

# ***“Strengthening Literacy through Hip Hop”***

***An Experimental Workshop at McClymonds High School in Oakland, CA***

***August 21-25, 2000***

Final Report

October 26, 2000

Prepared By:

Geoff Ward

Jamal Cooks

"Hip Hop will make students want to learn...."

- Kiana Curry, participant in the "Literacy through Hip Hop" workshop

## **Introduction**

In the Spring of 2000, the authors of this report were contacted by the director of a newly initiated Literacy Project at McClymonds High School in Oakland, CA. The director expressed an interest in developing a "Hip-Hop Curriculum" to use in the Literacy Project as it was thought that such an approach might effectively capture student interest and facilitate various reading and writing skill development objectives. With this invitation, we commenced to develop a one-week program intended to explore the feasibility and potential value of using Hip Hop cultural materials to improve the literacy skills of beginning high school students who are typically behind in their educational development. The result of this collaboration was a workshop conducted by the authors with a small group of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students at McClymonds during the week of August 21, 2000.

A detailed description of the workshop, a review of its implementation and an overall evaluation of the project are provided in the pages that follow. In summary, we feel that despite important problems resulting from recruitment difficulties and low attendance, the overall experience strongly confirms the pedagogical value of Hip Hop culture in the area of literacy development. To this end, the report concludes with a discussion of two upcoming projects which draw on valuable lessons learned in the "Literacy through Hip Hop" Workshop at McClymonds. We encourage the Literacy Project at McClymonds to continue exploring the use of Hip Hop culture and other creative strategies to improve the educational skills and experiences of disadvantaged students.

## **Hip-Hop and Literacy Work: The Concept of a Culturally Relevant Curriculum**

A culturally relevant curriculum features teaching strategies and methods grounded in the experiential background and cultural orientation that students develop and maintain in their

everyday lives. Opportunities for learning are believed to be improved by the utilization of concepts and materials that are already active in the lives of students. Indeed, educational professionals and experts have long recognized the pedagogical value of culturally relevant curriculums which, by definition, are more familiar and thus accessible for student groups.<sup>1</sup>

Through the development of Hip-Hop culture, young people have forged valuable social networks and instruments of communication. The culture includes several expressive forms including music, dance, visual art and literature which collectively convey the experiences and concerns of their typically youthful creators. The artifacts of this culture or actual materials produced include books, magazines, musical recordings, videos, photographs and more. These materials provide entrée to the mundane experiences, extreme fantasies, fears, questions, wisdom, confusion, humor, and dreams of their creators. Hip Hop culture has provided young people a vehicle through which they can express their emerging worldview and impressions of the world taking shape around them. As such, for many youth in the U.S. and increasingly abroad, Hip Hop is a highly “culturally relevant” form. Because of this, and specifically the intellectual enthusiasm which Hip Hop inspires in many young people, we have developed a literacy workshop where Hip Hop cultural artifacts are utilized to build reading, writing and oral communication skills.

Finally, paramount to developing a culturally relevant curriculum is involving the educational target population in the actual creation and maintenance of learning strategies and resources. To this end, in the course of the “Literacy through Hip Hop” workshop students were asked to give feedback on their experience and the value of this teaching strategy. These responses are discussed at the conclusion of the report.

### **Overview of the Literacy through Hip Hop Workshop**

The summer workshop conducted at McClymonds High School was designed to accommodate an anticipated group of twenty incoming ninth grade students. This school produces among the lowest achievement scores in the state of California and, consequently, it was expected that many of the students participating in the workshop would lack basic literacy

---

<sup>1</sup> A classic statement on this issue, especially relevant to this project, can be found in Paulo Freire’s, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1993 [1970].

skills standard for their grade level. Participants for the workshop were recruited by the project facilitators from information provided by school administrators. Recruitment and retention proved to be integral parts of the workshop experience and critical to the overall level of success. As such, these issues are discussed at greater length in another section of the report.

