

**Theory and Evidence on
How Hip-Hop Education Programs Attain Legitimacy**

by
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Abstract

In this paper, the research question “how do hip-hop education programs attain legitimacy” is explored through the lens of three case studies. Case study is chosen as the most suitable methodology for analyzing the complexities of the merits and limitations of hip-hop education programs. Suchman’s theory on legitimacy suggests that there are three main sources that contribute to the attainment of legitimacy, which include approval by society-at-large, positive media coverage, and association with legitimate others. Applying these three attributes to the case studies on High School of Recording Arts, Today’s Future Sound, and Hip Hop 4 Life, the results show that different hip hop education programs exhibit varying degrees of success in acquiring the three sources of legitimacy. For established education institutions like High School of Recording Arts, association with legitimate others plays a critical role as it answers to a wide set of stakeholders, while for partnership programs like Today’s Future Sound and Hip Hop 4 Life, positive media coverage offer a significant leverage opportunity for growth and approval. Looking into future prospects for these programs, more research on the psychological benefits of hip hop education programs could add an additional layer of legitimacy, as well as the development of a robust quantitative measurement system for these programs to track their progress and gain greater momentum on a national level.

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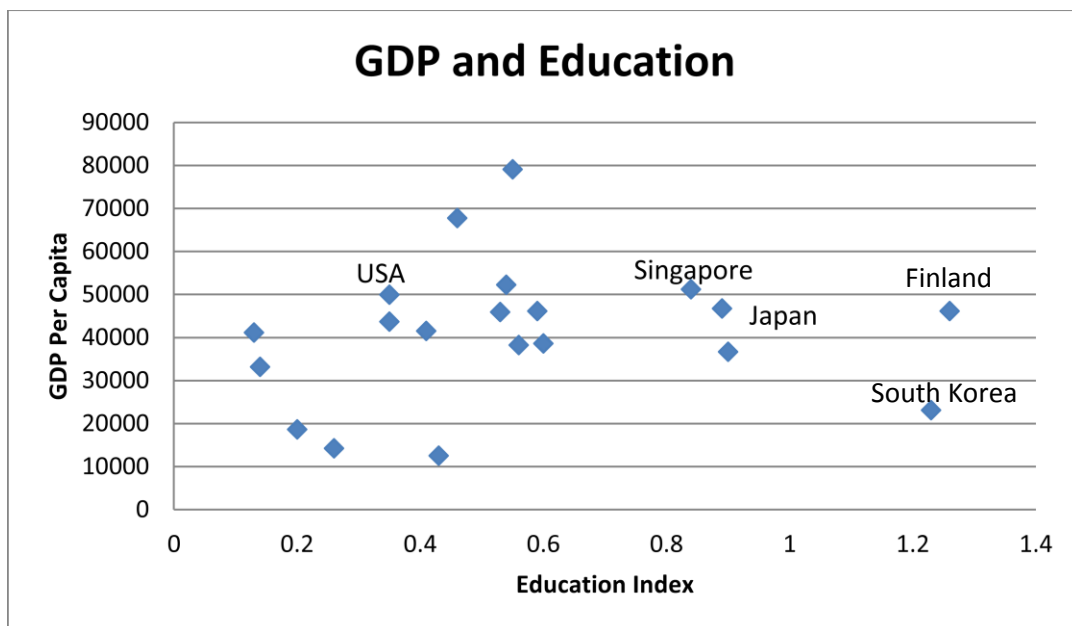
I would also like to thank Professor Marti Subrahmanyam for creating this wonderful platform for students to engage with faculty advisers to conduct research and share the results in a collaborative environment.

Lastly, I would like to thank Professor Ellen McGrath for introducing me to the field of social entrepreneurship and sparking the creative problem solver inside me to continue seeking innovation in the field of education, with courage and determination.

Part I Introduction

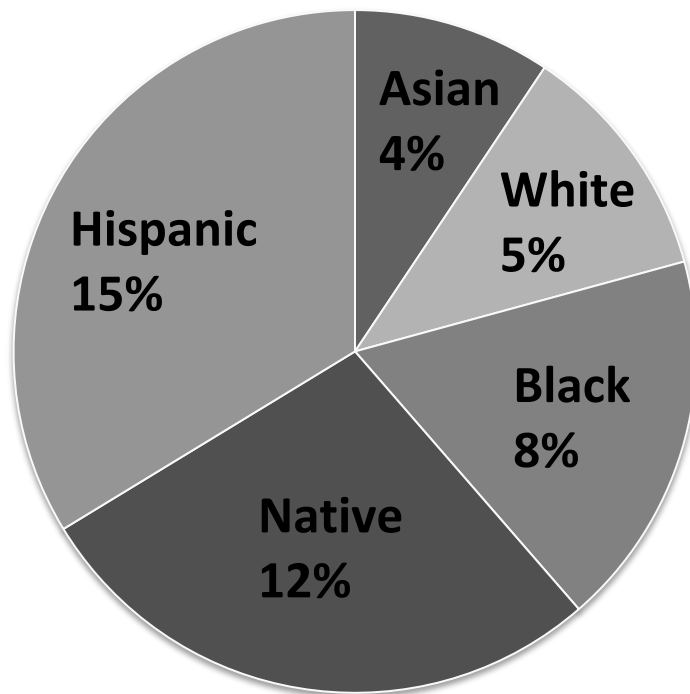
Education has a predominant position on the national agenda for every country in the world. In developed countries, it is the motor stimulating innovation and cutting-edge technology. In developing countries, it is the key to unlocking the untapped talents and silenced voices.

