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Between Academic Structures and Students' Home Communities: A Qualitative Study On

(Re)Imagining First Year Composition Using Hip Hop Based Education

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Damon Cagnolatti

2023

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Between Academic Structures and Students' Home Communities: A Qualitative Study on

(Re)Imagining First Year Composition Using Hip Hop Based Education

by

Damon Cagnolatti

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, Co-Chair

Professor Kristen Rohanna, Co-Chair

While California community colleges saw the successful implementation of AB 705 in the fall of 2019, equity gaps in first-year composition (FYC) course throughput rates have yet to be closed. Persistent equity gaps in course completion rates continue to leave the most disproportionately impacted groups of students vulnerable to a significant problem: many faculty are underprepared to meet the needs of a growing diverse student body and rely on current-traditional approaches to inform their pedagogy and curriculum. Findings from this study reveal that instructors who integrated *Hip Hop based education* (HHBE) principles into their pedagogy and curriculum (course assignments, syllabi, teaching/learning activities, and course materials) successfully bridged the gap between students' *community of cultural wealth* and the academic concepts to be learned. Moreover, they suggest a need for instructors to *expand the circle of*

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human concern (Powell, 2022). Implications from this study's findings suggest that faculty, department chairs, and administrators should become more *student-ready* by 1). supporting and offering professional development opportunities that include students' cultural wealth into course curriculum, 2). working *ecologically* (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) to determine points of intervention in the classroom and 3). building faculty professional development pathways rooted in *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (Paris et al., 2017) that aims to increase student-readiness, welcoming, and belonging among faculty and students.

The dissertation of Damon Cagnolatti is approved.

Patricia McDonough

Tina Christie

David F. Green

Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, Co-Chair

Kristen Rohanna, Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2023

DEDICATION

For Renee, Jeanie, and Bunny | Dre, Daniel, and Issac.

For Naomi, Kairo, Kalel, Zoe, Mille, Leia, Jacob, Jaxon, Julian, and my first godbaby Briahna.

For the roses that grow in concrete and the lotuses that grow in mud whose roots were snatched

out the Garden by old man Jim crow and the culture vulture.

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My mentor once told me, "They don't let just anyone into a doctoral program, you have be invited." This work is the sum total of a series of invitations, a collection of helping hands, a chorus of encouragement, and a garrison of prayers. Without a doubt, these prayers and invitations are unquantifiable and are as often unexpected and serendipitous as they are purposeful and determined. I am grateful and humbled by the unwavering support and love provided by both a chosen and given family, as well as a treasured intellectual, spiritual, local community. Dizzy Gillespie once described the invaluable contribution of Louis Armstrong to the legacy of jazz and its musicians who followed with one simple phrase, "If it weren't for him, there wouldn't be any of us." I hope that anything insightful and moving about this project will be taken as a reflection of the invaluable contribution deposited to me by the people I have included.

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out what each meant. They were my first model of the *cipher* as a noun and a verb . The Youngblood finally earned his spot in the Shadow Cabinet.

My people who have stayed ten toes down in the mud with me have enlivened me spiritually and emotionally. Joelle, Cass, Mony, John-John, my bros, Nevon, Lionel, Tony "Big T" Moran, Grandmommy, Auntie Allison, Auntie Linda, My cousins Bryan, Cherise, Starlett, Shante, Sharai, Summer Love-Joy, Karen "Ma" Jackson, Tony Jackson Sr., Tony, James, and Jordan; April, Marcus, Marina, Kyle, Leia, Kamille, Corey, Geneva, Jacob, Jaxon, Julian, Cuzzin Ashley, Brandi and Amaya Cagnolatti, Jason (my big bro whose tapes I used to sneak a listen to when we were kids), Monisa, Nori Cagnolatti, Auntie Stacey/Uncle Dennis', Ryan, DC, Taylor, Baby Crue, Josh, my family, The Rowles Family Christina "Moms" Rowles, Nino, WeeWee, Johnny, DeAndre "Big Dre", Samantha, Naomi (my baby), Davion and Lawanda Rowles are all part of this project.

