Hip-Hop Citizens

Local Hip-Hop and the Production of Democratic Grassroots Change in Alberta

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INTRODUCTION

"Hip-hop culture," I say assertively to my introductory music class, "radically impacted the music industry by replacing a choice between Tin Pan Alley[1] products with a choice to participate in the making of an urban culture." Each year I reach this moment in the semester full of hope. I share with my students a wide variety of hip-hop styles from old school, gangsta rap, and raggaeton. The range of students' responses to the aforementioned hip-hop manifestations range from indifference to appreciation, but "keepin' it real" is a style that is important to all (Rose, 1994; Williams, 2010, p. 221). This focus on "keepin' it real" emphasizes urban authenticity through a connection to neighborhood. Community solidarity, therefore, is central to this type of hip-hop aesthetics.

But, in the fall of 2010, I began to wonder if this assumption is correct based upon the changing landscape of the music industry and the changing dynamics in the wider society. While it is true that hip-hop emerged during the decline of both the civil rights and Black Power movement and carried these messages forward, recently hip-hop has become "co-opted by the capitalistic, market-driven forces in society"(Williams, 2010, p. 221). Hip-hop has, in other words, become a global music commodity (Becker, Crawford, & Miller, 2002; Forman, 2000; Gilroy, 1993; Henderson, 1996; Ibrahim, 1999; Mitchell, 2001; Rose, 1994; Schloss, 2009) and

is "dominated by commercialized, hegemonic popular culture" (Giroux, 2004; Williams, 2010). Therefore, I wanted to unearth whether there remains elements of hip-hop culture that have been able to resist the forces of Tin Pan Alley commoditization.

While I was mulling over this question, I became involved in an urban revitalization project in Edmonton, the capital city of oil-rich Alberta. The 118 Avenue neighborhood is an older community in Edmonton which has, because of rising crime, been labeled "distressed." Distressed, of course, is a euphemism for a crime-ridden community lost to drugs and prostitution. But "distressed" communities also have lower real estate costs. In an expensive city like Edmonton, this often proves to be an important draw for artists. As an ethnomusicologist of popular music interested in urban music ecology, I was concerned about the cultural-artistic ecology of this community in the throes of gentrification. Unfortunately, I had little knowledge of the neighborhood; therefore, I contacted a few colleagues who are involved in the arts and were involved in projects in this area. Together we set up a series of meetings with young artists and presenters in the area.

The purpose of this chapter is to capture my involvement with the young artists and presenters who are involved in emancipatory forms of hip-hop in Edmonton. The first part of the chapter documents how I became connected with the research partners in this project and an overview of some of the obstacles inhibiting the hip-hop community in Edmonton and impoverished sections of Edmonton. Next, I highlight how we became aware of how neoliberalism is responsible for inhibiting the development of the hip-hop scene in Edmonton as well as the development of 118 Ave. Third, I flesh out how the research team formulated a research methodology and pedagogy to revitalize the hip-hop scene in Edmonton and our urban community itself. Finally, I suggest how this project impacted the individual members of the research team, the hip-hop community, and this urban context. At the same time, I also highlight some of the obstacles of sustaining a cultural ecology that has the potential to raise critical awareness, inside and outside of the hip-hop world, of what causes oppression and how to dismantle it.

THE 118 AVE. MEETINGS AND HIP-HOP ECOLOGY

In the fall of 2010, I attended a first meeting with a group who would become my research partners. It was arranged at a 118 Avenue theater aptly named the Avenue Theatre. The theater had recently come under the ownership of a few young entrepreneurs who were working to create a not-for-profit foundation to support the theater. Andrew, one of the owners, agreed to host this first meeting. I arrived to a cozy circle of chairs on the old spacious stage. Andrew had only recently reconverted the

theater back from the punk skate park it had been. "Underneath this stage," he said, "is the main bowl for the skaters!"