The workshop was conducted for three hours each morning (9 a.m.-12 p.m.) during a one-week period (week of August 21, 2000). On the first-day of the workshop, students received a packet which contained a schedule for the week, lined paper for writing, a pencil, and a Hip Hop magazine which served as a text book for various activities throughout the week. While each day of the workshop involved a specific lesson related to reading, writing, and/or oral communication skills, the workshop specifically involved planning, developing and publicly presenting a creative project. The students created original posters on which they combined a collage of visual imagery obtained from Hip Hop magazines with an accompanying type-written essay wherein they discussed the content of their posters. Students were encouraged to create posters and essays addressing any theme generally related to Hip-Hop culture and to consider both fictional and non-fictional approaches.

A key literacy component of the project was learning to compose and revise multiple drafts of a written assignment and, more specifically, to identify and correct weaknesses in their written work with the assistance of feedback from others. Throughout the week, students received feedback on their project plans and were assisted with the development and revision of their essays. After completing a second draft of the essay and soliciting additional feedback from both a peer and an instructor, students transferred their hand-written third draft to a computer word-processing application. After typing and formatting their documents, the final draft of the essay was printed out and affixed to their collage. Finally, on the last day of the workshop students went before the class to formally present their completed posters. The presentations included time for questions and answers where students were asked to elaborate on their projects as well as to discuss specific and overall impressions of the workshop experience.

### **Detailed Description of Workshop Activities**

As mentioned above, each day of the workshop involved a specific lesson related to reading, writing, or communication skill development. Generally, each day's activities included

the following components: 1) a discussion about an aspect of Hip Hop culture; 2) a discussion about reading, writing, and/or communication skills; and 3) an actual hands-on activity where main points from these discussions were applied. Focusing on these areas, we provide a detailed description of each day of the workshop below.

### *Day One*

- ❑ **Hip Hop Discussion:** The workshop began with an “ice-breaker” where students were asked several questions about the history and expressive forms of Hip Hop culture. We were somewhat surprised to learn how little the students actually knew about Hip Hop culture, including when and where the culture emerged and its variety of expressive forms. The ensuing discussion focused on the historical development of Hip Hop, its representative forms, and its specific relevance to youth. It became apparent that students knew more about the culture than it originally seemed, and that their inability to answer the ice-breaker questions extended as much from nervousness/shyness and unfamiliarity with terminology (i.e. “expressive form”) as from a lack of information.
  
- ❑ **Literacy Lesson:** We focused here on the sometimes challenging problem of identifying “meaning.” This can be especially difficult in the case of Hip Hop expressions where there is frequent utilization of metaphor and symbolism. The particular focus of this discussion in terms of literacy was reading comprehension. We discussed various strategies for finding the meaning in a text, whether a rap song or textbook chapter, including in particular the use of “context clues” and the importance of re-reading materials until their meaning becomes clearer.
  
- ❑ **Activity:** Drawing on these discussions, the activity for this day was identifying meaning in the lyrics of Hip Hop songs selected by the students. First, students searched several internet sites for lyrics to rap songs and each student printed lyrics for three songs of interest to them. Focusing on one of these songs, students took turns reading the lyrics aloud and, drawing on the strategies we

discussed earlier, the group discussed what the artist was attempting to communicate to their audience.

### *Day Two*

- ❑ **Hip Hop Discussion:** This morning's discussion continued on the theme of "meaning" in Hip Hop, focusing especially on the unique language and terminology of this subculture. Referring to the lyrics obtained in Day One, the class went through these texts quickly to identify words that are especially unique to Hip Hop culture.
  
- ❑ **Literacy Lesson:** Continuing on the theme of comprehension, we discussed the importance of understanding the meaning of unfamiliar terms encountered in the course of reading text or listening to a presentation (i.e. history lesson). Strategies for identifying the meaning of these terms- including the use of reference materials, talking with others, and "reading around the term" for context clues- were emphasized.
  