United States is undeniably an economic powerhouse on the global stage. In 2012, it ranked number 1 in gross GDP of \$15 trillion, and number 11 in GDP per capita of \$48,112. However, its performance in educating its young citizens pales significantly in comparison. The results from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) show that the US ranks number 7 in average mathematics and number 6 in science for 4th graders, number 11 in mathematics and number 12 in science for 8th graders, behind countries including Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, Belgium. As illustrated in the graph below, the Index of Cognitive Skills and Educational Attainment shows that the US ranks number 17 trailing behind Canada which has a similar GDP per capita, but far behind Singapore, Finland, and South Korea which has half of US GDP per capita.



There is a clear gap between the US economic power and its education performance. A decade after the House of Representatives passed the No Child Left Behind Act on June 14, 2001, the country continues to struggle with disappointing results as 1.1 million American high school students drop out every year (Broad Foundation, 2010). As shown in the pie chart below, breaking down the astonishingly high dropout rates extracts valuable insight that Hispanic, Native, and Black students currently are three times to twice more likely to drop out of high school compared to their White and Asian peers. According to research conducted by Cecilia Rouse (Dean of Woodrow Wilson School), dropouts cost the US \$192 billion dollars in lost income and taxes in 2005 and if by 2020, schools and colleges raised the graduation rates of Hispanic, African American, and Native American students to the levels of white students, the increase in personal income in the United States would add a conservative estimate of \$310 billion dollars to the U.S. economy.

Dropout Rate by Ethnicity (%)



The solutions initiated by Congress to address this discrepancy, such as in the NCLB, are rigidly based on standardization where funding for schools increases when students score higher on national exams. This has inadvertently driven teachers to focus their time and energy on improving average student test scores instead of tapping into individual student's unique talents. As a result, students with disadvantaged and traumatic background perform poorly in schools because standardized tests bear little relevance to their harsh lives and thus low motivation for them to commit to academics.

Many educators and teaching artists in the past decade have been implementing hip-hop art and culture to increase the relevance and reflection of students' experience in the current education system. This form of intervention aims to address the issues of chronic dropouts, health problems, and unemployment, particularly in urban communities. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell's research demonstrates that there is a direct relationship between the students' performance in school and their interest in school. Improvements in the teachers' ability to connect lessons to what matters to the students, through means such as engaging students in creating their curriculum, project-based learning, and selecting topics relevant to students' experiences, have measurable positive impact on the students' overall academic performance and motivation for higher pursuits. The Federal School of Work Opportunities Act among other education policies strongly support the belief that students perform better when lessons and tasks demonstrate relevance to their current and future lives.

Budget cuts during downturns in the economic cycle often hit the arts sector the first and the hardest. To turn the tide and strengthen the foothold of the arts in the current education system,

education reform at the national level is necessary. Both the No Child Left Behind Act and Race To the Top Initiatives prioritize English and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) and tie funding to achievement on standardized tests. Recognized primarily as a musical art form, hip-hop is in reality multidisciplinary, employing elements of technology, engineering, and physics. A distinguished impact of hip hop is empowering students by acknowledging and incorporating their out-of-school literacies inside the school environs.

The field continues to lack data-driven measurements of impact. However support for hip-hop education program is spreading at considerable rate. In Martha Diaz's research at the Hip Hop Education Center, almost 300 survey responses were collected over the course of 2011 where more than 200 programs were national and/or international, and the highest concentration of programs were found in urban metropolitan. The legitimacy of hip-hop education programs is a crucial element in their establishment, sustainability, and growth. In this research paper, three hip-hop education programs are examined in detail in an endeavor to identify their sources of legitimacy.

This paper will discuss in depth about three distinct hip-hop education programs in three states across the United States, and analyze the sources of their legitimacy from a perspective that combines theory and practicality. The research question is "How do hip-hop education programs attain legitimacy." To answer this question, primary and secondary sources including case study books, personal interviews, official websites, and research articles are utilized for a comprehensive study. The findings reveal that hip-hop education programs need to score high in three critical aspects: approval by society-at-large, media coverage, and inter-organizational

relations. Depending on the form of the program, with the two largest baskets being brick-and-mortar education institutions and partnership programs such as afterschool workshops, the comparative importance of each of the three aspects varies.

Part II: History and Development of Hip-Hop Pedagogy

Research conducted by the Black Youth Project attests to the relevance of hip hop culture in the everyday experiences of Black and Hispanic youths. 58% of Black youth and 48% of Hispanic youth report they listen to rap music every day; 48% of Black youth and 35% of Hispanic youth watch rap programming on television several days a week.

The Hip Hop Education Center at the New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development conducted extensive research from 2010-2011, surveying over 300 hip-hop education programs in the United States, with a few inputs from the international community. The survey results provide valuable insight into the skill-building activities and academic disciplines in which we find the most hip-hop elements. The top five skill-building activities include team building, career development, identity formation, community activism, and media literacy (video/digital production). The top five academic disciplines include English language arts, entrepreneurship, ethnic studies, gender and sexuality, and geography.

