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From the Margins to the Middle: An Examination of Hip Hopcentricity

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by

IFe Jie

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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IFe Jie

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Professor Pedro Noguera, Co-Chair
Professor Tyrone Howard, Co-Chair

America owes an 'educational debt' to African American students and students of color due to the historical legacy of inequities found within its public-school system (Ladson-Billings, 2006). To reclaim the cultural integrity of African American students who are at the margins of curriculum and pedagogical approaches, centering Hip Hop music and culture is the goal of this work. Driven by pedagogical approaches of Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, this work examines one Los Angeles urban classroom based on Hip Hop music and culture. The findings of this study suggest that Hip Hop can be used as a focal point and basis for curricular content, the development of positive student-teacher relationships, the cultivation of both political and social awareness, and to positively influence students' overall engagement in class.

The dissertation of IFe Jie is approved.

Lakeyta Bonnette Bailey

Samy Alim

Pedro Noguera, Committee Co-Chair

Tyrone Howard, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2022

Dedication

“Hard Work plus Patience” – Nipsey Hussle

I dedicate this project to my children, Zayd Yahkisizwe, Yafeu Mutulu and Ori Jie. Because of you, my life has been forever changed. I dedicate this to my parents, to my mother Arvitis Jackson Mohammed, and my father, who transitioned in my first year of doctoral studies, the Great Elephant Rev. Leslie Mohammed. I stand on your shoulders. And to those, who have Dared to Struggle: to Aminata Umoja, Dr. Akinyele Umoja, Dr. Mutulu Shakur, Watani Tyehimba, Dr. Akida Kisane Lewis Long, Dr. Joyce King and Dr. Lakeyta Bonette Bailey, because of you I have Dared to Win. And to Hip Hop, to my loved ones in the game, to the West-Coast, I dedicate this study to the culture and community of Hip Hop. Freedom is something you create, then you fight to protect it. Hip Hop is ours and we will fight for its protection.

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Previous Degrees
M.A.T.., Middle and Secondary Education – Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA (2015)
M.A., African American Studies - Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA (2012)
B.A., African American Studies - Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA (2006)
California Teaching Credential- Single Subject: Social Studies Middle/High School
California Technical Education Credential- Arts, Media & Culture: Hip Hop/Content Creation

Publications
Akinyela, I. (2022) "Movement Music Revisited: A Qualitative Study of Conscious Rappers and Activism."in For The Culture: Hip Hop and Social Justice. (Edited by Lakeyta M. Bonnette-Bailey and Adolphus Belk, Jr.
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IFe JIe: #RealBlackGirls. Full album. 2014
IFe JIe: Street Sankofa. Full album. 2021

"Hip Hop can be a very powerful weapon to help expand young people's political and social consciousness. But just as with any weapon, if you don't know how to use it, if you don't know where to point it, or what you're using it for, you can end up shooting yourself in the foot or killing your sisters or brothers"

-Assata Shakur

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

America owes an 'educational debt' to African American students and students of color due to the historical legacy of inequities found within its public school system (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This debt has been the result of many factors (e.g., racist ideologies, legal sanctions, segregation), including 'deliberate and forced assimilation' that seeks to replace the cultural identities of students of color with Eurocentric (i.e., Americanized) cultural values (Ladson-Billings, 2006). To reclaim the cultural integrity of African American students and students of color in general, who are at the margins of curriculum and pedagogical approaches, centering Hip Hop music and culture through its application in an urban classroom is the goal of this work. Driven by the theoretical and pedagogical approaches of both Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, this work examines one Los Angeles urban classroom based on Hip Hop music and culture. Generalizations through the limited examination of one classroom cannot be applied to this work. However, this study may offer critical insights gained from this intensive study that could be valuable to other educators who would like to use Hip Hop to further their students' educational opportunities. Using qualitative methods and an emphasis on participant observations, I first explore how the Hip Hop classroom provided students with an emotionally and physically safe space. Second, I examine how the curriculum impacted students' critical thinking skills and how students were assigned and assessed on tasks within the Hip Hop

classroom that helped support students' sense of competence. In the following chapter, I describe my academic interest in Hip Hopcentric education, provide brief examples of how Hip Hopcentric education has been used and introduce the framework that argues for the use of culture in urban classroom environments.

BACKGROUND

Hip Hop is a genre of music whose associated culture was built on opposition and activism (Sule, 2006). Through rap, graffiti art, break-dance, DJing, and the search for knowledge of self and the community, it represents a cultural instrument that offers marginalized youth a cohesive mode of self-expression (Sule, 2016). The opposition that inspired Hip Hop was primarily rooted in the social and political oppression felt by urban youth that was made visible through the lack of employment, poor housing, and crumbling school buildings (Sule, 2016). The activism that many urban youths employed to resist these realities was expressed through African diasporic retentions such as drumming, storytelling, call, and response, which combined became the seminal roots of Hip Hop music and culture (Sule, 2016). These elements were rearticulated through Hip Hop in the form of rapping, cyphering, scratching, tagging, breaking, calling and responding, organizing, signifying, and teaching, culminating in a demonstration of how marginal peoples and identities amongst African diasporic people mattered (Sule, 2016).

Hip Hop can be a powerful force that has the potential to transform the educational experiences of marginalized youth (Prier, 2012; Baker, 2012; Akom, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2018). My academic interest in Hip Hop education began with the work of Chris Emdin, who explores Hip Hop in science classrooms, and Vajra Watson, who uses Hip Hop to inspire students to earn a High School diploma. In preparation for this research, I had the privilege to

travel to several places around the United States, from San Francisco to the South Bronx, witnessing how educators, administrators, and schools have used Hip Hop in urban spaces. With each visit, I observed firsthand how Hip Hop transformed the ways students engage in their educational careers and with academic content. While in San Francisco, I had the honor of watching Dr. Vajra Watson and her fantastic team of educators host a Senior Signing Day Summit for the students in a program Watson founded in 2008 called Sacramento Area Youth Speaks, or SAYS. SAYS collaborates with schools through professional development workshops and recommendations for classroom instruction. SAYS also welcomes students to join an after-school program that encourages youth to use their voices through the art of Hip Hop culture and poetry.

At the end of the school year, the SAYS team, in collaboration with the University of California Davis, hosts a summit to allow all the students throughout the Sacramento area to attend workshops and perform in a dance and rap battle. They also honor students who are succeeding in school and have committed to attending college. The theme for the 2019 summit that I was honored to attend was "#School is my Hustle ."The hashtag was displayed on the stage in the basketball stadium on the campus of UC Davis. I witnessed how students, through Hip Hop music and culture, re-centered the narrative of 'hustling' from a somewhat negative connotation or one that is limited to monetary gain to that of 'hustling' being a positive Hip Hop based approach to school engagement. In this sense, the commodity that students use or 'hustling' to engage in society's economies is their mind, education, and academic success.

Photo of myself and Dr. Vajra Watson and the opening ceremony of the #schoolismyhussle signing day.

While on this journey, it was fitting that I also traveled to Hip Hop's home, New York City (Hip Hop specifically started in the South Bronx), to witness how educators incorporated Hip Hop into academia. As I walked the streets of Harlem, headed toward Teachers College on the campus of Columbia University for the #HipHopEd Conference, I surprisingly ran into the conference's curator, Dr. Chris Emdin, author and Hip Hop pedagogue, standing outside. I was able to introduce myself and express my excitement of finally witnessing what Emdin and his fantastic team of fellow educators have come to call the "Science Genius Battle ."The battle is composed of groups of young people from both the Bronx and Brooklyn, who create music, poetry, and dance, all driven by science education content, to compete for the Science Genius Battle Champion title. Each group performed their creative piece to a packed audience of educators, administrators, academics, and peers. Full disclosure, although all the students' performances were outstanding, I was so impressed with one group of young men from Brooklyn, who created a rap song about energy, a song so good, it could easily have been on the radio. These young men took to the stage with so much excitement, passion, and enthusiasm that I almost instantly understood the Science Battles' purpose.

Emdin introduced the event to the audience with the charge that many African American and Latinx students have historically performed poorly in math and science. So, to fully engage young people in science content, the Science Genius Battle was created. These young people were engaging in science content through Hip Hop, music, and culture in a remarkable way. In addition to the rap battle, another group of young people performed a dance routine during an intermission inspired by the theme of Social Justice. The dance was so well choreographed, and the students were so well prepared that everyone in the audience remained in their seats during the intermission to support these young people. It was not until a teacher (he was not the dance teacher or a science teacher, just a teacher at their school) danced a solo and then joined the students on stage that the tears began to roll down my eyes; yes, I admit I cried. This display of Hip Hop culture and how the student-teacher relationship was transformed on stage was nothing short of remarkable and compelling. Students and teacher were the same- both vulnerable, both experts in the content -and in that moment, dancing and relishing in the synergy of Hip Hop.

Photo of myself and Dr. Chris Emdin and image of the introduction to the Science Genius Competition.

Morrell and Andrade (2002) write, "whether the power in its messages can be used for good or ill, few can dispute the impact of Hip Hop culture on the lives of working-class youth ."Prier (2012) similarly acknowledges that as schools are growing distant in the affirmation and recognition of students' lived experiences and identities, Hip Hop becomes a vehicle that can give students hope in a historically rejected society. Furthermore, Prier (2012) suggests that:

> As educators begin to study the cultural contexts of Hip Hop and the sociocultural contexts that shape it, they begin to understand the heart and soul of who these young people are, the struggles they go through, and how they respond in hopeful and despondent ways to systemic issues of racism, classism, and gendered identity formation processes in racialized contexts.

Although my visit to the 11th Annual SAYS Summit College Day and the 3rd Annual HipHopEd Conference/Science Genius Battle was informal and brief, I observed how Hip Hop could empower youth in the classroom. These experiences have significantly shaped my appreciation for Hip Hopcentric education and framed my approach to this work.

ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

This study uses a Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining pedagogical framework to investigate Hip Hop and education (Ladson-Billing,1995, 2000, 2006, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017; Paris, 2012, 2021). Culturally Relevant pedagogy focuses on producing students who achieve academically, demonstrate cultural competence, and critique social disparities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). For many African American students, balancing academic demands and success in school while demonstrating cultural competency is challenging (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Therefore, one of the goals of a Culturally Relevant approach to the classroom is to support students in maintaining their cultural integrity while also succeeding in school (Ladson-Billing, 1995). Similarly, Culturally Sustaining pedagogy "seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain (i.e., maintaining that which already exists)— the linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (Paris, 2012). The discourse on culture within education is often articulated through three leading perspectives, that are Culturally Releva.nt pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014, 2017), Culturally Sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2017), and Culturally Responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000, 2002, 2010). These perspectives will be further explored in Chapter 2.

This work acknowledges the cultural impact of Hip Hop-outside of the classroom as a reference point for its application within the classroom. Hip Hop researchers have found that a significant majority of youth worldwide connect to Hip Hop music and culture to express their cultural identity (Williams, 2009). Hip Hop music and culture have become one of the most influential musical genres in society- impacting entertainment industries outside of music (e.g., movies and fashion) (Mutegi et al., 2018). Hip Hop has also helped to influence how youth around the world engage in the economy, how youth make connections and build relationships, and influence listeners' social and political awareness.

This work aimed to understand how students experience the Hip Hopcentric classroom. Considering the influence of Hip Hop and my research intention, three primary research questions emerged:

1. How does Hip Hop influence students' social and political awareness?
2. How does Hip Hop influence students' relationships with teachers and schools?
3. How does Hip Hop influence students' engagement in school and the classroom?

In order to address these questions, I focused on observing a Hip Hop classroom, understanding the Hip Hop course curriculum, and Hip Hop based teaching practices. As I began to understand the role of culture in general and the current studies regarding Hip Hopcentric education in the classroom, I began to compare the variety of ways educators used Hip Hop to increase academic outcomes (See Chapter 2). Recognizing the growing popularity of research on the topic, I was eager to add to the body of work on Hip Hop by exploring how students experience Hip Hopcentric classrooms in urban schools. I recognized the importance of Hip Hop in the lives of urban students. I identified that research focusing less on academic outcomes and centered students' experiences is important and needs to be addressed. A review of the literature on Hip Hop and education revealed a need to provide additional support for how this musical genre and culture can support students. Again, although this study is limited in its examination of one classroom, the findings of this study might be of value to those educators who seek to use Hip Hop to increase the experiences of students academically, emotionally, and physically.

OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION

In this chapter, I have introduced the concept of Cultural Relevancy and Culturally Sustaining pedagogy as the theoretical framework that guides this work. I have also described

the rationale for my interest in Hip Hop and education and briefly described how these works have applied Hip Hop in education. Finally, I have also indicated the intentions for this study and how this study approaches the guiding research questions. The remaining chapters are organized as follows. Chapter 2 details the relevant literature for this study. Chapter 3 explains the research methodologies and analytic methods guiding this work. Chapter 4 reveals the findings of this study, and Chapter 5 analyzes these findings while providing recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Nasir and Hand (2006) have surmised that schools can be "sites of becoming" or spaces where students develop aspects of their identity, reconcile notions of their histories, and create knowledge. However, the current conditions of urban schools have become sites of curricular violence against students of color in general and African American students in particular (King, 2017). For example, in a recent report from the Center for Transformational Studies, "Beyond the School House," that addresses the state of Black children in L.A. County, African American students are reported to be overrepresented among those who are “under-prepared for college” (Noguera, Bishop, Howard & Johnson, 2019). African American students are subject to punitive discipline and chronically absent from school (Noguera, Bishop, Howard & Johnson, 2019). In LA County, African American students are reported to "attend schools that the state has identified as low-performing" (Noguera, Bishop, Howard & Johnson, 2019). They are also "more likely to be enrolled in schools where critical resources (e.g., school counselors, nurses, social workers, and highly qualified teachers) are in short supply" (Noguera, Bishop, Howard &

Johnson, 2019). African American students remain the most vulnerable children in L.A. County (Noguera, Bishop, Howard & Johnson, 2019).

This current condition is argued to be the result of many factors, including "access to healthy food, parks, clean air or good health services, racial isolation, and limited resources" (Noguera, Bishop, Howard & Johnson, 2019). Although specific to Los Angeles County, similar conditions can be found in schools nationwide that serve African American students (Haycock, 2001). These conditions may also be attributed to the use of deficit pedagogical models and the omission of African American student culture that have replicated the stratification of both racial and social hierarchies (Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017; Paris, 2012, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2000, 2006, 2014; Howard, 2010; King, 2017: Emdin, 2011; Akom, 2009; Love, 2018).

Unfortunately, this is not just a modern concern, as the historical legacy of public education has been marked by the continued imposition of hegemonic cultures within the school site that omit the pre-existing cultures among students of diverse backgrounds (King, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017; Paris, 2012; 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2000, 2006). This hegemonic culture, based on the traditions of White middle-class, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, heteronormative, white supremacist, and patriarchal tropes, has negated the cultures, identities, languages, literacies, and traditions of many students of color (Love, 2018; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017; Paris, 2012, 2021; King, 2017; Hand, 2006). Educators acknowledge the value of culture and cognition (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010) and the creation of counter-pedagogical approaches that increase the academic success and experiences of African American students and students of color. Therefore, it has become essential to eradicate the impositions of hegemonic cultures by restructuring the school site to include the cultures of a growingly diverse student body. It has also become critical that culture is recentered as an asset and not a pathology and recognized as a cornerstone of asset-

based pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017). Culture is understood as a "dynamic negotiation of people's repertories of cultural practice that includes engaging in activities as well as the variant learning that occurs within those repertories" (Gutierrez & Johnson, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017).

Additionally, the demographic composition of public schools has increasingly become more diverse. Therefore, countercultures should focus on developing diverse skills necessary for academic success and growth (Gay, 2010; Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). The work of Ladson-Billings (2014) provides the premise that any successful pedagogical practice that shifts the academic outcomes of African American youth rests on merging learning principles with an understanding and appreciation of culture. This present work on Hip Hopcentricity similarly prioritizes African American student success. It is theoretically driven by the pedagogical principles of both Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. However, this work recognizes that three commonly used pedagogical approaches have sought to include the culture of a pluralistic student population, that is, through the use of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy was first introduced by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995). She affirmed that the curriculum must be relevant to students' language, cultural practices, histories, and literacies and "find ways of incorporating more familiar cultural forms in the classroom" (Ladson-Billings, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017). Culturally Relevant pedagogy was also a response to the "achievement debt" that was formerly referred to as the "achievement gap" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2017). The debt suggested that teachers create instruction centered on students' prior knowledge as a first step in recovering and repairing the educational debt that America owes to African American students and other students of color in general (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Lee, 2017). Within CRP, students are also allowed to critique dominant power structures

and systems of oppression that have shaped their lived realities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) defines CRP using three primary elements: "focused on student learning, developing student's cultural competence and supporting their critical consciousness ."*Student learning* is defined as developing "students' reasoning abilities, problem-solving skills, and moral development" (Ladson-Billing, 2017). Cultural competence involves not just "cultural artifacts, foods, and customs" but also refers to "thought patterns, epistemological perspectives, ethics and ways of being" (Ladson-Billings, 2017). It also helps students "appreciate, ground, and recognize their culture of origin" and develop "fluency in at least one other culture" (Ladson-Billings, 2017). Finally, *critical consciousness* is defined as the "purpose or use" of knowledge students are learning in school and helps students solve problems that matter in their lives" (Ladson-Billings, 2017). More specifically, critical consciousness is fostered through opportunities for students to "question the materials they read in class, and pose questions about the social, cultural, economic, political and other problems of living in a diverse democratic society" (Ladson-Billings, 2017).

Ladson-Billings (2000) argues that the African American cultural experience is unique. Although many ethnic groups and oppressed peoples of color exist, African Americans are the only group to have experienced being forcibly brought to America for labor exploitation (Ladson-Billings, 2000). The idea of African Americans being less than human and uneducable has been a remnant of American white supremacy and continues to linger in the curriculum of public schools (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Therefore, much of what African American students were taught historically leaned towards vocations and domestic education, assuming that African American students were incapable of other educational experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2000). African American educators have since and continue to fight for African American students'

success, despite these racist beliefs and struggle to centralize this distinctive experience within schools (Ladson-Billings, 2000). In sum, Ladson-Billings (2014) proposes that by focusing on the academic success of African American students, or those who have minor success in schools, certain pedagogical principles may be revealed that will apply to all students.

Most recently, teachers have widely used and adopted Culturally Relevant pedagogy. Unfortunately, the theory's integrity has become somewhat compromised in that its application has become watered-down and misunderstood (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2017). Ladson-Billings (2017) later wrote that the most common applications of Culturally Relevant pedagogy in schools had become a project in "assimilation and narrow forms of success." As a result, cultural competence has become minimized to students simply "doing or reading something black," and developing a critical consciousness has become "viewed through the perspective of whiteness or forgotten altogether" (Ladson-Billings, 2017). As a result, educators and researchers have attempted to reconcile the misapplication of Cultural Relevancy and sought to strengthen the connections between culture and cognition.

One such iteration of Culturally Relevant pedagogy is articulated by Geneva Gay in the pedagogical approach referred to as Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. These terms, Culturally Relevant and Culturally Responsive, have been argued to be the "most used, short-handed terms and concepts in teacher education, teacher practice, and research on teaching and learning" (Paris, 2017). Culturally Responsive Pedagogy adopts the same premise of Culturally Relevant pedagogy in that it recognizes that the dominant culture of schools is based on Eurocentric models that omit the culture of a diverse (i.e., pluralistic) student body. As a result, Culturally Responsive pedagogy seeks to improve students' academic performance by teaching to their strengths, cognitive abilities, prior experiences, and accomplishments and responds to the ethnic

diversity of students through the delivery of instruction (Gay, 2000; 2002). Culturally Responsive pedagogy uses "the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching" (Gay, 2000; 2002). It further asserts that education must be validated, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative and emancipatory (Gay, 2000; 2002). Culturally Responsive pedagogy embraces the ethnic diversity of students within the classroom and centers on the cultural heritages of diverse ethnic groups.

Additionally, responsive pedagogy merges the spaces students occupy at home with the school environment and incorporates various instructional practices (Gay, 2000). Like Culturally Relevant pedagogy, Culturally Responsive pedagogy seeks to assist students in nurturing an affinity for their own culture as well as the culture of others (Gay, 2000). Culturally Responsive pedagogy also addresses the student's holistic needs, including their ideas of success, a sense of community, and identity-based connections (Gay, 2000). The incorporation of diversity within Culturally Responsive pedagogy is not limited to culture but also diversity in "integrated learning that intertwines the cognitive, physical, and emotional with the personal, moral, social, political, and skill" (Gay, 2002). In a similar trend, Culturally Responsive pedagogy also encourages teachers to use a blend of academic subjects (i.e.incorporating math, science, reading, critical thinking, and social activism) or multicultural curricular content, ethnically diverse content, resources, and instructional strategies to help students create a broad understanding of themselves, their community and the community and lives of others (Gay, 2002). In addition to ethnically diverse curricular content (i.e., formal, societal, and symbolic curriculum), Culturally Responsive pedagogy adopts diverse forms of knowledge beyond the traditional 'factual' content and values feelings, experiences, and ethics (Gay, 2002).

Culturally Responsive pedagogy proposes that students understand that there is 'no single version of the truth.' Instead, it supports students in finding their voice and encourages contesting dominant narratives and assumptions (Gay, 2000). Therefore teachers are encouraged to confront issues such as racism, historical travesties, hegemonic forces, and feelings of powerlessness (Gay, 2002). A shortcoming of Culturally Relevant pedagogical application is that it assumes teachers to 'do something or read something black' (Gay, 2002). Culturally Responsive pedagogy discourages teachers from focusing on the successes of the same high-profile individuals (i.e., Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement) or giving more attention to African Americans than other peoples of color and ignoring the contributions and actions of groups (Gay, 2002). Educators should instead incorporate a diversity of "race, class, ethnicity, and gender; and multiple kinds of knowledge and perspectives" (Gay, 2002). A significant goal of Culturally Responsive teaching is to impress upon students the idea that "knowledge has moral and political elements and consequences and that students should be encouraged to take social action to promote freedom, equality, and justice for everyone" (Gay, 2002).

Although this work is based on the pedagogical approaches of Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining theory, this work recognizes and proposes that Hip Hop also has the potential for creating diverse ethnic spaces or Culturally Responsive classrooms for students of color within public schools. For instance, Gay (2010) suggests that providing a symbolic curriculum is defined as "images, symbols, icons, mottoes, awards, celebrations, and other artifacts that are used to teach students knowledge, skills, morals, and values ."The most common forms of symbolic curricula are bulletin board decorations; and images of heroes and heroines" (Gay, 2010). A diversity of images, symbols, and artifacts can be found in the depth of Hip Hop culture and reinforced by its global appeal. For instance, connections to Hip Hop

literature inspiring the research questions for this work have been found within countries outside of the United States, such as South Africa (Swarts, 2008), Germany (Hoyler & Mager, 2005), Papua New Guinea (Richards, 2015), Poland (Miszczyński & Tomaszewski, 2017) and to Korea (Um, 2013), as well as in the urban centers of America. In addition, Chang (2007) proposes that Hip Hop is pluralistic, multiracial, intergenerational, and multilinguistic. Therefore, teachers could potentially provide a thoroughly symbolic curriculum based on Hip Hop.

Gay (2010) suggests another feature of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is "integrated learning, that intertwines the cognitive, physical, and emotional with the personal, moral, social, political, and skill ." Hip Hop has increasingly become a means for youth to express their resistance to sources of oppression that impact their lives (Prier, 2012). The positive responses of its incorporation into classroom curriculum and instruction have been noted by several Hip Hop Pedagogues, including Emdin (2015) and the Science Genius Battles or Akom (2009) and the study of Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy for example. Many Hip Hop Pedagogues have since intertwined various 'traditional subjects' with Hip Hop (e.g., History, English, and Science). Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (2014) argues that Hip Hop has the potential to reshape the way we "think, learn, perceive and perform in the world." Ultimately, the pluralistic potential of Hip Hop (Paris & Alim, 2017; Paris, 2012) and the supporting findings for this work may address the intentions of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, as found in the areas of the symbolic curriculum and integrated learning. However, the following is an analysis of the theoretical approach that best suits this current work on Hip Hop: Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining pedagogy.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy is Culturally Relevant Pedagogy that moves from the incorporation of the Culturally Relevant curriculum into the realm of sustaining (i.e., maintaining that which already exists) the linguistic, literary, and pluralistic nature of students of color within

the classroom (Paris & Alim, 2017). Culturally Sustaining pedagogy "seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism" (Paris, 2012). Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy also recognizes the concept of the "achievement debt" (Ladson-Billing, 2014; Paris, 2012) that has tragically informed deficit pedagogies that were commonly used to address African American students (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). Much like Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Culturally Sustaining pedagogy acknowledges that the culture (i.e., linguistic, historical, and literary traditions) students bring into the classroom has value and therefore serves as a resource pedagogy that supports students' achievement. Students do not have to adopt a hegemonic culture or replace the cultures in which they exist to succeed in school; their culture is valued, an asset, and is not pathological or at a deficit (Paris & Alim, 2017; Paris, 2012). Unfortunately, deficit ideas and rationalization in curriculum and pedagogical development have plagued schools. Paris (2012) chronicles that:

> "deficit approaches abound throughout the 20th century. From federal "Indian schools" with their goal of forcibly stripping Native languages and cultures from Indigenous American students and communities (reviewed and critiqued in Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006), to the "culture of poverty." Research of the 1960s and 1970s (Jensen, 1969) with the view that the home cultures and communities of poor students of color were bankrupt of any language and cultural practices of value in schools and society (see Labov, 1972). Later, during the 1970s and 1980s, different approaches marked a progression to viewing the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of students and communities of color as equal but different.

