

Developing Global Citizens: Hip Hop Based Educational Approaches in Soka Education

Beng Hwee Tan

Soka University

### Abstract

Hip Hop is a global culture that emerged from marginalized African American and Latino communities in New York City in the late 1970s (Durden, 2018). Serving as a source of empowerment for youths, Hip Hop has demonstrated huge potential in educational improvement across the globe. This has led to the field of Hip Hop Based Education emerging as a dynamic source of knowledge and ideas in education (Hill & Petchauer, 2013). Current literature reveals multiple possibilities in the development of global citizens through Hip Hop educational approaches. Some of these ideas include creating a critical awareness of inequality and injustice in society based on Freirean pedagogy (Williams, 2009), as well as the creation of local and global communities through the concept of the Hip Hop Nation (Forman & Neal, 2004). This idea of community is also reflected in Soka Education, where Makiguchi (1897) highlighted that the purpose of education should be the development of a “harmonious community life” (p. 50). This paper aims to identify the existing parallels between both fields of study, and introduce innovative ideas in Hip Hop Based Education that can contribute to the fundamental ideals of dialogue, global citizenship, value creation, and creative coexistence in Soka Education.

*Keywords:* Soka Education, Global Citizenship Education, Hip Hop Based Education

### Developing Global Citizens: Hip Hop Based Educational Approaches in Soka Education

Hip Hop culture and Soka Education both emerged in the midst of social climates filled with suffering and helplessness. At the heart of both movements lay a spirit of resistance and a desire for positive social transformation. The deep rooted influence of African and African American culture has equipped Hip Hop with rich cultural values that transformed the lives of millions of youth around the world. Over the years, Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE) has developed into a field of study consisting of pedagogical and practical applications of Hip Hop cultural values and practices in education. Over the years, HHBE has extensively contributed to youth empowerment, challenged social inequality, and provided a driving force for global change (Diaz 2011; Petchauer, 2009). Similarly, Soka Education has grounded itself on four globally transformative ideals of dialogue, global citizenship, value creation, and creative coexistence (Nuñez & Goulah, 2021). This paper provides an insight into the heritage of Hip Hop culture and Soka Education, as well as identify parallels between Hip Hop's cultural values and Soka Education. This paper also touches on the importance of community in both HHBE and Soka Education, followed by a proposal to introduce the Hip Hop cypher into Soka Educational spaces. Most importantly, applications of HHBE in Soka Education also provides a platform for the valuable educational practices of marginalized communities to demonstrate their potential for social and global change.

### **Hip Hop Heritage and Culture**

Hip Hop is an arts and culture movement that emerged from marginalized African American and Latino communities in New York City, United States in the late 1970s (Durden, 2018; Morgan & Bennett, 2011). Today, Hip Hop has evolved into a global cultural phenomenon, which is enjoyed, embraced, and practiced by millions across the globe. The general public's

understanding of Hip Hop is often formed through its appearances in media outlets, such as in popular music, dances portrayed in music videos, and social media platforms in recent years. However, Hip Hop in mainstream media has often been adapted to fit public consumption for commercial purposes, and do not provide a comprehensive portrayal of Hip Hop based on its cultural heritage. Hip Hop pioneers and educators have also mentioned that Hip Hop in popular platforms such as media outlets and dance studios is often misrepresented, as they do not promote an understanding of Hip Hop's cultural values (Medea Vox, 2019; Wisner, 2006). Hip Hop's history and culture is in fact highly complex, and over the course of its evolution, has been influenced by various individuals, communities, and cultures. Alridge & Stewart (2005) highlights that Hip Hop is not simply as an artistic form, but an entity that influences one's fashion, language, worldview and way of life. In fact, Hip Hop is often viewed among practitioners as a phenomenon that can only be understood through experience and involvement in the culture itself. Hip Hop's essence is deeply rooted in African cultural practices and values, which have been expressed through the lens of the African American experience, which culminated from the harsh living conditions and challenges they had faced in the United States.

The origins of Hip Hop emerged within the midst of struggle and resistance. In the 1950s and 60s, the Civil Rights era saw strong calls for social change in the United States. This had a huge impact on the communities who started Hip Hop culture. The Bronx, New York, was ridden with drugs, gang violence, and economic scarcity. Under such conditions, African and Latin American communities bore the brunt of many of these problems, as oppression and racial discrimination continued to plagued American society in both explicit and overt ways (Chang, 2005). The communities who founded Hip Hop culture started this movement with a desire to liberate themselves and transform society. As such, the Hip Hop movement is rooted in "social

justice and resistance against the oppressive systems and permissive violence against black and brown communities (Camacho, 2016, p. 8).” This spirit of resistance and social change is therefore the essence of Hip Hop culture. Engagement in Hip Hop involves expression and communication with authenticity and originality. Through such expression and communication, Hip Hop practitioners empower themselves, challenge existing problems in society, and push for positive change. There are four elements in Hip Hop culture: DJing, Graffiti, Breaking, and Emceeing (Alridge & Stewart, 2005). These elements serve as the platforms that practitioners engage with to express themselves and communicate ideas to the world. Hip Hop culture also has a fifth element, Knowledge. Knowledge is widely regarded as the most important element as it directs the other elements towards Hip Hop’s transformative potential on the self, the community, and society as a whole (Diaz, 2011). Knowledge in Hip Hop functions on two levels, an understanding towards the self and one’s community, as well as an understanding of Hip Hop’s history and culture (Diaz, 2011; Gosa, 2015; Vengesai, 2018). Through a mastery of Knowledge and their engagement with the other four elements, Hip Hop practitioners transform themselves, their communities, and eventually, global society as a whole.