Awkwardly, Megan, Beth, KazOmega, Omar (aka AOK), Andrew, my wife Claire and I sat looking at each other. Megan and Beth, friends, colleagues, and up-and-coming promoters soon made the introductions. I was introduced to Kaz and Omar, two local and notable hip-hop performers and promoters. I began explaining my concern with the 118 Ave. revitalization project—namely, whether it was created by the business elite to further exploit impoverished residents in Edmonton. Since I had only been in Edmonton for a few years—all of those spent at the university completing my PhD—I knew little of the community. It was my hope that these long-time and well-connected promoters could help me learn about the cultural community of 118 Ave.

For the next three hours Kaz and Omar explained the history of 118 Ave. as well as the connections between *the Ave* and the local hip-hop scene. They explained that their major yearly festival, Hip-Hop in the Park, had developed in this neighborhood and that this area continues to be an important center of local hip-hop culture. This festival, they explained, had been held yearly since 2008 on the third weekend of May to celebrate Hip-Hop Appreciation Week. This week was founded by KRS-One's Temple of Hip Hop and "marks the anniversary of when Hip-Hop became an official culture sanctioned by the United Nations."[2] The Hip-Hop Declaration of Peace encourages the recognition of hip-hop "kulture" as:

> an international culture of peace and prosperity. It is also a set of principles which advise all Hip-Hoppers on how to sustain the peaceful character of Hip Hop Kulture and to form worldwide peace. Additionally this declaration is meant to show Hip-Hop as a positive phenomenon which has nothing in common with the negative image of Hip Hop as something that corrupts young people and encourages them to break the law.[3]

During the conversation with Kaz and Omar, it became clear to me that hip-hop culture was playing an important role in community development on the Ave. but the hip-hoppers were, at the same time, engaged in an ongoing revitalization struggle themselves. While hip-hop could be used as a vehicle to aid in a community-conscious revitalization of 118 Ave., the hip-hop community was also struggling to articulate their own cultural revitalization. All of us felt that both revitalization projects could, and perhaps should, occur simultaneously. The question however is how to make this happen. What followed was a series of conversations with Kaz and Omar and a third participant, another key local hip-hop artist, college radio DJ, and educator, Marlon.

Together the four of us began to explore the struggle hip-hop musicians were having locally. Hip-hop had been introduced to Edmonton in the 1980s and, like many other places around the world, it flourished. It seemed that each time it flour-

ished, the most notable participants, the mature artists around which younger artists, audiences, and fledgling industry gathered, left the city for a larger urban center. In very few cases, they returned.

To some extent, this was to be expected. The vibrancy of the hip-hop scene in Edmonton paled in comparison to other urban centers, such as Los Angeles and New York City. The changing dynamic of the hip-hop scene made us recognize that our discussions were predicated on looking at hip-hop as a type of ecology. Artists, audiences, and industry were all interrelated and relied upon each other to develop. Howard Becker called this ecology an *artworld* (1982). The normal functioning of a music artworld produces a dense network of interrelations that Christopher Small called *musicking* and describes as:

> Members of a certain social group at a particular point in its history are using sounds that have been brought into certain kinds of relationships with one another as the focus for a ceremony in which the values—which is to say, the concepts of what constitute right relationship—of that group are explored, affirmed, and celebrated. (1998, p. 183)

I wish to add Becker's *artworld*, which focuses on production, to Small's *musicking*, which focuses on performance, to provide a larger view of the continuity between art and life that we call hip-hop culture. Hip-hop culture is not an art piece upon which we can gaze at a safe distance and evaluate. Hip-hop culture is a living cultural ecology within which we become enmeshed as we participate. This view of art is difficult to describe. The philosopher of environmental aesthetics, Arnold Berleant, argues: "Joining with continuity and engagement is the new dynamic character of art, shifting the deceptively static condition of art to a vital, almost disquietingly active role" (1992, p. 61). Recognizing cultural ecology requires a shift in perspective from art-as-an-object to art-as-culture-in-environment. And as in any ecology, health is based upon the health of the entire system. Viewing Edmonton hip-hop as an urban cultural ecology provides a frame to evaluate the fluxes and changes in the health of the ecology that the members have experienced.