> As a consequence, Resource pedagogies, resisting deficit thinking began throughout the 1970s and 1980s" (p. 93)

By not sustaining students' culture, schools reify deficit pedagogical models that seek "to eradicate the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices many students of color bring from their homes and communities and replace them with what was viewed as superior practices" (Paris, 2012). Additionally, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy recognizes that the academic deficits assumed to exist among students of color are based on the student's ability to assimilate into expressions of whiteness (Paris & Alim, 2017). Instead, CSP argues that deficits exist within the educational system itself and not within the students.

Therefore, Culturally Sustaining pedagogy seeks to move beyond simply recognizing the pluralistic culture among students (Paris & Alim, 2017). It allows students to examine their culture through positive critique, understanding that culture is forever shifting (i.e., intersectional) and is beautifully dynamic (Paris & Alim, 2017). Finally, Culturally Sustaining pedagogy moves beyond assumptions that certain cultural traditions are only specific to particular groups of students (Paris & Alim, 2017). As the theoretical positions of Culturally Sustaining and Culturally Relevant pedagogy continue to grow, Hip Hop has become a sought-after exemplar for both pedagogical approaches (Ladson-Billings, 2012; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). An alternative, inclusive, pluralistic, responsive, relevant, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, and intergenerational culture that has roots in an African Diasporic musical and cultural tradition that teachers and students of color may share is Hip Hop. Hip Hop could counteract the "climate, policies, and teaching practices in schools that aim to create a mono-cultural and monolingual society- based on White, middle-class norms of language and culture being" (Paris, 2012). I argue that Hip Hop be assessed and examined as a potential pedagogical

form of "resistance [pedagogy] that embraces cultural pluralism and cultural equality," a sentiment that has inspired the present research and the research of many others (Alim & Paris, 2017; Akom, 2000; Paris, 2012).

Research on Hip Hop that connects the efficacy of Hip Hop on learning and cognition (Paris & Alim, 2017) may also suggest that the Hip Hop classroom is perhaps an example of what Guiterrez (2008) refers to as a "third space." Third Space is understood to exist at the intersection of teaching and learning (Guiterrez, 2008). It "is not simply about building bridges for students between the often disparate knowledge of the home, community, and school spaces but that teachers and students bring together and extend the various activities and practices of these domains in a forward-looking third space" (Guiterrez, 2008; Paris, 2012). A Hip Hopcentric third space is also presumed to be where students do not have to shift culturally (i.e., code-switch, experience trauma of double consciousness, or experience invisibility) between the spaces of home, school, and community. Instead, a Hip Hop third space may become complete with all the above characteristics working harmoniously.

It appears that Hip Hop is a cultural repository that contains inter-generationally retained African Diasporic traditions- including the use of music in the daily lives of African peoples- in addition to concepts such as improvisation, syncopation, polyrhythm, and the use of cyphers (Maultsby, 1994; Keyes, 1996; Kitwana, 2002; Osumare,2015). Hip Hop is not a pathology. Hip Hop is a Culturally Relevant pedagogy (Hill, 2009) with elements of Culturally Sustaining pedagogy within its application. One of the critiques that Culturally Sustaining pedagogy seeks to address is the "over-deterministic links between race and language, literacy, and cultural practice" (Paris & Alim, 2014). This gross simplification goes beyond language, where communities of cultural practice, such as Hip Hop, are assumed to be only a cultural resource for

teaching Black or even Black and Brown students (Paris & Alim, 2014). This assumption reveals the limited understanding of Hip Hop's global presence and vast potential and, as such, does a disservice to Hip Hopcentricity by only incorporating it in classrooms of Black and Brown students (Alim, 2009; Alim, 2011; Paris & Alim, 2014). This work proposes that Hip Hop, in its fullest potential (i.e., Hip Hop content and Hip Hop practices), can appeal to youth internationally, to the learning styles of a diverse student population, and can be applied in various subject and content areas.

Hip Hop is a dynamic global youth culture that supports students of diverse histories, identities, languages, and backgrounds" (Paris & Alim, 2017). This is a fundamental goal of CSP (Paris & Alim, 2017). Hip Hopcentricity is also a way to "think about how popular art forms shape students' thinking and worldview" and a way to place student's needs first" (Ladson-Billings, 2017). Hip Hopcentricity also allows students to examine contradictory ideas within the genre and engage in opportunities for critical reflection, thus embracing a syncretic pedagogical approach that requires students to grapple with multiple emotions about texts and practices (Gutierrez & Johnson, 2017). For instance, within Hip Hop, both misogynistic elements (i.e., the use of derogatory slurs against women) and feminist (i.e., expressions of black female empowerment), both homophobic and gender inclusivity exists. The power of Hip Hop is in its ability to make space for various messages, images, and ideations that are at times in direct contradiction with one another. Hip Hop is also a platform that can empower students to disrupt "dominant narratives that portray people of color as less than human" (Wong & Pena, 2017) and can be used as a vehicle for social justice. For example, Hip Hop has a sustained tradition of using rap lyrics to speak about the realities of police brutality and has been used to create spaces of relief and release of the hardships of police surveillance (Wong & Pena, 2017). More

specifically, when creating counter-narratives that humanize students of color, Hip Hop also serves as a space that sustains the languages and linguistic styles of these expressions and centers students' voices, word choices, colloquialisms, and verbal traditions (Alim & Haupt, 2017). Another characteristic of Hip Hop culture that is important to note is that although recognized as a 'youth culture,' Hip Hop does not and does not emerge out of a vacuum; Hip Hop has roots. It belongs to a long tradition of music as an essential component of the everyday lives of African Diasporic people, a cultural remnant worth sustaining (Keyes, 1996). Hip Hop is a contemporary iteration of using improvisation, call-and-response, polyrhythms, and syncopated word that has been sustained over centuries (Maultsby,1994; Kitwana, 2002; Osumare, 2015; Keyes,1996). These elements have been visible also within Jazz, Blues, Freedom Songs, and spiritual songs used to worship West African deities. As we recognize the role of culture and its function in human development (Lee, 2017) and implementation into pedagogical practices, we also account for the historical and therefore sustained function of music in general in the lives and cultural fabric of diasporic peoples.

Hip Hop is one of many culturally identifying constructs that youth may employ. This work recognizes that students can simultaneously belong to 'multiple cultural communities' (Lee, 2017). As such, Hip Hopcentricity recognizes students' multiple cultural identities. Instead, Hip Hop can be offered as a centralizing and shared community that welcomes students of all ethnicities, gender, and gender identities, backgrounds, languages, histories, and legacies. Hip Hop's early pioneers and global appeal are evidence of its inclusive nature. As we continue to encourage students to critically examine issues of exclusion and inclusion (e.g., queer students, women, learning ability), we also create spaces to sustain the integrity of Hip Hop culture's

original intention and nature. Hip Hop prided itself on including diverse youth across multiple ethnic communities (Lee, 2017; Chang, 2005).

HIP HOP AND EDUCATION

Hip Hopcentric education has been expressed in various formats (Petchauer, 2009; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Williams, 2007; Stovall, 2006; Newman, 2007). Many of these approaches focused on using Hip Hopcentricity to increase students' academic performance or academic outcomes. This work emphasizes instead the use of Hip Hop in the areas of engagement, student-teacher relationships, and the skill of critically reading the world. Investigating Hip Hop music and culture in the classroom can be understandably vast, as there are several features to explore, including teaching practices, student responses and preferences, rap lyrics, and rap culture (e.g., fashion, news, media) at minimum. Similarly, the use of Hip Hop within education is varied, as some scholars employ Hip Hop during an individual lesson. In contrast, others may use Hip Hop as the cornerstone of entire curricular units.

Hip Hop music and culture have also been popularly implemented into academic institutions, according to Emdin (2011), in three distinct ways. The first can be found in afterschool programs (e.g., SAYS) in which students express themselves directly through Hip Hop music and culture and explore their potential to participate in the music industry (Emdin, 2011). Secondly, Hip Hop has been used in the classroom as a scaffolding method for elementary and secondary students (Emdin, 2011). Finally, Hip Hop has been typically used within academic institutions to introduce critical analysis of systems of oppression that plague our society (Emdin, 2011). Traditional academic institutions' general values and beliefs often prevent a seamless convergence of Hip Hop and the academy, which require the development of

lucrative mechanisms to strengthen this connection. They may begin with a viable Hip Hop based pedagogy (Emdin, 2011).

Although each approach has a different emphasis on how Hip Hop is utilized in the classroom (e.g., instructional practices, curriculum, classroom culture), they all focus on Hip Hop music and culture. Hip Hop culture in the classroom has created Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE) (Love, 2018), Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (Akom, 2009), Hip Hop Pedagogy (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002), Hip Hop Curricular and Culturally Relevant Hip Hop Pedagogy (Gosa & Fields, 2012). The proposed term, Hip-Hopcentric or Hip Hopcentricity, will serve as an all-inclusive phrase that captures the corpus of ways Hip Hop produces the most optimal experiences for marginalized youth. As Hip Hop research continues to grow, scholars have yet to create a canon for approaching this area of study; however, many studies have borrowed various methodologies and have offered somewhat of a guide in replicating future studies such as this.

For instance, Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) investigated curricular units that used rap texts (i.e., Hip Hopcentric literature) to connect with traditional (i.e., state-mandated) literature texts by using an ethnographic approach. The research began in an English classroom at a High School in Northern California. The research emphasized understanding the impact of Culturally Relevant curriculum, specifically on the development, integrity (e.g., Hip Hop authenticity), and rigor of a Hip Hop Literature Unit designed to engage students in Senior level English poetry. This study addressed Culturally Relevant pedagogy and Hip Hop solely within students' scholastic performance scope. The study focused on rap music as a literary text and supporting students in developing literacy jargon and skills used in "traditional" poetry units.

When coupled with rap text, the researchers confirmed that students could generate responses and perform the poetic skills and analytical awareness needed in traditional English classes.

Stovall (2006) and Williams (2007) similarly used ethnography to examine the use of rap lyrics and its impact on a Social Studies/Humanities course at an urban high school. The participants in this study were African American and Latinx males and females who participated in a six-series workshop focused on a thematic unit within the Social Studies course. Students could provide feedback about the workshops by maintaining a reflection journal and offering verbal feedback during the course. Throughout the workshops, students engaged in writing exercises, small group discussions, and critical thinking opportunities that addressed social issues such as justice and responsibility. Once the six workshops were complete, students were assessed on the impact of Hip Hop lyrics, specifically on the Social Studies content being taught. Although this study did not explicitly incorporate the language of Cultural Relevancy and Hip Hop, the tenets of developing a cultural critique (i.e., reading the world) of social issues and engaging in cultural content indicated within cultural relevance drove the findings of this work. Researchers confirmed that incorporating rap lyrics positively impacted students' level of engagement and investment in the course content.

Newman (2007) used ethnography and genre analysis to illuminate the disconnection between students' rap music preferences and the types of rap music teachers often present in the classroom. This study is insightful as many Hip Hop educators, perhaps unintentionally, promote their individual musical preferences when introducing Hip Hop into the classroom. Because Hip Hop is intergenerational, the Hip Hop musical preferences of the teacher may be drastically different from that of the students. In short, although both teacher and student confirm affiliations within the Hip Hop Nation and Hip Hop music and culture, variations

appropriately exist intergenerationally. Over two years, Newman (2007) used genre analysis, classroom observations in addition to related ethnographic methodologies to study 15-20 African diasporic (e.g., African American, Caribbean, continental African) and Latinx high school students in a half day course related to discussing and engaging various topics within Hip Hop music and culture. Students addressed issues such as violence, capitalism, and sexuality (e.g., developing a cultural critique of social issues) and the generational differences within rap styles and rap music eras through rap lyric analysis. While Newman (2007) investigated the rap music preferences of high school students in Queens, New York, compared to their adult instructors, the methodologies of genre analysis, for instance, proved to be an equally contributing feature of this study.

Pardue (2007) explored the extensive use of Hip Hop education in Sao Paulo, Brazil using what is referred to as critical ethnography. This study is significant because Sao Paulo has recognized the importance of art and education and has therefore employed rappers and Hip Hop artists (e.g., graffiti artists, break dancers) to serve as educators within the public school system. As such, Pardue (2007) explores how Hip Hop education is presented in the Casa de Cultura Hip Hop project and throughout the educational system or Unified Educational Centers within Brazil. Students explored the history of Hip Hop and were introduced to racial and social politics through the music and movement of Afrika Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation. Students also engaged in literary skill-building through practices such as rhyme composition. Ironically, the teaching artists enjoyed being presented with pedagogical challenges. Such as limited resources, student skill, and engagement level, while also being affirmed through recognition from the state as both a Hip Hop artist and a paid professional- a feat that has yet to take root in the United States.

Brazil's educational system and Pardue's (2007) work suggest an attainable goal for Hip Hop education within the United States public school system. The connection between art and education may be valued and not approached parsimoniously, and rappers, break-dancers, graffiti artists, deejays, and academics will be recognized as experts and professionals suited for consideration as legitimate, paid educators and scholars. These works also describe a need within the field of Hip Hop education research for a canon or format that may present the most favorable environments to study Hip Hop's application, impact, and connection to education. As described above, each study mentioned variations in the unit and focused of study (e.g., workshops, thematic units), in the core subject content area (e.g., social studies/humanities, English), and classroom structure (e.g., half-day course, lesson within a course). Interestingly, the population sample for each study was composed of African Diasporic (e.g., African, African-American, Afro-Caribbean) and Latinx youth in urban classrooms, and all studies used some form of ethnographic methodologies. The methodological goals of this study are to use qualitative methods as described in previous research. Also, to identify a research site composed of a majority African Diasporic or Latinx student population in an urban community. Finally, identify a research site incorporating Hip Hop as more than an afterschool program, an individualized thematic unit, or an independent lesson plan.

Petcheaur (2009) notes that many ethnographic studies on Hip Hop's connection to education focus only on the success of Hip Hop's connection to education. This focus often negates research studies that examine the mechanisms that explain how and why Hip Hop produces successful outcomes within schools. Similar limitations omit the lived experiences of students of Hip Hop aesthetics outside the classroom, which are later translated into the

classroom experience (Petchauer, 2009) and student engagement of Hip Hop based education delineated by gender or racial identity (Baker & Cohen, 2008; Petchauer, 2009).

Hip Hop pedagogues have diligently worked to document the power of Hip Hop in urban classrooms at the K-12 level, including the work of Bettina Love (2019), Chris Emdin (2011), Jason Rawls (2019), John Robinson (2019), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995; 2018), Antwi Akom (2009), Samy Alim (2015), Django Paris (2012), Lauren Kelly (2013), Vernon Andrews (2001), Dale Allender (2005), Ernest Morrell (2002), Jeffery Duncan-Andrade (2002), and so many, many more. Each of these educators, scholars, and Hip Hop Nation members has outlined how Hip Hopcentric teaching practices and content have been applied to encourage students' academic success. By focusing on student-teacher relationships, engagement, and social and political awareness (i.e., reading the world or developing a cultural critique of the world), this work seeks to strengthen the discourse on Hip Hop as a viable form of Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining pedagogy. It also seeks to add to the extensive body of work on Hip Hop practices and Hip Hop content in education.

HIP HOP PRACTICES

Hip Hopcentric teaching practices include, but are not limited to, the incorporation of sampling (Schloss, 2009), cyphers or spaces reminiscent of the black church ceremony (Stovall, 2006; Emdin, 2011), battles (Emdin, 2011), remixing (Rose, 1994), the use of call-and-response (Osumare, 2015), allowing students to be recognized as content experts (Emdin, 2011), and Hip Hop as a practice to promote expression and performance (Prier, 2012). The purpose of this study, therefore, seeks to expand the discourse on the application of Hip Hop within the educational system by focusing on students' experiences. Educators have used Hip Hop within the classroom via Hip Hop Practices and Hip Hop Content, which are the foundations of Hip

Hopcentricity. Hip Hopcentricity is a potentially inclusive term that can be used to refer to the multitude of applications of Hip Hop within education. Hip Hop practices and content is broad and continuously developing. The following descriptions will specifically focus on some of the more popular applications of Hip Hopcentricity that use Hip Hop cyphers, battles, freestyling, remixing, and sampling and focus on Hip Hop Content that incorporates Hip Hop Literature.

HIP HOP CYPHERS

The Hip Hop cypher is a distinct feature of Hip Hop culture. Historically, the cypher was the space emcee's created to initiate a 'freestyle' of rhymes while standing, sitting, or arranging themselves in a circle, thus the term cypher (Stovall, 2006). While standing in the circle, each participant takes turns reciting rap lyrics until all participants have been allowed to participate (Emdin, 2011). Although the opportunity is given to all participants, some choose to divert the opportunity, while others may provide background rhythm or provide feedback by supporting rappers by cheering (Emdin, 2011). The democratic nature of the cypher and its verbal interactions among youth may also lead to building camaraderie among students (Emdin, 2011). In this space, emcees use the cypher to construct knowledge about the culture (Stovall, 2006), which educators have been able to mimic in the classroom setting.

The cypher serves as an example for teachers to understand that to optimize exchange among students, organizing the classroom using a circular shape and repositioning the teacher as a member of the cypher versus the 'leader' of the cypher becomes critical (Emdin, 2011). Additionally, the cypher also provides educators with the notion that classrooms must be open to the possibility of students at any moment within the class session to be granted the opportunity to 'have the floor' and to permit students to engage in differentiated learning (Emdin, 2011). For instance, in the Hip Hop cypher, participants may be rapping and beat-boxing (i.e., providing a

beat with the mouth), while others may be cheering. Within the Hip Hopcentric cypher, teachers may have one student working on one task while another student is working on another task, while a third student may be solely providing feedback to their peers. Educators can also create teaching strategies according to the role of the student within the cypher. The rapper, for instance, interacts with each of the members of the cypher and uses distinctly Hip Hop jargon, which can exemplify how teachers can interact with their students and facilitate fluid communication between teachers and students (Emdin, 2011). The Hip Hop cypher also provides teachers with the notion that students can create classroom norms and expectations that honor the classroom space. In the same way, the Hip Hop cypher has 'unspoken norms' that are honored by all cypher participants. For instance, Levy, Emdin & Edmund (2017) detail the unspoken cypher as:

> (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.

The Hip Hop cypher, therefore, can apply to structuring group work amongst students, as Levy, Emdin & Edmund (2017) have described with their incorporation of Hip Hop cyphers in urban K-12 classrooms. Levy, Emdin & Edmund (2017) argue that the Hip Hop cypher becomes a 'community generated' form of support amongst students and, through observation, mirrors the cultural tradition of the African drum circle. Observations of the Hip Hop cypher summarize this community-generated support amongst students as follows:

> Rhymes were shared, and other members of the cypher called out in support and applauded when each person finished reciting his or her verse. When an individual stumbled over their lyrics, others in the cypher provided verbal validation to encourage the individual to continue. It reminded us of a sort of home-grown system of mutual aid. (Levy, Emdin, Edmund, 2017)

Hip Hop cyphers provide a reference point that allows educators to reshape the classroom according to the aesthetics and knowledge-producing practices shared amongst urban youth. Educators have since exemplified this application of the Hip Hop cypher in the classroom, which can be explored through projects such as Williams' (2009) Hip Hop C3 Project.

Williams (2009) used the framework of Freire's (1974) Critical Consciousness Circles and the Hip Hop cypher, to create a project that supported high school students develop literacy in the 'traditional sense' as well as develop a cultural literacy of Hip Hop and its impact on daily life. Through this project, and many others like it, educators are allowed to observe the complexity of the Hip Hop cypher, as it is argued to be a 'highly codified yet unstructured practice' that allows youth to exchange and create information (Levy, Emdin, Edmund, 2017; Kirkland, 2017).

HIP HOP BATTLES

Like the Hip Hop cypher, implementing Hip Hop battles can contribute to a learning environment that supports positive competition, complex thinking, critical questioning, and keen observation (Emdin, 2011). In the form of a battle, the competition allows students to refine their knowledge of a given subject, as students must master said information to participate in the battle. As aforementioned, one of the exemplary forms of this practice can be found with the

Science Genius Battles hosted by the #HipHopEd community. In this space, students must master science-based content, showcase their mastery by presenting a Hip Hop rap, and compete against other students. Mastery of the content is also displayed in students' creative writing in creating rap lyrics. Much of the competition is based on the student's lyrical creativity. It inadvertently fosters a desire among students to not only understand the curricular content but also apply it to subjects, events, and topics outside the curricular content. Although the term battle may assume a negative connotation of competition, the incorporation of the battle helps to support a space in which students can embrace their expertise in content, display their creativity, and, much like the cypher, provide a space for critical feedback, support, and acknowledgment.

SAMPLING

Sampling is another feature of Hip Hop culture that students may utilize to create knowledge in the classroom. Within Hip Hop music, sampling refers to a practice whereby a Hip Hop music producer uses some form of digital instrumentation to capture musical elements, traditionally from vinyl records, and use them to create a new instrumental track (Schloss, 2009). Transferring knowledge from one space to make meaning in another indicates how sampling can be applied in the classroom. Students can refer to connections and conclusions on classroom ideas and concepts by incorporating their experiences outside the classroom context. According to Schloss (2009), this practice also has an epistemological element regarding how individuals construct 'reliable perspectives by sampling from different sources of information. These experiences are limitless, and the connections are the same. Students within the Hip Hopcentric classroom are continuously encouraged to correlate classroom content and their lived everyday experiences.

Similarly, students begin to assess the value of classroom content once that knowledge is applied in the real world. The investment in obtaining information within the classroom that can be applied and valuable within students' lived experiences becomes a driving tenant of how students begin to construct knowledge within Hip Hopcentric academic spaces (Schloss, 2009). The opportunity for students to bring knowledge and experiences from outside the classroom has also been deemed essential, as students rely on knowledge produced outside the classroom to navigate the potential limitations within the educational system (Kelly, 2013).

FREESTYLING

Another critical feature of Hip Hopcentric practices within the classroom can be found in the idea of freestyling. As aforementioned, students within a Hip Hop cypher are given the platform to express ideas and gain feedback from peers. They agree to follow collectively established and agreed-upon rules of behavior in addition to the features detailed above. Within the Hip Hop cypher, exist another element that equally contributes to the construction of knowledge within the Hip Hopcentric classroom, which is initiated through freestyling. Freestyling, in some form, provides a platform for students to present sampled knowledge gained outside of the classroom into the classroom in a creative medium. Historically, the cypher was the place where freestyling was most valued (Stovall, 2006). The concept of freestyling also invites an element of flexibility and fluidity within the classroom. For instance, teachers may 'freestyle' a lesson plan, which assumes an impromptu, creative, and alternative approach to the traditional school day. As students are given the same freedoms to express themselves within the Hip Hop cypher openly, teachers are granted the same permission within the construction of classroom nuances and expectations once freestyling is applied (Stovall, 2006).

HIP HOP CONTENT AND LITERATURE

One of the most popular strategies educators use to incorporate Hip Hopcentric instruction in the classroom is using rap lyrics. Educators commonly incorporate rap music lyrics to engage students in subjects such as History and English literature. Incorporating rap lyrics is often made visible through classroom assignments that allow students to create lyrics reflecting classroom content and use rap lyrics to memorize or master information (Emdin, 2011). Hip Hopcentric content, however, is not limited to rap music lyrics but also embraces Hip Hop articles, blogs, current events, social commentary, and interviews. The corpus of Hip Hopcentric information drastically increases once educators understand that rap lyrics exist within a larger context of Hip Hop culture. Classroom content and rap music lyrics can benefit student engagement (Emdin, 2011). Some scholars argue for the recognition of rap lyrics as a formal body of work, referred to as Hip Hop Literature (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2002; Allender, 2005) which can support students' analysis of literary constructs as well to inspire critical social commentary.