- ❑ **Activity:** The class was broken-up into small groups where students worked with instructors to identify and define characteristically Hip Hop language appearing in the lyrics to several rap songs. The terms which attracted student attention included both original language (i.e. Will Smith's term, "gettin' jiggy") and alternative uses of generic language (i.e. Busta Rhymes' metaphoric usage of "Dangerous"). Attempting to clarify these meanings proved quite challenging and entertaining. After much thought, debate and laughter, the groups were able to pinpoint the meaning of some rather elusive terminology. In some cases, students decided that there is no discernable meaning to the language employed by Hip Hop artists; "it just sounds good."

The afternoon concluded with a screening of the first-half of a documentary film about the graffiti arts movement in Los Angeles entitled, "Graffiti Verite." The

purpose of this film was to expose the students to alternative expressive forms within Hip Hop culture, constructions of meaning in visual arts and, finally, some of the social issues and problems implicated in Hip Hop cultural expression.

### ***Day Three***

- Hip Hop Discussion: The remaining half of “Graffiti Verite” was shown and discussed. Particular attention was paid to the prevalence and importance of imagery in Hip Hop culture. For example, in the discussion of lyrical meaning, an especially perceptive student pointed out that music videos play a critical role in clarifying the meaning of songs and the intentions of artists. We discussed the roles and types of images surrounding Hip Hop culture, focusing on imagery in graffiti art, music videos and Hip Hop magazines such as *The Source* and *XXL*.
  
- Literacy Lesson: The focus of this afternoons lesson was the writing process. Specifically, we discussed with students the key stages in developing a piece of well-written work: 1) Selecting a topic, 2) Brainstorming/Outlining the story, 3) Writing a Rough Draft, 4) Obtaining feedback, 5) Rewriting, 6) Obtaining additional feedback and, finally, 7) Typing a final draft. Also, we discussed the importance of organization in a well-written essay. For our purposes organization was defined as having a clear introduction and thesis statement, a supporting body, and a clear conclusion.
  
- Activity: The afternoon activities involved utilizing Hip Hop magazines to reinforce the issues discussed earlier in the day and getting started on the development of individual projects. First, we divided into small groups to search the magazines for articles that provided examples of good and bad introductions, thesis statements, supporting points and conclusions. Next, we looked through the magazines for particularly interesting images and discussed their meaning and relevance within Hip Hop culture.

Finally, students were given time alone to think about and begin drafting their projects. During this time, the instructors roamed around the room to give students individual assistance with their work. This task proved difficult initially as the students were generally intimidated by the writing process. However, after some time it became apparent that students were becoming more comfortable and most eventually completed a rough draft. In the remaining time, students obtained feedback on their drafts from at least one peer and one of the instructors. Based on this feedback, students were asked to revise their drafts. Finally, those students who made sufficient progress toward a second draft were allowed to begin planning their collage and obtaining images from the magazines provided.

#### *Day Four*

- Hip Hop Discussion: Our intention was to discuss the remaining elements of Hip Hop cultural expression, specifically literature, dance, and music (i.e. the unique rhythms and sounds that accompany dance and/or rap in Hip Hop which are often produced by DJ's). However, in the interest of completing the projects we decided to forego this discussion and use the time for hands-on activities.
- Literacy Lesson: The focus of this brief discussion was two-fold. First, we discussed problem-solving in the course of writing. Issues including "writer's block" and general problems with concentration were discussed and strategies for overcoming these problems were provided. Finally, in anticipation of the final presentations, we discussed the elements of public speaking. In particular, this discussion focused on the importance of preparation, eye contact, voice projection, body language, and appearance.
- Activity: The majority of our time was spent completing individual projects. Students worked at different paces and with varying degrees of focus such that by this point there were projects at widely varying stages of development. Most of the students were at the stage of writing and revising at least their second draft

while a couple struggled with the task of settling on a topic and writing a rough draft. As this was the last day to work on the projects it was imperative that we push the students to focus and make use of the little time we had remaining. The students responded by working hard and, by the end of the day, each possessed a typed final draft of their essay. In the remaining time and sometime beyond noon, students cut images out of magazines, arranged them on their poster boards, and made final touches to their projects. Anticipating their upcoming presentations, some students began to dread the moment when they would be asked to stand before the other participants in the workshop and invited guests to present their finished projects.

