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Hip Hop and Activism

Bridging Boundaries and Healing Through Hip Hop Pedagogy

KAI ALEXIS SMITH

Documented in *Dreamer's Ally Network: Cal Poly Pomona*, as of 2016, there were 550 Dream Act students at Cal Poly Pomona and that number has only grown. Cal Poly Pomona's campus is also diverse by ethnicity, cultures, creed, and economics. Before the 2016 presidential election, student morale declined significantly. Students became concerned about their families and Dream Act status. The change was visceral. A number of faculty witnessed this change when a cohort arrived in Summer 2016. Before, the campus was lively and vibrant. However once fall/winter quarter 2016 came, the atmosphere became somber and sad. Student's anxiety levels peaked. To address this issue, Senior Assistant Librarian Kai Alexis Smith thought about harnessing the energy and creativity of a culture that many students across all the spectrums of diverse backgrounds were familiar with—hip hop. She planned the first annual *Hip Hop and Activism* series to spark new ideas, empower students and engage them in conversations around topics through the popular culture of hip hop.

The *Hip Hop and Activism* series was conducted in partnership with the African American Center. Additional collaborators included the Political Science department, Ethnic and Women's Studies department (EWS), faculty from the History department, Human Resources, and the campus hip hop student club also participated. Five events in the month of February 2016 were organized centering hip hop. Events featured discussions with faculty and students presenting on police brutality, hip hop, activism, and films such as *Slingshot Hip Hop* and *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*. After every event, a moderator (usually a faculty member) facilitated conversations that included unpacking history, concepts and ideas around race, identity, politics, policing, and socioeconomics in the United States, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Middle East. Many times, conversations went over the allotted time. These events and discussions often resulted in students recommending practical ways to be politically active in their lives. Some students suggested attending protests, creating and editing Wikipedia pages for marginalized groups of people, getting involved with local community activism in their neighborhood, and even seeking out more socially conscious hip hop artists. In addition, Smith created an online resource guide (<http://libguides.library.cpp.edu/hiphopandact>)

as a companion to the series of events with recommended readings and live Twitter streams from students that were live-tweeting at the events.

The series included the following:

2/7 and 2/21, 12–2 p.m.

2 panel discussions led by faculty on the topics of police brutality and hip hop and activism

2/9 and 2/15, starting at 12 p.m.

2 films with discussions after the screening with faculty:

Film 1: *Hip Hop Beyond Rhyme and Beats*

Film 2: *Slingshot Hip Hop*

2/28, 12–1 p.m.

Spoken word performance by student group 4 Elements Hip Hop Organization

Context

Hip Hop is a culture rooted in bringing together neighborhoods and communities that started in the Bronx, New York, in the 1970s. Hip Hop is composed of four elements: MCing, DJing, breakdancing, and graffiti. It started as an outlet for economically disenfranchised youth in the Bronx as a means for social and political commentary. It has become a global movement; youth across the world have adapted hip hop culture to comment on both local and national oppressive issues and to bring about change.

According to Derrick J. Jenkins, Sr. (2012, 77) in *Hip Hop Activism in Education*, hip hop pedagogy

refers to the style of teaching implemented by a teacher and a strategic effort by that teacher to raise the “critical consciousness” and “cultural awareness” through a social justice lens or perspective [Stovall, 2006]. Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy diverges slightly by focusing primarily on marginalized groups, as a school process for blacks, Latino, those in high poverty school environments and even teachers seek empowerment through the educational process. Gosa & Fields [2010] postulate that Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy serves three distinct functions within a curricula of empowerment: development of critical thinking within students, encouragement of the infusion of non-traditional texts and teaching tools for critique and lastly, as an emancipatory tool for connecting social ill to larger structures of oppression.

A hip hop-themed conference addressing social justice issues is not a new idea. Scholars such as Peter C. Murrell proposed to consider different types of educational approaches to reengage disenfranchised groups that integrate popular culture and as Jenkins, Sr., writes “culturally responsive pedagogies” (2002, 1). Addressing the experiences and worldview of students enhances learning and they are more likely to engage “in civil society in ways that hold schools, institutions, and politicians accountable to their interests,” according to Shawn Ginwright and Julio Cammarota (2011, 15). Universities across the United States have built upon these pedagogies through hip hop conferences to frame discussions around topics related to oppression, social construction of race, activism, misogyny, and police brutality as far back as the early 2000s. Ivy league institutions like Dartmouth in 2004 and University of Wisconsin Madison in 2017 have hosted hip hop conferences to frame discussions for their predominantly white student bodies around these important issues. Universities such as Georgia State, Virginia Tech,

Hampton, Southern Connecticut State, California University of Pennsylvania, among others, have hosted these conferences. Through discussions in hip hop conferences, participants can work towards dismantling stereotypes and spark conversations around controversial topics in a safe environment. These conferences can also help change preconceived notions and educate people about racism and the true social justice roots of the culture as well as the problems hip hop culture struggles with.