Allender (2005) argues that all rap music (i.e., gangster rap, neo-soul, old school) displays various degrees of skill and creativity in using literary elements such as plot, character development, motif, and theme. Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2002) argue that Hip Hop texts (i.e., articles, blogs, interviews) should be considered literary texts as many can be used to differentiate literary terms and ideas that inspire students to engage in literary interpretations. According to Duncan-Andrade & Morell (2002), Hip Hop texts are saturated with concepts of imagery, metaphor, irony, tone, diction, and point of view. Furthermore, Hip Hop's texts also invite social commentary on feminism, Marxism, structuralism, psychoanalysis, and postmodernism (Duncan-Andrade & Morell, 2002). Hip Hop literature is embedded with canonized features of a traditional literary text. Scholars have begun to argue that Hip Hop

literature be recognized within the academy as an independent subject of study and an acceptable alternative to text taught in urban classrooms, such as Shakespeare or the poetry associated with the Elizabethan Age and the Puritan Revolution (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2002). Much in the same conceptualization of 'sampling,' students can connect the analysis of Hip Hop texts to texts usually associated with literature taught in urban K-12 English classrooms (i.e., Shakespeare). Through this process, Hip Hopcentric text can merge the space between students' experiences in the streets and the academy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2002). The connection between Hip Hopcentric text and the academy can equally provide the opportunity for students to engage in critical discussions of their realities as marginalized urban youth (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2002).

For instance, Hip Hop artist Biggie Smalls effectively expresses his reality as an urban black male youth through a beautiful arrangement of rhyme, alliteration, rhythm, and metaphor, which educators might integrate into formal curriculum for language investigation and development (Allender, 2005). Likewise, analyzing the critical social commentary within the lyrics of Public Enemy, Refugee Camp, or Nas may provide students with opportunities to engage in classroom discussions that are 'conscious raising.' Rap lyrics also provide content for students to create literary essays. These topics can be used for research projects and a site upon which students can engage critical explanations of marginalization felt by many urban students worldwide (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2002). Curiously, rap music lyrics have been argued to be reflected in the broader culture, fueled with societal ills such as sexism, homophobia, and violence (Kelly, 2013). Rap music lyrics (i.e., rap music lyrics can be empowering to women and degrading to women) and their contradictions provide the opportunity to challenge the external and internal influences that students experience within their communities and society in

general (Kelly, 2013). Within these artists' lyrics, students can also explore ideas of self-esteem, power, place, and purpose and may further their understanding of the current urban social-political climate (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2002).

Kelly (2003) argues that a Hip Hop song exemplifies the process of investigation and questioning that may lead students to create a more meaningful and critical perspective. Furthermore, Kelly (2003) argues that it is not just the incorporation of Hip Hop songs that highlights the potential of knowledge production. Within the classroom, incorporating Hip Hopcentric aesthetics such as sampling and battling further increase the recognition of Hip Hop literature and potentially embody a specific Hip Hopcentric ideology or epistemology (Kelly, 2003).

HIP HOP ATTRIBUTES

As aforementioned, Hip Hopcentric education can be expressed through various practices and curricular structures using Hip Hop content and practices. This research aims to add to the discourse on Hip Hopcentric education by focusing on students' experience of Hip Hop as it relates to socio-political awareness, teacher-student relationships, and classroom engagement. Both the framework of a Culturally Relevant pedagogy and some of the attributes of Hip Hop that have supported urban youth outside of the classroom setting (e.g., engaging in local economies and building relationships within a global network) have shaped this study. The global Hip Hop audience has become multi-racial, intergenerational, and multilinguistic and is referred to as the Hip Hop Nation (Chang, 2007). Hip Hop has grown from being just a musical genre or a dress style to impacting society socially, economically, and politically. With origins rooted in the experiences of marginalized youth living in the United States, rap music has

undoubtedly surfaced and continues to be one of the most influential musical genres among youth within African American and minority communities (Chang, 2000; Sullivan, 2003). Although all the expressions (i.e., djing, breakdancing) are a form of Hip Hop, rap music, in general, is complete with diverse rap styles and content. This diversity has helped Hip Hop music and culture empower youth worldwide in various ways. For this research, three attributes of Hip Hop have influenced the guiding research questions of this study:

- ➔ Hip Hop has empowered listeners to build relationships amongst other Hip Hop nation members locally and globally.
- ➔ Hip Hop has socially and politically impacted listeners, as rap music has become a tool in political campaigns and to express the political views of minority communities.
- ➔ This research is influenced by how Hip Hop has equipped marginalized urban youth with opportunities to engage in both local and international economies and markets.

Within rap music, several genres and subgenres appeal to the diversity and ideals of fans across the globe. Conscious rap music is one of the most politically vocal genres that has expressed resistance to urban youth's marginalized realities (Rose, 2008; Cummings & Roy, 2002). The following descriptions will detail how Hip Hop has impacted its listeners socially and politically and contributed to social and political awareness. Next is a description of how Hip Hop has created a global network of Hip Hop members and affiliates, creating what Chang (2005) refers to as the Hip Hop Nation. Finally, I described how Hip Hop had empowered urban youth to participate in global and local economies and shift their socioeconomic status in meaningful ways.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IMPACT

One of the ways Hip Hop has influenced the Hip Hop Nation and its affiliates outside of the classroom is by exposing listeners to social and political content. Bell (1987) argues that the conditions and realities of African Americans, despite political advances and increases in economic mobility, necessitate some form of change. This change is often verbalized and expressed in conscious rap music. Conscious rap has been defined as having a "black nationalist sound, image, and message. " Conscious rap draws from struggles that anticipate the coming of the black nation (nation time) and a mythical attitude toward an immemorial African nation (nation place)" (Decker, 1993). Newman (2007) defines conscious rap as "provides overtly political, and specifically a progressive or Black Nationalist perspective ."Conscious rap encourages critique of social and political conditions and embraces rhetorical styles found in past African American social movements. The political potential for rap music was best expressed during what Hip Hop scholars have come to label the 'Golden Age of Rap' music, in which Black Nationalism, revolution, and politics were at the forefront of many popular rap songs and represented by several artists. According to Cheney (2005), this era was best described between 1988 and 1993, when artists such as Public Enemy and Ice Cube became leaders in announcing the disenchantment of African American youth living in impoverished communities. Rap music during this era did impact a generation of listeners. However, this impact was compromised by external forces within the music industry that demanded other types of less political rap genres, including gangster and party rap, to be promoted (Rose, 2008; Cheney, 2005). By 1991, record reports suggested that the gangsta rap album Niggaz4Life by N.W.A. was on top of the charts (Samuels, 1991; Krohn & Suazo, n.d.)

The socio-political impact of Hip Hop has been made visible in spaces of oppression and marginalization around the world. Hip Hop's influence and function as a repertoire of resistance can be found from South Central's streets to South Africa's shores (Swarts, 2008). From Germany (Hoyler & Mager, 2005) to Papua New Guinea (Richards, 2015), from Poland (Miszczyński & Tomaszewski, 2017) to Korea (Um, 2013), Hip Hop has proven to be a viable tool to bring attention to the realities of marginalized and oppressed youth globally and a cultural space to express a separation or discontent of hegemonic political and economic systems of oppression.

For instance, Hip Hop has become a means for youth living in Kampala in Uganda to voice their disenchantment with greedy politicians. Rappers in Kampala have been inspired by U.S.-conscious rap music. However, they believe 'real' Hip Hop refers to actions or music concerned with social issues and artists who strive to engage in some form of community activism, charity, or social movement (Schneiderman, 2014). The vision of Hip Hop in Kampala is to create a public platform that may invoke social change and justice (Schneiderman, 2014). The idea of giving voice to those who have been disempowered by the local government and providing opportunities for public critique and individuals to 'speak up to those public authorities and similar representatives who can engage the voices and experiences of people and alter political policies and political inequities (Schneiderman, 2014).

The Hip Hop style in Kampala is called Batuuze and has since become a Hip Hop organization that has operated in Kampala since 2005. Inspired by U.S. conscious rap, the founder of Batuuze, Jaja MC, has committed himself to give voice to and empower marginalized urban youths through Hip Hop music and culture. The mission of Jaja MC, fellow conscious rap artist Ndugu MC, Loadstar MC, and the Batuuze Hip Hop organization is to inspire young

people to create some social change. Batuuze Hip Hop also provides a space for youth to honor their Ugandan cultural histories and heritage by welcoming rap artists to rap in their mother languages (Schneiderman, 2014). For youth in Kampala, conscious rap is a way of addressing political issues. Their disengagement with society has become a musical or cultural expression, and an act of 'heroic activism' as youth align with Hip Hop as a 'counter-public' in direct opposition to systems of power (Schneiderman, 2014). This 'counter-space' becomes extremely valuable as Batuuze members who affiliate themselves with the global Hip Hop nation also affiliate themselves with a 'safe' global counter-space that is conceptually distinct from the restrictive local political environment (Schneiderman, 2014).

The Hip Hop style of Batuuze in Kampala was inspired by U.S.-based conscious rap music, adopting the charge to use Hip Hop to articulate the social and political realities of marginalized youth in hopes of inspiring social, political, and economic change. Hip Hop has also become a means to allow youth to express a separation from hegemonic and often oppressive political governments or separation from politicians that have ignored the needs of marginalized youth.

In the U.S., Hip Hop artist Questlove of the group The Roots and Jay-Z and Beyonce hosted a fund-raising dinner for the Obama campaign with seats starting at $40,000. By endorsing Barack Obama, these Hip Hop artists influenced how urban youth associated with the presidential candidate at the time, now former President Barack Obama. Using Hip Hop as leverage, President Barack Obama was able to reach youth traditionally marginalized within society and often devalued and thought to be less viable constituents within political campaigns (Elezi & Toska, 2017). However, leaders of the League of Young Voters reported that because of the participation of Hip Hop artists like Jay Z, Questlove, and others, the 2008 and 2010

elections saw the highest number of 18 to 24-year-old African Americans registered and vote (Elezi & Toska, 2017). Prior to the 2008 and 2010 elections, artists Jay Z and P. Diddy 2003-2004 used their platform to encourage youth to vote through the "Vote or Die "and "Voice Your Choice" campaigns, which were some of the initial examples of connecting Hip Hop to political practices (Elezi & Toska, 2017).

The connection between Hip Hop and the endorsement of politicians that sought to identify with marginalized youth as described during the U.S. 2008 and 2010 campaign election of Barack Obama, and the voter registration campaigns of 2003-2004, also inspired politicians around the world who similarly used Hip Hop to influence politics. For instance, Edi Rama, an Albanian public and political actor since 1992, was greatly influenced by Hip Hop music. Hip Hop first came to the Balkans and Albania in the early 1990s. Albanian Hip Hop has since become a musical and social movement incorporating artists from Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and many other ethnically and culturally diverse Albanian communities (Elezi & Toska, 2017). Edi Rama asked a local group called West Side Family to create a song for his campaign in 2003. The song "Tirona" was released early that year and was used to promote the vibrance of the city of Tirana (Tirona is a term from the local dialect for the name of the capital of Albania) and to brand a 'new era' under Rama's administration (Elezi & Toska, 2017). Three men established the Hip Hop Group West Side Family - Roland, Miri, and Flori- all attended the same high school in Tirana. Their song "Delusion" became widely known in 2000, followed by another hit in 2002 called "Mesazh" (Message). As the campaign began to mature, Rama and the West Side Family (having adopted their name from the U.S. West Coast Hip Hop scene) produced a music video for the song "Tirona," in which Rama was shown as a member of the group. They even recited a few rap lyrics (Elezi & Toska, 2017). By associating himself with

the West Side Family, Rama was able to distinguish himself as rebelling against the 'old politics of the city, a distinction that, in collaboration with Hip Hop, further led Rama to be perceived as a 'non-politician' or as 'anti-political' (Elezi & Toska, 2017). Rama won the 2003 local elections and asked the group to create a new song for the 2009 national campaign.

The new song, inspired by the messages within U.S.-based conscious rap music, acknowledged the value of Hip Hop as a means of rebellion, often containing messages of revolution and protest, and was called "Çohu!". "Çohu! Had a clear political message and called for listeners to 'take their fate in their own hands and bring about change" (Elezi & Toska, 2017). The messages in the song reflected the rhetoric of Albanian political activist Fan Noli, a member of the Albanian Renaissance. Through his poetry, Noli asked citizens to 'stand together against the authoritarian rule of the feudal system and the Albanian monarchy' messages that reflected much of the rhetoric in Rama's national campaign (Elezi & Toska, 2017). Despite losing the 2009 national campaign, Rama became recognized in Albanian politics as someone who identified with marginalized you who are constantly faced with 'reinventing new identities in a post-communist vacuum' and those who are using Hip Hop to reimagine the past, present, and Albanian future (Elezi & Toska, 2017).

By incorporating conscious rap music, that is, rap music that is politically and socially critical and fueled with messages of rebellion and revolution, Hip Hop has been continuously affiliated with marginalized groups of society who are fighting for equality, justice, and power (Elezi & Toska, 2017). Hip Hop has influenced the social and political awareness of listeners, fans, and aficionados, as reflected in the use of Hip Hop during political campaigns. Hip Hop's articulation of unfair social conditions and the platform that Hip Hop provides empowers youth to create critical political commentary in a safe space. The 'space' or cypher brings youth

together through Hip Hop culture. It has allowed for a global dialogue of collective injustices and grievances and a growing political and social awareness. However, it has also encouraged marginalized youth to connect and build relationships with other youth, domestically and internationally.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS- MAKING CONNECTIONS

Hip Hop has also become a means by which young people can build relationships and connect, centered on their association with Hip Hop music and culture (Schneiderman, 2014). Hip Hop has appeared in urban centers worldwide and, as such, has been labeled 'glocal' (Um, 2013; Templeton, 2003). "Glocal" is a term that refers to both the global appeal of Hip Hop and the localized aesthetics that communities merge with Hip Hop to create regional iterations of Hip Hop culture. For instance, the aesthetic base of Hip Hop has been argued to be stepped in what Osumare (2015) calls an "Africanist aesthetic" that incorporates polyrhythm, call and response, the postulating of social commentary, and dance. In other words, Hip Hop is an iteration of an Africanist aesthetic comprising the five elements of rapping, Djing, breakdancing, graffiti, and knowledge of self, which is 'glocalized' and transformed to satisfy the local political, social, and cultural context in which it exists. This 'glocalization' process connects listeners through Hip Hop music and culture both locally and globally.

Hip Hop became popular in Turkey during the 1980s. The glocal iteration of the Turkish rap style that incorporated native instruments such as the qanun (plucked, trapezoidal zither), ud (plucked lute with a short, bent neck), ney (end-blown flute), riqq (tambourine), and tabl (goblet-shaped drum) (Işık & Basaran, 2017). Hip Hop in Turkey is referred to as Arabesk Rap and is thought to reflect more of a Turkish arabesque culture than Hip Hop culture (Işık & Basaran, 2017). Arabesk Rap originated from young people negotiating the Turkish musical traditions of

songs related to love and similar emotional subject topics with a growing need to express a growing disdain for the social conditions of disenchanted Turkish youth (Işık & Basaran, 2017).

Arabesk rap became initially synonymous with 'love rap'; however, as the Hip Hop trend of using rap lyrics to create social commentary grew in Turkey, Arabesk rap became a medium to express pride and anger (Işık & Basaran, 2017). Similarly, as Arabesk rap spread among Turkish youth, Arabesk rappers wanted to distinguish themselves from rappers in the United States by advocating values such as 'kanka' or the idea of blood brotherhood, resisting ideas associated with beliefs of fate and promoting platonic or monogamous relationships (Işık & Basaran, 2017). Technology has been a valuable resource for youth drawn to Hip Hop music and culture (Rose, 1994). Technology is also exemplified by Arabesk rappers who use the internet to locally, nationally, and globally distribute rap music with a particular type of 'braggadocio, the use of slang, and patriotic ideals (Işık & Basaran, 2017).

Korean rap music has also been associated with the globalizing process, and coupled with the use of the internet, contributes to Korean Hip Hops connection to a larger global Hip Hop community (Um, 2013). Korean Hip Hop can be best understood as a mobile nexus between global and local production and regional and domestic consumption (Um, 2013). One of the local cultural aesthetics retained within Korean Hip Hop since the 1990s is the reverence for religious ideas and practices. Southern Korean Hip Hop has often been associated with 'middle-class, educated, and moderately religious members of society (Um, 2013). According to Um (2013), rappers publicize their religious affiliations by 'including their thanks to God during public performances and within the remarks written inside CD sleeves (Um, 2013). As Korean Hip Hop negotiated the local aesthetics with the elements and characteristics of Hip Hop in the U.S., Korean Hip Hop avoided rap music lyrics that elicit political controversy and embraced rap

lyrics with ethical themes (Um, 2013). Although U.S. Hip Hop has served as the basis for Hip Hop's aesthetic, music, and culture (Baker, 2012):

> In contrast, many 21st-century Korean Hip Hop lyrics are about everyday life, personal stories (underground/non-mainstream), or love (mainstream). For example, Drunken Tiger's acclaimed piece '8:45 Heaven' (2007) is based on his grief over the loss of a family member, and 'Keep the Change' (2009) by the Dynamic Duo (Choiza and Gaeko) is about a conversation with a taxi driver. (Um, 2013).

Korean Hip Hop fans incorporate the internet to consume Hip Hop music. Korean Hip Hop fans also create online communities that allow listeners to share ideas, share cultural styles and fashion, share music and engage online Hip Hop communities around the world (Um, 2013). As aforementioned, the members of the Batuuze Hip Hop movement in Kampala also use the internet and conscious rap lyrics as a form of coalition building among other members of the Hip Hop community who experience the same sense of marginalization within society (Schneiderman, 2014). For many listeners, Hip Hop has created a space that is inclusive to all, according to pioneering U.S. D.J., DJ Kool Herc:

> Hip-hop says, "Come as you are." We are a family. Hip-hop is the voice of this generation. It has become a powerful force. Hip-hop binds all of these people, all of these nationalities, all over the world together. Hip-hop is a family, so everybody has got to pitch in. East, west, north, or south - we come from one coast, and that coast was Africa. - DJ Kool Herc

Hip Hop music has been supported by the cultural connection of glocal Hip Hop and the expression of collective experiences. Osumare (2015) refers to socio-political 'connective marginality' that reflects the 'social inequalities that link youths internationally through Hip Hop culture. Some of the shared social inequalities expressed in rap lyrics around the world include a disdain for politicians and support for equitable political processes, disenchantment with educational institutions, a lack of employment, and violence from institutions of local, state, or federal government (Baker, 2012; Rose, 1994; Mutegi et al., 2008; Chang, 2005). It is the 'connective marginalities' of youth around the world in collaboration with an affinity or affiliation for Hip Hop music and culture that has led scholars to recognize the shared experiences around the world and embrace the term Hip Hop Nation (Bennett, 2011; Alim, 2009; Chang, 2007; Simmonds, 2006; Templeton, 2003). According to Morgan & Bennett (2011), the Hip Hop nation is an 'international, transnational, multiracial, multiethnic, multilingual community made up of individuals with diverse class, gender, and sexual identities. Similarly, Hip Hop scholar and linguist Alim (2009) defines the Hip Hop nation as 'multilingual, multiethnic and with an international reach, a fluid capacity to cross borders and a reluctance to adhere to the geographical givens in the present. Morgan & Bennett (2011) suggests that citizenship in the Hip Hop Nation:

> It is defined not by conventional national or racial boundaries but by a commitment to Hip Hop's multimedia arts culture. This culture represents the social and political lives of its members. In this way, the Hip Hop nation shares the contours of what international studies scholar Benedict Anderson calls an "imagined

> community," a term he uses to explain the concept of nationhood itself.

The Hip Hop Nation has also become a space that invites the 'global imaginary' of youth cultures worldwide (Weiss, 2002). Through the internet, Hip Hop's global imagination, inclusivity, and collective marginalization, youth around the world can make connections and build relationships as members of a distinctive Hip Hop Nation.

ENGAGEMENT IN THE ECONOMY

Hip Hop music and culture can serve as a tool for youth worldwide to voice experiences of social inequality, injustice, and increased marginalization (Elezi & Toska, 2017). By engaging in Hip Hop music and culture, members of the Hip Hop Nation are also given the means to 'forge connections' within a growingly global world (Schneiderman, 2014). Many youths worldwide are using Hip Hop to envision the social change geared towards increasing their quality of life and life opportunities, much of which is dependent on financial gains (Schneiderman, 2014). Hip Hop is also attributed to being a tool that allows youth to engage in 'street entrepreneurship' (Baker, 2013) and engage in the moral economy of society (Schneiderman, 2014).

Within Hip Hop music, distinctions have been made between the commercial or mainstream consumer markets and the underground or street consumer markets (Chang, 2007; Baker, 2012; Schneiderman, 2014). Often, the distinction between these two markets centers on lyrical content. In contrast, mainstream rap music is thought to be less socially and politically charged, while underground rap is fueled with social and political commentary (Baker, 2012). Distinctions may also be made based on Hip Hop's affiliations to global markets. For example, artists who produce mainstream rap music are thought to be more financially successful due to

the global distribution of commercial music than artists who engage in 'street entrepreneurship' or a more local market. Although commercial rap lyrics and content are financially lucrative in global markets, underground rappers have retained some authenticity (i.e., connection to the streets or the real world) due to their associations with local markets. They are recognized for their ability to use Hip Hop to engage in local economies and 'hustle' to financial gains. For instance, in Havana, Cuba, the term underground rap has varying connotations; Baker (2012) writes:

> In Havana, two meanings of the term underground bump against one another. On the one hand, in both local and global Hip Hop-speak, the underground has become uncompromising, moralistic, non-commercial, and often anti-capitalist. However, on the other hand, it is also a term widely used concerning the informal economy in Havana, the most capitalist city in a nation of hustlers and micro-capitalists'.

Cuba's underground economy, in general, has been described as unintentionally promoting entrepreneurial attitudes and beliefs as many of its 'citizens have had to buy and sell, hustle and network' to resolve their economic responsibilities (Baker, 2012). For many Cuban youth, rap music C.D.s serve as a product, a commodity to be sold in underground economies. Hip Hop also invites youth to commodify graffiti art, street dance, and DJing skills to gain income. According to Hip Hop lore, one of the earliest rap parties was thrown by DJ Kool Herc to raise money for his sister to buy new school clothes (Chang, 2005). Within Hip Hop colloquialisms, DJ Kool Herc would have been recognized as a 'hustler,' someone who could use unique skills to increase their life opportunities.

For young people in Havana, Cuba, street entrepreneurship or 'hustling' is a way of life. As aforementioned, much of Hip Hop's global appeal is centered on a 'collective marginalization' and shared experiences; it is not surprising that street entrepreneurship can also be found in urban centers worldwide. For instance, the idea of hustling, for many youths in Kampala, is the only means to engage in society (Schneiderman, 2014) writes:

> In Kampala, this way of living is called hustling (okutoba no obulamu: to fight for your life). For young rappers, hustling is associated with both danger and freedom. Freedom of getting out of dependency and stuckness compounded at home and into the streets. Nevertheless, there are dangers of getting stuck hustling, of being in the endless cycle of always looking for the money to buy the next meal. Hustling may refer to illegal activities, but basically, it describes the process of making minimal resources into a profit or making little resources into experiences and performances of excess and affluence.

By 'hustling,' marginalized youth in Kampala are also leveraging Hip Hop to become recognized as legitimate listeners and contributing members of society. Many youths strive to become validated as respectable 'media elites, rappers, visual artists, or media professionals' (Schneiderman, 2014). Through Hip Hop, these youth are also engaging in what Schneiderman (2014) refers to as a moral economy that relies on social connections and negotiations to earn 'social and economic gains. In this sense, Hip Hop allows the marginalized youth in Kampala to 'gain ownership' in public spaces (Schneiderman, 2014).

Within the US context, the idea of 'hustling' and engaging in more prominent social and economic industries outside of Hip Hop can also be exemplified by the legacy of rapper Nipsey

Hussle. Nipsey Hussle, a native of South Central Los Angeles, embodied the spirit of a 'hustler' in that his rap narrative rested on his ability to overcome the hardships of coming of age in South Central and, with Hip Hop, take ownership of his community through entrepreneurship and innovation (Jennings, 2019). Hussle leveraged his social capital to invite fellow rappers, politicians, and investors to revitalize the Hype Park community of South Central LA. By doing so, Hussle, before his untimely assassination, began to create a more extensive network of support for eleven urban communities within the US and Puerto Rico, to revive these forgotten urban centers and curtail the impact of displacement and socio-spatial segregation due to gentrification (Jennings, 2019). In a show following the assassination of Hussle, rapper Jay-Z pushed for audiences to 'continue the marathon' a phrase that has now come to embody Hussle's legacy as a 'hustler' as being comparable with a marathon runner, and to act using Hussle's economic and entrepreneurial blueprint, he raps:

> "Gentrify your own 'hood before these people do it," he rapped. "Claim eminent domain and have your people movin'. That is a small glimpse into what Nipsey was doing."

Hussle, who, at an early age, shined shoes and ran errands for the local gang members with whom he would later become affiliated, sold his mixtape CDs out of the trunk of his car. He was always dedicated to using his resources to impact his community positively; it is this dedication that earned him the name "Hussle" (i.e., Hustle) (Jennings, 2019). Once established as a successful Hip Hop artist, Hussle partnered with local Los Angeles investor, David Gross, to purchase the same business plaza he used to run errands for the Rolling Sixties Gang and sell his music CDs. This plaza, now recognized as Nipsey Square, was home to Hussle's Marathon Clothing company storefront, a franchised fast food restaurant Fatburger and a barbershop.