The most recent flourishing occurred in the wake of Eminem's *8 Mile* (2002). Kaz and Omar both got involved in hip-hop because of the film. They began looking for underground hip-hop battles. They soon found a few participants to take part in these types of cultural exchanges and helped to create many others. They realized that they were involved in creating the culture they had been looking for. Their participation made them the hip-hoppers they wanted to become.

The hip-hop world has changed since the 2002 release of *8 Mile*. For instance, various technologies impact how hip-hop is produced and consumed, while large-scale business leaders continue to limit the expression of hip-hop through their packaging of what they believe will spark consumers to buy hip-hop-related products

(e.g., CDs, videos, zines, concert tickets, clothing, and other projects and services). Therefore, I questioned whether hip-hop battles and community performances would resonate with youth who were new to the world of hip-hop or whether they would still appeal to people who were attracted to hip-hop by *8 Mile*.

I found that more and more hip-hop intellectuals are increasingly staying at home making mixed tapes and YouTube music videos. Kaz is fond of telling a story about a local would-have-been hip-hopper who developed some prominence following the release of one of these videos. This rapper was encouraged to finally perform live. Immediately following his first performance attempt, he walked off the stage, vomited, and never performed again. Kaz, Omar, and Marlon all agreed that most of the young people getting involved in hip-hop locally are staying at home and not getting involved in the culture of hip-hop. Or perhaps, they are looking at hip-hop as a product and not as a culture.

After some additional meetings, it became clear to us that both the 118 Ave. and Edmonton's hip-hop culture were suffering from forms of cultural erosion. We reasoned that a healthy economy, community, and art practice all required a healthy community base. The question was, however, what was the larger force causing the erosion? We guessed that perhaps the most obvious culprit, hinted at in the 7th Principle of the Hip-Hop Declaration of Peace,[4] was neoliberalism.

NEOLIBERALISM AND CULTURAL EROSION

In a world increasingly reduced to budget lines, the social significance of the arts,[5] and its civic potentialities, are generally overlooked and undervalued. Financial reductionism is not new.[6] The transformation from political economy to economics in the late nineteenth century, and its recent cultural elevation, is only one indicator, although significant, of a larger process of the financialization of daily life.[7] More recent, neoliberalism has deepened this transformation.[8] Increasingly, public policy decisions are made on the basis of quantifiable data, efficiency, and profitability (Lacher, 2006, p. 153) while the "state and the arts had been transformed from a discourse on tastes and morality to one of economic rationalism and political collusion" (Kapferer, 2008, p. 3).

A survey of popular music textbooks supports the hypothesis of a growing acceptance of neoliberal evaluation of popular music. The discussion is limited to a history of successfully produced popular music products created by an industry for consumption. Music, in many cases, has been reduced to music as commodity. Popular music courses have become the canonization of the popular music industry. There is rarely a focus on courses that critically engage the students in the evaluation of the production of cultural music in a culture of cultural businesses.

Henry Giroux warns that "in the society of consumers no one can become a subject without first turning into a commodity" (Giroux, 2009, p. 31). It is this subject, the very one that is produced for sale by the popular music industry, that targets young people to "deal with their lack of self-confidence, powerlessness, and the endless indignities heaped upon them in a consumer society" (p. 59). Producing subjects for the popular music industry is big business. There are many specialists employed who are responsible for unearthing how to manufacture pop culture to young people. For instance, they provide ready-made song lists to overworked instructors, who use them as an easy solution to this problem. It certainly is much less complex than the "neuromarketing which uses magnetic resonance images (MRI) to map brain patterns and reveal how consumers respond to advertisements or products" (p. 59). It is within this ecology of influence that much popular music appreciation is now nested.

TALKING COMMUNITY HIP-HOP

Kaz, Omar, Marlon, and I, now with the awareness that we were confronting not just something peculiar to Edmonton but a much larger cultural shift toward neoliberalism, set out to develop a collaborative approach to research. Since, from our perspective, neoliberalism is a philosophy of individualism and extreme market freedom, our confrontation may begin with the opposite—a focus on community and a resistance to reducing our discussions to market value alone. From here, we began creating a larger circle of local hip-hop artists, presenters, and educators to share our experiences with neoliberalism. We realized that it was impossible to confront neoliberalism by generating one town hall meeting. We tried to address other issues, which were personal rather than systemic in nature, in this fashion on a few other occasions, but we found little success in this approach. If this was going to be effective to confront the dominant ideological force impacting our lives, we determined that we needed to build upon a methodological foundation.