Details

Planning for the *Hip Hop and Activism* series started in October 2016. The series occurred in February 2017 during Black History Month since hip hop culture’s origins came out of black and Latino communities. Also, it was important to organize it soon after the 2016 presidential election.

Internal and External Partners

The idea for the *Hip Hop and Activism* series stemmed from a conversation Smith had with the coordinator of the African American Center. Smith just started her position in the library at Cal Poly Pomona and was trying to get to know campus contacts. The coordinator had experience booking local hip hop and spoken word artists on campus and was interested in a possible collaboration with another hip hop-themed event. She also informed Smith that there was a hip hop student group on campus called 4 Elements Hip Hop Organization. Smith thought about working with the cultural centers and faculty partners in her subject areas in the library for an event, but she needed to get library leaders on board. This initial conversation led to more opportunities for discussion with potential allies on campus. Smith pitched the idea to the Head of Public Services and the special events coordinator in the library. While the idea was ambitious, it was welcomed, but there were concerns about the short time frame to plan, since planning began just three months before the series’ projected start date and the budget was another matter. While the series had no separate budget, the special events coordinator provided lunch and snack for a few events with support from the dean of the University Library. Smith reached out to the African American Center Coordinator and they were able to provide snacks and a lunch for a few other events in the series.

Tips:

- Start planning at least six to eight months in advance. This provides adequate time to prepare a presentation to the library dean, director or board and develop a budget to arrange for funding.
- If you ask for funding before the start of a new fiscal year, it can be budgeted in for the next year.
- This lead time is also essential to arrange for guest speakers, room reservations, coaching; it provides speakers time to prepare their presentations among other logistics.

Logistics

In November 2016, Smith worked with an informal team which included a faculty member from the EWS, the African American Center Coordinator, and the University Library's special events coordinator. In an initial meeting, a project timeline was laid out. Important "to do" items were outlined such as determining the number of events, organizing panels, finalizing panel discussion topics, selecting the films for viewing, drafting a list of student groups for outreach, and identifying faculty on campus who could speak about hip hop and select a topic as well as guide a discussion after a film.

Within a few weeks, panel discussion topics were narrowed down and faculty were contacted. Smith booked the rooms in the library for the panel discussions and for the film viewings two months in advance. The group settled on two panel discussions that ran two hours long, two films, and two student-led events/performances. Working with the EWS faculty member became instrumental in the formation of panels. Her expertise in African American culture made her perfect to moderate discussions and speak on panels. In addition, the EWS department was instrumental in locating former Cal Poly Pomona alumni to moderate and co-present with faculty.

In order to reach peak attendance, events had to be scheduled during a time when students could participate. The films were scheduled during an open hour on campus when students didn't have classes, 12–1 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays. To get a student to come in during this time, Smith needed to provide food. Students will also attend events if faculty require it. Smith worked with faculty willing to have their students come to the panel discussion during class time. This situation was ideal because of the commuter nature of the student body at Cal Poly Pomona.

Tips:

- For academic or special librarians, while events in the series are public, it's best to plan them with faculty cooperation since it guarantees a core attendance.
- For public librarians and special librarians, think about the best time by considering the day of the week and time of days you get attendance. Then plan around that time frame. Try to partner with a organization or group in the community to increase attendance.

Student Groups

Because it was so important to have students involved, Smith reached out to EWS department faculty to recommend a student with public speaking experience. Faculty recommended a few alumni in the area and Smith reached out to them inquiring of their interest in participating. One student was interested and Smith spoke with her about expectations and the panel topic. While the alumna was new to moderating a panel and discussion, faculty speakers were supportive of the student and assisted when necessary.

Working with student groups has its challenges. They have busy schedules and full social lives. Therefore, it may be hard to contact them and you need to be ready for event cancellations with no or short notice. With the student hip hop group 4 Elements Hip Hop Organization, there was a similar issue of making initial contact. However, once communication began, the group was happy to work with Smith. Towards the end of the

month, members of 4 Elements Hip Hop Organization performed and facilitated a discussion with participants and an open mic.