### *Day Five*

- Hip Hop Discussion: There was no instruction about Hip Hop on the final day. This time was spent making last minute adjustments to final projects and preparing students for their presentations.
- Literacy Lesson: There was no formal literacy lesson on the final day, however, instruction was afforded through feedback following each individual presentation.
- Activity: The entire afternoon was consumed by student's final presentations.<sup>2</sup> Students came to the workshop dressed neatly in attire appropriate for public speaking and appeared equally anxious and excited about their presentation experience. We waited briefly for our audience to assemble before beginning the presentations, anticipating that some teachers, administrators and program sponsors would attend (two people eventually came). The presentation format was structured as follows. First, the presenting student went before the class and formally introduced her or himself (name, school, where they are from, etc.). Next, students had approximately ten minutes to talk about their projects. They

---

<sup>2</sup> A video tape of the presentations will provided once it has been converted to a usable format (VHS).

were asked to begin by generally describing the project and what they were attempting to accomplish before proceeding to discuss the actual images and accompanying essay. Following their discussions of their projects, the students were required to address a series of questions listed on the chalk board. Specifically, they were asked to indicate: 1) what they learned about Hip Hop culture; 2) what they learned about reading, writing, and/or public speaking; 3) what they appreciated most about the workshop experience; 4) what they thought could be improved in the design or application of the workshop<sup>3</sup>; 5) whether or not they thought Hip Hop was useful as a teaching device; and, finally, 6) if so, how else they thought Hip Hop could be used in educational settings.

Their responses to these questions were interesting and some are discussed at the conclusion of the report. Equally interesting though was the final stage of the presentation when the floor was opened to questions. Here, students had to react to unanticipated challenges from their peers, the instructors, and other members of the audience. Students did not hesitate to press each other for clarification of points they made in the course of their presentations and clearly enjoyed the opportunity to present such challenges. Presenters generally handled these questions very well, maintaining their composure and addressing the points that were raised. Finally, at the conclusion of each presentation the other students and instructors offered both critical and supportive feedback about the quality of the presentation, focusing especially on style (i.e. voice projection, eye contact, body language, etc.). We were pleased to see the students provide useful pointers about the ways their peers both excelled and could improve in their approach to public speaking.

---

<sup>3</sup> We received one typical response to this question (repeated by several students): have more kids in the workshop. Students felt this would increase the diversity of perspectives and exposure related to hip hop and literacy skills. When asked how they felt additional students could be obtained they typically replied that advertising and money (incentives) were key, however, they felt that students would be interested in the program if made aware of it.

### **Lessons Learned: Room to Improve and Prospects for Success**

The "Literacy through Hip Hop" workshop experience revealed both organizational problems and substantial promise with respect to this creative educational strategy. There were many lessons learned which will be useful to future efforts of this nature. For example, while there was no shortage of enthusiasm about Hip Hop, we were surprised to find that students were not very knowledgeable about the history and expressive dimensions of the culture. It was possible however, after learning this on the first day of the workshop, to adjust our plans for subsequent days to include time for an overview of Hip Hop culture and its expressive forms. We felt this was especially important since Hip Hop was created by youth similar in many ways to our students and that, therefore, this history could be a source of both personal pride and mutual respect for young people.