The same research also outlined the greatest challenges faced by hip-hop education programs. The negative stigma associated with hip-hop and the confusion about hip-hop culture/history was cited as the top hindrance to the effective implementation and expansion of such programs, among other factors including capacity building, infrastructure, and professional development of the field. Critics denounce hip-hop's associations with violence, substance abuse, glamorization of money, and promiscuity. A New York Times (2007) article asserts "Hip-hop, with its suggestive lyrics, videos and dance moves, has long been criticized by public health experts and parents, who fear that it leads to risky sexual behavior among teenagers." These challenges

underlay the perennial difficulties of finding sustainable funding by educators in this field. The same article also affirms that “many experts believe the keys to communicating with an entire generation of young people can be found in hip-hop...[and] that’s far more powerful than any negative influence the music may be having.” Because of the co-existence of hip-hop’s potential to fill the education gap and the negative stigma around it, attaining legitimacy is a critical step for hip-hop programs to gain a strong foothold in the education realm.

Part III: Theory on Organizational Legitimacy

In this research paper, the theoretical lens of “legitimacy” is used for understanding how hip-hop education programs gain acceptance. The existing theories stem from studies on a variety of different organizations, not limited to academic institutions, and lend valuable insight into foundation of legitimacy and the benefits from attaining it.

The prevailing conclusion from early research on ways of garnering legitimacy points towards conformity. For example, Westphal’s (1997) discovery that conformity to Total Quality Management practices enhanced the likelihood that a hospital would earn endorsement from the prestigious Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations. In addition, Suchman (1950) prescribes that legitimacy implies congruence with “some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions,” and the best way to gain legitimacy is through conformity.

Suchman further provides three aspects from which to assess the level of conformity and consequently legitimacy. First postulate is acceptance by society-at-large, grounded on the understanding that the more numerous the adopters of a practice, the more widespread its acceptance and the greater its legitimacy; density dependence is also a related theory that supports this proposition. Second postulate is media representation, as news stories and media coverage have national influence on shaping people’s opinions. Third postulate is inter-organizational relations, based on the concept that a subject becomes legitimate when it is connected to legitimate others.

The interest in studying legitimacy stems from the multiple benefits that are bestowed upon legitimate firms. There are three key benefits. First, legitimate organizations gain substantial latitude to choose their structures, products, markets, factor of production and more. Second, organizations gain the ability to garner resources from external audiences, to command the loyalty of internal participants, and to avoid misunderstandings and misuses among external and internal constituents alike. Third, legitimacy empowers organizations to enunciate claims based on both status and reputation; status and reputation further augment one another through the visibility, credibility, and mobility effects.

Based on the existing finding of conformity as the foundation of legitimacy, the research topic of legitimacy in relationship to hip-hop education programs is particularly interesting because hip-hop pedagogy is inherently revolutionary and disruptive of prevalent practices.

Part IV: The Case Study Method

The Case Study Research Method is selected for the analysis in this paper. As explained by Kathleen Eisenhardt in her research on the functionality of the case study methodology, case study is an effective research method in works that seek to establish an understanding of complex social phenomenon. The academic disciplines that predominantly use Case Studies include psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, social work, business education, nursing, and community planning. This method retains the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as small group behavior, school performance, and the maturation of industries.

According to Yin's book *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, there are three conditions that distinguish among different research methods including Experiment, Survey, Archival Analysis, History, and Case Study. The first condition is the form of research question, consisting of basic categorizations of "Who," "What," "Where," "How," and "Why" questions. Case study is effective at answering the "How," and "Why" questions. Unlike "What," "Who," and "Where" questions which are more *exploratory*, the "How" and "Why" questions are more *explanatory*, which require analysis of operational links over time instead of mere incidence. For example, if a study were conducted on "who" are at the bottom ranks of academic performance in high school and "what" their scores are compared to others, the investigators can use a wide survey of the school's student body. In contrast, if a study were done to understand "why" this group of students consistently performs at bottom ranks, the investigators would need to draw upon a wider array of documentary information in addition to conducting interviews.

The research question that this paper strives to answer is “How do hip-hop education programs attain legitimacy?” Case study is the most suitable method of research because it could more effectively provide an explanation for the “how” question and the study requires holistic analysis of the historical, cultural, and socioeconomic factors. Three programs are selected in this multiple-case research. The programs are High School of Recording Arts based in Twin Cities (Minnesota), Today’s Future Sound based in Oakland (California), and Hip Hop 4 Life based in South Bronx (New York). Their common characteristic is the in-depth integration of Hip Hop elements and a student body almost exclusively constituted by Black and Hispanic students. However, they also have meaningful differences not only in their geography which directly link to the political and socioeconomic environments, but also in the breath of their purpose – on a high level, all three programs seek to empower, but on a deeper level some seek to teach healthy lifestyle, some focus on graduating students from high school, and some inspire young teens to explore their musical talents. The co-existence of similarities and differences make the three chosen programs an interesting set of case that is representative of a large proportion of existing hip-hop programs, and thus more effective for finding an explanation to the research question.

Part V: Program Description

1. High School of Recording Arts

Since 1998, the High School of Recording Arts (HSRA) has been on a mission to educate youths whose socioeconomic environments posed daunting challenges to their pursuit of a stable education and meaningful life. The founder TC found his calling to establish HSRA on a march in Washington where he saw the desire for higher pursuits in the eyes of thousands of disenfranchised black men, and immediately knew that he could not simply let the status quo stay its course. Out of the basket of possible means of intervention, he picked out education, because he firmly believed in a better future built with pens instead of guns, learning instead of violence.

