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"A Sample is a Tactic": Hip Hop Pedagogy in the Library Classroom

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Learning how to conduct college-level research is not an easy task. Librarians are one of the most trusted sources to help students navigate these new waters (Head, 2013, p. 3). By adding a nuanced understanding of hip hop production methods to instruction librarians' existing practices, we can more effectively teach students about the research process while also communicating that our students' personal interests are worthy of academic study. Our workshop showcased how the instruction librarians at Radford University, a mid-sized public university in Southwest Virginia, incorporate hip hop pedagogy into teaching one-shot instruction sessions. Participants took on the role of students to try out specific active learning exercises demonstrating how this pedagogy ties in with the Framework of Information Literacy for Higher Education (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2016).

Librarians are not known for their extensive understanding of hip hop music; this lack of awareness is just one of many ways in which our knowledge may diverge from that of our students. Additionally, our field has a significant homogeneity problem. Data suggests that approximately eighty-eight percent of credentialed librarians are white (American Library Association, 2012). Hip hop is a culture grounded uniquely in the Black experience. If hip hop pedagogy is employed in library instruction, classroom power dynamics and the hazard of cultural appropriation simply cannot be ignored. (For a deeper understanding of the manifold issues at play when bringing hip hop into the classroom, see Sule, 2016.)

The Radford library instruction team has a history of incorporating examples from popular culture to help teach key concepts, which laid a foundation for adding hip hop music to the mix. When Craig joined the department, he used his extensive knowledge and experience acquired from nearly two decades of hip hop DJing to introduce colleagues who were less versed incorporate the concepts of music sampling into the classroom. During these classes, specific examples of hip hop music production methods are positive introductions to academic integrity for our students. They are often pleasantly surprised that a librarian is drawing from these sources and bringing hip hop and popular culture into the classroom. For students who have already learned about the dangers of plagiarism, this lesson remixes what they've already learned into a more holistic and empowering view of the research process.

Literature Review

Teaching research and information literacy skills via hip hop pedagogy has been explored in English composition literature. Sampling can be a powerful analogy for a range of issues—from ethical uses of source material, to plagiarism, to conversations regarding fair use (Wakefield, 2006). As the following examples will demonstrate, incorporating hip hop pedagogy allows us to reframe what is often a punitive, finger-wagging, one-way lecture into an opportunity to connect with a wide range of students. As Todd Craig argues, incorporating hip hop pedagogy also opens up conversations on citing and plagiarism from a dualistic, right-or-wrong approach, to a more open-ended, constructivist, and inclusive approach that transcends hegemonic Western constructs (2013, p. 22). Using the language of hip hop with examples of bitin', jackin', and transforming, can also help students figure out how to conduct their own research, particularly paying attention to the differences between bitin' and transforming, and gives them language outside of the dominant power structure to reflect on their own process (Craig, 2013). Others have also pointed out that using hip hop and sampling as an analogy for the research process as well as how to find and synthesize sources, shifts discussions of plagiarism into a much more positive and inspiring context. Discussing examples of sampling in the classroom should impart students with an understanding that sources can be used not only to solidify their arguments and build their case, but that research is a creative and

constantly evolving endeavor. Students can also re-envision a source's ideas, not by misunderstanding or misinterpreting, but by using their own lived experience to comment on a source's validity and, in doing so, transform the context into a new, more personally meaningful argument (Hess, 2006, p. 291).

LIBRARIANS AND HIP HOP PEDAGOGY

While librarians have an excellent understanding of issues related to ethical source use, it is uncommon for our colleagues to a have working knowledge of hip hop music production conventions. To a certain extent, hip hop is seeping into library studies, with many librarians discussing collecting sources, and several authors exploring how hip hop intersects with information literacy instruction (Foster, 2014; Kimball & O'Connor, 2010). However, the lack of a broader understanding has often led to librarians in practice addressing sampling with a limited perspective. Rather than consider hip hop's sampling musicians as copyright violating thieves, we must do deeper reading of the texts and acknowledge that they are using a creative process that is extremely similar to the one that scholarly research requires. Both processes must skillfully transform modes of consumption (finding and digesting source material) into modes of production (looping, chopping, flipping, and synthesizing samples for hip hop musicians and quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing text for students).