Hussle was also responsible for opening several businesses in the South Central community, including boutiques, grocery stores, play places, co-working spaces, and STEM centers (Jennings, 2019). In a recent interview, California Deputy Treasurer Jovan Agee acknowledged that:

> Hussle provided a blueprint for building wealth that can inspire the everyday man working the graveyard shift and selling T-shirts on the side. "He had to scratch and scrape to get into a position of acknowledgment," he said. "What he did is a blue-collared approach to economic development and self-wealth building that others can replicate." (Jennings, 2019).

As a South Central Los Angeles native and a Hip Hop artist and scholar, I have never been so proud to witness how Hip Hop empowered rapper Nipsey Hussle. Nipsey Hussle was able to move beyond the margins of society and become recognized as a successful rapper, community activist, entrepreneur, visionary, and member of the Hip Hop Nation. He hustled his way to take back control of his life opportunities and the opportunities of people who lived in the community that influenced him most. Nipsey Hussle exemplified the power of Hip Hop music and culture. He showed that through Hip Hop and its use of social and political commentary, its ability to make connections and build relationships, and engaging society through entrepreneurship, innovation, and monetary gains have the potential to impact the lives of urban youth positively. It is for this reason, and the role entrepreneurship has historically played in the lives of Hip Hop artists and within Hip Hop's history, that although beyond the scope of this research, this study proposes the sixth element of Hip Hop, that is entrepreneurship, also known as 'hustling '. Although this topic is not within the scope of the present research study, through

the review of literature for this work, I felt it necessary to the culture and the scholarship of Hip Hop to acknowledge the impact of this element and encourage future research to solidify the declaration of a new possible element within the culture.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Interestingly, as extensive as the studies described have been, there remains a need to strengthen the connection between the attributes afforded with Hip Hop music and culture and the potential use of Hip Hop in education. This study recognizes that Hip Hop music and culture have provided a vehicle that many marginalized youths have utilized to build relationships within a global Hip Hop network. Youth have also used Hip Hop to engage in the local and global economy and provide social and political commentary about local issues, concerns, and inquiries. Considering the impact Hip Hop has had on marginalized youth outside the classroom, this study explores students' experience of Hip Hop and education and whether Hip Hopcentric education expressed through a Culturally Relevant framework provides this same opportunity for marginalized youth within the classroom.

Hip Hop culture, according to Williams (2009), is the "lens through which many students today seek meaning, acceptance, and belonging, which in turn, posits Hip Hop as one of the most important but underutilized cultural lenses that teachers can employ for the success of students." Prier (2012) anchors the strength, resilience, and vitality of Hip Hop culture emerging out of disassociation and rejection of a dominant culture. Unfortunately, Hip Hop also engages in social, political, and highly racial forms of marginalization of urban communities across the United States. These characteristics are often visible in our schools (Love, 2019). African American students have experienced a gradual "push out" (Morris, 2015), curricular violence (King, 2017), and neo-liberal approaches to educational reformations and policies (Lipman &

Hursh, 2007; Ravitch, 2010; Saltman, 2014). Similar oppressive features have led to what Hip Hop scholar Bettina Love (2012) labels the 'educational-industrial complex,' which targets most children of color.

On the other hand, Hip Hop has contributed to the academic performance of students with continuous positive outcomes despite the obstacles within the educational system as defined above (Akom, 2009; Love, 2018; Kelly, 2018; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Williams, 2009). Hip Hop is fueled by inherently opposing values and beliefs from mainstream academic culture (e.g., individualism vs. community empowerment) (Williams, 2009). Young people engage in Hip Hop music in academic institutions via Hip Hop courses, Hip Hop curricula, symposiums, campus organizations, and personalized ways. Students create and engage in Hip Hop on their terms, which can collectively influence students' academic experiences (Petchauer, 2011).

Furthermore, the current trends within Hip-Hopcentric education push back on Hip Hop culture being used to administer Eurocentric curriculum and to only adhere to state and federal mandates (Emdin, 2011). To combat this, (Petchauer, 2011) argues that a distinction must first be made between Hip Hop as content and Hip Hop as an aesthetic medium. Hip Hop music and culture speak not only to the music but also to how knowledge is produced within the culture. For instance, hosting a Hip Hop performance for your students is one-way schools can utilize the aesthetic form of Hip Hop music within the classroom to empower students and their engagement with curricular content. However, Hip Hop should be more comprehensive than these cultural displays of inclusion and move towards understanding how knowledge is produced within Hip Hop culture (i.e., via sampling, improvisation, and cyphers). One general criticism of implementing culture into the academy is the creation of external displays of culture, which

prevent the complete interpretation of how culture can be brokered to invite funds of knowledge into the classroom (Howard, 2010). Hip Hop pedagogies, therefore, attempt to accommodate what Hill (2009) refers to as the "various ways that Hip Hop culture authorizes particular values, truth claims, and subject positions while implicitly or explicitly contesting others ."Implementing Hip Hop in the classroom must avoid the pitfalls of using rap lyrics as the only piece of Hip Hopcentric instruction. Hip Hop has the potential to truncate the 'potential of Hip Hop culture to truly reflect the complexities of both pedagogy and urban youth culture' (Emdin, 2011). Arguably, the lack of a vetted Hip Hopcentric pedagogy has led to rap-based instruction that is 'misnamed as Hip Hop' (Emdin, 2011).

Emdin (2011) and the #HipHopEd community have continuously advocated for educators to move beyond using rap lyrics to memorize curricular content or as a medium simply for creative expression. Youth engage in Hip Hop in various ways; for instance, some youth need to resonate with positive messages in rap lyrics (Petchauer, 2011). Hip Hop is a more than one-size-fits-all solution to incorporating urban youth culture into the classroom (Petchauer, 2011). Emdin's (2011) charge to educators regarding Hip Hop culture applies to all forms of cultural expressions by youth, that is, to ultimately use culture to contribute to not only the academic success of students but also use culture to relocate students from the margins of society towards the forefront. Emdin (2011) summarizes:

> While the creation and analysis of rap text within classrooms shows an appreciation for Hip Hop culture and advancement from conventional instruction (Dimitriadis, 2001), in too many instances, it merely uses rap as a way for youth to memorize information. This use of rap as a memorization tool calls forth archaic modes of instruction like rote

> learning. It bastardizes the potential of a cultural art form whose legitimacy as a learning tool has yet to be fully explored. The use of rap as the singular way to support Hip Hop-based instruction, particularly with youth of color, whose culture is primarily based on oral traditions with deeper meanings than words (Alim, 2004; Smitherman, 1997), limits the rendering of Hip-Hop.

Much of what Hip Hopcentric education has produced can be found in two fundamental applications: the incorporation of Hip Hop based content (i.e., beyond the surface use of rap lyrics) within the curriculum and the use of Hip Hopcentric practices in the classroom. These two Hip-Hopcentric strategies (i.e., Hip Hop content and Hip Hop practices) are not mutually exclusive and are often used in collaboration. For example, hip-Hopcentric education has used first Hip Hop content (e.g., Hip Hopcentric Literature) and second, Hip Hopcentric practices (e.g., Hip Hopcentric Cyphers, Battles, Sampling, and freestyling) to ensure the academic success of marginalized students within urban schools.

SYNTHESIZING HIP HOP: FROM THE MARGINS TO THE MIDDLE

The theoretical framework of both Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining pedagogy has been used in this study. First, center Hip Hop culture is the focus of this study, derived from the emphasis Ladson Billings (1995, 2000, 2017) has placed on the importance of African American student culture. Culturally Relevant pedagogy has helped to anchor the qualitative research methods as a focal point for data collection, as the focus will be on African American students enrolled in a Hip Hopcentric class. Secondly, the literature on Culturally Sustaining pedagogy honors those nuances that are already present that make students' culture visible and has been used for this work to identify Hip Hopcentric characteristics that are present

within the classroom and to understand how these characteristics are sustained or maintained (Paris, 2012, 2021, Alim & Paris, 2014, 2017). Finally, the research questions were derived using literature on how Hip Hop music brokers opportunities for economic engagement, building global networks, and developing a critical consciousness. The premise of this work is also based on the current use of Hip Hopcentric education. This work explores whether using Hip Hop content and Hip Hop instructional practices (i.e., the lens through which students can 'read the world' and 'read the classroom') (Hill, 2009; Akom, 2009) has the potential to serve as a teaching strategy.

Additionally, this work explores Hip Hop as a tool that can increase the social and political awareness of students, have the potential to ultimately strengthen student engagement with schools, and support building relationships with critical partners (i.e., teachers, administrators, and community leaders). Previous works in Hip Hop and education contribute to understanding the efficacy of Hip Hop in the classroom. Although this study is limited to teaching one teacher and one classroom, this study offers yet another aspect for consideration as the research on this topic grows.

The collective experiences of marginalized youth in urban communities continue to concern educators (Love, 2019; Emdin, 2011). Nevertheless, why use Hip Hop? The political and cultural environment in the South Bronx during the 1970s gave birth to Hip Hop and is one example of how the collective experiences of marginalized people can give space for the creation of repertoires of resistance. According to Chang (2005), the Bronx was a part of the 1929 New York Regional Plan Association, which implied building a major freeway through the city. The construction was contingent upon many 'urban renewal' rights that allowed the destruction of homes belonging to African Americans, Puerto Rican, and Jewish families (Chang, 2005, p. 11).

Urban builder Robert Moses is accredited for drafting and executing this plan. Keyes (1996) writes:

> As a result of the expressway, property owners sold apartments at lower rates to slumlords who neglected apartment upkeep yet charged exorbitant rent. As a result, African American and Hispanic residents were forced to live in dilapidated housing and rodent-infested conditions. As conditions worsened, crime escalated. As a result, some youths needed to form neighborhood groups or gangs to police their apartments, housing projects, streets, and neighborhoods from outside invaders.

Following a drastic renewal and gentrification that increased violence among youth, Hip Hop culture was created and became an expression that eased the conditions in the South Bronx (Chang, 2005). Keyes (1996) argues that the emergence of rap music and Hip Hop culture is the result of two significant factors: the 'dismantlement of the Bronx in the late 1950s giving rise to gang culture and the commercialization of disco' (p. 224). Hip Hop crews, in many ways, replaced the gangs in the South Bronx. Instead of engaging in gang violence, young people participated in community organizations such as The Bronx River Project and often attended parties (Chang, 2005). Because of rap music's growing popularity, participating in Hip Hop culture became an outlet for many disenfranchised youths who survived an environment characterized by violence, oppression, and poverty. Afrika Bambaataa is accredited with the establishment of The Bronx River Project in 1973, which encouraged youth to cease violence between gangs (Keyes, 1996). The BRP was renamed the Zulu Nation, which exemplifies the

influence of rap music among youth in the South Bronx. Hip Hop encouraged youth to end the violence in their communities and provided artistic freedom of expression.

Participating in Hip Hop culture (i.e., djing, rapping, graffiti art, and breakdancing) empowers youth to find more constructive outlets for positive social interaction (Chang, 2005). Bambaataa added a fifth element to Hip Hop: Knowledge of self and the community. Concepts such as the cypher or rap freestyle battle exemplify how constructive Hip Hop culture and its affiliate organizations became in replacing potential violent gang activity.

Whether marking public buildings with vibrant colors or turning a train station platform into a breakdance floor, or wearing a tuxedo suit with a pair of Chuck Taylor shoes, Hip Hop has become equated with both personal expression and resistance to oppression around the world (Change, 2005; Bonnette-Bailey, 2019). It is the voice of youth who seek to be heard, to shout to the rest of society that we exist and are dissatisfied with the world created for us. We will fight, struggle, shout, stomp, draw, scream, play loud music, and break our social dress codes and social expectations, until we create a world that serves us. At our very core, we want to be saved. Through various forms of expression, Hip Hop artists tell the world that we want liberation from what bell hooks (2004) calls the "imperialist-white-supremacist-capitalist patriarchal" foot on our neck.

Hip Hop music with political messages of resistance (Bonnette-Bailey, 2019) helps to bring awareness to issues of poverty, homelessness, and police brutality (Akom, 2009; Chang, 2005). Hip Hop is also a means of social and financial mobility (Mutegi et al., 2018) and is increasingly one of the ways youth express their resistance to the various sources of oppression that impact their lives. Prier (2012) reminds us that:

> We must always keep in mind that the vitality, strength, and resilience of Hip-Hop emerged out of rejection and denial of the dominant culture that practiced social, political, economic, and racialized forms of dis- placement of Black and Brown people in urban centers across America's communities of color.

If Hip Hop is not used for our liberation, it will be used for our destruction and oppression and further push black and brown people into the margins of society. A criticism of Hip Hop culture is materialism, gross consumerism (Pososhen Hunt & Andrzejewski, 2014), violent attitudes (Johnson, Jackson & Gatto, 1995), and homophobic and misogynistic lyrics (Jones, 1997). All of these have encouraged researchers to investigate the potentially negative impact of Hip Hop on urban youth (Cundiff, 2013). Kunjufu (1993) asserts that the power and popularity of Hip Hop have appealed to 'big businesses' who promote products such as cigarettes and alcohol using Hip Hop imagery, aesthetics, and artists to increase profits. Although these industries have thrived, the consequences of this industry on the social and mental welfare of its urban consumer base have been proven detrimental (Kunjufu, 1993).

On the other hand, Hip Hop has the potential to impact students' lives positively. Disassociating the music industry and the level of gross consumerism that drives Hip Hop markets (Kitwana, 2002) helps clarify the genre's essence. Hip Hop, at its core, comes from a West African musical tradition (Maultsby, 1994) and the legacy of music being used to withstand and resist the impact of enslavement, oppression, and continuous marginalization. It is critical, then, that as Hip Hop grows, educators understand the potential use of such a powerful cultural form in transforming the lives of urban students.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining frameworks and the various attributes of Hip Hop music and culture have led to the development of the research questions driving this study. The potential connections of Hip Hopcentricity within the classroom and Hip Hop culture outside of the school (i.e., within the global community) can be found in engagement, developing political and social awareness or cultural critique, and building relationships. The connection between Hip Hop, Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining pedagogy is therefore explored through the following research questions:

1. How does Hip Hop influence students' social and political awareness?
2. How does Hip Hop influence students' relationships with teachers and schools?
3. How do Hip Hop influence students' engagement in school and the classroom?

These research questions are intended to help strengthen the possibility of Hip Hop being a viable pedagogical form. Many studies on Hip Hop and education have focused on performance outcomes. In order to add to the current discourse on Hip Hop and education, this study focuses on students' experience of Hip Hopcentricity. Although limited by the examination of one classroom, this study is intended to provide detail in using Hip Hopcentricity in urban schools. The focus of this work differs from previous studies on Hip Hop and education, this work is guided by the methodological strategies used in previous studies. This study uses qualitative methods to identify a site composed of a majority African Diasporic or Latinx student population. In addition to identifying a school in an urban community that incorporates Hip Hop as more than an afterschool program, an individualized thematic unit, or an independent lesson plan. This work also seeks to identify elements existing within the classroom setting that are remnants or characteristics of Hip Hop culture and understand how the classroom

has provided opportunities to sustain said characteristics. Approaches that include many Hip Hop aesthetics (i.e., only studying rap lyrics or only using sampling in classroom practices) may assist in locating types of classroom practices, habits, and curricular strategies that can be recreated in schools (Petchauer, 2009).

This study's limitations note that ethnographic studies on Hip Hop and education focus only on the success of Hip Hop's connection to education, often negating research studies that are intended to examine the mechanisms that explain how and why Hip Hop produces successful outcomes within schools (Petcheaur, 2009). Other limitations omit the lived experiences of a student outside the classroom, which are later translated into the classroom experience (Petchauer, 2009), and student engagement of Hip Hop based education delineated by gender or racial identity (Baker & Cohen, 2008; Petchauer, 2009).

Analysis of the data for this study will incorporate a ground theory approach. According to (Petchauer, 2009):

> Grounded studies of Hip Hop move away from researchers' and commentators' privileged interpretations of Hip Hop texts and focus on the meaning-making processes between Hip Hop and the people who create, encounter, and practice it. Many studies also focus on how students mobilize Hip Hop or rap music in local contexts (e.g., Dimitriadis, 2001). Focus on how teachers use Hip Hop in school curricula (e.g., Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002) and how knowledge and performances of Hip Hop identity can function as cultural capital among Black youth (Clay, 2003). Focus is also placed on how the practices of Hip Hop contain

particular "ways of doing" for Hip Hop-identified students of all different ethnicities.

The present research design acknowledges both the value of a grounded approach, the incorporation of qualitative methods in researching Hip Hop's connection to education, and the limitations within these studies. The research questions will therefore be explored using qualitative methods with an emphasis on participant observations and examine how the Hip Hop classroom provides an emotionally and physically safe space for students. Secondly, I will examine how the curriculum impacted students' critical thinking skills and how students were assigned and assessed on tasks within the Hip Hop classroom that helped support students' sense of competence and engagement.

DISCOURSE, CONTEXT AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

As aforementioned, this study examines three significant intersections within Hip Hop education: Hip Hop's impact on students' socio-political awareness, student engagement, and finally, Hip Hop's impact on student-teacher relationships. This study first defines socio-political awareness within the context of what Freire (1970; 2000) refers to as a 'critical consciousness,' a seminal concept within Ladson-Billings's (1995) idea of cultural critique. This study also understands student engagement through the work of Ryan & Deci (2000), who offer a framework of engagement via motivation within SDT, or the self-determination theory. Finally, student-teacher relationships are explored through various frameworks that describe the general connections between adults and children.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL AWARENESS

The concept of cultivating students' social and political awareness stems from the work of Ladson-Billings (1995) and specifically of Freire (1970, 2000), who considers this awareness as

a feature of a 'critical consciousness' that allows students living in oppressive conditions to be empowered through both critically analyzing and impacting their reality. Freire (1970, 2000) defines critical consciousness as the ability to understand one's reality to bring about various forms of effective societal transformation (Freire, 1970; 2000). This transformation may occur inside the classroom and among the immediate communities students occupy. Several scholars have embodied the work of Paulo Freire's critical consciousness. They have applied this concept when addressing students' academic performance (Luter et al., 2017), civic development, resolving social disparities, and even medical or healthcare professionals who seek to provide better service through compassionate care of patients (Halman, 2017).

Studies of critical consciousness based on Culturally Relevant pedagogy focus on (Love, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995), youth-led action research (Yosso & Solorzano et al., 2001), critical project-based learning, youth community participation (Christens et al., 2016), community service projects, problem-posing, and case study asset-based community development methodologies (Akom, 2009). Studies have primarily gathered data within the classroom by examining teaching practices and the impact of Culturally Relevant teaching within distinct content areas (i.e., math, science, literacy), emphasizing such practices' efficacy on student performance outcomes. For instance, Love (2014) employs Culturally Relevant pedagogy to garner critical consciousness among students using the framework of Hip Hop culture and music among 17 5th-grade students who engaged in a 26-week program called Real Talk. The data from this program (i.e., a rap, a short film, and a mural) gave insight into how Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE) assisted students in addressing broader social issues such as police brutality, increasing drop-out rates, and global warming.

For this work, the problem-posing methodology used to foster a critical consciousness among students has been essential in determining the rubric used to assess how Hip Hopcentricity impacts students' social and political awareness. More specifically, Freire's problem-posing methodology includes five general phases: (1) identifying a problem, (2) analyzing a problem, (3) developing a plan, (4) implementing the plan, and (5) evaluating the plan, which demands some form of reflection and action (Akom, 2009). Akom (2009) used a problem-posing methodology in his Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy study. Students were given an assignment called a Community Case Study in which they asked a question relevant to their community, analyzed the problem, guided their fieldwork with a plan, and designed the critical elements of their research, followed by implications and evaluations of their research (Akom, 2009). The problem-posing methodology within CHHP allowed students to become active agents versed in reading the world through music and culture and an analysis of the general media, web research, famous cultural artifacts, surveys, oral history, and more (Akom, 2009). Similarly, the theory associated with CHHP is based on the work of critical race theorists, Yosso & Solorzano et al. (2001), as CHHP utilizes the following five elements to form its essential core:

> "1) The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of oppression; 2) Challenging traditional paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; 3) The centrality of experiential knowledge of students of color; 4) The commitment to social justice; and finally, 5) A transdisciplinary approach" (Akom, 2009).

In short, we are merging Freire's problem-posing methodology and critical race theory, positioning CHHP as a valuable intersection between theory and praxis, increasing the development of critical consciousness among students, and guiding social and political awareness observation strategies used within this study.

Table 1.1 - Social and Political Awareness Guided Rubric

Using Qualitative Methods, gather evidence of the following:	**Identifying a problem** -centralizing race, racism and other forms of oppression
	Analyzing a problem - using 'traditional' research materials in addition, to Hip Hop music, media, texts
	Developing a plan or solution - either hypothetical or tangible
	Implementing the plan or solution - either hypothetical or tangible
	Evaluating the plan or engaging in some form of *reflection and action*

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Research regarding student engagement is very vast. Understanding the types of engagements (i.e., participating in class or actively submitting assignments) and causes (i.e., engagement based on intrinsic or extrinsic motivation) for engagement are varied (Van Ryzin, Gravely, et al., 2009; Singh, Granville, et al., 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In pursuit of creating an operationalized definition of student engagement that applies to the present study, engagement is best understood not simply as the actions that students perform that show a

connection to the course and instruction but engagement because of motivation. In other words, research has supported the importance of understanding student engagement by assessing and emphasizing the significance of classroom environments that stimulate student motivation. For this study, the work of Ryan & Deci (2000) provides a guide toward understanding student engagement by emphasizing the significance of intrinsic motivation.

Ryan and Deci (2000) have argued that the best type of motivation is intrinsic, or engagement deriving from students who find satisfaction in the performance of an activity itself. To support intrinsic motivation, students must experience a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness or belonging (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivation and intrinsic satisfaction may also lead to positive feelings of health and general well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The desired state of "eudaimonia" (i.e., being healthy, happy, and prosperous), which is a result of meeting the universal needs of all human beings, should therefore be considered a life-long process (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation also refers to behaviors such as mastery of an activity, engaging in spontaneous interest, and general excitement for exploration, all of which are critical in social-cognitive development (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In addition to intrinsic motivation, research has also accounted for the role of extrinsic motivation or the tendency to perform an activity to attain a distinct outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation can be understood along a continuum. They range from less to more self-determined (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Similarly, forms of intrinsic motivation are likely to be sustained by a life-long experience of security and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Although the continuum accounts for behaviors within the extrinsic and intrinsic motivation constructs, there remains yet another form of motivation that may prevent individuals from acting (Lui et al., 2009). This form of motivation, called amotivation, may result from a

lack of competence (Lui et al., 2009). Although there are various forms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, Self Determination theory is proposed as inspiring intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which is a critical feature of engagement, learning, and creativity.

Ryan and Deci (2000) frame understanding students' basic needs using the self-determination theory. Self-determination theory suggests that students' fundamental and universal needs are expressed through autonomous opportunities, feelings of competence, and a sense of belonging or relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness can be expressed within the classroom environment in various ways. For instance, autonomy may be articulated as providing students with choices in learning activities or providing positive feedback to help support students execute learning tasks (Taylor, 2008). Competence can also be nurtured with interventions that refute negative performance stereotypes (Hanselman et al., 2014) that may arise during classroom instruction.

Similarly, relatedness can be achieved when students can connect their personal experiences with the curriculum (Lui et al., 2009) or make personal connections between teachers and peers (Eccles et al., 1993). Indeed there are a variety of practices that teachers and schools can employ to inspire intrinsic behaviors. Those, as mentioned earlier, are merely a few and can provide an introduction to effective teaching strategies that support SDT.

Autonomy is also imperative for the development of natural processes of maturation, social development, and general well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Choice opportunities for self-control and self-direction enhance intrinsic motivation because it reinforces feelings of autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The feeling of autonomy can be applied to any act, both inside and outside the classroom (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, Ryan & Deci (2000) show that when a student's home or classroom reinforces a sense of autonomy, students value their schoolwork

and, over time, express a more robust identification of the importance of doing the work (Ryan & Deci, 2015).

Scholars, including Faircloth (2012), affirm that an enduring positive sense of connection to one's learning context or a sense of relatedness is also an essential determinant of student engagement (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). Dewey (1910) asserts that when students' interests or personal curriculum intertwine with the general curriculum, students are more likely to enjoy engaging in the classroom (Faircloth, 2012). Waterman (2004) and Nisan (1992) conclude that when activities connect with a student's identity, it makes the curriculum more desirable and optimizes engagement.