LEARNING TOGETHER IN A CULTURE CIRCLE

Setting up the culture circle was very easy. I met again with Kaz, Omar, and Marlon and explained the idea of the circle very basically. They had, in the meantime, organized a Facebook group and began to invite participants. Our hip-hop culture circle marked the first time hip-hop educators in Edmonton sat together and discussed their projects, approaches, and histories. Everyone in the room was a recognized leader in the hip-hop community and was invited by another member of the group. The energy was very high as everyone introduced themselves and their projects. This

was a new experience for everyone. Hip-hop musicians here, as elsewhere, are provided very little organized support from professional music organizations or local urban radio stations. The desire to "speak back" provoked many who gathered in our culture circle to share their experiences with neoliberalism and hip-hop.

Freire, as reported by Dee Williams, began to teach literacy—not by teaching reading and writing first—by bringing community members together to "identify issues that impacted their daily lives" (Williams, 2009, p. 4). This approach to group discourse can "be used as a tool to problematise existing social relations and help move us towards a more democratic society. It creates a liberatory space where participants can question the nature of social reality and construct their own" (p. 11). By facilitating this culture circle, I hoped for two outcomes. First, I hoped that as a group we, as hip-hop educators, would being to discover our shared interests and responses to hip-hop's (neoliberal) public pedagogy that was eroding participation in local hip-hop culture. Second, I was hoping to find a dialogically oriented research methodology to revitalize the hip-hop community and the urban community.

CONSCIENTIZAÇÃO:[9] APPLICATION AND FINDINGS OF THE CULTURE CIRCLE

In Freire's *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1974/2010), he makes the distinction between naïve consciousness and critical consciousness. Naïve consciousness "simply apprehends facts and attributes them a superior power by which it is controlled and to which it must therefore submit . . . resigned to the impossibility of resisting the power of facts" (p. 39). Critical consciousness, on the other hand, "is integrated with reality" (p. 39). To be integrated into reality means to have a dialogical relationship with the production of reality. This stance toward reality puts the power to construct one's own réality directly within her or his power. The act of confronting reality will lead, Freire asserts, to the development of standoff between the way things are and the way they could be. It will subsequently lead to a standoff between the powers that construct reality in their image and the image of the world of the oppressed. The power of critical awareness emerges when the oppressed realize they have the power to change their reality. This awareness leads to the transformation of the oppressed into a conscious community willing to work together with a clear focus on what needs to be done to make their community better.

THE CULTURE CIRCLE: TOWARD CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

I was interested to see if the culture circle could be used in Edmonton's hip-hop community. I was hoping that this strategy could be useful in our contemporary urban

society, but I had no reason to believe that critical transformation would occur in this context. I was skeptical a critical conversation could invoke a project of humanization through a "conscious action to transform the world" (Freire, 2010, p. 81).

The Culture Circle as a Situation

It is, indeed, toward world transformation that Freire encourages. It is a humble revolution built upon very small steps. Freire presented each culture circle as a "situation." The goal was not to show people that they are not powerful, that would not be helpful at all. It would only add to the already oppressive feeling of powerlessness that is already engendered through public pedagogy. The "situations" at hand would become the social levers to aid in the development of the participants' conscientization, or the becoming of critical consciousness. Therefore, I believed our culture circle should begin with a "situation" with which we could all contribute. I decided to begin with a discussion about learning hip-hop and how that has changed over the last few artistic generations.

