HIP-HOP DANCE AS A MEANS OF UPBRINGING ADOLESCENTS: SEVERAL ASPECTS OF TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM

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Abstract

Research relevance is determined by several significant conditions, which derive from the socio-economical situation and opportunities of adolescent personality development that are linked to this situation: the socio-economical circumstances in the family, the mutual relationship between parents and children in the family, various stereotypes about hip-hop as an uncontrolled crowd behaviour, etc.

Based on the theoretical and empirical data, the article analyzes hip-hop culture, the attitude towards it and its possibilities of providing an awareness of adolescents as personalities. Hip-hop values serve as additional resources to formal education, as they teach the adolescent to search for non-standard creative solutions within instable and difficult-to-predict situations, to be aware of own identity in the family, at school and in society. Conducted empirical studies suggest that pedagogy that is based on values of hip-hop culture helps to decrease the tension caused by different cultures and nationalities, as the new generation reconciles the contradictions through artistic expressions instead of using aggressive actions against those holding alternative views. Hip-hop as a cultural phenomenon is linked to the principles of social justice. Adolescents make use of kinaesthetic means of expression to communicate their identity, this way overcoming the linguistic barriers. The adolescent has a possibility to integrate into the cultural environment by preserving personal identity. The competitiveness of hip-hop dance helps in self-affirmation and in finding approval – the adolescent feels understood. Hip-hop dance becomes a pedagogical means of social integration and of stabilizing social situations. Knowledge about hip-hop culture as well as its skills helps dance teachers better understand the age-related peculiarities of adolescents and facilitates a value-oriented upbringing process of adolescents. A hip hop dance teacher becomes the adolescent’s counsellor and a person of trust, helping to solve problems in the family, at school and in the local community.

KEY WORDS: hip-hop culture, dance, creativity, self-expression.

Introduction

Research relevance is determined by several significant conditions, which derive from the socio-economical situation and opportunities of adolescent personality development that are linked to this situation: the socio-economical circumstances in the family, the mutual relationship between family members, between parents and children. Often unsettled relationships in the family, particularly at an adolescent age, which in itself is a difficult period in life, cause aggressiveness, lead to protest against parents, teachers and their demands, as well as the general environment. The adolescents react this way as they feel like they are not understood and undervalued. Teachers and parents often search for opportunities to engage adolescents in a certain activity, to find ways of informal education that would motivate adolescents to be active and to express themselves. One of the options is to encourage adolescents to join a dance school of hip-hop culture, because hip-hop is a musical genre and a cultural movement that was started in the 1970s in New York largely by African Americans and Hispanics. Hip-hop culture is characterized by five basic elements: rapping, DJing, graffiti, breakdancing and knowledge. Other additional elements are beatboxing, hip-hop style of dressing and slang or a special language culture. The hip-hop lifestyle was started in Bronx and from there it has spread all over the world (Chang, 2005).

Surely one must take into account that there remain various stereotypes in society about hip-hop as an uncontrolled crowd behaviour etc. Propagators and promoters of hip-hop culture must be able to show that this type of dance is something that can stimulate self-expression skills and awareness of one’s personality among adolescents. That is of particular importance in times of social changes and in periods of crisis, when the state cannot ensure a stable socially economic environment, diverse opportunities in the labour market, and other guarantees for the security of an individual. Given that formal education does not always help to develop an active, creative and self-confident personality that is able to adapt to complex situations, hip-hop values can help formal education in teaching adolescents to search for creative solutions in unstable and difficult to predict circumstances and to preserve their identity.

The aim of the article is to draw attention to the essence of hip-hop dance and to its use within the adolescent personality development process, as well as to the professionalism aspects of hip-hop dance teachers that help the adolescents better understand themselves as well as the events in the society.
**Materials and methods:** theories on adolescent personality development within the contemporary cultural environment and on pedagogical conditions of learning hip-hop culture dances, analysis of empirical research results (interviews, observation of hip-hop dance lessons).

**Results**

Adolescents are usually the ones who get rapidly carried away by innovation, as they have the desire to be different and to belong to a certain social group, regardless whether this social group is acceptable and respected in society or the contrary – forbidden and condemned (Левикова, 2004).

The period of adolescence is of importance for the acquisition of not only family values, but also the general cultural values of society. At this age on the one hand the search for ideals meets a critical and judging attitude, and on the other hand adolescents develop a skill to abstract themselves, to analyze and to choose, to put socially significant values at the core of personal identity. The task of the society and pedagogues is to offer the adolescents an understanding and acquisition of such values that no only correspond to the category of ideals, but also help adolescents live in a world of changes and inner contradictions.

One of such opportunities is to join a hip-hop dance school. Globalization and cultural commercialization processes have facilitated the spread of hip-hop dance in the USA, Europe, Asia, Australia and Africa. The global character of hip-hop dance allows creating a dialogue between people of different cultures, as hip-hop dance, just like music, text and drawings (graffiti) allow for a democratic development of identity characteristic to each ethnic group and cultural environment, without distinguishing between gender, race or the socio-economic status (Pulido, 2008).

The passion for hip-hop among adolescents comes from the need characteristic to this age period to search for an alternative view of the existing culture and the wish to transform it.

The conducted theoretical and empirical studies show that the informal education process of adolescents based on hip-hop cultural values helps to reduce tension stemming from the different cultures of different national and social groups. An adolescent can actively engage in action through dance instead of engaging in aggressive expressions against those expressing alternative views (Akom, 2009; Alim, 2007).