Relatedness, autonomy, competence, or belief in your ability to accomplish a task must be satisfied according to SDT. Many African American or indigent students may be exposed to stereotypes related to their academic potential (Hanselman et al., 2014; Nasir, 2006). These stereotypes, in many cases, undermine the idea that African American and indigent people are capable of intelligence and success in education (Hanselman et al., 2014; Nasir, 2006). This type of 'stereotype threat' can lead to many psychological responses, including anxiety, disengagement within the classroom, and stress (Hanselman et al., 2014). A connection can be drawn between stereotype threat and African American students who face the issue of cultural negotiation and academic success, as described within the rationale for Culturally Relevant pedagogy. Marginalized students may experience pressure to perform at high levels in class and fall into stereotypes of performing poorly. The ideal classroom environment would be considerably free from these pressures and academically support students.

This research, therefore, relies on self-determination theory to understand the type of classroom environment that promotes student engagement. In order to understand the impact of

Hip Hopcentricity on student engagement, self-determination theory provides a guide to plot how students respond to opportunities for autonomy, competence, and relatedness within the Hip Hopcentric classroom.

Table 1.2 Student Engagement Rubric

Using Qualitative Methods, gather evidence of the following:	**Autonomy** - students making choices in learning activities and receiving positive feedback
	Competence - students believing in their ability to accomplish a task expressed through words or actions
	Relatedness - students connecting their personal experiences with the curriculum

STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

Student-teacher relationships have traditionally relied on models that recognize the teacher as an authoritative figure who can make recommendations and disseminate information to students without student demands or questioning (Hussain, Nawaz, et al., 2013; Davis, 2003; Freire, 1979; 2000). Unfortunately, these models have limited the possibility of student-teacher relationships in that they discount the knowledge and capital that students bring into the classroom as students are expected and assessed based on their level of obedience (Hussain, Nawaz, et al., 2013; Nasir 2006). Authoritative models may be acceptable in early childhood institutions (i.e., pre-K; Kindergarten). However, as students develop throughout middle and high school, positive teacher-student relationships become essential in students' academic success and levels of achievement (Hussain, Nawaz, et al., 2013).

Although the authoritative model limits the potential of mutual respect, sharing of information, and potential feedback from student to the teacher (Hussain, Nawaz, et al., 2013), researchers have recognized that teachers can add what is referred to as an "affordance value" (Pianta, 1997; Davis, 2003) to a positive-student teacher relationship. Affordance value accounts for the resources adults can bring to students, including academic, emotional, and economic support (Davis, 2003: Pianta, 1997). Similarly, teachers are recognized as socializing agents that can influence students' motivation to learn and inspire through classroom content and instruction that may address the development of social identity and help students to regulate their emotional, behavioral, and academic skills (Davis, 2003; Koca, 2016).

Building positive student-teacher relationships takes time to develop and mature (Davis, 2003). When the teacher can learn about a student, it may lead to mutual trust, good communication, and a more viable learning environment (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Classroom size can also impact student-teacher relationships, as the potential for positive relationships has been applicable within smaller classrooms. Studies have also proved that although teachers may seek to develop a positive student-teacher relationship, students may be unwilling to develop a relationship with teachers, creating unforeseen obstacles (Davis, 2003). Ethics of care (Nodding, 1986; 1988) and theories of learning (Vygotsky, 1978) contribute to how educators understand ideations of 'care' within the teaching environment. Care includes differentiating or scaffolding teaching techniques, providing opportunities for autonomy, and appropriately matching student activities with student demands (Davis, 2003). Care is also shown by not giving up on students who cannot master or perform effectively in classroom activities and demonstrating empathy and shared intellectual space with students (Davis, 2003). Students also prefer to invest in teacher-student relationships with teachers who are equally interested in both the students' lives

intellectually and socially. Teachers who embody general vulnerabilities that expose their 'humanity' are considered 'authentic' and reported to be the most successful in building positive relationships with students (Davis, 2003).

Essential to understanding student-teacher relationships is the omission of traditional authoritative models and the incorporation of models more reflective of positive adult-child interactions based on attachment models, motivation perspectives, and sociocultural perspectives (Davis, 2003; Koca, 2016).

In general, attachment models focus on understanding the student-teacher relationship using parent-child relationships and emphasize high emotional closeness and support, low levels of conflicts, and students' social and cognitive dependency on teachers (Davis, 2003; Koca, 2016). Motivation perspectives focus less on adult-child relationships and emphasize teacher effectiveness by creating a supportive and motivational classroom environment for students (Davis, 2003; Koca, 2016). Teachers can facilitate support of students through "class context, classroom climate, expectations, behaviors, tasks and strategies, scaffolding techniques in the classroom, matching the demands of each task and the instrumental support of students abilities to maximize their likelihood of success" (Davis, 2003; Koca, 2016).

Motivational perspectives also embrace opportunities for autonomy and a complementary power relationship between students and teachers (Davis, 2003; Koca, 2016). Autonomy support alludes to the teacher's ability to incorporate student feedback and understand students' needs and wants. Instructors who seek to demonstrate a supportive classroom environment may also help students to make connections between classroom content and their experiences outside of the classroom and provide opportunities for students to express an 'authentic voice' (Davis, 2003; Muller, Katz & Dance, 1999). Teachers can create a classroom environment that inspires positive

student-teacher relationships by manipulating the physical classroom space, communicating student expectations, giving students attention, and fostering a healthy socioemotional climate (Davis, 2003; Koca, 2016).

Sociocultural approaches to student-teacher relationships focus on the types of classroom activities of both students and teachers, opportunities for student-teacher interaction, and defining levels of engagement based on classroom context (Davis, 2003; Koca, 2016). In addition to the classroom context, sociocultural approaches acknowledge that classroom culture also becomes essential in creating classroom environments that contribute to positive student-teacher relationships. Negotiating activities such as mini-lessons on social justice and respect, providing space for honest discussions and creating activities that inspire peer interactions to contribute to classroom culture (Davis, 2003; Koca, 2016). Teachers can promote a sense of belonging among students by encouraging group work and inviting students into classroom processes such as rule-making and conflict resolution (Davis, 2003; Koca, 2016). Students and teachers can co-construct knowledge within the classroom and negotiate power and cognitive and social activities, as well as set norms of behavior, academic expectations, and even appropriate language use within the classroom (Davis, 2003; Koca, 2016).

Conclusively, the literature on engagement, student-teacher relationships, and developing a critical consciousness have guided the three proposed matrices above (i.e., Table 1.1, Table 1.2, Table 1.3). This study was designed based on qualitative methods and uses semi-structured interviews, participant observations, student work samples, and field notes to complete the corpus of data used for this work.

Table 1.3 Student Teacher Relationship Rubric

Using Qualitative Methods, gather evidence of the following:	Mutual respect, caring, and warmth between teachers and students Co-construction of classroom norms, behaviors, and activities No biasness or favoritism Students confidently asking questions and providing feedback Opportunities to learn about who your students are as individuals (i.e., socially, and intellectually) Reciprocal or good communication Use of physical space, communicating expectations about students' academic success Discussion of justice, social and economic equality, respect, and collaboration Attempts to create a supportive socioemotional climate in the Classroom (e.g., peer to peer interactions)

DESIGN STUDY

In order to approach this work, my first step was to understand the culture of Hip Hop. Although this work accepts the notion that Hip Hop culture is dynamic and pluralistic (Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017), it was essential to begin this qualitative approach by grounding myself in the culture. By that, I mean to refer to understanding the aesthetics of Hip Hop outside of the classroom. These aesthetics include observing Hip Hop battles, parties, and events, that detail several nuances of the culture. With this grounding, I was able to observe such things as the

social interactions of rap artists and Hip Hop fans, observing interactions between young men and women, their engagement with adults authority figures, and the reverence given to those referred to as O.G.'s (a term of endearment for an elder). I had to also become versed in Hip Hop linguistic traditions or expressions via colloquialisms and references to Hip Hop rap lyrics, movies, and politics. Observing Hip Hop aesthetics in the form of fashion trends (i.e., hoodies, hairstyles, shoe preferences, popular clothing brands) also became an asset in this work. Even becoming versed in food choices within Hip Hop, such as popular snacks like Arizona tea drinks, taki chips, and sour candy helps contextualize Hip Hop culture's dynamic aesthetics outside of the classroom. An essential first step in creating a "Hip Hop lens" would help identify the types of observations I would conduct and inform the data collection for this study. With this lens, I could then go into a Hip Hop classroom with a predefined Hip Hop context that helped inform the type of data that was salient to this research. I was able to observe those characteristics within the classroom that were similar to those observed outside of the classroom (i.e., parties, events, rap battles). The Hip Hop lens and the literature focused on how social interactions, engagement, and critical consciousness are defined and made visible among students and teachers (See about rubrics Table 1.1-1.3 for Social Engagement, Critical Consciousness, and Engagement).

The second step in this work was identifying a site composed of a majority African Diasporic or Latinx student population. Locating a school in an urban community that incorporates Hip Hop as more than an afterschool program, an individualized thematic unit, or an independent lesson plan was essential. The goal was to find a classroom environment that mirrored the Hip Hop spaces used to create my Hip Hop lens and to understand the potential correlation between these two spaces. Interestingly these spaces were similar in their focus on

Hip Hop and its demographics composition (i.e., African American youth). The difference between these spaces was that one space was focused on using Hip Hop music as a means of education and the other for entertainment. In order to address the driving research questions for this study, the above matrices (Table 1.1;1.2;1.3) helped to guide the potential correlations and to organize the semi-structured interviews, participant observations, student work samples, and field notes. The next step was to conduct a pilot study to test the application of the proposed matrices in a Hip Hopcentric classroom.

The pilot study identified five urban classrooms within the Los Angeles, California, area. Two criteria used in identifying the five classes included classes that use Hip-Hopcentric pedagogy or classes that served a majority African American and Latinx student population. Three of the classes were recruited through recommendations from friends and faculty once my research interest was articulated in formal and informal conversations. Two classes were recruited because of their location in a famous urban center in Los Angeles that primarily serves African American students.

TABLE 2: Pilot Study Participants

CLASSROOM	USES Hip HopCENTRICITY	SERVES MAJORITY AA/LX POPULATION
CLASS 1- Hip Hop Course	✔	✔
CLASS 2- Standard English Course	✔	✔

CLASS 3- Hip Hop Afterschool Program	✔	✔
CLASS 4-Continuation Program		✔
CLASS 5-Standard History Course		✔

Three of the classes specifically used Hip-Hopcentric pedagogy in the classroom, while all the classes served the majority of African American and Latinx students (i.e., approximately 95% or more). Classes were also recruited for variation within the sample population. Each of the Hip-Hopcentric classes differed; one was taught as an elective course, one taught Hip Hop within the context of a traditional course bounded by state standards, and one was a supplemental Hip Hop afterschool and summer program. The non-Hip Hopcentric classes varied in instructional approaches and overall classroom management. That is, one teacher seemed to be fully committed to the success of their students and exhibited excellent classroom management. The other seemed neutral in attitudes toward student success (e.g., the instructor appeared uninvested in the student's success - based on observation) and exhibited poor classroom management.

The pilot research relied primarily on classroom observations and interviews over approximately one month. Observations were used to examine conversations, classroom activities, and interactions (Merriam, 2009). Also, observations included understanding teacher-student relationships outside the instructional and physical setting of these interactions (Merriam, 2009) (e.g., during lunch, during afterschool). Interviews were conducted with both students and

teachers at random throughout the participant observations. Interviews were audio-recorded and semi-structured, lasting up to one hour per interview. The approach to the interview structure was based on listening attentively and asking follow-up questions that reaffirmed the participant's responses (Seidman, 1991). By listening and asking questions, participants' voices were valued and given reciprocity (Seidman, 1991).

By examining the five classes selected for the pilot study, I could connect how the Hip Hop aesthetics of sampling, battling, cyphers, freestyling, and use of Hip Hopcentric literature and related curricular material impacts students' experience in the classroom. In addition, the findings from the pilot study also served as a conceptual starting point for anchoring the research design used to examine the broader research questions of this study. That is, based on the qualitative data collected from the pilot study; I was able to confirm that Hip Hopcentric classrooms:

1. Allow the teacher and student to bring in their personal experiences, social capital, and general connections to Hip Hop music and culture into the classroom.
2. Allow for a curriculum that is rooted in the Hip Hop tradition of keeping it real or the valuing of truth by providing multiple perspectives on any subject or event
3. Allow for the production of knowledge within the classroom that is not only Culturally Relevant but knowledge and information that is practical or useful on the street/in urban youth's realities and can be made applicable immediately, within their communities, or later in their lives.
4. Allow for a space to analyze the complexities of issues within society critically and within Hip Hop music and culture itself.

5. Allow students to express and explore ideas of resistance when addressing inequality and social change as Hip Hop was created through and continues to embody various forms of resistance.

The research design considers how Hip Hopcentric aesthetics (i.e., sampling, freestyling) are visible in the classroom (i.e., based on the pilot study observations). Moreover, how Hip Hop influences students' social/political awareness, the relationships built between students and teachers, as well as students' general engagement in school and within the classroom. The pilot study provided a grounded rubric of sorts and guided and consequently inspired a more in-depth examination of the research questions, which was the final step in this process.

Once the pilot study was complete, and the efficacy of the matrices confirmed, locating the best school site to conduct this research was formulated. In order to explore the research questions driving this work, it became essential to identify a site composed of a majority African Diasporic or Latinx student population in an urban community. In addition to a site that incorporates Hip Hop as more than an afterschool program, an individualized thematic unit, or an independent lesson plan. Essentially, this research sought to identify the most inclusive use of Hip Hopcentric education within the classroom, that is, a classroom that:

1. Applies the use of Hip Hop aesthetics, which is inclusive of sampling, freestyling, battling, cyphers, and Hip Hopcentric literature (Petchaeur, 2009)
2. Acknowledges Hip Hop as a culture and invites students to engage in an understanding and appreciation of the history and cultural traditions within Hip Hop (Ladson-Billings, 2018)
3. Acknowledges a Hip Hopcentric worldview and 'reading of the world' through the investigation of Hip Hop music and culture (Kearney, 1984)
4. Uses Hip Hop as the bases for all, if not the majority, of curricular content

Although I was confident about identifying a site, I did recognize through my research that rarely, if ever, is Hip Hop taught as the primary content and focus of a course outside of collegiate institutions. Locating this optimal environment, therefore, became an opportunity for this research to genuinely contribute to the body of existing research on Hip Hop and education. I began by locating the urban community that would have a school serving most African American and Latinx students. As a Los Angeles resident and an urban community member, I decided to return to my old neighborhood in South Central.

South Central is considerably vast; however, the most popular affiliations of this community were made visible and emphasized with the career of rapper Nipsey Hussle, who highlighted a particular community within South Central, which is the Crenshaw District. As a member of this community, I was familiar with the local High Schools within the district and began by identifying three schools to begin my investigation.

Making connections with each of the schools was simple. Receiving a response from the schools proved to be more of a concern. I initially began by cold-emailing teachers within the content areas most noted for using Hip Hop and inviting them to participate in the study. Although this research aimed to find an environment where Hip Hop was the primary focus of a course, previous research has noted that social studies, history, and English courses are often welcoming to Hip Hop. I emailed approximately twenty teachers within the three schools identified in the Crenshaw District. Of the cold emails sent, I received a response from two teachers from two of the high schools. Each of the teachers described their affiliations with Hip Hop in their courses. One of the teachers, an auxiliary teacher who provided collegiate support, tutoring, and testing support for students, was willing to co-construct a Hip Hop lesson or unit and allow me to co-teach the unit. The focus of the course was not on Hip Hop; however, the

teacher was willing to incorporate Hip Hop and was familiar with Hip Hop based education. She described using Hip Hop to help students memorize classroom material, using Hip Hop to discuss social topics, and developing a rapport with her students because of her affiliations and love for Hip Hop music and culture.

The second teacher responded with such vigor and excitement to my invitation that he initially thought someone had instructed me to contact him directly; he could not believe it was a cold email! I struck gold, and I could not believe it! The excitement was because the course was within the district and taught Hip Hop as an elective course granting students A-G credit, and that also allowed this credit to be transferred with students to college. The course taught Hip Hop music and culture as the primary course content. Additionally, the school serviced a majority African American student population and was in the heart of South Central. Therefore, the course covered more than just an assessment of the music. However, it incorporated the history of Hip Hop, addressing both historical and current connections between Hip Hop and the socio-economic and political realities of marginalized people and incorporated Hip Hop practices. The class was perfect!

The school offered two sections of the course, one during the day's first period and one during the last period. The course met every other day, and I was committed to visiting the course every day for the entire school year. The course met for two full days during the week and for a half day on Friday. Each period was 90 minutes long on the full days and 30 minutes on the half days. For this study, I decided to focus on the day's first period. However, participant observations were conducted occasionally during the last period of the day, which became an opportunity to support the instructor (offering a form of professional reciprocity) and to "be there." Being present is a crucial feature of participant observations, according to

Borneman and Hammoudi (2009), that helped further to establish a presence amongst the students and the school. The teacher, a noted Hip Hop blogger, Hip Hop aficionado/DJ/Producer, and former publicist to one of Hip Hop's pioneers, established the course based on his love for Hip Hop and his passion for the liberation of marginalized peoples. The administration valued Hip Hop music and culture and was equally dedicated to providing the best opportunities to engage students. The course instructor developed an extensive curriculum finalized and approved by the state and afforded students both High School elective credit and college credit.

THE SCHOOL

My story with Hip Hop began on the streets of South Central Los Angeles. Therefore, it would seem fitting that I return home to my hood to find the ideal classroom site to conduct this examination of Hip Hopcentric education. For this study, the pseudonym 'Hussle High' will be used for the school site. I initially identified Hussle High because of its unique location in a very culturally rich area of South Central. It was only fate that I received a response within 24 hours of my initial email from the elective teacher. The teacher invited me to visit the school and begin our introductions.

Once I arrived, I learned that Hussle High is a charter school serving an overwhelmingly 95% African American student population in South Central. The demographic description of many surrounding schools within the Los Angeles Unified School District suggests that in the 2018-2019 school year, approximately 73% of students identified as Latinx, 10% as White, and only 8.2% as African American (https://achieve.lausd.net/facts). Identifying a school with a majority African American student population is a curious juncture within Hip Hop research

(and almost an anomaly in the city of Los Angeles!), as many students have. However, different racial and cultural backgrounds often associate Hip Hop culture with African American culture. Conducting Hip Hop education research with a majority African American population is a curious element since Hip Hop is a global phenomenon that appeals to the youth of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds worldwide. However, youth admittingly takes cultural cues from African American communities (Petchauer, 2009). Many students presumably associate Hip Hop with Blackness and the performance thereof. Attempting to find a sample to examine the power of Hip Hop culture as a byproduct of African and African American musical and cultural traditions amongst African American students may strengthen the potential for Hip Hopcentricity to be applied to students of diverse backgrounds around the world.

THE CLASSROOM

Hussle High offers an elective course whose curriculum is 100% based on Hip Hop history, music, and culture. The course is taught as an elective that students can sign up for individually through the school counselor. In contrast, some students are assigned to the course randomly—the administrators who saw the value of a Hip Hopcentric education. Hussle High is one of the few schools within Los Angeles that offers a course on Hip Hop and allows students to earn High School elective credit, which is required to graduate and can be used to satisfy collegiate elective requirements. Earning college credit increased the appeal to students who take the course, knowing that their credits can be used both in High School and college.

The course instructor and ranges primarily determine the course curriculum in topics from the origins of Hip Hop to contemporary social issues within Hip Hop music and culture. Its mission is to provide students with a global awareness using Hip Hop (i.e., reading the world via Hip Hop music and culture). The instructor is also responsible for teaching another elective course

on audio engineering in which students produce 'beats' and create tracks with lyrical content. When entering the classroom, students must first pass by the 'booth' or the recording booth, complete with professional microphones and computer software that functions as an active recording studio. The presence of the recording booth, the images of Hip Hop pioneers decorating the classroom walls, and the course content physically describe the visual aesthetics of this Hip Hopcentric classroom.

THE TEACHER

There are many assumptions regarding who is 'qualified' to use Hip Hopcentricity in the classroom. One of the most common is the assumption that a teacher must be young to follow the latest news, styles, and trends found within Hip Hop music and culture (Petcheaur, 2009). Another often unspoken assumption is that Black teachers are the best qualified to use Hip Hopcentricity. Considering the cultural roots and general associations with Hip Hop and Black culture (Petchaeur, 2009), this study recognizes these assumptions but advocates that those who are most qualified to implement Hip Hopcentric education are teachers who value students' cultural capital and affiliations. Goldenberg (2013) purports that for white teachers to succeed in urban classrooms, whose student population is often non-white, the teacher must recognize not only a student's culture but also how to engage with a student's culture pedagogically. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, in a 2007-2008 report, 83% of public school teachers were white, 6.7% African American and 6.9% Latinx (NCES, 2009).

Conversely, white students' enrollment in public schools has decreased from 28.3 million in 2004 to 24.9 million in 2014 (NCES, 2017). There are demographic trends in public school teachers and what Goldberg (2013) refers to as the mismatch between teachers and students. This study accounts for how a white teacher serving an all-African-American student population

can engage students by acknowledging and valuing the nuances of a cultural aesthetic by incorporating Hip Hopcentricity.

As aforementioned, I sent a general email to several schools in the Los Angeles South Central community and, within 24 hours, received a response from one eager and willing teacher. For short, this study will be referred to by his pseudonym, The Urban Scientist, or Mr. US. Mr. US has been teaching at Hussle High for over five years but has been self-identified as a Hip Hop teacher for over 15 years. Formerly a publicist, and manager for artists within the Hip Hop Nation such as KRS-1, Mr. US prided himself on sustaining the cultural and political integrity of Hip Hop music and culture. However, as the music industry began to dictate mainstream rap music's political and social commentary, often omitting rap songs that were charged with anti-racist, anti-oppression, and revolutionary lyrics, Mr. US found himself disenchanted. He perceived the destructive trajectory of Hip Hop culture and, in turn, focused his attention on empowering youth in urban communities. Throughout his career, Mr. US has taught students in juvenile facilities and facilitated courses in niche schools throughout Los Angeles that sought to incorporate Hip Hop into course curricula. He has found the most satisfaction currently as the only teacher within the district to teach a course solely on Hip Hop music, history, and culture.

Originally from France, Mr. US prided himself on being a b-boy during the height of the early 1980s. He tells stories of reading countless books on African history, including 'Message to the Black Man' by Elijah Muhammad, and following the teachings of the Nation of Gods and Earths. He has cultivated a body of knowledge later translated into his rap lyrics while rolling with a crew of youth in the streets of France and later stateside in New York and Los Angeles. Mr. US is the only white person I have personally met who addressed the impact of white

supremacy and white privilege openly and who educated himself and later his students on various systems of oppression that all persons should resist. He is truly one of a kind, and I am proud to say that after working closely with Mr. US, he has become a friend and consistent contributor to my work. Mr. US has been a continual advocate for Hip Hopcentric education and the liberation of African American youth throughout his career.

THE STUDENTS

Two sections of the Hip Hop course are offered, one during the second period and the other during the fourth. I observed both periods; however, my focus was on the second-period section because of convenience, and the overall intimacy of the course, as I could truly develop a rapport with the students. Hussle High is home to over 95% of African American students. Both classes were majority black, with two Latinx students enrolled in the fourth-period course. The second period, however, was utterly African American, with a total of ten students, three boys and seven girls, all either Freshman or Sophomore, and one girl that is a Senior.

All the students in the second-period course were invited to participate in the study. Students were given a written consent form and description of the study and asked to confirm their participation. The forms were given after I introduced myself to the students and described my intentions for research. All the students in the course confirmed their participation in the study.

All the boys are sophomores and will be referred to by their pseudonyms, Keak, B.A., and Agerman. Keak is over 6 feet tall and an acclaimed football player in the neighborhood. He is funny and charismatic and jokes a lot with Mr. US. B.A. is very quiet and thoughtful, and with his hazel-colored eyes and short dreadlock hairstyle, he is always very attentive, listening to every word that Mr. US says in class. Agerman is also tall, wears a low fade haircut with deep

waves, and is the anti- "old" Hip Hop head in the class, he only likes what is popular now, and although he is open to listening to other eras of Hip Hop music, he never seems to like it!

Only two of the girls are freshmen, CMG and Special One, CMG loves to cook and is constantly adjusting her hair in class, and Special One is the life of the class, constantly making jokes, engaging with the other students, and sometimes breaking Mr. US's rules like no eating in the class! The sophomores are Big Chan, the tall and outgoing aspiring rapper, Coniyac, a very introspective and critical thinker, Kola Loc, a singer and a huge fan of old-school R&B music and Spinderella, a local girl who prides herself on looking out for her little freshman brother who also goes to the school. The only senior in the class, Lauryn, is a student who endearingly calls Mr. US 'dad' and has established a rapport with Mr. US throughout her time at Hussle High.