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2018	Outstanding Men & Fathers Award, NAACP, Long Beach
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2019	Outstanding Activity Award, American Bar Association
2019	Outstanding Public Educators Award, NAACP
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PREFACE

"Here's a Little Story that Must be Told": Using Hip Hop to Transform Deficit

Perspectives of Teaching and Learning

You know, it's everybody enlightenin' they skills with the next person, and you know, you learn off of the best, you know what I mean? It's like training. It's like basic training. It's like, sparrin', you know what I mean? So, you know, that makes a better MC, bein' able to know that he can express hisself amongst people that can teach him as well as he teach them. Everybody's teachin' each other, you know because they say experience the best teacher…
—Raekwon on the "cipher" (qtd. in H. S. Alim et al., 2008)

The student body of King/Drew Medical Magnet High School was mostly comprised of Black and Brown students who come from the surrounding areas: Los Angeles, Compton, and Watts. Because we were students, it was assumed all too readily that we were subjects to be contained, restricted, and policed. This assumption was reinforced by a police presence at our school that was straight-up intimidating. Their station was located by the front entrance; they patrolled the hallways throughout the day constantly; and they even had jail cells just before you got to the boy's locker room on the second floor. The sheriff guards at the entrance combined with the metal detectors blurred the line between school and prison for us. Teachers were also restricted by state expectations and incentives to adhere to the rigid academic standards that were enforced by "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB). Signed into law in May 2001 by President George W. Bush, NCLB restricted both students and teachers and, consequently, a fuller exchange of ideas. On its face, the bill had two goals: to decrease the performance gap between affluent schools and inner-city schools and to increase teacher accountability in the areas of reading comprehension and mathematics. Schools that did not meet the mandated proficiency level lost their opportunity to receive federal funding. If they exhibited poor performance for two years consecutively, they not only risked losing federal funding but were also forced to undergo massive overhauls of their curriculum until testing standards were met.

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This incentive for high test scores had a perverse effect on the quality of education we received. Education under the political regime of NCLB was measured by our ability to regurgitate information and assumed that we had no knowledge worth contributing to our learning experience. Instructors, as they struggled to keep up with administrative demands and state expectations, began to rely solely on teaching to the test. Sadly, many of my classmates did not pass the California High School Exit Exam and were held back as a result. This national policy did not reflect the expectations we had for what education should be. Rather, it represented a policing strategy that was reinforced by an actual on-campus police presence. Students at King/Drew were resistant toward the policy and educational strategies that focused exclusively on teaching to a test; they fostered our general discontent with schooling.

In response to these conditions, my classmates, our teacher Mr. Lee, and I constructed a safe space to learn, dialogue, and build knowledge together on campus. Our goal was to facilitate a longer-lasting connection between our personal experiences and the expectations we had for our education. Such a space allowed us to reflect on our community and ideas that would improve our current social conditions. Moreover, it prepared us to engage in the literacy practices that we would later need to succeed at our respective universities and later in our professions.

An eleventh and twelfth-grade English teacher, Mr. Lee, or Thomas as he preferred to be called, opened his classroom to us during his free period and after school. He was a six-year nascent teacher and stood about six feet and had a caramel-cinnamon skin tone. He was one of the few Black teachers with a master's degree in Composition/Rhetoric and was a self-proclaimed Hip Hop head. Every few weeks he would come in with the latest Jay-Z or Nas and

every other emcee that dropped their album that week. If it was new, he had it first. Thomas let us use his classroom as a place where we could talk about Hip Hop.