The response to this opening situation led us into a conversation about Edmonton hip-hop specifically. Hip-hop artists in Edmonton have developed a community-based dialogic and dialectical approach to hip-hop. This experience, like Freire's *pedagogy of the oppressed*, has developed from the confrontation local creative workers experience with the products of global music industries. Community-based urban artists are people who have turned to art's expressive language out of necessity, and often to hip-hop by intuition and opportunity. Hip-hop was felt to be valuable as a language and expression because it celebrates individuality without the expense of losing community. It does so by providing an approach to voice that is historically oppositional and emotionally potent. It is the intuition that hip-hop may provide a remedy to feelings of alienation central to the popular music industry. Titi, a spoken-word artist, summed it up as follows: "I didn't know what it was I was doing or even looking for. But the moment your intuition follows something and it collides with your experiences . . . you start your own poetry and use your own voice." Everyone in the circle could resonate with Titi characterization of their emergence as artists and educators.

Hip-hop in Edmonton is inseparable from both community development and global capital. The relationship between community hip-hop and the mediated product of hip-hop is sophisticated and dialectical. The popular music industry produces cultural products that are widely circulated. Many of the men in the group, like Kaz and Omar had earlier shared, were turned on to hip-hop by *8 Mile*. The music industry, building upon already existent community art practices, takes and distributes hip-hop globally. Young people watch Eminem and recognized his alienation and the use of his talents as a way to rise up out of a violent world. They

could resonate with this strategy and may feel that they could use their talents to rise up out of their situation.

However, some of these young people also view *8 Mile* as product meant to inculcate the masses to support the neoliberal agenda. They learned to separate the product of Eminem from the social message that makes *8 Mile* socially significant. Instead of buying into the Eminem liberation mythology by purchasing liberation oriented products—itself a trap of global capitalism—some chose to emulate the artist behind the product. This emerged as the first lesson of street pedagogy: *become an artist not a copy of a product.*

Kaz and Omar, who were both first turned onto hip-hop by Eminem, developed themselves as artists, not as copies of a product. They began to work to emulate Eminem's battle style from the film, while concomitantly looking for the underground battle scene. Kaz is fond of remembering that "in my first rap battle I took on this great big Cree rapper and made fun of his widow's peak.…I thought he was going to kill me afterwards. We still laugh about that. And that's the day I met Omar (aka: AOK)." Real social networks were organized around what was learned from the movies.

Max, a cultural worker from a hip-hop education program called iHuman, said, "We've all heard about the white kid in the suburb that gets turned onto hip-hop. Well that's me. I felt like I was on the outside looking in. I wanted to be inside that culture so I came looking for it. I didn't want to be outside anymore." Max identified with a vibrant urban culture on TV that he decided he wanted to join. He began looking downtown to find that community.
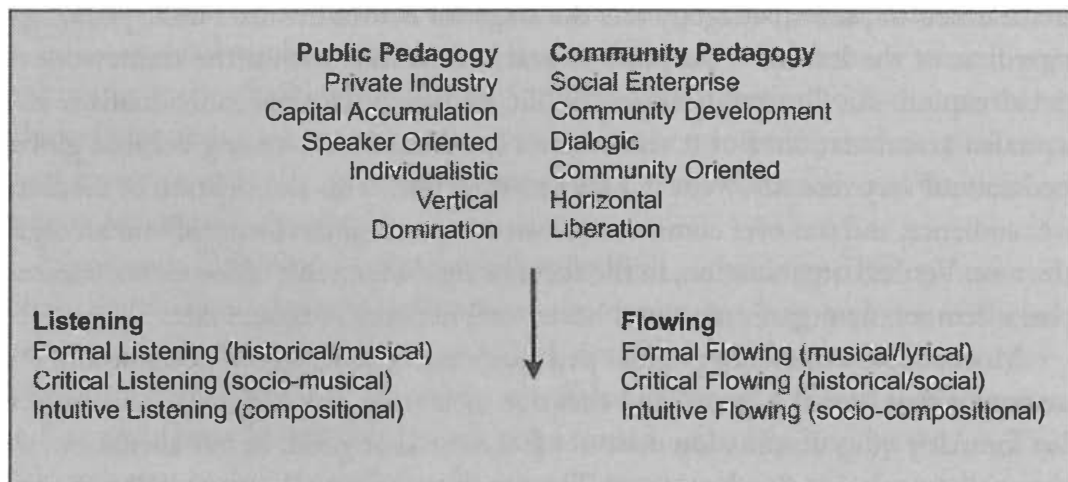
Awareness of "I Am Hip-Hop, We Are Hip-Hop"