TABLE 3: Student Participants

Student Name	**Grade**	**Gender**
Keak	10th	Male
B.A.	10th	Male
Agerman	10th	Male
CMG	9th	Female
Special One	9th	Female
Big Chan	10th	Female
Coniyac	10th	Female
Kola Loc	10th	Female

Spinderella	10th	Female
Lauryn	12th	Female

The students enrolled in the class either by choice or by recommendation from the scheduling counselor. Lauryn has been with Mr. US the longest, having requested his course every year since she started as a freshman. Because the credit is only given as an elective for one school year, Mr. US worked with the counseling staff to find alternative credit options for Lauryn. During her sophomore and junior years, Lauryn served as a teaching assistant and student aid with Mr. US. As a senior, Lauryn was not subject to the traditional class schedule, as she was only responsible for attending certain classes during the day and needed a complete seven-class roster. Although not formally enrolled in Mr. US's second-period course, Lauryn attended his class often. She also almost ritualistically visited Mr. US's classroom in the mornings, after school, and occasionally during break or lunch.

Outside of Lauryn, the other nine students were enrolled full-time in the course for the entire school year, and all attended the class for the first time. Special One and CMG were the only two students assigned the course by scheduling counselors. The remaining students all requested to be enrolled in the course. After identifying the site and the course, the teacher and all ten students agreed to participate in the study.

DATA COLLECTION

The first step to this process was to create a "Hip Hop lens" cultivated in Hip Hop spaces in the general Los Angeles area that would guide my observations. The second step was to find a classroom environment that mirrored these popular Hip Hop spaces. The third step, conducting the pilot study, allowed me to connect the "Hip Hop lens" to the literature and rubrics used to guide this work. These steps, along with the theoretical framework of both a Culturally

Sustaining and Culturally Relevant pedagogy, became critical in my ability to step into the Hip Hop classroom and begin data collection. This study adopted a qualitative approach to understanding the impact of a Hip Hopcentric education on students' engagement with schools, teacher-student relationships, and the development of social and political awareness. This approach allows the researcher to serve as the primary instrument for data collection (Creswell, 1994) and collect data by participating in the research setting, directly observing the setting, conducting in-depth interviews, and analyzing documents and materials (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Because of this approach, qualitative research is often used in education (Merriam, 2009). It allows the researcher to be anchored in descriptions of processes, meaning-making, and understanding through words and pictures (Creswell, 1994).

This study gathered data through participant observations, in-depth interviews of both the teacher and students and document analysis of lesson plans and student classwork. This approach is also imperative to this work as Hip Hop has become how young people make sense of the world (Schneiderman, 2014) in the same way that ethnography is a culturally grounded way of being in and viewing the world (McGranahan, 2018). According to McGranahan (2018), this approach allows one to explore the "lived expectations, complexities, contradictions, possibilities, and grounds of any cultural group ."As Hip Hop is explored in the classroom, the complexities and contradictions inherent in the music and culture are revealed as students explore rap lyrics with diverse topics and opinions. As a member of the Hip Hop Nation, using qualitative methods helps to serve as a mechanism not only to identify these types of nuances but also to rely on participant-based observations to describe such nuances. A qualitative approach is more than just a method; it is also 'something to know and a way of knowing it' (McGranahan, 2018). The qualitative methodologies can be incumbent upon participant observation and field-

based knowledge from the researcher's ability to immerse themselves in a given community's activities (e.g., describing social context, relationships, and processes) (McGranahan, 2018).

The data for this study were collected over one school year, approximately nine months, and utilized qualitative strategies such as analytic memos, field notes, and open-ended interviews with students and teachers throughout the school day. The class met during the second period of the day, and I was able to interview students before class, after class, during school breaks (i.e., lunch and nutrition), and, when appropriate, during the class period. No interviews were conducted outside the school day or the school site. Many interviews followed observations of behaviors or comments expressed during the class period. Therefore students were interviewed randomly and as needed. By the conclusion of the research, all students engaged in an in-depth or brief interview. O'Reilly (2005) acknowledges the significance of interviews as it allows the researcher to "produce a richly written document that acknowledges the role of theory and respects the human experiences while recognizing the role as the researcher and involving direct and sustained contact with participants '. Interviewing the teacher, however, was much more flexible, as I was able to interview Mr. US throughout the school day, over the phone, and outside of school hours. This accessibility to Mr. US allowed me to establish rapport and gather a greater context for the course curriculum, objectives, and overall approach to implementing Hip Hopcentricity in the classroom. Also, although the research focus centered on the second-period class, I could remain in the classroom throughout the entire school day if needed. Staying in the class also allowed me to understand how Hip Hopcentric practices were expressed in other courses. For example, Mr. US is also responsible for teaching an audio engineering course in which the students do not explore Hip Hop content but use studio equipment to create audio beats.

As a participant observer, I could also sit at the desk with Mr. US, functioning as a co-teacher when appropriate and collecting completed classroom assignments after they were passed out to the class. At the end of the classroom period, Mr. US allowed me also to review the work submitted by the students. My role as participant observer became very 'natural' and applicable to the qualitative approach to the study. This 'naturalness' may be due to my experience serving as a High School teacher in Atlanta, GA, which helped me become familiar with classroom management and general protocols. Over time, the students began to see me as another resource in the class, often asking for help on assignments and allowing me the space to give instruction and provide insight during classroom discussions and activities.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected for this study was based on qualitative methods that included participant observations, interviews, analytic memos, field notes, and document analysis of students' work. The data was then analyzed to surmise the findings for this work. The internal validity or the confirmation of the quality of the interview questions and methodological approach was achieved when comparing the teacher's and students' observation field notes for consistency and differences. Consistencies and differences were found within the participant responses that accounted for variations to school in general, the enjoyment of the class, and affiliations with Hip Hop music and culture. External validity or the ability to apply the conclusion of the findings to another content area was expressed via prior knowledge and my positionality as a certified teacher for K-12, my membership to the Hip Hop Nation, and post-secondary institutions as a graduate student researcher. External validity was also achieved based on the literature reviewed for this research. In addition to the interview transcriptions, observation field notes were compared to provide validity in combination with my analysis.

External validity was heavily dependent on the literature from previous Hip Hop research studies, my prior knowledge and understanding of both the culture and music of Hip Hop and the role of Hip Hopcentricity in education.

Analysis began first with the transcriptions and field notes used as a base for automatic writing, which places the role of the researcher at the center of data interpretation. Richardson (1994) describes automatic writing as involving 'narratives of the self and, as such, was used to analyze the interview transcriptions. Reflexivity helps to also account for the researcher's background and assumptions (Sule, 2016). Instead of dismissing prior beliefs and experiences, it allows the researcher to recognize that knowledge is contextualized and co-constructed (Sule, 2016). This approach also encourages the researcher to be transparent and include assumptions, identities, and experiences within the research process (Sule, 2016).

Analysis of the data also incorporated a ground theory approach. When coding and generating analysis, the grounded theory approach, according to Bauer and Brazer (2012), can support the identification of everyday situations from a new outlook. Consistencies were coded and grouped based on participants' responses and focused on the student's performance in the classroom, with the teacher, and with the course curriculum. A multilevel process helped to both organize and analyze the data. Next, the research questions were rearticulated as three primary open codes or "fractured or split into individually coded segments" (Saldana, 2009). Merriam (2009) suggests that open coding allows the research to remain 'open' to all outcomes within the data. The data was then openly categorized into three primary sections, student-teacher relationships, student engagement, and social/political awareness. Then, data within each one of the categories was compared to the research rubrics (See Figures 1.1-1.3), and selective coding was used to understand the interrelationship between the rubrics and the data transcriptions, field

notes, interviews, and analytic memos. Saldana (2009) explains that conducting the second coding round supports the researcher in generating a central concept or idea rigorously. Finally, using in-vivo coding, scenarios were identified using single words and phrases (Merriam, 2009). These phrases and single words were then used to establish caveats or a synthesized story or description of the in vivo codes.

Data analysis at the onset of data collection allowed for consistency with the in vivo coded system. Codes were also used to look for comparisons among students and teachers and interrelated comparisons between each participant (Merriam, 2009). Differences may be influenced by the participant's age, educational level, and personality. This method of in vivo coding revealed sub-themes and outlying themes that were also critical to the analysis. Ultimately, all interviews were compared to one another to understand how students engaged with Hip Hopcentric content, practices, with Mr. US, and with school in general.

By using in vivo codes, Saldana (2009) suggests that this method creates space to translate the experiences of "members of a particular culture, subculture, or micro-culture ."These caveats, presented in Chapter 4, were also analyzed using the previously discussed theoretical framework and the pilot study's findings. Ultimately, each caveat was used to generate a theme. As a result, five significant themes, presented in Chapter 5, emerged that help to speak to the research questions and possibly more significant concepts or phenomena associated with using Hip Hop in the classroom.

The study design emphasized how students engage with Hip Hopcentricity in the classroom, and the ability to use the students' and teachers' voices directly provided a window into their individual experiences. In addition, centering participant voices are consistent with

other studies interested in the impact of Hip Hopcentricity (Hill, 2009; Dimitriadis, 2001; Pennycook, 2007a, 2007b; Forman, 2001).

TABLE 4 Research Methodology at a glance

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	RUBRIC	DATA COLLECTED

How does Hip Hop influence students' social and political awareness? How does Hip Hop influence students' relationships with teachers and schools? How does Hip Hop influence student's engagement in school and the classroom?	Teachers and students bring in their personal experiences, social capital and general connections to Hip Hop music and culture into the classroom. Curriculum that is rooted in the Hip Hop tradition of keeping it real or the valuing of truth by providing multiple perspectives on any subject or event Production of knowledge within the classroom that is not only relevant but knowledge and information that is sustaining, practical or useful on the street/in urban youths' realities Opportunities to critically analyze the complexities of issues both within society in general and within Hip Hop music and culture itself. Opportunities for students to express and explore ideas of resistance when addressing issues of inequality and social change	Participant Observation Interviews Document Analysis

The following chapter will detail the study's findings at Hussle High, a High School in the heart of South Central Los Angeles and home to a completely Hip Hopcentric based course serving an all-African-American student population. Based on the accounts of the ten student participants and the teacher Mr. US, the findings describe the impact and potential use of Hip Hopcentricity. In addition, these findings describe how Hip Hopcentricity can transform teacher and student relationships, influence their engagement with teachers and schools, and provide a lens through which students can cultivate social and political awareness.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The findings of this study, described in the following chapter, are the result of data collected using qualitative methods with an emphasis on participant observation. In addition, analytic memos, student and teacher interview transcripts, and class materials were collected as data. Based on these artifacts, the findings point to critical areas in which Hip Hopcentricity helped students engage in class, build a positive teacher-student relationship, and develop social and political awareness.

Research on Hip Hop and education usually focuses on how Hip Hopcentricity impacts academic performance (Petchauer, 2009; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Williams, 2007; Stovall, 2006; Newman, 2007). This study instead focuses on students' experience of a Hip Hopcentric classroom at a site that incorporates Hip Hop as an entire course serving an all-African-American student population in a popular urban community. These findings add to the existing body of literature on Hip Hop and education by suggesting the following findings: The findings point to how the Hip Hop classroom provided students emotionally and physically safe space.

The data suggest how the curriculum impacted students' critical thinking skills. The data suggest that how students were assigned and assessed tasks within the Hip Hop classroom helped support students' sense of competence.

As previously mentioned, this work borrowed the 'storytelling' method often used in qualitative methods, which allows for constructing various components of narratives to convey an overarching meaning (Bailey & Tilley, 2008). Constructing narratives is also essential within African American and Latino cultures (Larkey & Gonzalez, 2007; Nwoga, 2000), as storytelling is used as a common cultural practice and is consistently valued within Hip Hop culture (Sule, 2016). To best highlight the corpus of data collected during this study, the findings detailed in the following chapter are in the form of stories or caveats.

CAVEAT #1 The Setting

Mr. US's classroom is like no other. As a High School teacher in Atlanta, I remember being mandated to organize our classrooms according to state and school regulations that often limited the types of decor teachers were allowed to display. However, the mandate created a uniform decor within most schools. So when I first walked into Mr. US's classroom, I was amazed. After crossing the classroom threshold, to my left was a state-of-the-art recording booth. As a Hip Hop artist, I have experienced recording in studios from Los Angeles to Atlanta to New York, all of the different quality and all varied based on the financial investment and the engineers' preferences. The quality of Mr. US's booth matched that of some of the more quality settings I have witnessed, complete with a recording mic and interface, soundproof paneling, state-of-the-art recording headphones, and of course, some LED lights to create a futuristic feeling. To my left was a display board of study words, like 'imperialism, sexism, and gentrification," which detailed, in short, the type of vocabulary Mr. US wanted to ensure his

students were versed in before leaving his class for the school year. On the remaining walls were vast posters of some Hip Hop's Pioneers, including EPMD, Tupac Shakur, NWA, and Public Enemy. Sprinkled between the posters were pictures of historical figures such as Malcolm X, Huey Newton, and Assata Shakur.

Each of the desks was clustered in groups of four, with seven clusters in the classroom. Although the desk clusters fit in somewhat of a puzzle shape with each desk table linking together, it created a way for each student to face the front of the class and sit perpendicular to Mr. US's desk, creating a T-like shape between Mr. US and the students. There was one main window in the classroom that faced the outside courtyard and one on the classroom door facing the hallway, which Mr. US kept covered with paper to create a sense of privacy for himself and the students. The hallway leading to Mr. US's classroom was the central vein of the two-story school building, with students occasionally stopping to congregate in the hallway in between classes. Right outside the hallway, towards the front of the building, was a vast Nipsey Hussle mural drawn by a former student who dedicated the mural to the school after the murder of the beloved rap legend. The mural was also the backdrop to the outdoor kitchen set up daily during lunch to provide students with free or reduced-price lunches. The lunches were highly modest, offering students cartons of milk or juice, an occasional piece of fruit, and, depending on the day, a lunch with pizza, chicken nuggets, a burrito, or similar foods the students did not enjoy.

Each student at Hussle High [pseudonym] wore a basic uniform but found ways to create their style. Many girls wore their hair in long braids, colored lace front units (e.g., wigs), or their natural hair pulled back into a ponytail. The young men seemed to prefer a freshly cut hairstyle complete with waves and, on occasion, long braids. I remember thinking that if this school were in Atlanta, many young men and women would dress the same, but more students would have

dreadlocks, not Hussle High. I saw maybe two students out of the entire student body wearing their hair in a dreadlock style. Both the boys and the girls loved to rock (e.g., wear) gold jewelry, either seen in their choice of earrings, gold chains, bracelets, or rings. The students also enjoyed wearing colored jade charms on their chains, and almost all the students kept a clean pair of Vans or Jordan tennis shoes. The style of dress, hairstyles, and jewelry that many of the students displayed appeared to be a typical west coast Hip Hop style of dress. Interestingly, none of the young girls I saw at Hussle High wore high heels, which was a fashion must when I was in school. Teachers were not mandated to wear a uniform, but Mr. US somewhat had a uniform aesthetic to his dress. He committed to dressing 'business casual' (i.e., khaki pants and a collared button-down shirt) Monday through Thursday. However, like clockwork, Mr. US dressed in his oversized hoodie and jeans every Friday with Nike tennis shoes resembling a Hip Hop dress aesthetic, much like his students.

Mr. US was meticulous about keeping the classroom atmosphere clean and with a positive energy that could be felt when anyone walked into the room. He softly played various types of music over the sound system in between classes and sometimes projected a video of the music he played using the overhead projector. He also kept the window leading to the courtroom open to let in the sunlight and fresh air. From the state-of-the-art recording booth to the various posters of Hip Hop artists displayed around the classroom alongside the students' work that was also plastered on the classroom walls, the physical environment of the Hip Hop class was inviting and affirming.

CAVEAT #2 Physical Safety

After every day, Mr. US ritualistically swept the classroom floor and described this time of his day as "therapeutic and peaceful." Many days, I stayed after school with Mr. US while he

swept, and we would talk about the ongoings of the day and other random things that came to mind. One time I noticed the consistency of how he swept the room, starting at the far left end of the classroom and making his way under each cluster of desks one by one, then to his desk, and finally towards the studio booth and front door. I watched him do this so often that we talked about his after-school ritual one day. He said, "you know, this is like the one time of the day I can reflect on what we did for the day and what I may want to add to the lesson for tomorrow. I guess I never realized that I like doing this; it is soothing, and it makes it so that the classroom feels peaceful when I come in in the morning. What is funny is that the other teachers, will you know, come and keep me company while I sweep because everybody that knows me knows that I am not just going to leave right after school; they know they can find me in here sweeping. Even the students come through too. A couple of years ago, I had a group of students who would sit with me and build. We would talk about all kinds of stuff, sometimes even personal things that they did not feel comfortable discussing with other adults. But, they knew they could bring it to me, and it was all good, and I would make sure they were straight. So, yeah, it is funny; it is like my thing after school I do all the time".

Hanging out with Mr. US during his total time allowed me to build relationships with some of the other teachers at Hussle High, including a math teacher and one of the paraprofessionals, both of whom were black males. Mr. US seemed to attract the school's like-minded teachers and Hip Hop fans; most importantly, he felt a dedication and commitment to the students. When the students would visit after school to talk to Mr. US, the other teachers that hung around joined the conversation and helped to create a safe space for the students to emote.

Mr. US's classroom was not the only safe space at Hussle High, where the students gathered after school. Once while visiting one of the two teachers' lounges on campus, I noticed

the Assistant Principal's office, which sat right next to the main lounge, was also a safe space. I watched as the AP was surrounded by a group of students just hanging out, talking, braiding each other's hair, and scrolling on their cell phones. The AP had a reputation for being close with students and came to school once with a cast. I was so curious about her broken arm that one day after warming up my lunch, I stopped by her office and asked about her injury. She responded, "I just fractured it; it's not that bad, they just want me to keep it on to make sure it heals right." She continued, "Yeah, I fractured it breaking up a fight the other day between two of my girls. They were just going at it and wouldn't listen to anything I was saying so I just jumped in and physically stopped them and got pushed to the ground. I tried to break my fall with my hand and fell down [lifting up her bandaged arm and gesturing with her facial expressions that this was the result]". I told her I was sorry and wished her a quick recovery.

The students at Hussle High seemed to seek out those teachers and staff to whom they could bond and took advantage of the time inside and outside the school day to create positive relationships. What was unique about Mr. US's after-school guests were that many of them were not enrolled in his class; they were either former students or students that knew of his reputation throughout the school. I learned from this that the students outside of Mr. US's class craved the type of student-teacher relationship that the students inside of this class enjoyed. Mr. US had the reputation of being one of the 'cool' teachers on campus and someone that the students could trust.

CAVEAT #3 Shelter in the time of the storm

Mr. US's reputation as a safe or "cool" teacher, known for the welcoming classroom and someone that the students could trust, became extremely clear after one major event during Black History Month. I had never experienced anything like this before. It was the most

prominent school fight I had ever seen. That may say a lot because I grew up attending a high school where gang turf battles were regular. Where dead bodies were found on the sidewalk after school because of a gang shooting, and where the motto" live by the gun, die by the gun" was a daily mantra of teenage boys surviving the hood.

At first, the school was unprepared to host a Black History Month program, which was no surprise to Mr. US. Mr. US addressed the issue that there were no scheduled programs in class one day and brought the idea to the students to encourage the administration to host some recognition for the month. The students, inspired by the conversation, followed up on the idea and created a program. The administration had a reputation for being incredibly supportive of the students and agreed to allow the students, two of whom happened to be both enrolled in Mr. US's Hip Hop class and serving on the Student Body Committee, to organize the event. Big Chan (pseudonym) and Lauryn (pseudonym) were two of the most active students in the program.

It was not surprising that the music the students chose to play for the event was Hip Hop. After all, they were in the middle of a major urban center, South Central Los Angeles, and most of the students were African American and both culturally dressed and talked with a Hip Hop aesthetic. As the Hip Hop music softly played while the Student Body president spoke, some students created a cypher around the amp. Unfortunately, the courtyard had no stage, platform, or formal setting to centralize the program, so the cypher around the amp became the pseudo stage. Because students were enjoying their break, many continued to do their own thing, ignoring the program and choosing instead to hang with friends on the other end of the courtyard or hang out at the basketball court.

As the program ended, the Student Body President thanked all the participants and guests for coming to the event, gestured to the student operating the amp to lower the music, and invited the principal to make final remarks. The principal kindly accepted the unplanned invitation to speak, and before the concluding remarks could be made, a small commotion broke out on the basketball court. Within seconds, the small outbreak grabbed the attention of the principal, teachers, and other administrators in the courtyard. Like watching a chain of dominoes topple in succinct order, with first a student stepping in to address a group of basketball players, a girlfriend of one of the basketball players steps in and challenges a group of students to back off.

Unfortunately, no one backs down, words are exchanged with anger, and fists immediately start to fly. The fight seemed completely spontaneous, erupting so quickly that the staff pivoted from a celebration to scrambling to jump in and stop the action. One of the boys yelled out, "he called me a bitch" referring to the custodian, which only made him charge the custodian more aggressively. By-standing students instinctively surrounded the crowd of gladiators, standing on tables, finding high spots to watch the fight and cheer on their friends. I stood there completely still, watching with no emotion and unprecedentedly unbothered (I guess the trauma of growing up in South Central made me somehow numb to the fervor).

As the staff rushed to break up the battle that spread through the courtyard, much like the notoriously unpredictable California wildfires, each student engaging in the fight was now grasping at the opportunity to prove themselves. Running behind the person who just hit them, called them out by their name, or appeared to be an easy target to challenge. At one point, I saw the same custodian who attempted to break up a group of boys chasing a girl who was adamant about reclaiming her dignity and just looking for someone to swing on and hit. Some of the

students leading the Black History Month program are helping the administrators, who began shouting at the students to return to class.

Mr. US. gathered all his students from the chatter, literally calling his students by name and directing them to come inside the classroom. Once his students were in class, Mr. US closed the door. As if to create a boundary between the classroom and the excitement brewing in the hallway. An announcement blares over the intercom, "Attention teachers, we are currently on lockdown; no one is allowed to leave." One disorderly student, who was not in Mr. Us's class but asked to stay in Mr. US's class after the administration became preoccupied with the fight, walks out because he is on his cell phone, and Mr. US asks him to put the phone away. Mr. US turns on some soft house music, the type of music made for dance parties, and sometimes you hear it in shopping malls or an elevator. The sounds of the music created a sense of calm within the class, and the juxtaposition of the calm classroom and the rumbling hallway was now evident as Mr. US's class instantly became a safe space for the students. It seemed as if the administration felt the calm vibrations emanating from Mr. US's classroom because there was a knock at the door as soon as the vibration was present.

The Vice Principal asked Mr. US to assist with gathering the remaining students from the hallways and getting them back to class. The excitement was quickly growing, and the administration was preparing for school to be over within the hour. Finally, the bell rang. It was as if the administration sounded the horn for round two of the fight. Anticipating the inevitable, the administration called for all the teachers to volunteer and come to the courtyard. Several teachers ignored the request to manage the courtyard as students were leaving the campus, but Mr. US did not, and neither did I. As school let out, I walked with Mr. US towards the courtyard and saw the students intently leaving the school as if they knew another location to finish the

fight. However, this is South Central LA, and the Los Angeles Police Department controls the streets outside of the school bounds. Once the students left the hands of the school administration, they put themselves at the mercy of law enforcement.

I saw some teachers slowly disappear from the crowd and leave. Nevertheless, Mr. US stayed on the front lines. The reinforcements wanted revenge, and the shouting and fighting escalated. The difference between my experiences and this was the magnitude of the fight. The entire corner near the school was littered with people, angry and combative, some students, some adults, everyone ready to "get off" (i.e., fight). The administration and teachers were now clearly outnumbered, ill-prepared and untrained for this type of circumstance, and before I knew it, the police were coming.

The sounds of police sirens and helicopter propellers filled the air. Interestingly, the police stayed calm and maintained the barricade, showing no emotion or fear. The students began to calm down, recognizing that they were met with an equal but opposite force. Finally, the police presence seemed to work, and no one began physically fighting. Little by little, the crowd faded away, and the students, their friends, and family slowly left. Within what seemed like a few minutes, the fight was finally over.

CAVEATt #4 Emotional Safety

The first time I met Lauryn was the first day I came to visit the school. I arrived right after the last bell for the day and caught Mr. US gearing up to begin his ritual sweeping. I sat down at one of the students' desks and began to introduce myself, my work, and my connection to Hip Hop music. Not long after beginning my rehearsed introductory monologue, a young lady with a high ponytail and gold earrings came to the opened door, slightly leaning into the classroom. Mr. US looked at her, and she gave a very subtle gesture with her mouth and eyes, a

gesture that seemed immediately discernible by Mr. US. He then turned his attention to me and politely excused himself for a second to meet with the distraught young lady. I did not understand the telepathy between Mr. US and Lauryn, but I could feel that she needed him much more than I needed to introduce myself and reassured Mr. US that I was in no rush and to take his time tending to his student. While Mr. US walked outside the classroom to meet with Lauryn in the hallway, I sat alone in the class for just a few minutes. During that time, I wrote a memo to myself 'young black girl comes to the door seeking counsel from this white male teacher: follow up. As a young black girl who once walked down similar streets and school hallways and perhaps even faced some of the same stereotypical life experiences at the urban core, I wanted to understand what would make this young woman find solace in this teacher. What was unique about this moment?