### **Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE)**

Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE) is a reflection of the element of Knowledge in Hip Hop culture. HHBE involves the incorporation of Hip Hop pedagogy, cultural and spiritual values, as well as artistic practices into the realm of education. Over the years, there has been an increased recognition of Hip Hop’s value in education. In particular, renowned universities around the world have begun offering Hip Hop related classes, hosting events and conferences, as well as spearheading research in HHBE (Petchauer, 2009). Applications of HHBE are present in a variety of platforms. Hip Hop Studies courses in educational institutions provide

opportunities for students to learn about Hip Hop's history and culture, as well as its impact on society. Alternatively, Hip Hop can also serve as supplementary material to enhance students' understanding towards the main content area in classes (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). This supplementary material can be in the form of topics in Hip Hop Studies, as well as through the performative elements of Hip Hop. More commonly, Hip Hop has been present in after-school programs, which often involve youth learning about and engaging with the four elements of Hip Hop. With a focus on Hip Hop's cultural values, these after-school programs are structured to enable youths to develop into individuals of character who can contribute to the transformation of society (Van Steenis, 2020). These HHBE also encompasses the development of educational practices and approaches through Hip Hop's social transformative values and pedagogies (Petchauer, 2009). These practices has positively transformed educational environments, empowered underprivileged and oppressed communities, as well as enabled students to develop critical thinking skills. Hence, Diaz (2011) notes that HHBE has enabled people worldwide to develop their "identity, voice, and leadership in society" (p. 3).

### **The Heritage of Soka Education**

Soka Education is an educational pedagogy that culminated from the educational ideas, approaches, and philosophies formulated by three Japanese educators and Buddhists: Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda, and Daisaku Ikeda (Goulah, 2021). Similar to the roots of Hip Hop culture, Soka Education emerged from a spirit of resistance and social change. The founder of Soka Education, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, had lived a life of resistance. Makiguchi was a practitioner of the Buddhist philosophy founded by a 13<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist priest Nichiren. Nichiren was a revolutionary who believed that Buddhism had strayed from its true spirit, and stood up to challenge misguided beliefs within the government as well as the various

Buddhist schools present during his time (Nichiren & Gosho Translation Committee, 2003). Makiguchi was greatly influenced by Nichiren's spirit of resistance and change. As an educator, he often challenged ineffective teaching practices in Japan and refused to provide favorable treatment to the children of government officials, which eventually led to him being forcefully relocated to another institution (Goulah, 2010). During the second world war, Makiguchi also resisted the Japanese military government's oppression towards religious freedom, which led to his imprisonment until his death in 1944 (Ikeda, 2010). His disciple, Josei Toda, continued his work and rebuilt the Soka Gakkai, an educational and religious organization during that time, out of a desire to provide a driving platform for the transformation of a society plagued by the devastation of war, into one in which every human being can become truly happy (Ikeda, 1999). Toda's disciple, Daisaku Ikeda then greatly expanded the pedagogy of Soka Education, allowing for the introduction of a vast array of concepts and ideas, spreading its philosophies around the globe, as well as establishing various Soka Educational institutions around the world (Goulah, 2021). Based on its historical roots, Soka Education is a pedagogy that was built from a spirit of resistance, empowerment, and change. Hence, an exploration of concepts in Soka Education will reveal that its founders had left it as a highly flexible and adaptable educational pedagogy, avoiding rigid definitions and guidelines. This is in tandem with the concept of the Middle Way in Buddhism, which rejects extremism and rigidity, while instead encouraging flexibility, reflection, and change (Soka Gakkai, n.d.). This will serve to enable Soka Education to function as an educational philosophy that can benefit diverse individuals, communities, and societies, while allowing it to adapt to the never-ending changes that occur with time.