Becoming aware of the social significance of an urban music community through the channels of public pedagogy sets the stage for contradiction. Public pedagogy, regardless of the lessons it purports to teach, functions within the framework of global capital. As illustrated above, public pedagogy teaches individualism and capitalist accumulation. But it also teaches speaking over listening because global media, until very recently, went in only one direction. This domination of medium over audience, and star over community, instructs youth about forms of human organization. Vertical organization, in the form of rigid hierarchy, becomes normalized where democratic organization and horizontal networks become rare.

Most people experience popular pedagogy as the pedagogy of domination. We are taught that "greed is good" and that our social role is to dominate and collect. But for many of us domination does not feel natural or good. In our alienation, we recognize ourselves in the dominated. The apparatus of capital accumulation in popular culture have recognized this and have incorporated products for the dominated groups as well as the dominant social actors. *8 Mile* is just one example.

In our culture circle we recognized that by emulating Tupac/Notorious/ Eminem/Snoop, we have the potential to developed technical skills for hip-hop. However, our contention ran into serious contradiction. We recognized that is was improbable for us to move from the underground to above ground—to follow Tupac/Notorious/Eminem/Snoop into the spotlight in the hip-hop world. Therefore, we realized that emulating hip-hop leaders is not a fruitful way to develop as artists. Our development must take place locally if we are to have healthy hip-hop ecology.

For women, the contradiction is doubled because there are few artistic role models. Megan, a local MC and workshop facilitator, said that "rap is empowerment" but she had to find her own way. She learned that "hip-hop doesn't tell you to stay in your clique it's about the medicine of hip-hop culture. It's about how to treat people." To achieve this aim, she had to overcome the sexism and male exceptionalism of hip-hop. Through this dialogue, the group realized that women must work with men to create a balanced cultural ecology, and men must work to help women MCs play an integral role in this culture.

Overcoming the image of socially degenerative image of hip-hop, learned from the channels of public pedagogy, provided local hip-hop artists their first experience of *Conscientização*. This helped the artists identify a *product-oriented* vision of hip-hop culture and move to embrace a *life-oriented* hip-hop. Hip-hop as community pedagogy became much more than learning the techniques of rapping; rather, it became thinking about life differently. Local hip-hop's community-oriented pedagogy provided a dialogic approach to learning in community. This was the second lesson of our culture circle: *"I am hip-hop, I am my message, and hip-hop is my culture. We are hip-hop."*

Public Pedagogy	**Community Pedagogy**
Private Industry	Social Enterprise
Capital Accumulation	Community Development
Speaker Oriented	Dialogic
Individualistic	Community Oriented
Vertical	Horizontal
Domination	Liberation

Listening	**Flowing**
Formal Listening (historical/musical)	Formal Flowing (musical/lyrical)
Critical Listening (socio-musical)	Critical Flowing (historical/social)
Intuitive Listening (compositional)	Intuitive Flowing (socio-compositional)

Listening and Flowing Rubrics

The third lesson extended our confrontation with public pedagogy. This lesson is built upon the first two (beyond the product, and we are hip-hop) and goes further to incorporate some directions for community hip-hop pedagogy. There are six skills that the research team identified that must be part of a socially generative hip-hop pedagogy. In community pedagogy, these skills are often learned through a mix of trial-and-error and peer support. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to unpack these skills in any great detail or attempt an application to formal music pedagogy. Therefore, the remainder of this paper will provide a breakdown of how these *listening and flowing* skills are developed and how they work together in the production of local hip-hop.

