

Hip Hop Project engages students

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Typically the 3 Rs learned at school don't include rapping.

But at Scott Collegiate, students are earning credits for performing an art form they love — hip hop.

The Hip Hop Project — a partnership with the University of Regina's Interactive Media and Performance Labs — began last fall as an innovative way to engage students in traditional English and Arts curriculums with a modern cultural twist. Now, as the project finishes up, a group of Grade 10 students will hold a concert at The Exchange on Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

The free concert will feature an hour of student performances, and local artists Def3 and DJ Quartz. Special guest performers will include DJ Chela from New York and Grammy nominated Mystic from Los Angeles.

Chris Beingessner, who helped develop the project with English teacher Sherrie Kuntz said: "We looked at how we could tie hip hop into some course work that they need to graduate ... They meet all of the same English outcomes that are met in a regular class, but they meet them through the lens of hip hop, so it works to engage them."

Jonathon Fehr signed up for the project because it was more appealing than normal class work.

"When I first got into the Hip Hop Project, my grades were failing, but (right now) I have some of the best grades in the class. You really just get into it," he said.

Charity Marsh, national research chairwoman of Interactive Media and Performance, said the partnership builds bridges between aboriginal youth in North Central and the university.

Marsh said it was exciting to see the students' creativity throughout the 12-week

project.

Aaron Bull, a young break-dancer turned hip-hop artist, said this concert will be the first time he will show his family what he can really do. He enjoys writing songs to reflect his mood and express his thoughts.

Chastity Benjoe has always enjoyed writing. Rap now allows her to share stories about her personal experiences, things she sees and stories she hears from other people.

"It's exciting to hear your own voice, doing your own lyrics," she said. "It gets you out of your shell and shows what you can do."

Benjoe said the project helped her focus on school and she wants to encourage other students to join.

"(We) want to tell kids, 'come on, you don't always have to be running around on the streets, you could actually make something of your lives,'" she said.

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