

Case study

Charlie Thomson

Details

What:

Charlie Thomson was invited to present his Hip Hop Education Project, *The Shakespeare Sessions*, at the Think Tank III Conference hosted by the Hip Hop Education Centre at New York University. The Think Tank theme was 'Building a Hip Hop Education Legacy: A Global Cipher from the Streets to the Classroom'.

The Hip Hop Education Centre is a world leader in hip hop education and research. The Think Tank series brings together scholars, practitioners, teachers, community leaders and policy makers from around the world to share current research, present workshops and build networks.

At the Think Tank, Charlie presented the *The Shakespeare Sessions* and represented Australia on an international panel discussing Hip Hop trends, music and education, alongside representatives from China, Netherlands, Brazil, Mexico and Africa.

While in New York, Charlie was also able to attend many Hip Hop cultural events facilitated by Zulu Nation, an international Hip Hop awareness group formed by Hip Hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa. Charlie also attended the first annual Hip Hop summit at Lehman College, The City University of New York.

The purpose of this trip was to promote the Hip Hop Education work Charlie does in Brisbane and increase his knowledge of this genre through workshops, events and networking with international artists in his field. These activities have provided inspiration and direction for the next stages of Charlie's professional career.



Charlie Thomson presenting at the International Survey Panel, Hip Hop Education Think Tank III, New York, 2013

When:

November 2013

Where:

New York City, USA

Arts Queensland contribution:

\$2,631 – Individuals Fund

Contact for further information:

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Links:

<https://myspace.com/shakespearehiphop>

Outcomes

- An immediate outcome of this activity was the opportunity for Charlie's students to have author and educator Sam Seidel visit and present in Brisbane. Sam Seidel is the author of *Hip-Hop Genius: Remixing High School Education* and was one of the featured presenters at Think Tank III. Mr Seidel has since invited Charlie and his students to consider a visit to the USA to present their work.
- After meeting Brad Cunningham from Reynolds Secondary School (Canada) at Think Tank III, a collaboration has formed to share ideas and instrumental music. The first song/collaboration, *You Can't Relate*, is already under development, and Brad has also invited Charlie and his students to tour and perform to young people in Canada.
- Elliot Gann, the CEO of Today's Future Sound (an organisation which uses music production and media arts to empower young people as artists and community members) has offered to provide free instrumental and production advice to the young people Charlie works with. This has the potential to lead to exciting future collaborations.



Charlie Thomson meeting Afrika Bambaataa of Zulu Nation, New York, November 2013.

Learnings and reflections

Through this experience Charlie has been able to firmly place his work within an international movement, learning that Hip Hop education to engage and educate young people can be traced back to the 1980s. The opportunity to meet others doing similar work and observe education programs in action reinforced for Charlie the impact arts-based programs can have on young people, for example by fostering a sense of hope. In particular, Charlie was inspired by other arts workers whose projects also engage with Indigenous young people:

'Listening to international arts workers who also work with Indigenous young people, it became obvious how Hip Hop music can be utilised to develop the literacy skills of young people from various backgrounds. This has inspired me to connect and work with more Indigenous young people and relevant organisations in Brisbane.'

Moreover, the experience emphasised for Charlie the importance of building local networks and relationships:

'I learnt how powerful building networks and relationships is and how willing people are to share their ideas. I learnt how when you meet likeminded people who are doing similar things, this is a source of great encouragement and inspiration.'

Indeed, upon returning to Australia, Charlie has made contact with local Hip Hop organisations in Brisbane to plan how they can work together.

Charlie also had some interesting reflections on the resourcing of arts projects internationally:

'It was interesting to learn that in Brazil, Hip Hop educators are employed at a government level – such is the significance of Hip Hop education in that country. But more generally, I became aware of how well-resourced my programs are in comparison to other similar projects. It reinforced to me the point that having resources is one thing, but making the most of them is another.'