

THE SCHOOL OF RAP

by Alexis Allison

What happens when you take Drake's hip hop sound and mix it with Ontario's educational curriculum?

You get Free Your Mind, a Hip Hop education STEMposium and two-day event geared at educating students and their teachers through 16 different workshops, all with a hip hop theme. It's all part of using hip hop as a critical pedagogy (HHCP). Here, that just means using hip hop culture as an educational link to inspire students to learn about themselves, their communities and the world in a new and exiting way. It's thinking outside the box and using hip hop to create a more fair and just world for us all.

STEM is a method of teaching that stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. But here, organizers of the Hip Hop STEMposium said they were most interested in using experiential, hands-on learning to encourage imagination, problem solving and collaboration.

In its first year, the program was attended by 450 students and 150 teachers participated!

Students were able to learn everything from dance, to social justice, to musical engineering using hip hop music as the starting point. Even teachers got involved and had their own workshops. One workshop used hip hop lyrics to learn about some of the challenges their students may be facing in life. This event took place in Toronto, Ont. and the organizers have big plans to hold another Hip Hop STEMposium sometime soon. Feedback from students and from teachers was very positive.

Check out some of the workshops!

Kanye & Us Ecological Exploration

In this workshop, students listen to and analyze music performed by Kanye West. Kanye's message is often about self-love and self-confidence. Students use their cell phones to engage with the workshop. They learn about hip hop culture and treating everyone with respect, even those who may seem different.

Open Beats

In this workshop, students are able to build a simple beat machine. The machine is attached to small speakers and a button that controls frequency, rhythm and sound. Students can also learn how to code on computer software to produce their own musical beats. It's the same software some professional music producers use!

99 Problems - But Life Ain't One

Do you recognize the phrase "99 Problems"? It's from Jay-Z's hit hip hop song! This workshop helps students to better cope with peer pressure and other life stresses they may be facing. It uses hip hop culture and its history to build character and promote conflict resolution to help students form healthy relationships with their friends and family.

Mighty Uplift

Students get to get up and dance in this workshop about krump, a kind of dancing that has roots in the hip hop community. Students will first learn about the history of krump and its connection to social justice issues in equity, diversity and stereotyping. Then, they will get to learn the basics of krump and actually dance it. It's a form of street dancing that has expressive, exaggerated and energetic movements.



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