### **Key Concepts in Soka Education**

Over the past number of decades, numerous concepts and ideas have emerged under the umbrella of Soka Education's pedagogical framework. Ikeda highlights that the essence of Soka Education lies in the idea of human education, which can be conceptualized as an education which enables individuals to develop their humanity (Ikeda, 2000). There are four key ideals in Ikeda's idea of human education, which are dialogue, global citizenship, value creation, and creative coexistence (Nuñez & Goulah, 2021). Dialogue in this sense refers to an engagement with various aspects of phenomena, such as one's environment, literature, art, as well as with fellow human beings. Through such engagements, human beings can reflect on and reevaluate their thoughts and beliefs, which then facilitates the inner transformation of the individual in a process known as 'human revolution' (Ikeda, 2003). The second ideal, global citizenship, is a highly significant concept as students who experience Soka Education are expected to develop into global citizens. This sense of identity as a global citizen enables students to look beyond the limits of their ethnic, cultural, and national identities (Daisaku, n.d.), and live harmoniously as part of a greater global community (Makiguchi, 1897). Global citizenship in Soka Education is defined by three characteristics:

- The wisdom to perceive the interconnectedness of all life and living
- The courage not to fear or deny difference, but to respect and strive to understand people of different cultures and to grow from encounters with them
- The compassion to maintain an imaginative empathy that reaches beyond one's immediate surroundings and extends to those suffering in distant places (Ikeda 2010, 112-113)



The three tenets of wisdom, courage, and compassion are in fact important values taught in Nichiren Buddhism as they represent the characteristics of Buddhahood (Nuñez & Goulah, 2021). Hence, Soka education takes on global citizenship based on a unique Buddhist spiritual perspective, where individuals continually engage in personal growth and development, and develop the qualities needed to make greater contributions to society and on a global scale.

The third ideal, value creation, in fact lies within Soka Education's name. The word Soka, was derived from the Japanese words *sozo*, meaning creation, and *kachi*, meaning value (2021). Therefore, the word Soka itself represents the creation of value. Makiguchi defined value in terms of the three features of beauty, gain, and good. Beauty refers to the entity that is determined by the sensory perception of humans, gain refers to growth and development of individual experiences, while good is defined by benefit towards one's community, society, and the world as a whole (Gebert & Joffe, 2007). Ikeda later expanded on this definition to define value creation as the process of tapping on one's wisdom, courage, and compassion to live a purposeful life while contributing to the well-being of others (Nuñez & Goulah, 2021). The ability to create value should be applicable to any situation, environment, or context, making Soka Education a global pedagogy that can be applied in different countries and cultures. This is because opportunities value creation is grounded in dialogue and communication, where the dignity of every individual must be recognized and respected (Ikeda, 2010). The final point, creative coexistence, is based on the Buddhist concept of dependent origination, where all living beings are interconnected and dependent on one another. Ikeda introduces the Japanese word *kyosei*, which translates to the idea of living beings coexisting harmoniously and creatively (Nuñez & Goulah, 2021). Living beings therefore, cannot live in isolation and must creatively seek solutions to problems and disagreements so as to create harmonious societies. In a nutshell,

the four ideals of dialogue, global citizenship, value creation, and creative coexistence are also interconnected, in which each ideal contributes to and enhances the others.

### **Hip Hop Based Applications in Soka Education**

From its historical origins to its ideals, there are many parallels between HHBE and Soka Education. Both Hip Hop culture and Soka Education was born out of an era of resistance and a desire for social change. In both platforms, there is also a strong recognition for the ideals of peace, inclusiveness, and community. The dignity and potential of every individual is respected and individuals are empowered to bring out the best in themselves. Hip Hop and Soka Education also emphasize on the importance of positive change on the societal and global level. This section will highlight numerous Hip Hop Based Educational approaches, demonstrate their relationships with Soka Education, and explain how these ideas can be connected to the goal of fostering global citizens. These approaches do not solely apply to students, but involve administrators and faculty members as well. This transformation of educational spaces as a whole is important because teachers must be able to serve as good role models, in order to enable students to develop into global citizens.

### **A Hip Hop Cultural Pedagogy**

An approach based on Hip Hop cultural pedagogy involves bringing Hip Hop's cultural values into educational spaces, which encompass entire educational institutions, including classrooms and faculty offices. There are four core values in Hip Hop culture: Peace, Love, Unity, and Having Fun. These values serve as guiding principles that determine the atmosphere and relationships within Hip Hop spaces. The driving point behind these core values are not based on passivity, but are driven by Hip Hop's heritage of resistance. Hip Hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa stated that Hip Hop was about creating spaces where people could move away from

the negativity and problems plaguing the streets of New York City during Hip Hop's early years (Hagedom, 2008). Therefore, the four core values were born out of a spirit to transform society and create communities that were free from gangs, drugs, and violence, which were prevalent in society during that time. Morgan and Bennett (2011) adds that the values of Peace, Love, Unity, and Having Fun also represent Hip Hop's purpose of bringing people from different countries and cultures together to create positive change globally.