Thomas established his presence as a *transformative leader* through the setup and arrangement of his class. Once you entered his classroom, you knew you were in a different world on campus: the sense of pressure and tension between students and police figures that was felt most thickly at the entrance was dissipated by the sounds grooving from the computer speakers of DJ Premier and Guru who together formed the rap duo, Gangg Starr. The desks were positioned in a circle. Along the far wall, were two striking posters over his workstation: a Black and white headshot of Malcolm X pointing in mid-speech with the words "By Any Means Necessary" around the border of the frame; and another headshot of Ernesto "Che" Guevara outlined in black, in contrast to the red background—strong and determined. To the right of his workstation was a display of student freestyles, poetry, essays, and lyrics, which adorned the cabinets facing the whiteboard. Circling back to the wall along the right of the entrance was an array of CD cover images from Les Nubians, Mos Def, Talib Kweli, Erykah Badu, Public Enemy, Ice Cube, Nas, and dozens more. The collage was tightly organized so that no part of the white wall beneath it would show through its block formation. The bordering edges of the display, the white wall acted as a matte and gave a picturesque quality and feel to the collage in its center, which, when combined with the display of student work, revolutionary figures and images, and a handful of intellectually curious youngsters invigorated the classroom with excitement and energy. Thomas was one of the few teachers who transformed the bland sterility of the classroom into a live learning environment teeming with art that resonated on a deeply cultural level with students. But this was not a transactional transformation for the sake of making his class look cool. The room intentionally and deliberately provided a source of

intellectual stimulation, as well as inspirational motivation for us. Thomas embodied the qualities and characteristics of both an MC and what Northouse describes as a *transformative leader* in that he moved a crowd of students by using Hip Hop as a bridge to connect the word and world, that is to say, the practice of acquiring literacy to the practice of freedom. In the students who frequented his sanctuary, he saw the opportunity to guide, nourish, and develop potential leaders who could transform the world.

We would discuss the writing and philosophies of these figures whenever we came into Thomas' class. Nicki Gomez, another classmate, had to explain to me who Che Guevara was when I asked Thomas about that poster by Malcolm X. Before he could say anything, she broke it down.

"Damon, how you talk all that stuff about the Panthers and revolution and you don't know who Che is?" She asked, jokingly.

"Hey, I wasn't exposed to dude. My dad was more concerned with the struggle in the U.S." She shook her head and smiled and started to school me.

"Che was a major radical figure"

"Radical?"

"Yeah, he was a leader in a revolutionary Cuban guerilla group of the late 1950s. And he was a former medical student." Right away she caught my attention. At that time I was volunteering in the emergency room and the trauma center at King hospital and had aspirations of becoming a physician. Nicki spent the entire period schooling me on the Marxist military strategist's journey from Argentina to Mexico and his belief that poverty was a result of greed and imperialism. The idea that the solution would be best addressed through a worldwide revolution connected back to figures I was more familiar with: Malcolm X, Public Enemy, and the Black Panthers. This

wasn't the first conversation I'd ever had with Nicki, but it was the first time we had a conversation on something I was learning and felt inspired by.

In class discussions like these, we sought to enhance our understanding of the messages the people on the wall were kicking. Thomas' classroom soon became a regular forum outside of formal classroom time—but still within the confines of our high school—where we could dialogue, learn, and compose. It was in his classroom that I first came to view Hip Hop as something more than merely a form of entertainment. Throughout our dialogues, we exchanged ideas, cultures, histories, claims, evidence, facts, and opinions about social issues that were relevant to our communities rather than merely absorbing lessons and directives.

This study is an invitation to the experiences of a community that is rich in literacy development traditions. It reveals a toolkit through the insights, struggles, and collective responses of students. It looks to offer insight into the processes and strategies of instructors who take seriously the cultural relevance and pedagogical potential of Hip Hop cultural practices and philosophies to empower students to seize control of their learning. It asks, can Hip Hop be used to cultivate a stronger sense of belonging and engagement among students in first-year composition (FYC) courses? How might instructors be influenced by, make use of, and structure their courses based on Hip Hop cultural practices and philosophies? And lastly, how might culturally relevant strategies, like *Hip Hop based education* (HHBE), provide an effective instructional approach to help students develop academic knowledge of self in FYC transfer-level courses? The experiences in this study initiate a journey in search of the cultural practices that instructors use to bridge the gap between the home and educational environments of today's youth.