Listening and *flowing* are the two parts of this community's hip-hop pedagogical method. These two components, when fully developed, are experienced as a single competency. However, the development of most of these skills happens in partial isolation. For instance, each of these two main components can be broken down into three parts: formal, critical, and intuitive. In both cases, the level of abstraction moves from the least abstract (formal) to the most abstract (intuitive). Listening skills develop over time and through practice. *Formal listening* happens when listening to albums and singles is guided by community discussion. These discussions, the dialogic aspects of listening, help community members associate performers with styles and sonic textures. Much more research needs to be undertaken to understand this process.

Critical listening maps styles and sonic textures onto social discussions. The sound of Chuck D's delivery, for instance, says just as much as his rhymes. The development of critical listening is an extension of formal listening that often remains preverbal and intuitive. Through social convention, we come to understand and associate textural sounds with sociopolitical ideas and identities.

Developing a palette of these sound-meanings is a next step in the development of listening. This process is also dialogic and happens within style communities[10] and goes a long way to explain the connection between sound and politics. In the learning process, these associations are explicit. Errors are pointed out and mistakes or errors in judgment are often noticed and discussed. The division between novice and skilled performers is evident in how completely internalized the connections are between levels and how originally they can be demonstrated in their art. The demonstration stage I call *intuitive listening*.

Intuitive listening is a compositional style of listening that is very active. It is a type of *reading of sound* that skilled listeners engage in. It is this process that makes it possible to have sophisticated listeners engage with sophisticated messages.

Although I call this type of listening compositional, I do not mean to imply that only people who can compose music have this ability. In fact, before someone can begin to compose music, they must develop this type of listening. Only then can they move on to *flowing*.

In this community-oriented pedagogy, *flowing* represented the making of hip-hop. Once the first two stages of listening have been developed, the first stage of flowing has already begun. *Formal flowing* happens when one is beginning to understand the building blocks of rhyme, rhythm, and meter that are central to hip-hop. *Critical flowing*, the next step, happens in a much more abstract and temporal way. Critical flowing makes use of the sociomusical and historical-musical palette developed in the first two listening components and draws out, compositionally, sound and lyrical codes and presents them in new ways. Critical flowing is a level of complexity above formal flowing as it requires the composer to function at multiple dimensions at the same time.

The final stage of the community pedagogical process is *intuitive flowing*. As suggested in the word *intuitive*, all of the other five tasks have been mastered and internalized before the artist functions as a community elder and leader. I do not want to try to pin this skill down because it is very rich, complex, and difficult. It is the most, and perhaps only, seemingly metaphysical aspect of the hip-hop pedagogy. A number of culture circle members referred to it as "intuition" or to hip-hop as "the eternal creative spirit," or "the special human intelligence that you can't teach." It was generally agreed that the best art, including hip-hop, illustrates a distinct voice through the representation of life.

CONCLUSION: CREATING HEALTHY URBAN CULTURE ECOLOGIES

The first culture circle ended with the realization that with the next *situation* the community needs to address how they think about their larger culture. A great emphasis was placed on becoming a good performer; however, there was thought put into developing the audience and industry aspects of the culture. These are the remaining social ingredients needed to develop a healthy ecology. The culture circle provided the context for this community to recognize that hip-hop pedagogy has been targeted primarily to "distressed" communities. Hip-hop education programs have been developed to help youth who are considered vulnerable because of their proximity to crime or because of their class or immigration status. Yet, little has been done to educate youth generally. We realized collectively that much more work needs to be done to educate the general public about how hip-hop propagates prosocial values and relationships as well as to dispel the mythologies of violence and misogyny that the mainstream music industry associates with urban

youth and the hip-hop world. Further, we also need to engage in a larger discussion of the skills required of hip-hop performers *and* listeners. Too often the skills of listeners are overlooked and left underdeveloped. The impact of this omission is significant. Without developing listener skills, an important aspect of the ecology is undermined. The popular media does a great job at listener education. Our circle has decided that it is time for us to do the same. This means that we will have to develop partnerships with local music educators in order to work out ways to help develop listener-oriented hip-hop education for the youth of our city.

Focusing on hip-hop ecology provided a new framework to discuss the different yet equal roles that need to be played in order to have a healthy and productive ecology. In this way our culture circle in Edmonton remains very rich and though provoking. We are beginning to understand the complexity of social and economic revitalization.