Tips:

- Reach out to students and youth leaders at least six—eight months in advance. For academic librarians, work with the faculty advisor to get students to respond. Be persistent.
- Try to set the dates for the events earlier in the semester or between midterms and finals to have faculty and students participate.
- Follow up with participants at least a week before the event.

Faculty Onboarding

It was important to reach out to faculty to reassure them that they did have the expertise to join the conversation on hip hop from their specialty and perspective. Smith reached out to faculty in various departments to inquire about their interest in speaking on a panel(s) and moderating discussion(s). Surprisingly, faculty were hesitant to participate because of their lack of expertise or lack of knowledge and biases towards hip hop culture and hip hop pedagogy. Hip hop pedagogy uses the interdisciplinary nature of hip hop culture to educate and empower students with student-centered curricula and practices. There were a few faculty members that Smith reached out to that immediately declined. Smith helped them learn more about hip hop culture and its social justice origins and explain the ideas behind the programming, the vision, and what each faculty member could contribute with their expertise using hip hop pedagogy. Once the faculty realized that they could contribute to the diverse voices in the interdisciplinary programming and understood hip hop pedagogy, they agreed to participate.

Tips:

- Identify speakers on campus in a variety of departments or in the community as potential panelists. With at least six to eight months' notice, begin reaching out to them. This provides time to discuss the event with speakers in case they are hesitant.

Outreach and Publicity

An outreach strategy was developed which included traditional advertising as well as outreach to student groups, faculty and local hip hop celebrities. The administrative assistant in the University Library office designed fliers and digital signage, which she placed around the library and in the student center. In addition, she sent information about the *Hip Hop and Activism* events series to *Poly Updates*, which is a list of events on campus for faculty. Outreach included digital signage emailed to faculty, public relations contacts, and the dorms. The Library Club, a student club composed of mainly undergraduate students interested in library activities, made *Hip Hop and Activism* buttons for further promotion. Smith reached out to a number of local celebrities in the greater Los Angeles area, but because of the short time frame she did not receive responses. Smith did not pursue celebrity outreach as aggressively as she could have.

Tips:

- Develop a communications/outreach plan. Recruit someone with graphic design skills to design advertising.
- Reaching out to local celebrities can be hard if you don't have contacts already. Create an agent list and start reaching out at least six to eight months before the event. Sometimes it can take weeks to get a response. If celebrities cannot attend the event or perform for free, as an alternative, ask them for any swag they can donate to use in a raffle or as giveaways.

LibGuide

To supplement the discussions, Smith created an online resource guide accessible through the University Library's website (<http://libguides.library.cpp.edu/hiphopandact>.) She researched important literature on the topic as well as the library's resources. When recommending the resources the library did not own, she provided alternative access points such as interlibrary loan and at that time LINK+, a library consortium. Smith had since updated the guide to draw upon resources from CSU+ the consortia lending program between California State University libraries. She also added links to important archives, magazines, and websites.

Tips:

- The research component might take more time than you realize. Plan ahead and work on this as early as possible.
- Reach out to speakers for recommended readings and multimedia to add to your guide.

Assessment

In order to understand if the series were successful, Smith used a variety of assessment methods. Before the series, learning outcomes were developed to benchmark assessment. Attendance was measured. Attendees had to register in advance and sign in at the door before entering the room where events took place. As with many programs, some of the registered students did not come; on the other hand, students who didn't register showed up for the panels and films. In the end, panel discussions were often full, around 45 attendees, which was near the maximum capacity of the room. Fewer students, at least a dozen, attended film screenings. Unfortunately, due to the length of these films, many students had to leave before they ended to get to classes. So there were usually only a handful of students left in the room at the end of the screening to participate in the discussion with faculty.

Live tweeting was encouraged to crowd-digest highlights from the talks and provide an opportunity for those who could not attend to participate in the discussion. A hashtag was created specifically for the series, which was #cpphiphop. However, on this campus students did not tweet at the events all that much. At the end of every *Hip Hop and Activism* series event, students were encouraged to fill out a Google form with a few questions to provide feedback about the event. The attendance at events totaled 123 and

28 attendees filled out the survey. That is 23 percent of total attendees responded to the survey which is better than anticipated.