Peace in HHBE involves active commitment and action to create peace in society. Since Hip Hop originated from marginalized communities who desired change in society, Hip Hop artists and activists around the world often actively confront social and global issues through platforms that call for resistance and change. For example, Street Dance Activism was created by dancer, educator and activist Dr. Shamell Bell as a platform for the use of dance to disrupt existing structures of oppression in society. In 2014, the participants of Street Dance Activism danced outside the Los Angeles Police Department headquarters in response to the fatal shooting of a mentally ill black man by the police (Easter & Saldivar, 2017). As the activists danced, they were engaging in the black cultural practice of expression, while at the same time, encouraging the public to question current social situations and problems. Hip Hop dance is also social and communal in nature, which brings people together and empowers them to joyfully work towards a meaningful cause. Since these activities involve the use of art, they are also rooted in the concept of non-violence. The idea of Peace in Soka Education is also based on action and commitment. Dr. Jason Goulah, a renowned scholar in the field of Soka Education states that value creation involves consistent actions and interactions that contribute to the lives of the self and others, which lead to the creation of peaceful and harmonious societies (*Daisaku*, n.d.). As such, many Hip Hop based activities are prime examples of actions and platforms that create

value for the establishment of peace in society. Despite its Japanese roots, Soka Education's stance towards peace is vastly different. While perceptions of peace and harmony in Japanese society are based on passiveness, obedience, and conformity (Wierzbicka, 1991), Soka Education's idea of peace is based on action, resistance, and change. Ikeda stresses on the importance of an active approach towards peace, stating that "action is much for important than mere conceptual talk about peace" (Galtung & Ikeda, 1995, p. 19), and "If you are good-natured but fail to stand up to injustice, you cannot protect anyone" (*Strength*, n.d., para. 8).

Having Fun in Hip Hop culture involves this idea of joy and celebration in the process of transforming one's life and society. When Hip Hop dance activists engage in dance to protest against the tragic events involving police brutality towards black communities, the activists were dancing with smiles and laughter, engaging in a process of joyous struggle (Easter & Saldivar, 2017). This also translates to the concept of learning joyfully in Hip Hop culture. While some might perceive education and joy as mutually exclusive, Hip Hop culture views learning and Having Fun as inseparable. From an African cultural perspective, joy is a fundamental part of the human experience, a perspective that is often disregarded due to a Eurocentric view towards black cultural heritage and practices (Jenkins et al., 2021). Similarly, happiness and joy in education is a fundamental principle in Soka Education. Makiguchi viewed happiness as the purpose of education and human life as a whole (Nagashima, 2015). The concept of happiness in Soka Education is grounded in human connection and interaction (Ikeda, 2010). It is not a self-serving view of happiness centered on individual pleasure. Instead, it involves living a life of contribution and value creation, where one contributes to happiness not solely for the self, but for one's community and society (Goulah, 2012). The values of Love and Unity demonstrate the importance of community in Hip Hop culture and reflect the relationships between members of

the global Hip Hop community. Hip Hop practitioners are expected to treat each other with love and respect and any disagreements are resolved with these values in mind. Most importantly, there is also an emphasis of love and respect towards both the self and others (Hip Hop, n.d.), where every individual feels empowered, and in turn empower one another to create change in society. This is in line with Soka Education's emphasis on the dignity and limitless potential of every individual. These points will be further elaborated on in the upcoming subsections of this paper.

Putting a Hip Hop Cultural Pedagogy into practice, students should be encouraged to build knowledge and engage in conversation about a variety of topics in society and the world. Such topics may be controversial or sensitive, and such a critical approach might serve to challenge political interests and even academic culture both at the institutional and national level. Nonetheless, this spirit of resistance and change lies at the heart of HHBE and Soka Education. Makiguchi himself believed that the purpose of Education should be free from political interests (Ikeda, 2010). Students should actively engage in critical conversations, fostering an awareness towards important issues such as inequality and injustice in society. Williams (2009) suggests that such an approach in HHBE is in line with Paulo Freire's framework of Critical Pedagogy, which "would empower the students, together with the teachers, to challenge marginalizing social contexts, ideologies, events, organizations, experiences, texts, subject matters, policies, and discourses" (p. 1). Notably, both students and teachers are involved in this process of navigating critical topics in society, and working together to come up with solutions to social and global issues. In line with Hip Hop's spirit of Having Fun, and Soka Education's goal of happiness, students and teachers should work together to build joyful classroom environments that can best cater to the unique needs of each and every individual. Likewise, teachers and

administrators should serve as role models by developing joyful work environments within educational institutions as well. Most importantly, the process of critical conversation and resolving society's problems, should be built upon the goal of happiness for the self and others. The driving force for combating social issues should not be driven by reckless anger and vengeance. Instead, it should be built upon a compassionate desire for the happiness of those who are suffering from the inequalities and injustices that plagues modern society. Lastly, educational institutions can be built based on the concept of community, where relationships between faculty members, as well as between faculty and students, reflect that of community and creative co-existence. The values of Love and Unity are fundamental in the relationships between individuals. Faculty should treat each other with utmost respect and recognize the unique abilities and experiences of each other. Likewise, the relationships between educators and students should reflect the same values. The following section will provide in-depth insights about the concept of community in Hip Hop culture and HHBE.