Cultivating a cultural ecology is difficult work. It takes a great amount of time, dedication, and patience to develop the questions that need to be asked and the skills to answer them, once posed. We have also realized that we need to continue to develop diverse relationships within the circle itself. Not everyone is interested in developing a pedagogical program for the general public. Some participants are only interested in training new rappers. Other participants want to work with the local government to improve the conditions of the community, while others believe private initiatives have the power to eliminate the forces responsible for the oppression of most global youth at today's historical juncture.

All of these things need to be valued. We are realizing that there is no one solution to revitalizing our ecology, whether it is local hip-hop or a neighborhood. The solution is to develop a rich and complex cultural ecology that values egalitarian and community-minded participation whatever that may look like. Perhaps, this is our first real lesson in community revitalization.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are some ways in which educators confront debilitating representations of the hip-hop world with their students?
2. How can disaffected communities across the globe develop a cultural ecology that values egalitarian and community-minded participation?
3. Now that youth are often staying at home and not getting involved in the culture of hip-hop, how should educators approach hip-hop in their classrooms?

NOTES

1. Tin Pan Alley was the music-publishing center of New York City during the early twentieth century. The name is now synonymous with the centralization of music industry practices and the music *product* that it famously developed. It changed the relationship that composers had with their craft and created a Fordist approach to music products.
2. For more information please see the About page at the Hip Hop in the Park Web site, http://hiphopinthepark.ca/home/about/. Accessed June 22, 2011.
3. For more information please see The Hip-Hop Declaration of Peace online at http://www.declaration-of-peace.com/en. Accessed June 22, 2011.
4. The 7th principle reads: "The essence of Hip-hop is beyond entertainment: The elements of Hip-hop Kulture may be traded for money, honor, power, respect, food, shelter, information and other resources; however, Hip-hop and its culture cannot be bought, nor is it for sale. It cannot be transferred or exchanged by or to anyone for any compensation at any time or at any place. Hip-hop is the priceless principle of our self-empowerment. Hip-hop is not a product."
5. John Dewey in *Art as Experience* (1934) wrote: "The acknowledged community of form in different arts carries with it by implication a corresponding community of substance" (p. 199).
6. The erosion of liberal values is not new. Historians have noted the beginning of this process in the depression of the 1870s that "undermined or destroyed the foundations of mid-nineteenth-century liberalism which appeared to have been so firmly established" (Hobsbawm, 1975, p. 63).
7. Randy Martin suggested that a turn toward financialization provides "paths to action with definable results that clearly distinguish good from bad in measurable terms of success and failure" (2002, p. 10).
8. David Harvey has argued that the emergence of the neoliberal state tended to favor "strong individual private property rights, the rule of law, and the institutions of freely functioning markets and free trade. These are the institutional arrangements considered essential to guarantee individual freedoms" (Harvey, 2005, p. 64). Harvey's discussion of the history of neoliberalism suggests that free market economics became synonymous with the freedom liberalism promised. It is, paradoxically, the freedom movements of the 1960s and 1970s that set the stage for market-driven decision making as an expression of freedom itself. This type of freedom, for Harvey, is a regressive version that has lost social and civic underpinnings. Bill Dunn echoes this: "Individualism is at once the great achievement and great limitation of liberalism. In the name of freedom it provides an enduring challenge to totalitarianism, past and present. . . . In positing freedom against collective oppression it denies the possibility or desirability of conscious, collective decision making" (2009, p.13).
9. In Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he wrote that "the conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own *conscientização*" (1979/1993, p. 49). *Conscientização*, does not have a direct translation into English but has been variously translated as *critical consciousness* or *consciousness raising*, or *to become conscious*. Each of these translations refers to a process of developing a critical awareness of one's own dispossession by engaging in dialogue that focuses on the contradictions experienced in one's own life.
10. A style community is a local group that shares aesthetic approaches. In a mediatized society, like ours, a style community may include members with whom they do not actually have any direct contact.

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