From its humble beginning of a one music studio, TC succeeded in creating a full-scale school for youths who need more attention and care than they could receive at regular schools. Situated in the turbulent neighborhood of St. Paul's, the institution serves as a safe haven that is simultaneously recognized by the academic community, thanks to his affiliation with Dr. Jennings, and respected by the gangs, a tribute to TC's tough reputation from his teenage years as a drug hustler.

Core Leadership

The school's core leadership consists of a Board of Directors, the Founder & Executive Director (TC), along with program director, development director, and education director. The program director is responsible for innovation and assigning the staff to their positions. He also has established a culture that allows the staff to feel that they play a key role in analyzing data and in attempting to solve problems in a professional learning community fashion. The flat hierarchy of

leadership is an aide to learning at HSRA. In addition, advisers are matched to a group of 15-20 children with whom they establish trustworthy relationships that often lead advisers to help out students when they become homeless or when particular family issues draw the students away from their academics. These personal relationships help tremendously in motivating students to care about their learning because the advisers are always there for them.

Student Profile

The student body consists of urban teens between grades nine to twelve. Currently there are 247 students enrolled in this independent charter school authorized by the Minnesota Department Education. About 92% of the students are African Americans, 8% White. In addition, 27% are special education students, 91% eligible for free or reduced cost lunch, higher than State average. There were 44 suspensions in 2008-2009, which increased to 66 in 2009-2010. The average 2009 Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA-II) Reading score was 52% proficient or advanced, compared to state average 80%. The average 2009 MCA-II Math test score was 16%, proficient or advanced, compared to state average 44%. The students come to HSRA with severe academic deficits with much ground to be made up.

Critical Aspects of the Program

I. Individualized Learning

The greatest distinguishing factor of the school is its focus on music and creative production. The school is fully equipped with a recording studio with cutting edge technology that allows access to students in good academic standing. The mission of the school is to reinstitute students who have dropped out or been expelled from traditional schools; the school's success in recruiting these students and keeping them enrolled till program completion by and large is attributable to

its uniquely designed learning experience that appeals to students' interest in the hip hop culture and adapts to their inconstant study schedules.

The challenge of graduating the students is undeniable, with the average age of enrollment at 17.6 years old and less than 12 credits accumulated. In order to engage the students to help them complete the program, the program director guides each student to create a Personal Learning Plan on the first day of enrollment. The Personal Learning Plans allows some degree of flexibility in the study materials and sets the academic expectations for the semester. It is made clear to the students on their first day that the goal for all of them is to graduate with twelve proficiencies in place. Each student tracks progress on the twelve proficiencies and earns credit only when an adviser verifies competencies. No student is allowed to graduate unless they have a letter of acceptance in their PLP from a post-secondary institution. The PLP is reviewed often and is a living plan so students understand careers and opportunities. Although this personalized approach and hip hop element are appealing to the students, the school still suffers from a low attendance rate at 64.1%, because the students face a multitude of external problems that detract them from schooling.

To combat the low attendance rate, the staff reviews attendance three times a day, much more than at regular high schools. Every Monday, the staff all participates in professional training activities such as refining individualized instruction method, formative assessment data, and review of lesson plans. Every day, the staff interacts and engages with students to provide immediate feedback and positive encouragements. The students could view their own goals and accomplishments through the proprietary database Excellence, designed specifically for the

school's purpose. Adviser (teacher) contact, home visits, family connections, and peer concern are all exemplary strategies that are being used to improve attendance.

II. Relevance of Learning

The twelve proficiencies including English and Mathematics are taught in purposely designed ways to increase the relevance of the materials to the students' lives. For example, instead of analyzing William Wordsworth's poems, a meaningful piece of rap lyrics may be dissected. Instead of learning statistics using hypothetical cases, students use the school's attendance data to create whisker-box plots and scatter plots, and learn the differences among mean, median, and mode. The relevancy of this lesson documents the effort of the staff to model to the students the role that student involvement plays in academic growth.

At HSRA, time is used as a tool to ensure that students' needs are met effectively. Students report that their day is differentiated. They note that they do not do the same things at the same time and that advisers change things up to help increase variety in the learning process. Examples include a class planning a day trip to an aquatic reserve to study biology and staff regrouping students on the spot to re-teach a difficult concept.

III. External vs. Internal Environments

The schools start at 9:30am and closes at 7:30pm. The late start time recognizes both the fact that some students live far or they have part-time jobs, and the research result that teenagers learn better in later morning rather than 6 or 7am. The late closing time is set with the best intention of offering a safe environment for the students for as long as possible each day. Many staff members have reports that the students become anxious and agitated when the clock turns close

to 7:30pm because they realize that they will soon step out of the safe haven into a tumultuous and often violent household. The school studios are kept open late at night and on the weekends to allow students to refine projects in a protected environment.

The school configures time inside the day to allow for the individual needs of the students. For example, there is a quiet room where students go for a “time out” from their studies, to regain inner peace. Often, the students’ previous traumas in life can lead to moments of agitation, and when those moments are triggered, the students are allowed to stop doing their work and seek retreat until composure is regained.

In addition, the staff is purposeful in finding out about community issues and debriefs incidents with students so as to mitigate these potential disruptions. By providing a channel for the students to openly discuss their fears and the dangers they face, it promotes a strong sense of community and a safe environment within the school walls for the students to learn.