Similar to this lesson were other relatively minor but still useful discoveries that will inform our future application of this educational strategy. We learned more for example about the specific artists which appeal to youth today, the mechanisms by which our students were exposed to Hip Hop culture, and the attitudes of their parents toward Hip Hop. In general, our students were interested in a very small group of musical artists who they were primarily exposed to through music videos. Also, while some indicated that their parents were critical of the language and messages in some Hip Hop music and vocal about a need to be critical of such content, the students were generally allowed to consume Hip Hop culture at their discretion. These findings suggest a need for future workshops to purposefully expose students to a wider array of artistic styles, mediums of artistic expression, and concrete strategies for becoming more critical and sophisticated consumers/practitioners of Hip Hop and other forms of popular culture.

Still, the most valuable lessons from the workshop came in two areas. First, we learned a hard lesson about the fundamental importance of recruitment and retention for a program of this nature. While anticipating a group of approximately twenty students, the number of workshop participants never exceeded ten, and only five students can reasonably be said to have completed the entire workshop. This small turn out was the result of several factors which future efforts should seek to avoid and/or address. Three key factors are outlined in more detail below. Finally, notwithstanding the small group of participants, we learned a great deal about the value of this teaching approach from the performance and feedback of the students themselves. Thus,

as is appropriate for a project grounded in the expressive creativity of young people (i.e. Hip Hop), we conclude this section on “lessons learned” with a review of the personal development and evaluative comments of students who participated in the workshop.

### ***Recruitment and Retention***

Key problems related to recruitment and retention were encountered in the course of planning and facilitating the workshop which ultimately compromised its success. While these difficulties extended from a range of sources both within and beyond the control of the sponsoring organization and the workshop facilitators, they should be taken into careful consideration in anticipation of similar projects in the future. Specifically, there were three issues which constrained efforts to recruit and retain student participants: 1) miscommunication between the project sponsors and workshop organizers; 2) the somewhat ineffective use of advertising and incentives; and 3) logistical characteristics of the workshop including scheduling and transportation. Each of these points and recommendations for improvement are discussed further below.

Discussions between the Literacy Project (sponsors) and the workshop providers (consultants) began in February of 2000 and accelerated in April when a formal workshop proposal was submitted. The proposal did not address recruitment, primarily because the workshop facilitators were under the impression that participants would be drawn from a pool of students participating in existing programs sponsored by the Literacy Project during the regular school year and summer. Some or all of these students, we expected, would be joined in the workshop by additional students who were identified by the school or Literacy Project as individuals in need of such instruction. This misconception lasted through the end of July when the workshop providers received a formal letter of agreement from the sponsors where, again, the issue of recruitment for the rapidly approaching August workshop was not addressed. The sponsor’s expectation that the consultants would recruit workshop participants did not become known until early August and, at this late point, the consultants began to aggressively recruit students for the “Literacy through Hip Hop” workshop. We feel that recruitment and retention suffered greatly as a result of this miscommunication. We would recommend that students either be drawn from existing programs or, if this is not possible, be recruited months in advance through the combined efforts of consultants, local programs and the school system.

Faced with only a small amount of time and the challenge of recruiting 20-25 students, our recruitment strategy involved a combination of aggressive advertising and the use of incentives. First, we called over 100 parents from a list provided by the school that included all students enrolled in 9th grade classes over the summer and students who entering McClymonds in September. After obtaining approximately 50 verbal commitments for students (either from them or their parents) to attend the workshop, we mailed letters/flyers to each of these student's homes to remind them and their parents about the summer program and obtain confirmation. Recipients of the flyer were asked to telephone the consultants to confirm their place in the workshop and approximately 20 students did so. Expecting that some of the students who did not confirm might actually attend and that some of the confirmations might not, we were relatively confident that a group of 15-25 students would ultimately participate in the workshop. Indeed, many of the parents and students we spoke with sounded excited that the school was offering a free program for their students and that the program would involve Hip Hop culture. To further strengthen the appeal of this voluntary workshop, as it would require students to attend school in the last days of summer vacation for an early morning activity offering no formal credit, we indicated in our advertising of the project that students would receive an incentive for participating in the form of a gift certificate and school supplies.

