

Producer and Rapper Ray Luv Shares Love, and Hip-Hop, to Help Kids Stay in School

By *Simma Lieberman*



There is a crisis in education, inclusion, and communication amongst people, particularly young people in the US. While some people don't see it, or don't think it affects them, because they choose to live in their own little life bubble with people just like themselves, the fact is that high numbers of high school dropouts mean higher unemployment, and higher crime.

According to research by the Alliance for Excellent Education <http://www.all4ed.org/files/HighSchoolDropouts.pdf> each year, approximately 1.3 million **Ray Luv, Shares Love and** students fail to graduate from high school; more than half are students of color.¹ The graduation rate among students of color is as much as twenty-five percentage points below their white peers.

Lack of people feeling included, means lack of participation in making democracy work, with increased anger and feelings of powerlessness, Young people who feel this way may bully others to make themselves feel better. Kids that are bullied often feel excluded, and alone with no one to help them, and see drugs and alcohol, or suicide as the only way out.

I keep hearing politicians, and talk show hosts blaming any and everyone who disagree with them, along with hip-hop musicians, rappers, South Park, Stephen Colbert, and atheists. They are long on condemnations and clichés, and short on recognizing that the causes, and solutions to our societal problems are complex.

There is no doubt in my mind that music; media and icons of popular culture always affect young people. That can be a good thing, or a bad thing depending on the message. While the past few years, most attention has been on lyrics that romanticize violence, and drugs and that denigrate women.

The voices of Rap and Hip-Hop musicians, who are demonstrating leadership by promoting respect for people across diversity spectrum, and education in their lyrics and actions, are not given the same opportunity to be heard. However, some of these people are taking the initiative to collaborate with people in technology, and education to spread their message to young people everyone else.

One such artist with the right message is well-known producer and rapper, Ray Luv, who previously worked with Tupac, and wrote his first song.

Ray began writing and rapping over twenty years ago, when he was in middle school about his experiences growing up in a rough neighborhood in Santa Rosa, CA. During that time he met Leila Steinberg who was promoting young musicians, while also creating art and cultural programs for kids like Ray, who were considered "at risk."

He could have taken his life in the “wrong direction,” but Steinberg became his mentor. She said I’ll help you with your music, but you have to be part of the solution, and be a good influence on young kids, and talk to them about education, self-help and working hard.”

“At our local cultural center, I taught classes to kids and wrote songs with them. For some of these kids, this was their first opportunity to express themselves.”

“We were talking about Martin Luther King, and raising money for Women Against Rape, and programs to feed the homeless.”

Ray continues to work with Leila and her organization, AIM (Alternative Intervention Models,) that uses arts and athletics to help bring young people of all backgrounds together and break down barriers of race, gender, and sexual orientation. Kids are encouraged to stay away from drugs and street crime, to not bully other kids, and to use their talents to become successful.

Ray works to connect young people from different backgrounds, who would otherwise have no contact, so they can develop relationships and see each other as individuals, and let go of stereotypes they have about each other.

He talked about a recent AIM program at Palo Alto High School that included NFL wide receiver, DeSean Jackson, Palo Alto educator and journalist, Esther Wojcicki, Troy Byrd, co-founder of Bryant College Entrepreneurship Center and other people from technology companies like Google in Silicon Valley.

“We spoke to these kids about our individual experiences growing up, and how we each achieved success. “

Their common message to these kids was to stay in school, work hard, chase your dreams and you can be successful.

“We made these students aware of other schools where they don’t have the same opportunities or resources, like McClymonds High School in Oakland where the drop-out rate is 70%.”

Because of this program, Palo Alto students donated money so that impoverished kids in some of these other schools could attend Sports Rhythm summer camps, and bring more AIM programs to their schools.

“We’re also involving other people in our programs, from Silicon Valley, and more women like Yolanda Hogan, who was the only woman with Tupac in Thug Life, I want kids to see strong women, who have high levels of self-esteem and have become successful in business and as entrepreneurs,” said Ray.

“One teen told us how depressed, alienated, and disconnected he felt. He said that he had no friends, and felt excluded, alone and isolated, which led him to contemplate suicide. He had never openly talked about it before, but after hearing other kids share their stories, shared his. He ended up getting the support and caring he needed from the other kids, and felt included for the first time.”

“We don’t believe in excuses or justifying negative behavior, because of who they are, where they come from, or their present life situation. There are always ways to move forward. One kid from a dysfunctional family, wanted to be an actor, but thought it was hopeless since his family had no money. We showed him how to get access to free acting lessons. He’s auditioning for a part in a movie about the life of Tupac.”

He uses twitter and his online TV show, “Pushin’ The Bay,” (www.PushintheBay.com) to tell young people, “Your discipline, not just your desire dictates your future, and to show them how.”

“We’re planning an online book club, to get kids reading, writing and developing critical thinking skills. If they read the book, and write about it, they’ll get rewards like free concert tickets or free music.”

He’s redeveloping his website www.RayLuv.com and continuing to collaborate with Silicon Valley leaders. “By merging audio and video technology, with hip-hop, we can to educate young people and give them information they need to control their future while listening to their favorite music. It’s almost like learning through osmosis, with kids not realizing they were getting schooled.

With so many people frustrated, and looking for solutions to social issues like unemployment, teenage pregnancy, bullying, high school dropout rates, etc., there is an opportunity for business savvy, socially conscious hip-hop and rap artists and entrepreneurs, like Ray Luv, and Leila Steinberg, to collaborate with socially responsible tech leaders like Steve Wozniak, and leverage their collective resources, diverse talents, creativity and intelligence to solve these problems, and create the kind of inclusive society where everyone can be successful.

Simma Lieberman, (The Inclusionist.) is a diversity and inclusion/culture change consultant, speaker, and coach. She brings brilliant people together from seemingly disparate backgrounds to solve common problems, and take action.

If you’d like to speak with Simma, about how to create dialogues, and round tables with diverse individuals that result in solutions that benefit everyone, contact Simma at Simma@SimmaLieberman.com or call 510-527-0700.

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