IV. Close Faculty Relationships

The staff at HSRA is regarded with respect by parents and students. Advisers update the parents on student performance and constantly call them. E-mail is also used to give immediate feedback to parents. Advisers call parents or guardians at least ten times a semester to give and receive updates on student performance. These contacts are kept in a log and are monitored by the leadership team. Students do performances at parent/teacher conferences and then parents are asked to provide feedback to students about the quality of the work. The mutual respect between students and teachers foster a relaxed environment where intellectual discussions take place.

The community also took the initiative to raise their voices to the state, demanding more education programs like HSRA where learning is intertwined with students' life experiences. The weekly community meeting provides an opportunity for staff, students, and community members to engage the entire school in building close relationships. Students state that the staff is really supportive and this inspires them to learn and progress on their PLPs. At this meeting a variety of recommendations and recognitions are made through "shout outs" and "Keith" awards. Keith was a student who was killed in a gang shooting and the students keep his memory alive by giving these awards to each other and staff for contributions to learning.

V. Resourcefulness

HSRA has established external partnerships that engender academic improvement. A community group, Friends of HSRA, confirms the role that community plays in the school. This group meets monthly and they are sponsoring a second annual golf tournament to aid the finances of the school. Many of these members operate under the radar in their support and often finance things that individual students need. Community members have been invited to participate in the governance of the school many times but have been reluctant to do so for a variety of reasons. These include lack of time and confidence in the professionals who currently make such decisions.

The school board has a plan in place to develop external partnerships and has been successful in establishing them. A development director is on staff to guide this effort. These partnerships include: Pillsbury, composers, business leaders, contractors, real estate moguls and African American community leaders. The leadership team nurtures these relationships and does not feel that they spend inordinate amounts of time in this arena.

The staff is also resourceful in combatting underachievement within the school. Daily routines are well embedded and are implemented consistently by the staff. School leaders systematically collect data in order to evaluate programs and the effect of teaching strategies. Leadership noted, however, that they were not aware of potential discrepancies between the performances of male versus female students. Key faculty members have the capacity to support the work that is needed. The establishment of effective professional learning communities linked with the Monday staff development day provides a rich collaborative climate. This climate allows the opportunity to monitor and evaluate practice. All external projects such as Click It and Hope for Haiti are carefully considered to ensure that they reinforce the schools goals. Working closely with community partners, the goal to reclaim urban dropouts and provide an opportunity for graduation is bearing fruit. One female student exemplified this when she shared that she had been working at night in a club, but decided that was not her future. She came back to school at HSRA to get a diploma and pursue an opportunity to have post-secondary training.

2. Today's Future Sound

Today's Future Sound (TFS) is a registered charity that teaches music production and beat making to youth and the general public in the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond. TFS offers these services in schools during the school day, after school, and in community settings. TFS uses music production and media arts as vehicles through which to empower youth as artists and community members while fostering their well-being as individuals. The organization's work incorporates educational, therapeutic and social components that can empower individuals to build confidence, inspire creativity and create change.

Core Leadership

Today's Future Sound excels at providing music production/beat making and media arts workshops for children from all socioeconomic backgrounds. The founder and main instructor, Elliot Gann, approaches teaching with a deep understanding of the potential benefits of the workshops on the kids' development of confidence and passion for learning. His doctorate degree in Psychology has garnered him the much-needed credentials to tap into the education field and gain the trust of the parents, teachers, and children.

Student Profile

The organization focuses on underserved communities particularly in Oakland, where it is based. It does workshops and ongoing classes in both community settings (community and youth centers like Youth Uprising) and in Oakland/Berkeley Unified School Districts at schools such as King, Edna Brewer, West Oakland Middle, Jefferson and Hoover Elementary among other places.

Most of the students are African Americans, with a small percentage of Latinos. They come from low income families and often need special attention than what they receive at school. They are proficient in English.

Critical Aspects of the Program

I. Individualized Learning

There is major focus on individualized learning. Every child enrolled in the program, regardless of the number of sessions he/she attends, receives individual attention from the instructor and develops skills from the particular level he/she starts with.

Elliot and his team seek to deliver one-on-one instruction as much as possible. They actively gauge students' skill levels and work towards catering each child's unique needs. For example, a child talented at applying mathematical principles is often paired with a teammate who has exceptional spatial and visual capability. Children with different work styles are encouraged to collaborate and help each other recognize their strengths. TFS also brings in resources to cater to each child's particular interests. For example, one of the children who is viewed as high risk expressed an avid curiosity about rapping. Recognizing his needs, the instructors invited established rappers to come in and support him, even though rapping is outside the usual scope of the workshops.

II: Internal and External Environments

In Oakland where TFS is based in, the workshops serve to extend the hours that the children spend in the school environment, safe from the violence and shooting that occur daily within ten blocks of the schools. The children who participate in TFS programs are given the opportunity to spend time in guaranteed security. Their alternative is much less desirable, especially wandering on the streets with the threat of gunfire. Because of the safe environment, TFS's programs have excellent attendance, Elliot and his team seek to implement multimodal intervention, meaning they engage the principals, teachers, parents, and the students to foster strong relationships in order to sustain long-term learning for the students. When students are absent, Elliot personally calls relevant parties to discover the reasons for missing classes and motivate the students to come back on track. For example, in the case of a student who was suspended twice for missing his regular school days, Elliot intervened and worked with him on identifying his needs with a teacher. The student found new motivation to go to classes.

III: Relevance of Learning

The mission of the organization is to teach the students a skillset that enables them to positively express themselves. The learning does not fit any state test requirement nor does it apply towards credits in any kind. However, the relevance of the skill lies in its therapeutic effects on increasing students' confidence and sense of self-worth, and fostering an intrinsic desire for long-term learning.