### **Building Community**

Community lies at the foundation of Hip Hop culture. The idea of community in Hip Hop is not simply an abstract and idealistic concept of togetherness, it is a core practice that has been grounded in black cultural traditions. Wilson (2013) goes as far as to define Hip Hop culture as a community of practice, where practitioners come together to engage in activities, grow, and create meaning. This compliments Makiguchi's idea of "harmonious community life" (Makiguchi, 1897, p. 50). Based on the principles of Soka Education, the community is the place in which one develops, and through the process of growing with and contributing to one's community, one gradually learns to harmoniously socialize with people from other communities, countries, and cultures. Makiguchi, in fact, emphasized that the environment in schools should

reflect that of a family (p. 52). Communal relations in Hip Hop culture, particularly among crew members, reflect that of a family. This is because family is an integral part of African cultural tradition. Gilroy (2004) quotes the lyrics of Hip Hop artist KRS 1, which goes: “Definitely develop your African mind because we are all family. And once we see that we are all brothers and sisters no matter what, we go far beyond the nuclear family—from an Afrocentric point of view” (p. 91). In Hip Hop culture, there is the concept of *Each One, Teach One*. This phrase originated from the period of slavery in the United States where blacks did not have opportunities for education. *Each One, Teach One* is the idea that whenever an individual gains access to any form of knowledge, it is their responsibility to share this knowledge with fellow members of the community (Each, n.d.). Therefore, community in Hip Hop culture involves members empowering, encouraging, and supporting one another.

These ideas of community can be applied to Soka Educational settings, where the classroom environment can be transformed into a community. In this regard, students should be encouraged to forge deep bonds of friendship with one another. This can be done by allocating class time for interaction and dialogue, which is a fundamental aspect of global citizenship in Soka Education. Opportunities can be provided for students to developing an awareness about each other’s daily lives, their struggles, as well as personal victories. Students should also be encouraged to support each other’s’ learning by sharing knowledge, helping those who are struggling, as well as encouraging one another. It is important to note that the teacher is also an integral part of this classroom community. Teachers are not perceived as a distant figure of authority, but as a participating member of this community where mutual support and growth is emphasized. Hence, teachers also learn from the students themselves, and students can in turn play a supportive role to the teachers. The relationships between teachers and students in Hip

Hop culture are also grounded in mentoring and deep emotional connections, where older and more experienced artists guide and foster youth by sharing social and cultural capital, leading to growth and progress for the community as a whole (Sweet, 2017). This is connected with the Mentor-Disciple Relationship in Soka Education, which places a strong emphasis on the human interactions between teachers and students, and the happiness of both teachers and students are interconnected (Goulah & Ito, 2012). This challenges preexisting academic cultures, where distance between teachers and students are encouraged in a hierarchical relationship. This relationship can then be transformed, where students and teachers form close bonds as part of the same community, and work together towards the goal of mutual growth. Dee Williams (2009) notes that Hip Hop culture's ability to challenge existing academic cultures is important as there has been a divide between mainstream academic culture and the culture present in the social and communal life of students. As a result, most students end up "choosing cultural affiliations that often put them in opposition to a mainstream academic culture" (p. 1).

The communal relationship between people must extend to the academic institution as a whole as well, which will be reflected in the relationships between teachers and faculty members. This involves building a work culture where teachers view each other as part of the same community, empower and support one another, while celebrating each other's achievements. Communities of educators working together to advance education would undoubtedly lead to huge positive impacts in the field of education. A school consisting of a closely connected community of teachers growing together, sharing knowledge, and working towards educational transformation would be revolutionary. From a teaching perspective, teachers must also be able to engage in a harmonious community life in order to serve as role models for students. Teachers must also possess the skills required for harmonious and creative



co-existence in order for them to be able to guide students to a similar outcome. Such an academic culture therefore not only focuses on the growth of students, but that of the teachers as well. As mentioned in earlier sections of this paper, Soka Education's philosophy highlights that human interaction and dialogue is key towards the development of a harmonious community. Members of the community must be able to engage in honest and open conversations in a space where people are able to display authenticity and vulnerability. The construction of such safe spaces is therefore crucial, and institutions should ensure that teachers and students are able to express their authentic selves and share their honest thoughts and ideas without fear. In Hip Hop culture, one such space for expression exists. This space is known as the cypher, and has traditionally been a space for authentic discourse, expression, and empowerment.

### **The Cypher**

The cypher is the creative space in which Hip Hop practitioners express themselves through the four elements. This is often manifested in the form of an informal gathering of Hip Hop artists taking turns to display their artistic abilities in the middle of a circle. The cypher can be traced to African and African American spiritual traditions such as the ring shout (Durden, 2018). The ring shout has its roots in traditional African cultural dance and music, where people would move around and perform in a circular structure. This eventually evolved into a space that African Americans used to express themselves and communicate through music and dance during the era of slavery (Floyd Jr, 2002). In this regard, the cypher is a democratic space for expression, where participants are free to express their unique identities and personalities without discrimination. In recent years, a Hip Hop pedagogical approach, along with the cultural norms of Hip Hop cyphers, has been used to create safe spaces for youth expression, dialogue, empowerment, and therapy in educational contexts (Carroll, 2020; Levy, 2019; Levy et al., 2018).