Once Mr. US returned to the class and rejoined our introductory conversation, I asked if everything was okay with the young lady. I reminded him that I did not want to take away from his time with his students. Mr. US reassured me that everything was okay and that "Lauryn is like my daughter, she comes to me all the time. Yeah, she's cool, she was just having a moment and needed to talk about some stuff but she's okay. This is her Senior Year and she's just ready to get out of the house and start living her own life away from the drama". I understood exactly. Moreover, I knew I would see and hopefully grow to know more about Lauryn.

Lauryn was not officially enrolled in Mr. US's class, at least not now. However, she started with Mr. US in the 9th grade and made such a powerful connection with the course and with Mr. US that she and the counseling staff found creative ways to keep her affiliated with the Hip Hop course. Because the school is relatively small for an urban High School, and because of the charter structure's flexibility, Lauryn could take Mr. US's course for the A-G credit needed

for her graduation. She later returned to his course as a volunteer for volunteer hours and supported him as somewhat of a teacher's assistant. As a senior, Lauryn occasionally stopped by Mr. US's classroom during breaks and after school to sit and chat. Lauryn would also get passes from her other teachers, whose classes she was enrolled in, to visit Mr. US when class sessions were not busy or when she finished her work early.

Over time I became very familiar with Lauryn. I developed my relationship with her, taking the lead from Mr. US, who always made himself available to his students on a personal and academic level. His openness inspired me, and I extended that same openness to all his students. Lauryn even helped me out once for a Hip Hop concert that I was throwing at a club not too far from the school. Once, I asked Lauryn why she related to Mr. US so much? She laughed immediately and responded, "I do not know why; he is just cool. I can always talk to him, and he just seemed to you know, like just care about us, like really care. When I first was in his class, he was like the only teacher to ask me how I was doing because he could see my face was all messed up or like I had just finished crying".

One day, Lauryn came to visit Mr. US during lunch. Mr. US and I were sitting and reflecting on the latest happenings in Hip Hop news, a quality time I later realized allowed Mr. US and I to nurture a genuine friendship around Hip Hop and our passion for the culture. As Lauryn stood in the doorway of the classroom, like clockwork, Mr. US looked at Lauryn, and Lauryn gave a gesture that communicated she needed to vent. Mr. US looked at me and then looked back to Lauryn as if to ask her if it was okay if she vented with the both of us. Lauryn nodded and entered the room. I assumed that over the school year, Lauryn began to see that I was safe and that I cared about her overall well-being enough for me to listen to her concerns. She approached Mr. US and me, taking a chair from a nearby cluster of desks, moving it closer

to our direction, and taking a seat. She sat in front of us, and immediately we created a tiny cypher. Almost instinctively, Mr. US and I both changed our posturing, sat straight up, leaned in closer to reflect our interest, care, and concern for Lauryn, and gave her a listening ear.

She began to talk about her leaving for college. Mr. US and I already knew that Lauryn earned a scholarship from a private college in the South, and we talked about her experiences in a new city and her plans to join the dancing team once she settled into the southern school band culture. Despite all the excitement, Lauryn's mother, who had never attended college, refused to complete the financial aid application used to determine her financial profile for school. Lauryn's struggle with her mother was not new. Over the school year, she talked to me specifically about feeling as if her mother thought she was in competition with her, which was exacerbated by the fact that Lauryn is a young woman living in the household with her mother and new boyfriend. She told me once, "I hate him; he has called me a bitch and everything. The new boyfriend tries to parent Lauryn, which is entirely unwelcome. Lauryn and I talked about her biological father, who passed away when she was a young girl and how she has always been opposed to someone stepping into her life and trying to force the father's role in her household. To complicate things, Lauryn is a beautiful girl and is very intelligent. Her mother made Lauryn feel insecure about her intellect and shapely body, often accusing her of wearing form-fitting clothes to attract male attention.

Lauryn described that her mother's refusal to finish the financial aid form was a way to hurt her ambitions because she expressed to her mother that she wanted success in her life and to become more than what her mother could imagine. Lauryn's mother wanted help around the house with bills and rearing the more minor children living in the home. Lauryn's mother did not want her to leave because she needed her help, while simultaneously pushing Lauryn out of the

home when Lauryn did not heed her mother's demands. Finally, today it came to a head; Lauryn and her mother argued so badly this morning that she decided she did not want to return home. "She wants me to stay to give her what she wants, but she won't let me go and give me what I need! It seems like she is always doing this; she just does not wanna see me happy". Although I was listening and understanding Lauryn's plight, I watched as Mr. US sat intensely, looking at Lauryn and giving her the listening ear that was the glue of their relationship. Lauryn needed to be heard, affirmed, and heard by another adult that choosing to attend college was a good thing and not something that she should feel ashamed of achieving. Lauryn cried while venting with Mr. US and me, and Mr. US comforted her with loving words. He told Lauryn, "somethings you just gotta let pass and keep your eyes on the prize. If you need me to, I will send her an email and explain to her why the financial aid form is so important". Lauryn, hopeful because Mr. US intervened with her mother, took a deep sigh of relief, hugged Mr. US, and then leaned over and hugged me.

Lauryn is a special girl with a lot of talent, passion, and optimism. It was beautiful that throughout this journey, I finally could answer my curiosity about Lauryn and Mr. US. Their relationship was built on listening. Mr. US helped to guide Lauryn in a direction that would afford her the best outcomes in life, both inside and outside of school. Mr. US and Lauryn, over the years, developed a trust and comradery that appeared to supplement perhaps the parental relationship Lauryn missed at home with her mother.

Lauryn and I talked a lot about her excitement about going to college. I asked her once about what she thought would change with her relationship with Mr. US once she graduated, and, in my asking, it seemed as if the reality of her leaving the school and the city became real. Lauryn said, "The only reason I would come back to this school is because of Mr. US. You

know I am going to know him for a long time. It is not like once I leave, I will never talk to him again, no ". She said, "you know I am going to know Mr. US for a long time ." As I asked the question, Mr. US stood nearby and overheard Lauryn's response. He continued that "even last Friday, one of the old students that I had in the 9th grade [the student graduated a few years ago] came to my class and was talking to me". The student said, "you know you are like my dad." Mr. US continued, "I am trying not to cry and all that, and I tell him, you know, whatever you need from me, I got you because he has told me how he thought that his dad was not shit and was not there for him. The student thought I was the only person he could talk to about life". He would come before school and after school to chill and talk. When I would hear all of what he had to say, sometimes I like, whooooo [takes a deep breath], yeah, you would be surprised. I am glad I could be there for yall [looks towards Lauryn] when you need me".

CAVEAT #5 Curriculum and Critical thinking

Mr. US was genuinely committed to giving his students information to help them navigate the realities of growing up in Los Angeles. He also creatively connected the Hip Hop classroom to broader social and political issues, especially those evident around the Hussle High community. Current events often prompted the general knowledge he sought to impart to his students. One day, the students entered the classroom full of outrage. Many students lived within the community and often passed a famous mural drawn almost 20 years prior. Since then, the mural has become a symbol of pride and joy amongst the residents. The infamous mural depicts the legacy of African resistance, starting from the enslavement of African people during the great MAAFA (e.g., the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade), and chronicles the spirit of resistance throughout time, all the way up to the legacy left by the Black Panther Party. This type of imagery is prevalent, as many residents can view countless street murals dedicated to the

struggles of black and brown people living in Los Angeles throughout the city. This mural has been seen in movies and television shows and has become an iconic symbol of the community.

The students' outrage this day was in response to witnessing the vandalization of the mural. The culture of graffiti art and street murals in Los Angeles is so prevalent and appreciated that the vandalization of any mural or street art would seemingly be offensive. However, this disregard was the result of growing racial tensions felt not only within the city of Los Angeles but the growing tensions due to the political climate within America. Some political economists would argue that since the 2017 elections and the inauguration of the 45th president, white supremacist sentiments once hidden behind robes and closed doors were now made visible and growing exponentially (Inwood, 2019). These white supremacist sentiments are symbolized with images that reflect a historical timeline of white supremacy dating back to the 1930s with the legacy of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Movement. One of the most recognizable symbols is the 'swastika .'Whether you were born in the 1930s or 2013, many people of color recognize the swastika symbol as an overt display and announcement of white supremacy. As aforementioned, the mural depicts a history of African resistance in America, with powerful images of Black Panther activists standing with large afros, black leather jackets, and raised fists. The vandals drew several swastikas on the faces of the activists in the mural, large and colorful, for everyone in the community to witness.

The community was also outraged, the news fervently reported the destruction, and the students were fueled with anger. As the students entered the class, it was as if they were already intensely discussing the vandalization in the hallway and the conversation naturally spilled into the classroom. "Yeah, Mr. US, did you see our mural?" CMG (pseudonym) said, and as a tag team wrestling match, B.A. jumped into the conversation," I cannot believe that they really did

it; these fools drew a swastika on the damn mural (shaking his head)." Keak continued, "I am sick of all these racist like for real, they gone have to catch these hands on me!". Agerman agreed, "on my mama ." Mr. US allowed the students to vent and express their disdain for the incident while encouraging them to take their seats. The students, invigorated by their outrage, took their seats and literally sat on the edge of their chairs, anticipating Mr. US's comments about the event.

Instead of giving his opinion, he walked to the overhead projector and showed the class an article he had already cued up for a class discussion. Mr. US asked Spinderella to help pass out a hard copy of the article to each student, and the students began to settle into the moment. Mr. US addressed the class, "I know yall are pissed, and I am too. The blatant disrespect to this community, our community, is unacceptable. But y'all know this ain't nothing new. There are so many moments like this in this country, and with this president, it does not look like it will go away any time soon. So first off, I want to make sure that y'all know that the people who originally drew the mural have already been contacted, and they are working on painting over the swastikas immediately. By tomorrow morning, we should see the mural back to normal. So that is great that the community did not waste any time acting on this and getting that mess taken down. And secondly, I want to bring your attention to this article that really talks about the political climate that basically allows this type of racism to run rampant. Let us read the article to have more information for ourselves and our families so that when this comes up, we are prepared to have the knowledge we need to move forward. "CMG, why don't you go ahead and start us off, and then popcorn [choose another student at random] for someone else to read after you finish the first paragraph." CMG begins to read the article, "This is the first time in over 15 years that the mural depicting influential African American figures in the heart of this Los

Angeles community has been vandalized." The students continue to read the article. Afterward, they begin a discussion of topics inspired by the article. With Mr. US acting more as a moderator than a teacher, each student could express their thoughts and ideas about the article, which broadened to include issues such as police brutality, the L.A. riots in 1992, the Watts Rebellion in 1965, and gentrification. The students recounted personal experiences with racism within the community and their desire to see change.

Mr. US allowed the students to use this topic to drive the lesson for the day. We asked the students to come up with possible solutions in addressing the issue of white supremacy in the community as an 'exit ticket' assignment (e.g., assignment students are asked to complete and submit as they are literally leaving or exiting class for the day). After a lengthy discussion and listening to the experiences of one another, the students excitedly took out a sheet of paper. They began writing their suggested solutions to this social ill. The bell rang, the class was over, and as the students submitted their exit tickets, some shouted out what solution they offered. Agerman shouts out, 'man….I put that they need to leave our neighborhood", Keak agreed, 'on me, I said they need to let us own everything, man, like everything, like the stores, the police, the block, like everything! Big Chan said, 'Mr. U.S., I put that they need to find out who these people were and just put them in jail and make an example out of them for real!" Mr. US remained neutral, not offering his opinion on the matter but allowing the students to comment at will on their preferred solution. The students exited the classroom with almost the same excitement that they entered; instead, this time, their emotions were focused not just on the problem but also focused towards possible solutions.

CAVEAT #6 Assessments and Assignments

Mr. US taught his course under two major themes. For the first half of the course, the curriculum focused on the history and legacy of Hip Hop, and the second half connected Hip Hop to local and global issues. Mr. US also strategically scaffolded many daily assignments to help students engage in classroom activities. For example, the 'do-now' activity, assigned at the beginning of class, helped students begin class with an attentive attitude. The topics of the 'do-now' were wide-ranging. However, one assignment the students enjoyed most was rating the quality of Hip Hop artists in various areas, such as best performer, lyricist, best visuals, or videos. Mr. US would suggest a few artists that the students were already familiar with to rate and simultaneously seize the opportunity to introduce new artists that the students were to investigate to complete the activity. The students seemed to enjoy rating artists' performances, and one day, Agerman and B.A. volunteered to answer the 'do-now' almost as if they were in a competition. Both young men raised their hands and waved them with excitement. The students were so eager to participate that Mr. US could not decide who should go first and asked the young men to play a quick game of rock, paper, and scissors to determine a winner. B.A. won the game and quickly shared his answers to the 'do-now' while squeezing in a quick taunting gesture aimed towards Agerman.

Students usually had an eager attitude in the morning. Again, the course design focused on supporting students to feel confident about their work and the information they brought into the class. Mr. US says, "I am more interested in having these worksheets and assignments spark something in the students that makes them excited about what we are doing and not just a waste of their time or giving them busy work. I am trying to build their critical thinking skills. I want them not just to perfect the assignment but to show me that they are thinking about it deeply.

Every day is an opportunity to pull that out of them. I just want us to think and talk and to process this information. If I do that then I'm good and I know that it will work.".

One strategy Mr. US uses when designing his lesson plans and assessments is providing students with choices. He argues that "I give options all the time. I even give options during the final exam! I have three final exams they can choose from, and the students can choose which exam best fits their style. Moreover, they feel more confident because it is like they choose this, and know they can kill it. I know that everybody has different learning styles and whatever you think is going to work for you is okay with me. So everything at the end of the day hopefully is something that they can relate to". He continues, "I give them assessments and based on the assessments, that'll let me know what Lesson 1 should be. We work on that problem area and then move forward, lesson 2 and 3 so that everybody will have a different experience and it's somewhat at their own pace and based on your [their] Lexile number."

Giving students options was also extended into daily assignments when appropriate. For instance, the class was assigned to answer a series of questions displayed on the overhead projector. The students were instructed to take out a sheet of paper and complete the assignment. Kola Loc raised her hand and asked, "do we have to write the whole thing down on paper?" Mr. US's response, "no, do whatever works best for you though; it is up to you," left Kola Loc confident about completing the assignment, relieving any hesitation she may have felt about the task. Mr. US has mastered anticipating his students' emotional reactions to specific assignments, especially those that ask students to present or perform in front of their classmates. He explains, "I always make live performances an option based on the rubric, I make it optional because if I made it mandatory, there would be some students that would just take the zero all the time, I already know. I would set some of them up for failure and don't want to do that."

Supporting students during classroom activities is another strategy Mr. US uses to help engage his students. Mr. US explains instructions and expectations for assignments at the beginning of the lesson and throughout the class period and clarifies keywords or related inquiries to the assignment or task. During my observations, I noticed that Mr. US does not sit at his desk during class. Instead, he often walks around the class, talking to his students, answering questions, and supporting them as they work. During activities, Mr. US will casually walk around the classroom, make himself available to his students, and make announcements to help students stay on task. For instance, Mr. US would announce, "Midway through the period, I will be checking for your progress," or announce reminders such as, "Our next check point is at 10:20am". The students developed an assurance that Mr. US was consistently available to support their progress in class and did not hesitate to seek his help. Keak often called Mr. US over to his desk to ask for help, and after being frustrated by an activity, raised his hand and said, "Mr. US we struggling, can you help us?". Mr. US responded, "sure," and walked over to help Keak. He begins, "okay so remember that we are picking our favorite songs and then change the lyrics. Now the cool thing about this assignment is that there is an infinite number of options to select from. So, choose a song of your choice…" Keak, now feeling more confident about the activity, replies, "I know what song I want," and Mr. US reassures him, "okay good, do you have your rubric? And what song are you going to use?" Keak excitedly says the song title, "Murder on My Mind, this song is sooooo good. Imma change it to something else on my mind!" Mr. US, "yeah, that'll work, just the way that Jasmine [pseudonym] and Sinah [pseudonym] from the other period did on their Instagram, just like they changed that one song into something about food, yeah you can just flip it like that. They got down, you know, they almost had a concert in here!". After his explanation to Keak, Mr. US ends with, "I hope this helps, but let me know if

you need more clarification." Keak gestures with a head nod that he is ready to proceed and begins writing his new lyrics on his sheet of paper.

Mr. US prided himself on being able to provide his students with one-on-one support during class. On occasion, he would find himself being pulled by many students all at once but seemed to manage the swarm of requests easily. Mr. US communicated to his students with care and told his students, "Hold on, I'll be right over to you," a phrase that the students repeatedly heard throughout the class period. In addition to the one-on-one support, Mr. US also tailored his classroom management style to encourage a mutually respectful classroom environment. For example, when needing his students' attention during class, Mr. US would countdown out loud from three down to one while knocking on the whiteboard in the front of the class. The students always responded to the knocking and the counting with respect and would slowly turn their attention towards Mr. US. When disciplining his students, Mr. US never reprimanded a student in front of the entire class. Instead, Mr. US always addressed behavioral issues with the students privately or on a one-on-one basis, asking students to speak with him outside of the classroom, or addressing students at their desks in a low tone to not bring attention to himself or embarrass his students.

CAVEAT #7 Allow me to introduce myself

In doing this work, I had to recognize my position. It followed me every time I entered the classroom. It felt like the students could smell Hip Hop on me! As I approached this research, I remember intentionally thinking about what I was going to wear to conduct my observations (the struggle is real). Do I dress like a teacher, college student, Hip Hop artist, a mother? So many hats that I wear and so many positions that I occupy all at once. Merriam & Lee et al. (2010) discuss the power and impact of positionality as a feature of ourselves and that, as

researchers, we should make this visible and embrace it in our work. I decided after all that I occupy all these positions and that I will and should make my positionality visible in this work, literally and figuratively (my final look was cute, I dare say). As a Hip Hop artist and an educator, I found myself, at times, researching as a participant observer. I offered information during class discussions, supporting students with their work, or even discussing lesson plans with the instructor and 'bustin out a hot 16' (i.e., rapping a verse) during a freestyle cypher with the students. As a result, I was afforded a level of trust from the participants. A level of freedom, in that I was free to be both a member of the Hip Hop Nation and, in this case, the Hip Hop classroom and a researcher. This position also held me accountable and ensured that this work highlighted both the power and preciousness of such a valuable space the Hip Hop classroom has become.

On the first day of my observations, Mr. US said he would allow me to introduce myself once the students had been given instructions for the do-now assignment. Mr. US told me he was having a difficult time with the students that morning, so I decided to rap a verse of one of my songs before I said my introduction. I knew the music would grab their attention and give me *an edge in connecting with the students. As I become more versed in Hip Hop's power, I like playing with the flexibility of implementing it in the classroom. Hip Hop is the common ground that I stand on with the students, just as I thought I captured their attention. I watched them as they sat quietly, clapping their hands and making a beat to my acapella verse. After I finished, I told the students my name, and they asked about my affiliations with music. One girl said, "who do you rap with?". I explained to them that I was a part of the RBG camp and explained what RBG (e.g., Revolutionary but Gangsta) is and why it is essential. The same student, an African American female, said, "oh," pointing to the board, "like that," as some words were written in

Red, Black, and Green colors on the board. The students seemed to give me a pass or felt a sense of credibility. I explained to them my LA roots, rapping with artists such as Nipsey Hussle and Stic of Dead Prez, even though I explained to them that I did not take the 'gangsta' or 'street route' because my being a female and knowing that I was 'smart .'I told them I went to Crenshaw High School and was the only one of my friends to graduate. I explained that I had lived in Atlanta for the last 15 years and went to the same High School that the rap group Migos went to, North Atlanta and that I taught at a school in the same neighborhood as rappers 21 savage and Young Thug. I gave the students as much Hip Hop context as possible so that they would gauge my authentic connection to Hip Hop music and culture. Afterward, the students clapped their hands, and I would say they accepted me and allowed me to be in their classroom as an observer. Mr. US then passed out the class quiz they were to complete for the day. Once all the papers were distributed, Mr. E. leaned over and said, "this class is like night and day, it's unbelievable, I guess the rapping worked."

REFLECTION

This research allowed me to assume many roles within the study. At times, I was a participant observer, and occasionally, I fluctuated between being a teacher's assistant and a co-teacher. The experiences I brought into the classroom were valued and regularly called upon. The relationships between myself and the students began to grow over time. As a community resident, I would see students outside of school at the malls or even at the gas station. I never wanted to give the impression that the connections within the school were superficial and would not be extended outside the hallways. I challenged myself to be welcoming, affirming, and supportive to the students inside and outside the classroom. Once, while getting my tires changed at a shop near the school, I saw Agerman walking down the street with friends and a small dog

on a leash. He immediately saw me and came over to give me a big hug. I complimented him on his dog, and he told me she was for sale and asked if I wanted to buy her. I told him no, and that if I knew anyone interested, I would let him know. He was going to the corner store and asked me if he could borrow a dollar. I gave him two, and he smiled, said thanks, and walked away.

At that moment, as a Hip-Hop teacher, the commitment to 'keeping it real, teaching students the truth or context, building relationships, and supporting students' academic growth must be reflected both inside and outside the classroom. The students want to know that they can count on you, on the street and at school. It made sense why Mr. US was one of the few teachers to hold the line of students after that dramatic fight spilled over into the hands of the Los Angeles Police Department. It made sense that he intentionally kept his room peaceful and calm for his students and the school. It made sense that he used Hip Hop to address various topics and information that students would need to help navigate their circumstances and academic careers. It made sense because Mr. US is committed to his student's success and well-being and fought to protect and maintain that by any means necessary. The experiences of this research, and my understanding of the power of Hip-Hop music and culture, allowed me to surmise the following. That if Hip Hop is not used for our liberation - to empower and inspire marginalized youth around the world, to help to strengthen student-teacher relationships, develop social and political awareness and help students to engage in schools. Hip Hop can potentially be used for chaos and destruction.

SUMMARY

The above caveats detail the significant findings of this study. The major findings are as follows:

- ➔ These findings suggest that Mr. US provided his students with a physically and emotionally safe space.
- ➔ The findings also suggest that he was able to provide his students with opportunities to address issues of racism and representation.
- ➔ Additionally, Mr. US's Hip Hop classroom gave students choices when completing assignments and on final assessments.

Mr. US provided a safe space, allowing students to discuss and learn about social and political issues and giving students choices in class. These findings suggest that Hip Hop can be used as a focal point and basis for curricular content, the development of positive student-teacher relationships, the cultivation of both political and social awareness, and to positively influence students' overall engagement in class.

Mr. US made himself available for his students to come and talk, whether it was in between classes or after school. The ritualistic sweeping at the end of the school day helped Mr. US prepare for his lessons and have a moment of quiet reflection to think about his day. It was also a time that students could find a listening ear with like-minded adults that shared a passion for mentoring students. During this time, Mr. US also built relationships with students outside of his class. The Hip Hop classroom became a center for students to build positive student-teacher relationships through after-school talks and the opportunity for students to connect with teachers on a personal level. Mr. Us also built individual relationships with his students like Lauryn. Mr. US listened to Lauryn and, when necessary, gave advice or advocated for her. As a result, Lauryn could trust Mr. US, especially when it came to making sure she could go to college. When Lauryn's opportunity to attend college was jeopardized by her mother's unwillingness to complete financial aid forms, Lauryn came to Mr. US for help, and he obliged by reaching out to

Lauryn's mother on her behalf. Mr. US built a positive student-teacher relationship with Lauryn by being available, listening and giving advice when needed, and helping Lauryn accomplish her goals. Mr. US was emotionally safe for his students, allowing him to connect to his students on a personal level.

The Hip Hopcentric classroom, at times, was a literal safe space. Mr. US kept the classroom clean, with fresh air and natural light shining. The soft music he played in between classes also added to the comfortable and inviting classroom feeling. When a big fight broke out on campus, Mr. US's classroom became somewhat of a shelter during a storm. His classroom was able to maintain a peacefulness when the school was erupting with chaos. The soft music, lighting, air, and the arrangement of the desk contributed to the Hip Hopcentric classroom being separated from the mayhem. Mr. US was recognized as a teacher that could maintain peacefulness in his classroom and help spread that peace throughout the school. He was tasked with keeping unruly students in his classroom and leading the efforts of teachers attempting to keep the chaos of the school fight at bay. During the commotion, the students seemed to appreciate the separation of the Hip Hopcentric classroom and the school. They were comfortable and appeared to feel safe. Mr. US appeared to have provided his students with a physically safe space. The safety of the space and the feeling when entering his classroom helped Mr. US to gain respect among the students. That mutual respect contributed to Mr. US building positive student-teacher relationships with students.