On the first day of the workshop only 6 students arrived. While somewhat discouraged in light of the recruitment efforts already described, we immediately attempted to recruit additional students. First, we asked these students to invite others who were also entering high school this year or had just completed their first year. Also, we returned to the telephones and called an additional 50 households. This time, we indicated (and increased) the amount of the monetary incentive (\$20) in addition to the school supplies we offered. Once again, we were assured by more than 15 students (or their parents) that they would attend. The following day (Tuesday), approximately 10 students attended the workshop and these included all but one of the participants from the first day, a few of their friends, and three new students. We repeated our efforts to recruit again that night but, after only 6 students attended on Wednesday (no new students), we decided to forego additional recruitment and concentrate on working with and retaining these 6 students. One particular striking occurrence in this recruitment effort was the frequency of parents telling us that, while they wanted their children to participate in the workshop, they could not guarantee that the child would agree to attend. In light of this trend,

we feel that a more effective strategy of advertising and recruitment would simultaneously seek to build parental commitment to assure that students attend and generate student interest in participating. One way to accomplish these objectives might be to offer an incentive or package of incentives that appeals to both parents and students. In addition to actual monetary rewards these might include, for example, the waiver of certain fees, improved access to competitive and appealing school programs, a formal recognition of outstanding performance, or special field trips. Ideally, students for such a workshop would be drawn from existing programs or identified early for participation. We have discussed creating a Hip Hop club at the school, for example, where club membership would include workshop attendance as well as more entertainment and recreationally oriented activities.

Finally, practical improvements to the logistics of the workshop might have a positive effect on recruitment and retention. Our students came from what were often considerable distances (as many as six miles) to participate in the workshop and, since in most cases the students walked or rode bicycles, it is amazing that they continued to attend the workshop throughout the week. In the future, a logistical change which might positively impact turnout would be the provision of transportation to and from the school. Finally, an afternoon workshop might be more appealing to students and families who do not live in proximity to the school and are without transportation. In short, while clarifying the recruitment plans and enhancing incentives would likely improve attendance considerably, it is also likely that making it easier for students to participate would have as much of an effect on attendance as any other remedy.

### ***Student Feedback***

The problems we encountered with recruitment and retention should by no means be taken as an indication of the workshop's success or lack thereof. The workshop did serve its intended role as a pilot for using Hip Hop to teach literacy, and the consultants learned a great deal in this regard. More importantly, all indications are that this was a valuable learning experience for the students we did have the pleasure of working with. While their number was small, we had a special group of students who demonstrated through their daily conduct in the workshop, their final projects, and their evaluative comments that this was a useful and enjoyable opportunity to strengthen their literacy skills. In this section, we briefly review information about this group of students and share some of their personal feelings about using Hip Hop in an

educational context. This information is provided in the form of brief bio's on each of the workshop graduates.

□ P.J. Brito (Pedro Jr.):

"PJ" is an energetic and creative 9th grader that enjoys sports and arts. He is originally from Vallejo, CA and was spending the summer with his father in Oakland. Throughout the program, P.J. made class lively and fun with his warm, entertaining, but disciplined personality. It was evident through his early arrival every morning, his participation in class discussions, and his diligent work on his project that he enjoyed and benefited from the workshop experience. When asked about the value of using hip hop as a teaching tool he responded: "This stuff is interesting to me and I think a lot of kids will do something that they like. I had a lot of fun and I want to do this again." In particular, PJ indicated that he learned more about when to use proper English in speech and writing, the artistic elements of graffiti, and better strategies for reading and formal writing. PJ was a very talented student and the workshop gave him a chance to display and enhance his abilities.