My anecdote recounts how students and teachers constructed a learning environment that allowed students to develop Hip Hop literacies including *cultural capital*, dialogue, and critical inquiry. These experiences tell a story that frames the pedagogical potential I see in Hip Hop cultural practices to enrich the way college readiness and self-efficacy are developed in the composition classroom. And while this study intends to contribute to the conversations in higher education research and practice on student success, composition and rhetoric, and culturally relevant pedagogy, like rap artists Ludacris and Jay-Z, I do it for Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE) as a burgeoning field of study and as a tool for developing critical literacy in FYC courses.

Hip Hop heads appropriate spaces to perform a range of activities where they can build community. In our class meetings, we developed the ability to read and produce texts in a way that affirmed our subjectivity. This affirmation better enabled us to critique the unequal power relations within our social landscapes. We developed our critical literacy by schooling each other in ciphers and engaging in rap battles and freestyles. In Hip Hop culture, the cipher, rap battles, and freestyles represent a thing as well as an action. The cipher is a space where Hip Hop heads go to dialogue, exchange knowledge, and reflect on experiences that shape their collective worldviews. Participants gather in a circle while two emcees exchange either prewritten or spontaneous rhymes and critiques in its center. Battling refers to emcees' ability to provide and exchange critiques between opponents. Freestyling refers to a spontaneous expression of the first idea that comes to mind or a spontaneous free flowing written rhyme. Rap battles—or battling— and freestyles—or freestyling—occur in the cipher. The exchange of knowledge in the cipher through battling and freestyling represents both concepts and practices of *Hip Hop based education* (HHBE).

In my experience, there exists a great variety of approaches that composition instructors employ that reflect their interest in popular culture. However, through long established cultural norms, generally accepted norms, and traditionally held beliefs about the students we serve in higher education, particularly in community colleges, have shaped classrooms into spaces where students merely absorb and regurgitate rules and directives. However, this study argues that the composition classroom should be a space that encourages students to reflect critically on the social issues that are situated in the environments of both their home and school communities. In this way, HHBE offers a worthwhile approach for instructors in composition courses to radically shift and expand the ways they shape students' *academic self-perception*, *sense of belonging*, and *academic persistence*. I hope to illustrate the processes, qualities, circumstances, and pedagogical tools of HHBE that empower students to interrogate both the issues that pervade their communities and the messages in rap music that often illustrate such issues.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

If we admit that in education it is necessary to begin with the experiences which the child already has and to use his spontaneous and social activity, then the city streets begin this education for him in a more natural way than does the school.
— Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*

Between academic structures and a students' home *ecology,* there exists a *community of cultural wealth* that few researchers of community college composition have explored in the conversation on college readiness, equity, and Black student success. This study offers a qualitative exploration into how faculty deploy the use of a particular strand of *culturally sustaining pedagogy*, which educational scholar Emery Petchauer (2009) identifies as *Hip Hop based education* (HHBE) in first-year composition (FYC) co-requisite courses (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris et al., 2017). Moreover, it aimed to examine the potential of HHBE to shape the academic self-perception, sense of belonging, and persistence of Black students in the FYC classroom. By exploring the methods and techniques of instructors who integrate HHBE principles into course assignments, syllabi, grading policies, and course materials this study hopes to shine the spotlight on the experiences and perceptions of instructors who have been inspired by Hip Hop to bridge the gap between students' *community of cultural wealth* and the academic concepts to be learned.

Statement of the Problem

In California community colleges, 80% of college students are placed into developmental, necessary skills, or developmental education courses in their first year of attendance. Less than half go on to complete a degree, certificate, or transfer. Those who do, endure a long academic journey that, on average, takes from four to six years to complete (Mejia et al., 2016). According to the California Community College Success Scorecard (2020a), only

40% of underprepared students go on to complete a degree, certificate, or transfer in six years, while 70% of their transfer-ready counterparts (2020). The perceived solutions have become an even more enormous obstacle to student success and completion as developmental education courses created an institutional bottleneck for non-transfer level students. Developmental education courses lock students into a holding pattern, which requires more time to graduate. To date, there remains tremendous work to be done to eliminate structural gaps and reduce the asymmetrical access of low-income students to academic support at community colleges.