One of the topics that Mr. US never seemed to shy away from was white supremacy. When the vandalization of a street mural outraged his students, Mr. US catered an entire lesson designed to address the racist event. Mr. US allowed the students first to discuss their initial reactions to the swastika drawn on the Afrocentric mural in their neighborhood. He then

provided the students with information. Instead of being sensational and just allowing the students to talk, Mr. US helped the students to critically analyze the event by providing an article that gave context to the topic. Mr. US expressed his intention to ensure that the students could understand the issue and help the members of their families and community understand the issue better.

In conclusion of the lesson, Mr. US tasked the students with imagining a solution to the racist incident. The students left the class with a sense of empowerment and new information on racism. This lesson directly reflected a current event that affected the students and their community. The Hip Hopcentric classroom allowed for freestyling within the curriculum, and Mr. US freestyled a lesson for his students. In changing the curriculum to address the issue of racism and the vandalization of the mural, Mr. US was thought to be contributing to the student's social and political awareness. The assignment that Mr. US gave the students to conclude the lesson also is thought to have influenced the student's social and political awareness.

Finally, Mr. US designed the Hip Hopcentric classroom to be flexible for students. Mr. US gave his students choices when completing assignments and on major assessments or final exams. For instance, if an assignment suggested that students perform in front of the class, Mr. US would make the performance optional. Mr. US also gave his students choices, such as the assignment that asked the students to choose any rap song and remix or remake the song with different lyrics. For the final exam, Mr. US allowed his students to pick the exam they felt the most confident in completing. By doing this, Mr. US remarked that he would not 'set his students up to fail .'In addition to giving students choices and flexibility, Mr. US assigned students tasks that were interesting and relatable. Many consistent assignments that the students completed every day, like the 'do-now' or the 'exit-ticket' assignments, were on topics that the students enjoyed

writing about or completing. One of the students' favorite assignments was scoring artists according to some criteria. This assignment was a way for Mr. US to introduce new words and new music to the students. This assignment was also an example of how Mr. US helped his students engage in the classroom by giving assignments that the students enjoyed. The findings suggest that the flexibility in how Mr. US assigned and assessed tasks in the Hip Hopcentric classroom helped his students' sense of competence and engagement in class.

The findings ultimately point to the Hip Hopcentric classroom as having the potential to provide a safe place for African American students with a flexible and relatable curriculum and a space where students can talk about racial issues or issues that could be difficult to discuss. In providing students with this experience, the Hip Hopcentric classroom may positively impact student-teacher relationships, political and social awareness, and student engagement in class. Centering Hip Hop music and culture breaks away from traditional pedagogical approaches not designed to accommodate marginalized cultures and communities. Using Hip Hopcentricity, teachers can move students from the cultural margins of academic institutions towards the forefront. By centering Hip Hop culture, educators allow marginalized youth's experiences, interests, preferences, and cultural lens to serve as a foundation for building new knowledge.

CHAPTER 5

PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study aimed to explore the relationship between Hip Hop and education. In essence, this study was built on the notion of bringing culture into the classroom environment in order to serve students better. Much of what is taught and perpetuated in traditional public school settings are derived from Eurocentric cultural perspectives and histories (Love, 2012; King, 2002). However, students who are not a part of the dominant Eurocentric culture (i.e.,

marginalized students) may experience school adversely when home and community culture merges with school culture. Students' adverse experience of schools has been a consequence of what is referred to as structural racism or a system built on hierarchy and inequity that penalizes students based on race, culture, and socioeconomic status (Valdez, Takahashi, et al., 2020). For instance, students of color often experience severe limitations and access to resources while in school, which supports the notion that poverty and school achievement are directly related (Kennedy, 1986). It was once argued that students who live in poor neighborhoods or come from indigent households have extreme difficulty in school (Kennedy, 1986). In order to counteract this complex effect on learning, students from marginalized communities are more likely to need additional support in school (Kennedy, 1986). In addition to performance disparities, many marginalized student communities also have minimal access to qualified instructors, access to quality learning materials, and access to quality facilities (Valdez, Takahashi, et al., 2020). Sadly, the limitations in accessibility are rooted in a legacy of unequal or inequitable treatment of indigent people of color and marginalized communities throughout the history of America's educational system (Valdez, Takahashi, et al., 2020).

As urban youth experience schools, they also tend to create spaces where they can emote and navigate academic performances that are traditionally not permissible within formal school settings (Sule, 2016). For marginalized students, participation in dominant or non-dominant spaces is a factor when creating safe emotive spaces (Sule, 2016). However, many marginalized students find themselves outside of dominant spaces and similarly find inconsistencies within the culture of emotions permitted within them (Sule, 2016). The culture of emotions within schools can also be understood as the shared meanings, beliefs, and attitudes a school has towards emotional expressions and how schools either support or neglect these emotional expressions

(Zembylas, 2006). Ultimately, as the interest in the culture of emotions become salient within education, educators are encouraged to possess some form of emotional intelligence in understanding students, as well as how schools and teachers respond to various displays of emotions (Zembylas, 2006). In other words, school settings may have an impact, albeit implicit, explicit, or neutral, on students' emotional expressions and responses (Zembylas, 2006).

Schools within urban communities may face obstacles in providing students with a safe, positive, and supportive environment due to several factors. Factors include a lack of cultural responsiveness, inconsistencies in the enforcement of school norms and rules, limited use of supportive behavioral interventions that may substitute for disciplinary practices, and generally low expectations for many marginalized students (Wolff & Rogers, 2019). Marginalized students are also limited in their access to classroom-based learning opportunities that incorporate media consumption and production, such as accessibility to internet and safety strategies, library media specialists and media centers, or general accessibility to relevant media and learning resources (Wolff & Rogers 2019). Many of these disparities also limit access to quality history, civics, and government classrooms, a full primary curriculum, or civic learning opportunities experienced outside of the classroom setting (Wolff & Rogers, 2019). These limitations prevent students from fully engaging in the American social and political economy (Wolff & Rogers, 2019). Interestingly, limitations for civic engagement are also found within urban schools as marginalized students are less likely to have access to discussions about current events, the study of government, history, or discussions about society and politics (Wolff & Rogers, 2019). There are limitations for students to discuss issues they care about or learn about the problems of their communities and explore ways to respond to them or engage and simulate civic processes (Wolff & Rogers, 2019).

Considering the obstacles that marginalized students face regarding the factors that can influence success, educators must find solutions, strategies, pedagogies, and practices that can help to achieve. The idea of cultural relevance (Ladson-Billings, 1995) surmises that culture is a crucial feature within education that can help to increase students' success in schools. The incorporation of culture is not a 'one size fits all solution to the marginalization of students in schools, in the same way that Hip Hop is not a fix-all solution. The findings of this research suggest that culture via Hip Hop be considered a valuable resource that educators can utilize when appropriate. A Culturally Relevant framework anchored this research in acknowledging that when students bring their home and community culture and languages into the classroom, they are better able to connect with instructors (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Using culture can also help students connect to course material through cultural references in the curriculum and bridge their home culture with the classroom culture. Finally, culture in the classroom helps students to learn and understand the world they live in on a local and international level.

Although many cultural references may be used in the classroom, this work adopts the culture associated with Hip Hop music and aesthetics. The rationale for Hip Hop is based on its popularity as a global phenomenon and international audience. The Hip Hop global audience, referred to as the Hip Hop Nation (Chang, 2005), is exceptionally diverse and includes a range of ethnicities, nationalities, races, cultures, genders, ages, and places. The nation is therefore created on the premise of one commonality: Hip Hop music and the cultural aesthetics of the genre. This study recognizes Hip Hop music and culture have provided a vehicle that many marginalized youths around the round have utilized in many facets. Of them to build relationships within a global Hip Hop network, engage in both the local and global economy, and provide social and political commentary about local issues, concerns, and inquiries. Considering

the impact that Hip Hop has had on the lives of marginalized youth outside the classroom, this study aimed to explore students' experience of Hip Hop within the classroom and propose that Hip Hopcentric education expressed through a Culturally Relevant framework possesses opportunities for marginalized students.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

This study proposed that Hip Hop is brokered to help marginalized communities engage in society, build relationships and address social, political, and economic disparities. Hip Hop can also be used within the classroom to influence students' engagement in class, the development of teacher-student relationships, and nurture a socio-political awareness. The findings of this study suggest that Mr. US's Hip Hopcentric classroom was able to provide a physically and emotionally safe space for students, provide flexibility within the curriculum and classroom practices and give students opportunities to address social issues such as racism. These findings also suggest that the emotionally safe Hip Hop classroom helped Mr. US develop relationships with his students, one-on-one or in a group setting. Similarly, students who could make choices when completing assignments or assessments appeared to be more eager to complete tasks and felt a strong sense of competence and engagement. Students were also given opportunities to 'read the world' or address white supremacy and racism issues by critically analyzing current events affecting their community. Reading the world may have arguably nurtured students' political and social awareness.

The proposition that Hip Hop can help students within the classroom in the same way Hip Hop has helped marginalized communities outside the classroom is explored with this study's findings. Often, students feel as if teachers are in classrooms simply for economic gain and the emotions that teachers possess lean more towards apathy than understanding (McKnight,

2015). The impression that many students assume when considering being in classrooms with apathetic teachers is that teachers are not interested in their backgrounds, the families that they come from, or the communities in which they reside (McKnight, 2015). As teachers invest in the emotional well-being of their students, they also embrace the idea that as teachers, they meet and share space with their students daily. Moreover, as such, they may be more aware and able to understand their students and identify those suffering from adverse experiences (Pirskanen, Jokinen, et al., 2019). By understanding students' emotions and cultural derivatives, educators also create a sense of 'mattering' among marginalized youth (Sule, 2016). In other words, students are given a sense that not only does their emotions matter, but their emotions are understood using culturally based understandings, which acknowledges that their culture matters (Sule, 2016). Mattering is primarily tied to a sense of belonging and creates a feeling amongst students that educators are concerned with their experiences. They are loved and accepted, and their cultural affiliations are welcomed and supported, contributing to positive self-esteem (Sule, 2016). For many urban youths, Hip Hop culture has served as a safe space that allows for self-affirmation and mattering while also providing a space for youth to challenge feelings of unworthiness (Sule, 2016). By simply participating in Hip Hop culture, many youths can foster a sense of belonging (Sule, 2016).

When Mr. US acknowledged his students' emotions, he made them feel as if they mattered, which helped the students see Mr. US as someone who cared and with whom they could connect. The students seemed to rely on Mr. US for advice and would consistently come to talk with him either after school or in between classes. The relationships he built with his students were expressed through Mr. US consistently making himself available to his students,

listening to his student's vent or emote, and providing students with advice and emotional support when necessary.

Allowing students to address issues like racism can be uncomfortable for educators, as topics like race and racism can be emotionally triggering (Greene, 2000). As aforementioned, students from marginalized communities are often limited to classes that offer opportunities for civic engagement and civic discussion of serious topics. Youth in the US public school system is bombarded with diversity in life experiences and realities. Students who experience the impact and confrontation of drugs and drug abuse face abortion and birth control decisions and are forced to make decisions around the use of handguns. Many students are impacted by family issues of abandonment, foster care, and child abuse (Greene, 2000). Unfortunately, many schools do not consider the reality of these circumstances, fail to support students in understanding and managing these issues, and instead focus on the traditional models of public schooling (Greene, 2000). As schools continue to develop and as educators seek to create schools of the future, research has argued that young people be supported through various forms of academic preparation, including mentorship and coaching, and in developing the skills necessary to cope with or manage a variety of ills and complexities within society (Greene, 2000). Mr. US created a space within the Hip Hopcentric classroom to address the social ills that students experienced. He confronted issues such as racism head-on by providing information to his students and allowing students to discuss the issues. The goal is to help students read the world and propose solutions to these ills. As Mr. US closed out the lesson on racism, he tasked the students to imagine a solution. Within Friere's (1985, 2000) problem-posing model, students can help to develop a critical consciousness and social and political awareness when they find a problem, analyze the problem, and explore possible solutions (Antwi, 2002). By addressing the

issue of racism in class, Mr. US has arguably influenced his students' social and political awareness.

Finally, for students to feel intrinsically motivated to participate in school, they must experience a sense of competence, relatability, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Waterman (2004) and Nisan (1992) assert that activities that connect with a student's identity make the curriculum more desirable and optimize engagement. The Hip Hopcentric curriculum seemed to appeal to Mr. US's students. For instance, students were able to express their personal opinions through assignments that allowed them to rate Hip Hop artists, which was an assignment that they often enjoyed. Giving students options within assignments also helped students to feel a sense of competence, as with the assignment that allowed the students to pick any Hip Hop song and rewrite the rap lyrics to any topic of the student's choice. Students were also given opportunities to express autonomy by way of making choices. Mr. US allowed his students to choose which final exam topic they wanted to be assessed on and gave students at least three options. Setting the students up to succeed was an important goal in Mr. US's classroom. By providing the students with options and addressing content they enjoyed and could relate to, Mr. US's Hip Hopcentric course is argued to have also helped students engage in class.

The findings of this study suggest that Hip Hopcentricity influences students' social and political awareness, class engagement, and teacher-student relationships. That by providing students with a curriculum they can culturally connect to, flexibility in class assignments and assessments, and a physically and emotionally safe space. These findings are consistent with the literature that describes the value of physical and emotional safety (Pirskanen, Jokinen, et al., 2019), choice and reliability within the curriculum (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and the value of allowing students to discuss social issues in class (Greene, 2000).

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of this study suggest that Hip Hopcentric classes provided students with a physically and emotionally safe classroom environment, allowing students to discuss critical social issues and to make choices with assignments and assessments. These provisions may have helped students build teacher-student relationships, nurture political and social awareness and engage in schools. Mr. US created the curriculum for this Hip Hop course. He was very intentional about the types of issues he wanted to teach his students, such as 'gentrification.' He was very intentional about the students learning to appreciate Hip Hop music and culture. Because the course is an elective, Mr. US could also free-style his lesson plans. For example, the lesson plan Mr. US created to address the vandalization of the street mural was impromptu and in response to the event. The casual and safe environment of the Hip Hop course also allowed Mr. US to bring his dress style into the classroom. On Fridays for instance, Mr. US dressed in a way that was reflective of a Hip Hop aesthetic complete with a hoodie sweatshirt, jeans, and Nike tennis shoes. Mr. US was able to bridge the gap between his home and community culture in school and allowed his students to do the same. The Hip Hop classroom also allowed students to find relatable cultural artifacts displayed on the classroom walls and identify a cultural context within class assignments.

The findings suggest that the Hip Hopcentric class created a particular environment that benefited marginalized students. However, an alternative analysis of the findings may suggest that it was not the Hip Hopcentric class that produced these results but rather the character and nature of Mr. US and his approach to teaching.

Mr. US was attentive to his students inside and outside the classroom. He was also very consistent and available to his students when they needed him. Mr. US ensured that his

classroom remained clean, with fresh air and plenty of sunlight. He arranged his classroom so that the desks were far apart enough for him to walk through the rows of desks and assist students one-by-one or in small groups while completing classroom assignments. Mr. US was a teacher that gained a reputation for caring for his students and helping students succeed in school. If Mr. US were teaching another subject matter, for instance, math, the findings would suggest the same outcomes because of the influence of Mr. US as a teacher. Alternatively, Mr. US is a prototype of the Hip Hopcentric teacher, that those teachers who tend to gravitate towards teaching Hip Hop in schools express some of the same teaching practices and care within the classroom. One of the challenges with this study design was isolating Hip Hop as the sole explanation for the findings.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In addition to the limitation of examining only one teacher in a Hip Hopcentric classroom, additional limitations of this study can also be found in the distinction between the teacher and the course subject. Examining the teacher in another classroom environment outside of Hip Hop is necessary for the study to understand what personal attributes the instructor brings into the class. For instance, witnessing Mr. US teach his beat-making course broadened my understanding of Mr. US as a teacher and the types of care or one-on-one support he provides to all his students. Similarly, observing multiple classroom settings that all use a Hip Hopcentric approach would have increased the understanding of how Hip Hop explicitly supports students. By examining many Hip Hopcentric classrooms, less emphasis would be placed on the teacher, and the focus would instead be on the consistency of course content and practices that support students. Another limitation of this study was the inability to apply Hip Hop practices in other subject areas. For example, sampling within a Math course or using cyphers in an English

course would strengthen the argument for using Hip Hopcentric practices in courses where Hip Hopcentric content is not applicable or conducive. Finally, this study was limited by not having a student participant enrolled in the Hip Hopcentric course but did not relate to a Hip Hop aesthetic. All of the students in this study appeared to relate to Hip Hop music and culture, whether displayed in the style of dress, the use of language, or the use of prior knowledge and familiarity with course content. This study did not, however, have a student within the sample population that may have adversely experienced the Hip Hopcentic classroom and was unable to relate or connect to cultural references throughout the course. Although outside of the scope of this research, these types of limitations are undoubtedly factors that may impact the analysis and implications of this study's findings.

Implications of your findings

The implications of the findings for this study may suggest several types of support that marginalized students may need in public schools, regardless of the subject content. First, marginalized students may need to feel safe in school generally. Considering the types of distractions that students experience, schools may need to serve as respect or a sanctuary that protects students. Many marginalized youths face what McKnight (2015) refers to as distractions or elements within society that may be destructive and detrimental. Urban communities often face inequitable access to health care, safe housing, quality educational facilities, legal support or counsel, and various physical and emotional hardships (McKnight, 2015). For many marginalized youths, these distractions often compete with the goals and attention provided by schools. Using drugs or intoxicating substances, intimate relationships, violence, gang banging, or as in Lauryn's home, living with a dysfunctional family can be drastic distractions that can negatively impact students' success (McKnight, 2015). It is worth noting

that many teachers are ill-equipped to handle the gravity of such realities for students and, unfortunately, with a lack of understanding, fail to provide countering expectations of their students or incorporate pedagogies that would prevent students from falling victim to these distractions (McKnight, 2015).

Marginalized students also need to feel that their teachers care for them and want them to succeed. Unfortunately, many teachers and school staff have been accused of being inattentive, aloof, dismissive of students' emotions, and at times cruel (McKnight, 2015). However, studies have now suggested that when teachers have a positive attitude toward their students, many students experience a decrease in boredom and frustration (Mendzheritskaya & Hansen, 2019). Furthermore, it has been argued that students have the potential to reflect the emotional expressions of their instructors. That is, if students experience a teacher who displays anger, then the students, in turn, may experience the transmission of negative emotions and express anger or similar emotions as well (Mendzheritskaya & Hansen, 2019). Regarding the transmission of emotions from teachers to students, it is essential to note that the two most frequent emotions expressed by teachers that negatively impact students' learning experiences are pity and anger (Mendzheritskaya & Hansen, 2019). These two emotions have been reported to affect not only students' cognitive processes but also students' ability to stay on task and may encourage tendencies to avoid performing classroom tasks and activities (Mendzheritskaya & Hansen, 2019).

Finally, marginalized students may need not only to discuss issues of poverty and racism but also to imagine solutions to these social ills and their futures. One way to engage students in cultivating their imagination as it relates to their future possibilities and a vehicle through which schooling can be reimagined that centers the lives of black and brown students is through

'Afrofuturism' (Wozolek, 2018). Schacter & Madore (2016) defines Afrofuturism as a 'futuristic philosophy for an art curriculum for Black existence .'Afrofuturism becomes a space and opportunity that seeks to challenge the social ills that many black and brown students face. It also helps students see their futures through the arts and themselves within the larger world (Schacter & Madore, 2016). Afrofuturism also grounds black and brown students (i.e., marginalized student communities) in a foundation that centers on their experiences (Schacter & Madore, 2016). Within Afrofuturism, there is a heavy emphasis on the use of the arts, which includes popular culture in film, cinema, and literature, in addition to a wide range of arts, including new media, visual arts, performing arts, and music (Wozolek, 2018). Afrofuturism also critically analyzes how Black people can imagine their futures, given the historical and systematic destruction of their past at the hands of Europeans (Schacter & Madore, 2016). Afrofuturism provides students with the tools that give them agency to create their existence and futures (Schacter & Madore, 2016). It also helps students create a sense of self-realization that, despite their social realities, makes space for black students to feel safe within their bodies (Schacter & Madore, 2016). By using the arts, students can affirm their existence and loosen the effects of oppression, marginalization, and colonization by exploring and imagining a Black-centric future (Schacter & Madore, 2016).

No matter the cultural reference used in class to support marginalized students, the implications of the study findings suggest that students may need to be able to relate to course content, have positive relationships with teachers, and be emotionally and physically safe in school. Although the limitations of this study cannot discern whether it is Hip Hopcentricity or the teaching strategy that helped the students, this study argues that no matter the pedagogical

approach or the instructor, to support marginalized students' experience, centering culture may increase success in school.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The findings of this research propose that the Hip Hopcentric classroom be a space where students can feel emotional and physical safety. As well as provide a place where a sense of competence can be nurtured and a space that may help students examine critical issues impacting their community. As the theory of Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining pedagogy continues to gain traction, future researchers may rely on the potential of Hip Hop pedagogy. Hip Hop pedagogy may help not only to center the cultures of marginalized youth around the world but also find opportunities to sustain those practices within Hip Hop music and culture that are made visible in the classroom. Practitioners may also consider implementing the various ways Hip Hopcentric education can be applied in the classroom. Whether through the incorporation of Hip Hop content and literature and the blending of Hip Hop with other subject matters such as History, English, or Science. Alternatively, incorporate Hip Hop practices through Hip Hop battles, cyphers, improvisation, or sampling. Most importantly, I recommend that future research anchor itself on identifying those cultural, linguistic, and aesthetic retentions that already exist within Hip Hop music and culture and continue to build and strengthen the idea of sustaining these retentions within urban classroom spaces. The opportunities to create cultural competence and foster authentic spaces of multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic, diverse, and pluralistic environments may be possible with a pedagogy based on Hip Hop music and culture.

Hip Hop music and culture have always been diverse, and those consumers who only consume 'mainstream' Hip Hop risk the potential to misunderstand the gravity of Hip Hop's inherent diversity (Daley, 2020). Many misperceptions within Hip Hop are driven by ill-

informed social and political contexts that can be seen with the association of violence and criminal activity and Hip Hop (Daley. 2020). The diversity within the genre would argue that Hip Hop both reveals and criticizes issues of violence and crime and addresses issues of socio-economic disparities that exacerbate these features. As Hip Hop prides itself on welcoming a variety of voices and avoids the pitfalls of being monolithic, it creates an opportunity for diversity of sound and purpose (Daley, 2020). Similarly, while Hip Hop has a reputation for promoting wealth and sexism, it is crucial to recognize how Hip Hop challenges ideas of toxic masculinity and embraces voices outside of a heterocentric perspective (Daley, 2020). For instance, there is a rise of LGBTQ+ artists (e.g., Lil Nas X & M.I.A.) within Hip Hop, who may have found rejection in the culture at specific periods in Hip Hop's history (Daley, 2020). Ideals of wealth within Hip Hop have also grown, as many artists have a reputation for reinvesting their earnings back into the communities they came from and creating and donating to black-owned businesses (Daley, 2020). Hip Hop, nevertheless, has historically revealed the presence of social ills experienced by marginalized communities and does not hesitate or avoid the reality of these ills (Daley, 2020). When Hip Hop is misinterpreted as monolithic, consumers fail to understand the complex and expansive nature of the genre (Daley, 2020).

Many students on the margins of the classroom would benefit from incorporating Hip Hop practices and Hip Hop Literature when appropriate. It is also beneficial to address the use of Hip Hop practices specifically (i.e., sampling, freestyling, cyphers) in other content areas, including Math, Language Arts, and Computer Science. These practices are arguably universal and applicable to several content areas. Hip Hop Literature, on the other hand, may have reasonable limitations. However, there may exist the possibility for its application in other content areas as well.

It is no doubt that Hip Hop has played a significant role in the lives of marginalized communities both inside and outside of the classroom. My Hip Hop affiliation as a doctoral student has also transformed my place in the world. From a young girl from the hood who never thought of graduate studies to now a growing scholar hoping to continue using Hip Hopcentricity to transform my community's lives and educational outcomes. This work has shown me in many ways that, at its core, Hip Hopcentricity provides an authentic connection for students because it speaks to the relatable culture. There is an acknowledgment within Afrofuturism that we (i.e., African diasporic peoples) exist in a world where many of our cultural traditions have been lost or stripped away by the presence of oppressive forces. Some may even argue that African diasporic peoples have no culture, specifically those living in the United States. However, Hip Hop is our cultural frame of reference for many of us. It embodies our ancestors' musical and cultural retentions; it is our voice of defiance, our mode of expression, our drum, and our heartbeat. It is the way we talk, the way we dress, and the way we understand who we are and who we are not. Therefore, for Hip Hop to be incorporated into our education is profound. It is transformative, it is familiar, and it has the potential to be a vehicle for our academic freedom and our liberation.

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