Within the Hip Hop cypher, participants are also encouraged to express their most unique and authentic selves. Originality is hugely emphasized in Hip Hop culture, and copying the style or art of another practitioner is largely frowned upon. Within this space, participants encourage one another through their voices and hand gestures, and the loudest cheers are often heard when the performer in the middle produces a move or verse that is original and expresses their unique selves or feelings. As participants take turns to go into the middle, they respond to each other's moves or verses, and challenge each other to build, create, and display even more innovative concepts. Durden (2018) explains that the cypher is a space for “engaging in conversation, transmitting ideas, and enabling growth (p. 76),” where participants challenge their limits and develop their knowledge and abilities. Because the cypher is a space that embraces the unique experiences and identities of all participants, it often functions as a space for people of different countries and cultures to connect and build friendships in Hip Hop sessions and events.

The cypher in Hip Hop culture, therefore, is a space that exemplifies Soka Education's ideal of recognizing the dignity and unique potential of every individual. Bogen (n.d.) states that in Soka Education, successful teaching involves recognizing that every student is different, as they each have unique paths and purposes in life. Soka Education also incorporates the Buddhist concept of “cherry, plum, peach, and damson” (Attitude, n.d., para 10) to describe how every human being is unique, and that it is important to enable people of all backgrounds and lived experiences to thrive. Hence, inclusiveness is an indispensable aspect of Soka Education. Ikeda stresses on the dangers of an education that is rigid and only benefits a specific group or type of person (Ikeda, 2021), indicating that education should enable students to fulfil their potential and create value based on their unique paths in life. This is also evident in Makiguchi's writings about the importance of recognizing the inner abilities of students regardless of their outward

appearances (Ikeda, 2009). Based on the philosophy of Soka Education, each student undergoes a process of unique growth and development known as ‘human revolution,’ where they manifest the unlimited potential present within their lives (Goulah, 2012). Through this process, students develop into capable individuals who can create value in society and contribute towards peace and happiness in their communities as well as on the global stage.

The cypher can then be introduced into educational spaces to promote growth, expression and community building. Cyphers can be conducted in classrooms as well as in faculty and staff meetings or gatherings. Cultural norms and structure exist within the cypher, and this will need to be reinforced within an academic setting. Levy et al. (2018) highlights that:

In any hip-hop cypher, the following unspoken norms are always present: (1) everyone stands equidistant from one another in a circle, (2) everyone has a chance to share, (3) all voices have equal value, (4) praise is awarded to individuals when they share, and (5) equal support is provided to participants when in need. In cyphers, these norms converge to create a sense of comfort, safety and belonging for group members (p. 4).

When setting up the cypher in academic institutions, these norms can be shared and scaffolded through a variety of activities to build cyphers that reflect those present in Hip Hop cultural settings. For example, all members of the cypher can share their needs and perceptions of a safe space, which will facilitate the development of a space where everyone can feel safe to engage in conversation and display their most authentic selves. Classroom discussions and even faculty meetings can take the form of the cypher, while informal cyphers can also be set up for students, teachers, and staff to talk about a variety of topics, such as their challenges, victories, and work together to come up with solutions to any problems that may arise. This will also facilitate the development of a community environment in classrooms and academic institutions. Cyphers also

provide a space for individuals to portray their unique identities and lived experiences, while promoting a mutual understand and respect towards each other's individuality and uniqueness. This is particularly important for minorities and individuals from historically marginalized communities, who may be scrutinized or discriminated against due to a lack of understand towards their cultures and backgrounds. The cypher will therefore provide a liberating space for freedom of expression and innovation, serving as a platform that challenges and dismantles the "conventional colonized and controlling pedagogies" present in highly conformist educational settings (Jenkins et al., 2021, p. 49).

### **Conclusion**

Soka Education's four fundamental ideals of dialogue, global citizenship, value creation, and creative coexistence reflect a powerful desire for social and global transformation. This spirit stems from its historical roots of resistance and social change. Likewise, Hip Hop culture has its roots in the struggles of African and African American communities. Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE), therefore, has shown its potential for educational reform and global change. Hence, Hip Hop culture and HHBE's has multiple parellels with Soka Educational pedagogy. Hip Hop's values of Peace, Love, Unit, and Having Fun, provide concrete guidelines and applications for Soka Education's calls for peace and the happiness of humanity. Hip Hop also has deep rooted applications for community building, which can serve as practical applications for Soka Education's goals of harmonious community life and creative co-existence. Lastly, the cypher in Hip Hop provides an inclusive and safe space for cross-cultural dialogue and authentic expression, which enables the dignity and potential of every student and teacher to be recognized and developed. Most importantly, HHBE in Soka Education challenges traditional white-centered norms and standards of education, placing black educational practices at the forefront

and opening up spaces for the educational philosophies of marginalized communities to be put into practice. Future research should explore more of such practices and applications in Soka Education, which would greatly aid its development into a truly global educational philosophy that can contribute to the betterment of society and the world.