The feedback received was constructive and positive. Every survey participant wanted more events to continue the discussion in the future. When asked: "Share your thoughts! What could be improved? What would you like to see next year?" select students responses included:

- "I really enjoyed the discussion and hope to see more of these on campus! I especially enjoy the parallels of Hip-Hop and social impact and hope to see how other forms of Pop culture can affect activism as well. I would definitely come back next year to this discussion."
- "Thanks for the organizing this series. Definitely these documentary films are very informative especially for someone out of black communities to learn more about their culture and their hardships and obstacles in fulfillment of their dreams mainly among young generations."
- "Next year there should be a workshop that teaches you how to find these underground socially conscious artists."
- "It was an amazing and empowering experience. It would be great to bring in more hip hop artists in the future."
- "I really enjoyed it; however, I could not stay for the discussion portion because it interfered with my class. It is unfortunate that not that many people showed up but perhaps it is due to conflicts with clubs, classes, and work schedules. People are usually busy during U-hour."
- "A bigger space for everyone in attendance to have a seat would be nice."

Overall, participants enjoyed the series of events and wanted it to occur again for further discussion.

Tips:

- Try to offer an incentive to encourage participants to take the feedback survey. If you get swag from local celebrities use them for raffle prizes. Enter survey respondents into a raffle for the prizes after they complete the survey. Add a section at the end of the survey for participants to add their names and contact information.
- Assess whether live tweeting is popular on your campus or in your community. Also, investigate whether another social media platform is heavily used, to encourage continuing the conversation outside the event space.

Post Mortem

Smith planned the first *Hip Hop and Activism* series in 2016. She plans to organize future *Hip Hop and Activism* events and will use the survey feedback to make adjustments for the next series. The events turned out to be more popular than anticipated. Some of the main issues Smith learned from included student behavior regarding registering for events. They rarely did this which resulted in not having enough space or food. Smith will assemble a *Hip Hop and Activism* team to brainstorm a way to avoid these and other potential issues.

To make the process more inclusive to all faculty on and off campus, Smith wants to put a call out to faculty to submit proposals. From these proposals, panels will be arranged for future events. Also, this will open up participation to off-campus contributors. A caveat is that funding will not be offered for speakers, they will be compensated with lunch. By participating in this series, faculty working towards tenure can incorporate their involvement as part of community service.

Tips:

- Draft learning outcomes for the series/events.
- Refine the assessment questions. Make the survey shorter and easier to take.
- Rethink the distribution method of the survey. Maybe, have a box with a small piece of paper with the survey questions and pencils nearby.

Conclusion

While the *Hip Hop and Activism* series was planned on short notice with very few resources, the panels, films, and discussions clearly connected with many students from diverse backgrounds on Cal Poly Pomona's campus. The series provided a platform for students to work through current issues and put them in context. In addition, students were able to explore the varied forms of activism that might work for them. While this series started in the library, it can work just as well at the University level and bring together faculty near and far to continue the conversation on social justice, information freedom, and activism.

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Bringing Critical Race Theory to the Library Bill of Rights

From the Past to the Future

CELESTE BOCCHICCHIO-CHAUDHRI

The principle of intellectual freedom forms the cornerstone of modern librarianship in the United States, and the Library Bill of Rights forms the bedrock for the ethical justification of that freedom. Many scholars in the field of Library and Information Science have written on the philosophical underpinnings of intellectual freedom, drawing primarily on the Western European liberal tradition as embodied by Enlightenment thinkers like John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant. This paper seeks to expand our understanding of intellectual freedom by putting it into conversation with the writings of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in order to ask: intellectual freedom for whom? And what is the appropriate role for librarians and other information professionals seeking to foster substantive intellectual freedom?

Critical Race Theory began among African-American legal scholars in the 1970s and has since spread to other academic fields including education and political science. Across disciplines, CRT scholars believe that racism is an ordinary part of life, rather than an exceptional act of blatant discrimination. Because American society has woven a preference for whiteness into its fabric, racism can be difficult to address. It is often subtle and unacknowledged. In this case, "whiteness" means not only skin color, but also the culture, values, and ways of thinking that have been historically developed by European and White American thinkers. Therefore, it is not enough to bring people of color into organizations without questioning the foundations of those organizations. CRT scholars also believe that because many people benefit from racism, large sections of society have little interest in combating it. Finally, CRT scholars understand race as culturally constructed, that is the meaning that people associate with different skin colors, hair textures, and other physical differences changes in different times and places (Delgado, Stefancic, and Harris 2017).

The issue of race and racism in the field of Library and Information Science is a troubling one. Despite efforts by the ALA to recruit people of color to the field, in 2013, 82.2 percent of graduates from MLIS programs were white and a mere 3.8 percent were black (Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow 2016). Indeed, Hathcock argues that the infrastructure of LIS diversity initiatives unwittingly predicts their failure. Because efforts to recruit