To address the disproportionality of underprepared students, community colleges in California began to experiment with structural changes. Most notably, in the fall of 2019, they began to implement Assembly Bill 705 (AB 705). AB 705 has increased enrollment toward more universal access across all student groups into transfer-level courses. Between 2015-2019, a statewide analysis found that transfer-level course enrollments increased by 51%, while students across the board saw an 18% gain in throughput rates (Browhawn, et al., 2021).

While in the fall 2019 cohort, most student groups in first-year composition courses (FYC) outperformed the state average throughput rate (67%), gaps across racial/ethnic groups only slightly decreased. In a study on one-year throughput rates for transfer-level English by ethnicity between 2015-2019, researchers found that in the fall 2015 cohort, the gap in throughput rates was greatest between Black (32%) and White (61%) students at 29% points, and in 2019 it decreased to 21%; similarly, the gap between Black and Asian (60%) students was 28% points, while in 2019 it decreased slightly to 24%; the gap between Black and Latinx (41%) students was 9% points, and fell to 7% in 2019 (Browhawn et al., 2021). While colleges saw the successful implementation of AB 705 in the fall of 2019, equity gaps in FYC/English throughput rates have yet to be closed. These slight decreases in equity gaps potentially point to two

potentially underlying structural issues that may contribute to their persistence: 1). Many FYC

faculty have had little if any, preparation in teaching and learning and as a result are left

generally underprepared to meet the needs of a diverse student body (Murray, 2002); 2). Faculty

departments have yet to craft pedagogical and curricular strategies that connect ways of teaching

and learning that emerge from students' home communities with the academic concepts and

ways of knowing to be learned (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The combination of these two factors

highlights a persistent issue in the struggle to reduce throughput gaps in FYC courses across

racial/ethnic groups in community colleges: faculty who rely on current-traditional approaches to

inform their grading policy, pedagogy, and curriculum are not *student-ready* despite near

universal access afforded by AB 705 (McNair et al., 2022).

The consequences of not being *student-ready* are especially significant for African

American students, many of whom are clustered in the nation's low-income communities without

access to college preparation resources (Fiel, 2013; Rothstein, 2014). These students are

ultimately denied access to high-paying, high-prestige careers (Curry & Schillingford, 2015). A

significant body of research suggests that contextual factors disproportionately impact higher

educational attainment rates between students who enter *prepared for college* and students who

enter *unprepared for college* (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012; Perna, 2007; Rothstein, 2014; The

Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019). Some contextual factors include first-generation

status, lack of access to pre-college preparation resources, and persistent segregation in low-

income neighborhoods and schools form structural barriers and obstacles. A growing number of

scholars suggest that various environmental factors contribute to the lower rates of attainment

and degree completion for those unprepared (Aysola et al., 2011; Barnes et al., 2010; Castro,

2013; Fiel, 2013). Researchers have called on postsecondary institutions to develop more

comprehensive approaches to increase college readiness (CR) among students of color (Arnold et al., 2012).

Gaps in the Research

While the sense of belonging, engagement, and persistence of Black students has been studied as a recurring feature in the scholarly conversation on student success, there currently exists no scholarship that focuses on the sense of belonging, engagement, and persistence of Black students in FYC courses that employ *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (CSP) practices. CSP stands on the foundational work laid by Gloria Landson-Billings's (1995) article "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy" (CRP). However, in observing how practitioners have taken up CRP, scholars of CSP argue that the work being done under the umbrella of CRP falls short of its goals.

As Alim & Django (2017) explain, the term "relevant" does not support social critique nor does it do enough to explicitly maintain students' cultural identities and practices. The result has been the simplification of student cultures and even language in a kind of one-to-one mapping of race to language. For example, African American Vernacular English is assumed to be a culturally relevant resource only for teaching Black students (Paris et al., 2017). As a result, this kind of oversimplification renders notions of culture as one-dimensional. Furthermore, this emerging tendency of neutralizing culture in the practice of CRP entrenches students even deeper in the current tradition of education as assimilation into white middle-class values (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Lexia Learning Systems, 2021; Paris et al., 2017).