□ Jasmine Walker:

Jasmine is a 15 year-old who decided to attend Oakland High School in the fall. She was initially very quite but gradually emerged as one of our brightest and most mature students. She became a vocal leader in the workshop. Her comments were usually thought provoking and complex and, despite her small frame, she was not reluctant to challenge others in the workshop (i.e. the boys) to stay focused. She initially had very little understanding of Hip Hop and its expressive forms. The workshop helped her learn a great deal about the culture and she conveyed this new appreciation in her project where she discussed the elements of fashion, dance, and graffiti art in Hip Hop. When asked about the strengths and weaknesses of the workshop she responded: "I enjoyed making my picture [and] I had a lot of fun. I learned a lot about hip hop culture." She especially emphasized learning about the history of hip hop and strategies for writing in school (i.e. drafting and editing). Jasmine was initially very intimidated by the writing process but was clearly impressed by her personal accomplishment after producing a much-improved final draft of her essay.

□ Charlicia Davis:

Charlicia is an outspoken 15 year-old who has a strong interest in the arts broadly defined (i.e. drawing, music, and drama). She was very motivated to start school because she was going to join a group on campus called Pipadia which focused on building and developing the individual art and drama talents of students. It was somewhat difficult, however, to get Charlicia to focus on the academic aspects of the workshop. She seemed to feel that she was going to be an artist and thus have little need for improved reading and writing skills. Nonetheless, the instructors and some of the other students (i.e. Jasmine) encouraged Charlicia to work on her writing skills as it was clear that she had a great deal of anxiety in that area. She made significant improvement over the course of the week but still has a ways to go in her development. When asked about her impressions Charlicia commented that, "I enjoyed learning the differences in music and how music can effect your learning in a positive way." She also learned more about visual arts in Hip Hop and specifically, "the difference between tagging and graffiti." Indeed, of all our students she was the most fascinated with this expressive form. Her workshop folder and final project were covered with graffiti sketches of her own. Additionally, Charlicia noted that the workshop helped her to improve her typing skills.

□ Kiana Curry:

Kiana is a 10th grade student who will be attending McClymonds in the fall and was the oldest student in the workshop. Kiana was a very interesting case as she made a complete 180 degree turn in the course of the week. She originally came to the class and disengaged, putting her head down and often vocally indicated that she did not want or intend to participate in any of the activities and discussions. Still, she occasionally made comments that proved that she had more to add to the workshop sessions than she wanted us to know. In retrospect, we realize that she was trying to hide her intelligence. After much coaxing on the part of the instructors, Kiana eventually emerged from this shell and became a vocal and very helpful contributor to the workshop activities. Her adjustment provided a useful model for the other students who likely noticed her opening up to the workshop and working diligently on her project. Kiana indicated that the workshop helped her to learn more about how students feel about hip hop and that "Hip Hop is more than rap" as it includes, "clothes, dance, art, and personal style." She also indicated learning that, "in presentations, you need to make eye contact, to speak out load, and to be

confident." In light of the initial difficulty we encountered in trying to reach Kiana, we were especially pleased to hear her comment that, "Hip Hop will make students want to learn...like when we went on the computer we were able to learn about stuff that we liked." Indeed, Kiana was in many ways our shining star. While she was not consistently our best student, she did have stronger skills compared to many of the younger students in the workshop and, more importantly, she personally evidenced the value of this teaching strategy for students who, like her, are reluctant to engage traditional educational approaches.