In this respect the development of hip-hop cultural values among adolescents is equally important in the context of the economical and national situation of Latvia, as hip-hop as a cultural phenomenon is linked to principles of social justice that are realized in a non-violent way. Marginalized groups of adolescents, the social identity of which has developed by perceiving the self as an object of discrimination or repression, can express their identity through hip-hop dance, which uses kinaesthetic means of expression, thus also overcoming the linguistic barriers. That gives an opportunity to integrate into the cultural environment and to preserve one’s personal identity. Hip-hop dance with its competition among dancers facilitates self-affirmation and helps to feel socially valued. Based on values that give peace, love, unity and joy, hip-hop dance becomes a pedagogical means for social integration and stabilization of social situations (Darby, Shelby, 2005; Akom, 2009).

The research process revealed several of the dance teacher’s professionalism aspects, in which hip-hop dance is used as a means of facilitating the upbringing process at an adolescent age.

Comparison of contemporary hip-hop culture acquisition principles and principles of traditional culture acquisition based on the alternative pedagogical system clearly shows that the pedagogical process of hip-hop dance acquisition and teacher’s professionalism can become the means of upbringing and work organization for adolescents. That is based on such important preconditions as taking into consideration the adolescent as a personality, mutual agreement with the adolescent on how to better complete the task, belief in his or her abilities and reliance. Within the hip-hop dance process the adolescent can feel like a part of a particular social group regardless of membership of a particular ethnicity, language and speech skills, experience and other conditions important at this age (see Table 1).
Identity of adolescents often develops through the bodily, sexual, ideological, social and intellectual identity (Erikson, 1998). In addition it is precisely the external changes that the adolescent draws the most attention to, and in this regard acquisition of hip-hop culture provides such an opportunity, as those who take part in this process have their own style of dressing, an own meeting time and place. The aspects of competition and rivalry are equally important to the adolescent. During the hip-hop culture acquisition process the pedagogue, on the condition that he or she is professionally aware of this, may create situations, in which adolescents can test their skills by competing with others. The gathered empirical data showed that although victory is important to adolescents, it is not more important than the competitive process itself. A professional hip-hop pedagogue only needs to organize the process in a way that allows each adolescent to test their skills without emphasizing victory as the most important thing, in order for adolescents to make out the place of their personality within the particular group. If a pedagogue is able to model the situation that is favourable to the development of adolescent values – the need to express own personality and to receive the needed unity between group members – adolescents will no longer look for casual friends or a strange environment that is not aware of its action targets.

Within the process of hip-hop culture acquisition it is possible to create an environment that would satisfy the adolescent’s need for order, provide a secure and stable basis for existence and also give a chance to experiment. The aspect of tolerance is important in the upbringing process, particularly living in the multicultural society of today. When acquiring the hip-hop dance culture, adolescents are forced to take into consideration that the dance involves a large number of dancers. Therefore during this process it is important for adolescents to receive support from their mates, friendships and, subsequently, show respect to those who are different. In the context of hip-hop values it needs to be noted that for the pupils of a hip-hop dance school the support for own mates means to support others even when one actually desires to win, and this shows a prevalence of altruistic, selfless motives over egocentric ones (Hooks, 2003).

The disciplinary impact of hip-hop dance shows itself not only in the acceptance of dance rules as values, but also in the adolescents’ ability to interiorize these rules and to accept them as an internal norm. Uncertainty about the perspectives of adult life, uncertainty about personal changes in an adolescent often creates physco-physiological agitation and pressure. If energy is not sublimated accordingly, it expresses itself as an explosion, whereas hip-hop dance, considering its dynamics, may provide an alternative to street fights and other destructive actions.
Research results reveal that at the adolescent age it is not the idea, its improvisations or even the achievements that are important, but rather the environment, the ‘arriving early’, blending into the environment and life in it. The adolescents cannot lie in the sense that, to be sympathetic to them, means ‘to be present’, ‘to be into it’. This aspect is very important in the pedagogical context – hip-hop dance teachers must understand that the adolescent preoccupation with ideas, lifestyle, its acceptance in reality is a process of value interiorization. This is one of the ways how step by step an adolescent personality comes into being (Cobb, 2007; Hill Collins, 2006).

Empirical research results show that when working with adolescents a hip-hop dance teacher is the mediator between adolescents as a group and each of them individually (adolescents often are unable to formulate their goals, desires, reconcile the abilities and needs). If the pedagogue succeeds in creating a communication process with mutual tolerance, identification with a favourable environment is the one that allows adolescents to subsequently choose to achieve something and to look for opportunities of how to do it. Yet achieving something is only possible when adolescents move on to the next circle of development – the highest expression of creativity – improvisation, which means not to reproduce, but to take an existing dance value and to develop it according to own experience.

Conclusions

- Taking into account that the self-expression of adolescent personality is characterized by creativity, necessity for self-affirmation, a rebellious nature, social protest and the breaking of existing stereotypes, the hip-hop dance can reduce the tension of adolescents and their internal and external contradictions in the social environment. Hip-hop dance provides an alternative to the destructive action of adolescents. Dance helps to sublime the inner anxiety and aggression.
- The adolescents’ activity within the hip-hop culture acquisition process facilitates the development of their values, as the pedagogical process ensures an awareness of an individual personality, provides opportunities for self-expression, a creative approach and independence in thinking and individual action.
- The use of hip-hop dance as a means of upbringing is the way a dance teacher’s mastery is expressed. Knowledge in the field of hip-hop helps contemporary dance teachers understand the philosophy of adolescent age and their value-orientation, and helps to organize a process, in which an adolescent is aware of him- or herself as one belonging to this social environment.

References