LOEX WORKSHOP EXERCISES

Librarians at Radford University have experimented with hip hop pedagogy in the classroom for the past two years. All the while, we were testing what fit both our librarians' comfort zones and the students' knowledge bases. Several specific examples have worked well for us in our first and second year seminar classes. It has been essential for our success that we both provide ample space for classroom discussion and debate, as well as a willingness to move beyond simple binaries. The way in which our students consume media is radically different than the conventions they are expected to use in the confines of the academic research and writing process. By comparing hip hop convention with that of the accepted academic research process, our students are able to navigate between the two established protocols and determine when each is appropriate.

Sample One: The Funky Technician and Mac Miller, Research as Inquiry

This lesson introduced our "students" (i.e., the LOEX workshop attendees) to two artists. First, we played clips from "Hip 2 Da Game", from artist Lord Finesse's 1995 "The Awakening" album. While this album was critically acclaimed, it was not commercially successful. We mentioned that Lord Finesse sampled approximately half a dozen artists, manipulated the samples, and synthesized them with an E-mu SP1200 drum machine to create "Hip…"'s instrumental. Next, we moved on to Mac Miller, a white rapper from Pittsburgh with whom our Radford University students are often familiar. He posted a video for his song "Kool Aid and Frozen Pizza" in 2010; the beat he laid his verses over was "Hip 2 Da Game". "Kool Aid and Frozen Pizza" has over 30 million views to date. The similarities were immediately recognized and then we could unravel the story further. It is important to note that Lord Finesse sued Mac Miller for damages and the case was eventually settled out of court. Mac Miller argued that he was using the convention of a mixtape, where artists will use other people's beats. However, mixtapes are traditionally a promotional tool, whereas a YouTube video with millions of views has commercial value, in the revenue received from views and as a promotional tool for his 2011 tour. (To explore this example in more detail, see Arthur, 2016.)

We then asked our "students" how they felt about the case—was Mac Miller's use ethical? Discussion in the workshop mirrored our experience in the classroom; many good points were raised on both sides. To solidify the incorporation of the Research as Inquiry frame, Craig played several of the samples (using the ideal classroom technology: two Technics 1210 turntables, a Rane DJ mixer, and Serato Scratch Live - but do not fret, YouTube videos would work too) that Lord Finesse used to make his track. Snippets of different sources ranged from James Brown to Oscar Peterson (WhoSampled, n.d.). Students—and workshop attendees—successfully differentiated between a wholesale lifting of a track versus synthesizing different sources to make ones own new work. This conversation then turned to ask our "students" what the expectations are for their own research assignment. How are they expected to use sources?

We ended this example by sharing a worksheet we have used in the past. It has an original passage with two sample paraphrases: one poor paraphrase that is too close to the original, and one that has been adequately reworked. Our "students" drew similarities between the creative processes of Mac Miller and Lord Finesse in the songs and to the sample paraphrases on the worksheet.

Sample Two: 'Kast meets the Queen Bey and Nicki, Scholarship as Conversation

An example that we have used to great success is the incorporation of elements from OutKast's "SpottieOttieDopalicious" in both Beyonce's recent song "All Night" from Lemonade (2016) and Beyonce and Nicki Minaj's "Flawless (remix)" from 2014.

Nicki Minaj and Beyonce are arguably two of popular culture's largest figures at the moment. Nearly all of our real-life students—regardless of their background—are at least somewhat familiar with both. "Flawless (remix)" was released in August of 2014 and was a hit although it was considered an album cut and not a single (Raymer, 2014, para. 3). OutKast, while one of the greatest hip hop duos of all time, is often surprisingly less familiar to our Radford University students. When OutKast's *Aquemini* album was released in 1998, both Minaj and Beyonce were around 17 years of age. *Aquemini* was—and still is—an influential album and inasmuch was certified platinum shortly after its release (Baraka, 1999, p. 28). It is highly likely that 'Kast influenced Beyonce and Minaj as they were finding their artistic voices.