## References

- Alridge, D. P., & Stewart, J. B. (2005). Introduction: Hip Hop in History: Past, Present, and Future. *The Journal of African American History*, 90(3), 190-195.  
<https://doi.org/10.1086/JAAHv90n3p190>
- Attitude*. (n.d.). Daisaku Ikeda: buddhist philosopher, peace and educator. Retrieved September 14, 2022, <https://www.daisakuikeda.org/sub/quotations/theme/attitude.html>
- Black Music Research Journal*, 22. 49-70. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1519943>
- Bogen, M. (n.d.). *Honoring the Child In Front of You: Understanding the Place of the Individual in the Education Philosophy of Daisaku Ikeda*. Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue. Retrieved September 19, 2022, from <https://www.ikedacenter.org/thinkers-themes/themes/humanism/bogen-light-of-learning>
- Camacho, M. C. (2016). *How does hip hop serve as a catalyst for collective resistance : "Fight the power"- a beats, rhymes, and life approach : a project based upon an investigation at Beats, Rhymes and Life*. [Master's thesis, Smith College]. Smith ScholarWorks.
- Carroll, J. N. (2020). How a Hip-Hop digital Space Became an Outlet for Political Dialogue, *Journal of Political Science Education*, 17(1). 762-769.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15512169.2020.1845187>
- Chang, J. (2005). *Can't stop won't stop: A history of the hip-hop generation*. Picador.
- Daisaku Ikeda's Philosophy of Education*. (n.d.). World Tribune. Retrieved September 12, 2022, from <https://www.worldtribune.org/2020/daisaku-ikedas-philosophy-of-education/>
- Diaz, M. (2011). *The World IS Yours: A Brief History of Hip-Hop Education*. Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, New York University.

[https://www.academia.edu/1088920/The\\_World\\_IS\\_Yours\\_A\\_Brief\\_History\\_of\\_Hip\\_Hop\\_Education](https://www.academia.edu/1088920/The_World_IS_Yours_A_Brief_History_of_Hip_Hop_Education)

Durden, E. M. (2018). *Beginning Hip-Hop Dance (Interactive Dance Series)*. Human Kinetics, Inc.

*Each One, Teach One*. (n.d.) The University of Arizona College of Education. Retrieved September 17, 2022, from <https://coe.arizona.edu/each-one-teach-one>

Easter, M. & Saldivar, S. (2017, April 28). These L.A. dancers are changing the way people protest. *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/la-et-cm-street-dance-activism-20170420-story.html>

Floyd Jr, S.A. (2002). Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry.

Galtung, J. & Ikeda, D. (1995). *Choose peace*. Pluto Press.

Gebert, A., & Joffe, M. (2007). Value Creation as the Aim of Education: Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Soka Education. In D. T. Hansen (Ed.), *Ethical visions of education: Philosophies in practice* (pp. 65-82). Teachers College Press.

Gilroy, P. (2004). It's a Family Affair. In Forman, M. & Neal, M.A. (Eds.). *That's the Joint: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. (pp. 87-94). Routledge.

Gosa, T (2015), The fifth element: knowledge. In J. Williams (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop* (pp. 56-70), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goulah, J. & Ito, T. (2012). Daisaku Ikeda's Curriculum of Soka Education: Creating Value Through Dialogue, Global Citizenship, and "Human Education" in the Mentor-Disciple Relationship. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 42(1). 56-79. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41342474>

- Goulah, J. (2010). (Harmonious) Community Life as the Goal of Education: A Bilingual Dialogue between Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Francis W. Parker. *Schools: Studies in Education*, 7(1), 64–85. <https://doi.org/10.1086/651295>
- Goulah, J. (2012). Environmental displacement, English learners, and value creation: Considering Daisaku Ikeda in the East-West ecology of education. In J. Lin & R. Oxford (Eds.), *Transformative Eco-Education for Human and Planetary Survival*, (pp. 41-58). Information Age Publishing.
- Goulah, J. (2021). Value Creation and Value-Creating Education in the Work of Daisaku Ikeda, Josei Toda, and Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1137>
- Hagedom, J.M. (2008). *A World of Gangs: Armed Young Men and Gangsta Culture*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Hip Hop: A Culture of Vision and Voice* (n.d.). The Kennedy Center. Retrieved September 15, 2022, from <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/media-and-interactives/media/hip-hop/hip-hop-a-culture-of-vision-and-voice/>
- Hope and Joy in Education: Engaging Daisaku Ikeda Across Curriculum and Context (p. xxxii). Teachers College Press. Kindle Edition.
- Ikeda, D. (1999). *The Human Revolution*. Weatherhill.
- Ikeda, D. (2000). *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra, Vol. 1: A Discussion*. World Tribune Press.
- Ikeda, D. (2003). Our power for peace. In D. Krieger (Ed.), *Hope in a dark time: Reflections on humanity's future* (pp. 89–94). Capra Press.
- Ikeda, D. (2010). *Soka Education for the Happiness of the Individual*. Middleway Press.