IV: Close Faculty Relationships

The student-faculty relationship is close-knit. The teaching ratio is at most 1 instructor per 3 students. Sometimes, 2 or 3 students will collaborate together on one project, and 1 instructor can simultaneously oversee several groups. At this point, TFS is not in close contact with all the parents yet but does recognize the importance of parent intervention.

V: Resourcefulness

The founder Elliot is well-known within the intersection of the two fields of Hip Hop and Psychology. He has a core team of three volunteers in Oakland who help primarily with grant writing and community outreach, as well as assisting in the music workshops. The greatest resource for TFS lies within its wide network of connections with independent musicians, DJs, filmmakers, and various nonprofit organizations. Elliot has presented at multiple conferences, establishing his credibility as well as the positive reputation of Today's Future Sound. Although TFS is based in Oakland, Elliot delivers workshops throughout the States and Canada by invitation. Each time he travels to work with a new group of students, he rallies through his personal network a troupe of instructors and filmmakers to successfully execute the workshops and document the progress in future endeavors to expand the program's outreach.

The organization currently lacks the resources to quantitatively measure and track the workshops' impact. In an interview, Elliot expresses the desire for numerical data to prove the benefits of the workshops to donors and grant committees. However, his hands are all tied at the moment to implement change to set aside energy for measurement. Also, there is no readily available measurement system for soft skill development such as the increases in self-esteem and confidence that TFS undoubtedly cultivates.

3. Hip Hop 4 Life

Hip Hop 4 Life is dedicated to the mission of skill development and empowerment of youths through a series of interactive programs. Since 2003, Hip Hop 4 Life has served over 12,500 youth and parents in New York City and across the nation. It has a base in Brooklyn, New York, but it mostly travels to various school sites to deliver the programs and workshops.

Hip Hop 4 Life was established as a response to vital health and life issues among American youths, especially within lower-income communities of color in predominantly urban areas. The growing problems related to physical and mental health, as well as the lack of needed resources in underserved schools and neighborhoods, presented a clear need for programs that can begin to combat ignorance and lack of motivation to better preserve one's life and future. Hip Hop 4 Life finds its own formula to solving this social issue through its three-part program including Empowerment Team Mentoring, Youth Development and Community Outreach.

Core Leadership

The core leadership consists of the executive director, program manager, program assistant, and program coordinator. Tamekia Flowers-Holland is the founder and executive director of the organization. With a degree in Marketing from Syracuse University, and 14 years of experience in event planning, marketing, talent relations and youth culture, working within the entertainment and corporate industries, she has a vast net of resources to offer. Hip Hop 4 Life consummates her passion for youth empowerment and offers a venue for her to channel of her previous experiences and connections to build and create such an organization.

The organization also has a board of directors, headed by Nicole M. Tucker who is the chairperson, as well as the managing director of Nikk Kier Media Group and Shabumi Marketing & Public Relations. She has been Chairperson of the Board of Directors for the past six years, and brings her vast experiences in media consultancies and entrepreneurships to helping guide Hip Hop 4 Life to its maximum potential.

Student Profile

The organization focuses on at risk and low income youths aged 10-18 in New York and across the nation. At its inception, it engaged primarily teenage girls through its two-year mentoring program Empowerment Team, as well as a variety of one-day or multi-week personal development sessions. In 2007, it created an additional Youth Development program tailored for boys, called Man UP!. Then in 2008, Hip Hop 4 Life started its first parent session with 25 members, which has now been expanded to 80-90 parents.

Critical Aspects of the Program

I. Individualized Learning

There are three core programs that reach students with different needs and time commitments. The first component is the Empowerment Team, which serves tenth and eleventh grade female students who gain mentorship from the staff and other successful women partners of the organization. Members of this program also receive life skills training and health/nutrition workshops, outings, college and career planning, and the opportunity to take leadership in community service projects and event planning. The success rate of the members getting accepted into colleges is close to 100%. Aside from one who went to vocational school, everyone else graduated from the program and pursued post-secondary education.

The second component is the Youth Development program which includes one-day or multi-week club workshops designed to promote personal development, health awareness, and professional development. These workshops are tailored for diverse groups of students ranging from elementary, middle school, to high school and beyond. The personal development club is called Shades of Beauty for girls, and Man Up! for boys. The self-esteem enrichment and obesity prevention club is called The Rhythm. Lastly, the leadership and post-secondary readiness club is called Follow the Leader. The purpose of having three distinct programs is to provide the most suitable and needed mentorship and guidance to a large diverse student body.

The third component is community outreach, where large conferences and events are organized in order to engage different stakeholders including parents, celebrities, foundations, and school board. For example, the annual New York Youthfest offers empowerment workshops and the

Parent Enrichment Program focus on helping the parents with personal training and life skills development.

II: Internal and External Environments

The development programs seek to tackle the achievement gap within underprivileged communities across the nation. Tamekia asserts that she plans to take Empowerment Team to Africa in 2013. Thus, with the diversity of the students served comes a wide range of socioeconomic environments that the organization has to reconcile with. The overarching themes of the development programs are physical and mental health for at risk and low income youths. Research indicates low income and unstable households have a negative effect on the confidence and self-esteem of the children, who adopt unhealthy eating habits which then further hurts self-esteem, in a vicious cycle. To turn the coin on this vicious cycle, Hip Hop 4 Life engages students in a positive environment where moral support and trust breed, and where students learn to appreciate and love themselves from a new angle.