□ Lloyd Darn:

Lloyd was our most challenging student and the one we might not have been able to reach. He desperately wanted to become part of the group but lacked the necessary social skills to get along with everyone. He was also subject to teasing from other students because of his personal hygiene. It was clear from the outset that Lloyd came from a very difficult home environment and was unprepared to fully benefit from the workshop experience. Although he came to the workshop everyday, he typically arrived late and left early on some occasions (during the short break). While in the workshop, he would frequently stare into space and disrupt other students who were focusing on the lessons. The amount of violence and despair in the story he composed for his project were further indications that Lloyd lived a difficult childhood and was distracted from learning. Still, there were moments when Lloyds intelligence and strengths radiated through these problems and it is clear that, while he may not have personally benefited to the extent he could have, he did appreciate the use of Hip Hop to develop educational skills. He felt, for example, that "it is important because we need to know about hip hop history." Furthermore, he reasoned that since, "All teens like rap...it is a good way for teens to do a little better in school if you relate rap to your school work." He was especially interested in the history of Hip Hop culture. Lloyd presented a difficult challenge and clear reminder of the complex needs of some disadvantaged students. It is difficult to know how much Lloyd benefited from the workshop, as he did not attend the final day, but it is important to think carefully about how similar kids could benefit from such a workshop in the absence of the more comprehensive intervention they clearly need.

## **Final Expense Report**

- Consultant Fees \$4750  
Cost includes compensation for all work performed in connection with the workshop including time spent on curriculum preparation, planning meetings, phone calls and correspondence between consultants and to parents, and the final report.
  
- Travel \$1500  
Costs included airfare, food, room and board for Geoffrey Ward as well as gas, food and incidentals for Jamal Cooks during the week of the workshop.
  
- Gift Certificates \$200  
Certificates to Tower Records were given to students who participated in the program as a reward for completing the week long session.
  
- Food \$100  
Students were taken to lunch at H'S Lordships in the Berkeley Marina on the final day of the workshop to celebrate their completion of the program.
  
- Workshop Supplies<sup>4</sup> \$450
  - 30 binders @ \$2 each
  - 30 dictionaries @ \$5 each
  - 30 packs of pencils @ \$3 each
  - 30 Hip Hop magazines @ \$5 each
  
- **Expense Total** **\$7,000.00**

---

<sup>4</sup> Note: Binders, dictionaries and pencils were given to students at the completion of the workshop for use in the upcoming school year. Magazines were used for reading and writing lessons as well as the development of collages.

### **Next Steps**

The McClymonds workshop was an excellent learning opportunity, not only for those students who managed to complete the program but, as significantly, for the workshop facilitators. Lessons learned from the McClymonds Workshop are currently being used to devise and facilitate alternative versions of the “Literacy through Hip Hop” curriculum. The Hip Hop and Cultural Studies Collective, a student-run organization at the University of Michigan co-founded by one of the consultants (Geoffrey Ward), plans to sponsor two workshops which will use Hip Hop cultural material to facilitate the development of basic literacy and advanced research and writing skills among students in the local community.

In the first workshop, we will work with a select group of residents at the W.J. Maxey Juvenile Correctional Center to improve their basic reading, writing and oral presentation skills. This workshop will largely replicate the “Literacy through Hip Hop” workshop conducted at McClymonds, however, some adjustments will be made in light of what was learned at McClymonds and the unique circumstances at Maxey. The second workshop will focus on improving the social research and writing skills of traditionally underrepresented college students at the University of Michigan. These students will work under the supervision of Collective members on original Hip Hop research projects and as research assistants on ongoing projects. Their participation will involve formulating research questions, collecting and reviewing relevant literature, and contributing to the development of research papers. The purpose of this workshop will be to expose students to the dimensions of scholarly research and writing while also assisting in the development of skills they will find useful in their college courses. Students will have the opportunity to present aspects of their work at the Collective’s Spring conference.

Finally, we greatly appreciate the support of the Literacy Project in our effort to develop concrete strategies for using Hip Hop culture in literacy development. The McClymonds workshop provided an excellent opportunity to explore this utility and develop specific curricular approaches. Overall, the workshop strongly confirmed the value of Hip Hop culture in this area of work. As we remain committed to working in creative ways with disadvantaged students to improve their skills and better prepare them for the challenges that await them in their educational and professional careers, we look forward to the possibility of future collaboration with the Literacy Project at McClymonds High School.