Ikeda, D. (2021). *The Light of Learning: Selected Writings on Education*. Middleway Press.

Ikeda, D. (2009). Foreword. *Educational Studies*, 45, 111–114.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131940902762128>

Jenkins, T. S., Boutte, G., and Wynter-Hoyte, K. (2021). Showing Out: Africanisms and Hip-hop Mindfulness as Black Cultural Praxis of Excellence, Resistance, Joy, and Love. *Journal of Effective Teaching in Higher Education*. 4(2). 43-64.

<https://doi.org/10.36021/jethe.v4i2.184>

Levy, I. P. (2019). Hip-Hop and Spoken Word Therapy in Urban School Counseling.

*Professional School Counseling*, 22(1b). 1-11.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X19834436>

Levy, I., Emdin, C. & Adjapong, E. S. (2017). Hip-Hop Cypher in Group Work. *Social Work with*

*Groups*, 41(1-2). 103-110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01609513.2016.1275265>

Makiguchi, T. (1897). On the Significance of Social Aspects That Mr. Parker Says Should Be Incorporated into the School Experience. *Shoki kyoikukauron shu*, 49-55.

Makiguchi, T. (1897). On the Significance of Social Aspects That Mr. Parker Says Should Be Incorporated into the School Experience. *Shoki kyoikukauron shu*, 49-55.

Medea Vox. (Producer). (2019, December 5). “Teaching dance is teaching empathy”: On hip-hop, cultural appropriation and being h-u-e-m-a-n | Medea Vox [Academic podcast].

<https://medea.mah.se/2019/12/vox-hiphop/>

Morgan, M., & Bennett, D. (2011). Hip-Hop & the Global Imprint of a Black Cultural Form. *Daedalus*, 140(2), 176-196. [https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED\\_a\\_00086](https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00086)

- Morrell, E., & Jeffrey M. R. Duncan-Andrade. (2002). Promoting Academic Literacy with Urban Youth through Engaging Hip-Hop Culture. *The English Journal*, 91(6), 88–92.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/821822>
- Nagashima, J. T. (2015). Daisaku Ikeda's Philosophy of Soka Education in Practice: A Narrative Analysis of Culturally Specific Language. In Goulah, J. (Ed.), *Daisaku Ikeda, Language and Education* (pp. 132-151). Routledge.
- Nichiren & Gosho Translation Committee (2003). *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*. Soka Gakkai.
- Núñez, I. & Goulah, J. (2021). *Hope and Joy in Education: Engaging Daisaku Ikeda Across Curriculum and Context*. Teachers College Press.
- Petchauer, E. (2009). Framing and reviewing hip hop educational research. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(2), 946-978. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308330967>
- Soka Gakkai. (n.d.). *The Middle Way*. <https://www.sokaglobal.org/resources/study-materials/buddhist-concepts/the-middle-way.html>
- Strength*. (n.d.). Daisaku Ikeda: buddhist philosopher, peace and educator. Retrieved September 14, 2022, from <https://www.daisakuikeda.org/sub/quotations/theme/strength.html>
- Sweet, C. V. (2017). *Local Embeddedness Matters: A Study of Hip-Hop Artists' Interaction With Their Local Community*. [Doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University]. Digital Commons. [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_dissertations/4406](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/4406)
- Van Steenis, E. (2020). Positive Youth Development through Hip-Hop Music Production, *Afterschool Matters*, 31. 51-59. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1249788.pdf>

Vengesayi, K (2018, November 2). *The Fifth Element: On Conscious Hip-Hop*. MoPOP.

<https://www.mopop.org/about-mopop/the-mopop-blog/posts/2018/november/the-fifth-element-on-conscious-hip-hop/>

Wierzbicka, A. (1991). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: The semantics of human interaction*. Mouton de Gruyter.

Williams, A. (2009) The Critical Cultural Cypher: Remaking Paulo Freire's cultural circles using Hip Hop culture. *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 2(1), 1-29.

Wilson, J. A. (2013). The MC in Y-O-U: Leadership Pedagogy and Southern Hip-Hop in the HBCU Classroom. In Hill, M. L. & Petchauer, E. (Eds). *Schooling Hip-Hop: Expanding Hip-Hop Based Education Across the Curriculum*. (pp. 66-92). Teachers College Press.

Wisner, H. (2006, September 1). From street to studio: hip hop comes inside. *Dance Magazine*, <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/From+street+to+studio%3A+hip+hop+comes+inside.-a0150864191>.