III: Relevance of Learning

The workshops and mentorship provided by the programs offer invaluable lessons for the youths. Confidence and self-esteem are the foundation of any achievement. Especially for youths growing up in adverse conditions, with self-assurance, they gain the courage and willpower to break the poverty cycle and pursue higher education. Hip hop is integrated into many of the workshops to teach healthy lifestyles, physical activeness, and confidence (“swag”). These life skills also known as emotional intelligence, can benefit the students for a lifetime.

IV: Close Faculty Relationships

Mentors, teachers, parents, and students are in a close-knit community together. The staff engages the youths in classroom setting, but also seek to impact their behavior and lifestyle choices outside the classroom. Recognizing parents' role in a youth's healthy development, the organization officially started offering a program for parents in 2008 to engage them in discussion and workshops about mental and physical wellbeing. Many student graduates go on becoming mentors for the Empowerment Team program and other workshops. The repatriation is a reflection of the close relationships between students and faculty, and the mutual commitment to each other.

V: Resourcefulness

At first glance at the list of Friends of Hip Hop 4 Life and Notable Guest Speakers on the organization's official website, one might be pleasantly surprised by the extent of the celebrity endorsements the organization is able to acquire. Tamekia leverages her past network within the media and entertainment industries to promote Hip Hop 4 Life for it to gain media coverage and a reputation. In an interview, she chronicles the journey of financial sustainability from every cent coming out of her own pocket, to getting the first grant from W.K.Kellogg foundation, and now to funding from donors such as Walt Disney, MTV, Bank of America, and The Department of Education. In the past two years 2011-2012, the non-profit raised \$700,000-\$800,000 dollars. Now, with sound financial resources and immense support from celebrities and media, Hip Hop 4 Life is on track to scale its impact and even expand into Africa.

Part VI: Program Comparisons

In this section, the three hip-hop education programs (High School of Recording Arts, Today’s Future Sound, and Hip Hop 4 Life) are examined side by side in the endeavor of answering the research question “how do hip-hop education programs attain legitimacy.” The chosen programs are at different stages of maturity, and their attained legitimacy fall on different grades along the scale.

The theoretical research on legitimacy discussed in an earlier section underscored the important role of conformity in the attainment of legitimacy. Recall the three aspects of conformity were acceptance by society-at-large, positive media representation, and connections with legitimate others.

Although hip-hop education programs defy traditional and prevalent education pedagogies, it is interesting to see how the above aspects play out in the three chosen programs. The table below summarizes the results in a succinct form, with the details in the following sections.

| | High School of Recording Arts | Today’s Future Sound | Hip-Hop 4 Life |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Approval by Society | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project-based learning • Graduation rate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualized learning • Academic improvements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community engagement • Healthy life skills training |
| Media Coverage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book publication • TV news coverage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-initiated coverage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrity endorsement • TV interviews |
| Inter-organizational Relations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Street” cred • Academic credentials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education institutions • Volunteers • Donors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education institutions • Volunteers • Celebrities |

Approval by Society-at-Large

The academic world is becoming attuned to the usage and incorporation of Hip-Hop elements into different levels of teaching. Respectable foundations including the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Soros Foundation, and the Nathan Cummings Foundation, have contributed to the hip-hop education realm.

In *Hip Hop Genius*, the author Seidel draws parallel between the teaching methodology of High School of Recording Arts and Project-Based Learning (PBL), which is becoming a prevalent method of learning based on the idea of “lines of desire.” A close analogy comes from an architect’s experiment of letting pedestrians walk across a large area without clear demarcations for walking. As time passes, “roads” emerge from the footsteps of the people passing by, and those lines are turned into pavements. Project-Based Learning espouses the idea that every child has unique learning styles and interests. If given a flexible learning environment, the child could chart his or her own learning objectives. This methodology is currently used by the Big Picture Learning, EdVisions, High Tech High, Buck Institute for Education and many more.

The two underlying drivers for the effectiveness of PBL are individualization and relevance. A student charting his own course creates an individualized learning plan, similar to the Personalized Learning Plan adopted by HSRA and workshop selections offered by TFS and HH4L. Research at Buck Institute demonstrates that PBL is especially effect with low-income and at-risk students because they often need special attention and find interest only subjects relevant to their lives, rather than the standardized English and Mathematics curriculum. HSRA has entrenched individualization and relevance of course materials deeply into its unique combination of Adviser mentorships, Personalized Learning Plan, and EXCELLENCE database

tracking system. The graduation rate at HSRA is approximately 60%, a considerable achievement based on the grounds that all of its students were former dropouts. TFS at its core is an individualized empowerment workshop that aims to endow a skillset to the students who can use it for self-expression and for confidence development. Along similar veins, HH4L directly engages with students on subjects that touch every aspect of their lives – mental and physical health – through the use of group-tailored workshops that vary in time commitment and content. The college admission rate for HH4L’s Empowerment Team program is around 100%. The graduation and college admission rates are among the few quantifiable metrics that lend credibility to hip-hop education programs.

For standard students from caring families, school is a fair playfield where everyone takes the same classes and the better students are those who work harder. Although this model is outdated, these students receive individualized care and attention at home from their family, who often support them in pursuit of their interests in sports, musical instruments, or other talents. For at-risk and low-income students, education at a traditional school puts them at a severe disadvantage where disconnect is bred from the very beginning. Because of the lack of care and love at home, and sometimes the reality of domestic and street violence, these students will perform much better when individualized attention is given and the learning materials help them become stronger and more capable in ways they can draw direct links to everyday reality.