"Spottie…," like "All Night" and "Flawless (remix)," contains samples of other works. Outkast members André "André 3000" Benjamin and Antwan "Big Boi" Patton synthesized inspiration as well as source material from the British rock band Genesis, the seminal American funk band Sly & the Family Stone, and even the television show *Good Times* in their songwriting process ("SpottieOttieDopaliscious," 2015). The signature horn line that first appears at around forty seconds in the track, however, was, according to oral history, a completely original piece composed and played by Clark Atlanta University student musicians (personal communication with Morehouse College alum Trey "DJ 2-Tone Jones" Wallace, November 12, 2015).

While the "Flawless (remix)" would have likely been successful without the inclusion of the signature horn riff, it would be difficult to argue that the slightly sped up sample is not meant to serve as a deferential nod to 'Kast. The "Flawless (remix)," while otherwise largely an original composition, also contains a brief, repeated vocal snippet of Q-Tip of A Tribe Called Quest saying "right" that can be found at the tail end of his first verse in the lead off track, "Steve Biko (Stir It Up)," from their classic 1993 album *Midnight Marauders* ("Flawless (Remix)," 2015). With "All Night", the horn riff has been re-played and transformatively re-interpreted. Notably both André 3000 and Big Boi received songwriting credit.

Having someone with a deep interest in hip hop as a colleague helped the other instruction librarians interested in using this example facilitate classroom discussions. Without having someone acting as a guide, it may have been difficult for the instruction librarians to understand the context of "SpottieOttieDopalicious" and the "Flawless (remix)." We included the backstory in our workshop so that it could be shared with others not as familiar. Once the librarians felt confident in the example, the effect on student engagement was dramatic. When we asked our students and our workshop's "students" why Nicki and Beyonce decided to use "Spottie…", they unpacked the myriad issues that this example illustrates, and students communicated complex ideas related to source use. This connected directly with the frame of "Scholarship as Conversation," and we then ventured into the academic realm in a number of ways: exercises on mining bibliographies, how to identify seminal works, and how to track an author throughout the literature.

Sample Three: Rhi Rhi and Richie, Information has value

Unfortunately, many of the examples we use have a limited shelf life. Popular culture cycles through art at a fast rate; an example that successfully connected with students one year may be viewed as tired the next. Fortunately, there is a freely-available website that can help solve this dilemma for librarians who may not be as versed in hip hop: WhoSampled.com. WhoSampled has a section called "Hot Samples." By browsing through this section, Alyssa (as the hip hop novice) was able to identify promising current songs that featured samples. WhoSampled offers embedded YouTube videos with the original songs, and the sample's timestamps. If you are still uneasy, you can run your ideas past a few willing students before embarking on your lesson plan.

In the exercise tied to this sample, we started off asking workshop participants to define plagiarism. Then we played clips from Rihanna's "Work" (2016) and Richie Stephens' "Sail Away" (1998). We then asked "students" to move to one side of the room if they felt that Rihanna plagiarized and to the other side of the room if she did not—no one could be in the middle. Depending on how closely the examples resonate with the students as well as their understanding of both conventions, sometimes (and preferably) the discussion can get lively. Librarians can stretch this exercise by using agree/disagree statements related to plagiarism. Some of those statements are inspired by the "Plagiarism Attitude Scale" exercise from the OWL at Purdue (2015). Using statements about plagiarism forces students to both examine the examples in a dichotomy, with the conclusion that the examples used are often more complex than merely right or wrong which, in turn, moves the students beyond the all-too-common dualistic mindset. Students are then able to link the examples and sampling practices to their own research processes as well as to the frame "Information has Value."

CONCLUSION

It is important that the teachers have a solid understanding of their chosen examples before trying to incorporate them into their lesson plans. In all honesty, a few of our trials crashed and burned due to lack of preparation. With more work and conversation, they have been a welcome and important addition to the teaching toolkit and have increased the recognition across our campus of this powerful pedagogy. Additionally, using sampling as an entry point paves the way to bringing other aspects of hip hop pedagogy into the classroom. These examples can be the foundation for further explorations. Hip hop can help teachers create critical pedagogy

lesson plans as well as creative opportunities for campus outreach and student engagement. Most notably, bringing hip hop into the classroom promotes the transformative powers of student-driven undergraduate research projects.

Very rarely do we see more lively debate and authentic engagement amongst our students than when we incorporate these examples in particular and hip hop pedagogy in general into our classes. We hope that we have provided a framework that you can use to open a discussion with your teaching partners to ultimately help spread the gospel of hip hop pedagogy.

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