender, orientation, and class). The approach is cutting edge and 'packaged' in a manner that is accessible for this generation of students.”

-administrator, Student Affairs

Community Partner responses:

“In fall 2008 Voices of a People's History of the United States had an opportunity to collaborate with the Hip Hop Theater Project and the NYU Center for Multicultural Education & Programs. We were consistently impressed with the creativity, dynamism, and professionalism of the Center team. It served as a model for the kind of work we would like to do on college campuses around the country, with a focus on empowering and involving students in creating artistic programming that can motivate a new generation to make their voices heard. The Center expanded our horizons and we left with valuable lessons we will carry into the future. We look forward to working with them again.”

-Anthony Arnone, Co-Author, *Voices of a People's History of the United States*.
Seven Stories Press (2004)

"My experience working with the Center around their Hip-Hop Pedagogy Initiative is that the Center has tuned into a major cultural pulse on the campus of NYU. The folks at the Center

understand intrinsically that Hip-Hop is more than just Rap music and it shows in the approach they've taken to building the initiative and its network of participants.”

-Clyde Valentin, Executive Director, Hip-Hop Theater Festival

“The Center for Multicultural Education Programs not only serves as a hub for the NYU community to access and engage the conversations and movements happening within hip-hop culture, but also serves as advocate and activist within the greater NYC grassroots nonprofit network. This type of institutional and educational support is invaluable to the many nonprofit leaders who are dedicated to youth development and social justice. “

-Michael Cirelli, Executive Director, Urban Word NYC

As the Director of Education with the Hip Hop Theater Festival, I worked closely with The Center to design and implement the major partnership ...It is important that major universities continue to figure out ways to share resources, jointly program and co-curate events with community based organization - in the way the Center has managed to do through this Initiative.”

-Daphne Farganis, Director of Education, Hip-Hop Theater Festival