Media Coverage

Hip Hop 4 Life greatly benefits from positive media coverage, largely owing to the personal connections of its founder Tamekia within the entertainment industry. Celebrity endorsement may not be seen as the most academically certified means of establishing legitimacy, but it was

definitely a catalyst that helped the program to get financial funding and make an impact large enough to be recognized by the nation.

High School for Recording Arts has also benefited from the media in raising the public awareness about its pedagogy and successful track record. *Hip Hop Genius: Remixing High School Education* by Samuel Steinberg Seidel provides a detailed report on the school's student-faculty relationships, academic programs, and students' post-graduate pursuits. There are numerous reports written on the school that showcase the positive results achieved by the hip-hop-based curricula in turning dropouts into motivated individuals.

Today's Future Sound is constantly striving to gain more recognition by the academic field, and one of the initiatives is increasing its media coverage. The founder Elliot attends many conferences centered on Hip-Hop and education to bring spotlight to TFS. Furthermore, he always has a cameraman for capturing photographic and video footages from the workshops to show the public and raise awareness.

Inter-organizational Relations

Before delving into the discussion, an important distinction between High School of Recording Arts, and its counterparts (Today's Future Sound and Hip Hop 4 Life), needs to be laid out. The former is a brick-and-mortar accredited high school that answers to a different set of stakeholders including the state education board, whereas the latter two are after-school programs that seek partnerships with existing education institutions and primarily answer to funders. In some sense, inter-organizational relations are more critical for HSRA because accreditation is a prerequisite for education institutions. TFS and HH4L are less constrained by governmental bodies and freer

to design a variety of programs that seek to enhance students' performance in school settings and in their lives outside. These two programs face another constraint stemming from their dependency on generous funders, which may not prioritize the various outcomes in the same order. Without accreditation and consequently visible quantifiable results such as graduation rates as direct outcome of the school, TFS and HH4L struggle to provide quantitative measurements of success in order to garner consistent funding for operations and expansion.

The HSRA embraces its community and has both the “street cred” from its founder TC and the “academic cred” from the respected education leaders on its board. Legitimacy allows the school to be chartered and recognized by the education department, and thus helping it to accomplish the mission of getting its students into postsecondary education or jobs. Positive media coverage including the publication *Hip Hop Genius* by Samuel Steinberg Seidel, as well as accolades from various education summits, all contribute to reinforce the school's credibility as an effective educational institution.

Today's Future Sound draws most of its credentials from the Founder's personal academic achievements. With a Doctorate Degree in Psychology and a thesis on the Therapeutic Effects of Hip Hop, Elliot Gann is academically certified in the eyes of the schools, students and parents, and viewed as a rare bridge between hip hop culture and education in the eyes of the professional music producers and DJ's. Elliot serves as the node of connecting the two worlds of under-resourced schools with good-hearted musicians. In an interview, Elliot describes his Doctorate degree as the major credential that has helped him to obtain grants and establish the initial relationships with the schools. Now, Today's Future Sound has built a positive reputation and draws legitimacy from its own existence.

Part VII: Conclusion

Hip Hop Education Programs are undeniably gaining attention in both the academic and public realms. Although hip hop has roots in non-conformity and associations with disrupting the status quo, the institutionalization of hip hop culture into a new education pedagogy is garnering legitimacy over the years as many programs have proven the effectiveness of using hip hop to empower disenfranchised students and converting negative circumstances into positive grounds for learning and breakthroughs. From close examination of the three programs: High School of Recording Arts, Today's Future Sound, and Hip Hop 4 Life, one realizes the importance of the three aspects of conformity in helping hip-hop education programs attain legitimacy. There is an inherent irony in this conclusion since hip hop culture is born out of non-conventionalism. However, the key insight lies in the different areas of contribution by each aspect of conformity. Acceptance by society-at-large is beneficial for all initiatives in this field and hip-hop education is riding forward on the same tide as project-based learning; Media is most effective at garnering celebrity endorsements, increasing funding, and scaling projects such as Hip Hop 4 Life; and associations with credible partnerships are most critical for education programs that aim to provide accreditation or students pursuing graduation. On top of embracing partnerships within the "street" community and the academic world, hip-hop education is gaining additional credibility from the support of the psychology field. Research shows that hip hop breeds a healthy environment for group activities which are influential in the identity formation of adolescents. Particularly for adolescents who have suffered separation, neglect, and domestic violence, they can find a solid sense of belonging and empowerment in the hip hop community, a positive substitute to gangs and crimes. For example, Beats, Rhymes, and Life is an organization founded by Tomas Alvarez in 2004 that uses hip hop therapeutic group activities to revive

positive self-image and motivate healthy pursuits within at-risk adolescents. This connection with psychological benefits could potentially be a major contributor to scaling hip-hop education programs.

Looking into the future, extensive research in discovering and designing an effective system of quantitative measurement metrics is required for hip-hop education to gain a scalable platform and attain legitimacy in the eyes of both the education field and the investor community. If our mission were that no child is left behind in this 21st century march, our educators need to adopt innovative and adaptive pedagogies. If classical music had failed to tune in a large group of colored students in the past, educators now have the option of tuning into hip-hop beats to reignite the spirit for learning.

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