In contrast, CSP is "about sustaining cultures as connected to sustaining the bodies–the lives–of the people who cherish and practice them" (Paris et al., 2017); that is CSP, calls for instructors and researchers to shift towards a more explicit way of sustaining students' cultural

ways of knowing (*linguistic capital*), sense of community history (*familial capital*), and ways of maneuvering through social institutions (*navigational capital*) in the practice of teaching and learning. Moreover, there currently exists no scholarship that examines how instructors use CSP to create the learning conditions necessary for students to draw on various forms of *community cultural wealth* for students in first-year composition courses at community college institutions.

Statement of the Purpose

This study aims primarily to explore instructors' perceptions of how *Hip Hop Based Education* (HHBE) approaches might shape students' academic self-perception, sense of belonging, and persistence in FYC courses. It looks to examine the methods and approaches of instructors who use HHBE principles to integrate students' *community of cultural wealth* into their course syllabi, assignments, classroom activities, and course materials. This study is informed by a person-place-context-time (PPCT) model introduced by Urie Bronfenbrenner's *human ecological theory* (1994*)*, which privileges students' voice, cultural background, and history as a bridge to connect students' *community of cultural wealth* with the academic concepts to be learned. The purpose of this study is to explore the pedagogical strategy of CSP, specifically the branch known as Hip Hop based education, as a model of equitable teaching and learning in FYC courses and to explore the role it plays in shaping *academic knowledge of self*—especially students' academic self-perceptions, sense of belonging, and persistence. *Hip Hop Based Education* (HHBE) offers a promising approach that has the potential to increase student investment and buy-in for teaching approaches that embrace collaborative learning, productive struggle, and race-consciousness. Moreover, it offers an approach for reducing the successful completion gap in FYC courses, while increasing *college readiness* for all students, especially among African Americans.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do community college instructors who are influenced by Hip Hop culture implement Hip Hop based education (HHBE) in composition courses?

2. From the perspective of the instructor, how if at all does their use of HHBE encourage positive development of students' *academic knowledge of self*—sense of belonging, academic self-perception, persistence?

3. In what ways, if at all, does the instructor's use of hip hop-based education shape the development of students' *academic knowledge of self* throughout the composition writing process?

4. In what ways, if at all, does the use of HHBE shape how students draw on their own cultural capital throughout the composition writing process?

Overview of the Research Design

For this study, I explored how HHBE potentially shapes Black students' academic self-perception, sense of belonging, and persistence–which I refer to as *academic knowledge of self*– as demonstrated throughout the writing process. Using a qualitative methods approach, I interviewed four instructors and examine their syllabi, lesson plans, class activities, and writing assignments. Using *first and second-cycle* (Saldana, 2021) coding, I developed descriptions, patterns, and thematic categories that demonstrate how instructors reshape the traditional learning environment to invite students' *community cultural wealth* in FYC courses. Lastly, to gain a better understanding of how instructors' use of HHBE might create the learning conditions for students to draw on their own forms of *community cultural wealth* to develop *academic knowledge of self*, this study examined responses from student focus groups.

Significance of the Study

By integrating HHBE practices and various forms of students' *community cultural wealth* with a human-ecological approach in FYC courses, this study seeks to understand how instructors can 1) help students to develop and enhance their academic knowledge, ways of knowing, identities, and goals; 2) help students to learn about themselves and their home community more fully by leveraging equitable classroom practices; 3) help to inspire a new vision teaching and learning that centers student-belonging as a primary goal.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hip Hop lyricists often refer to 'the cipher,' a conceptual space in which heightened consciousness exists. The cipher is a privileged outlaw space. Those inside the cipher are central, so it claims an insider rather than outside consciousness.
                    —Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop*

Persistent equity gaps remain despite increased access to transfer-level first-year composition (FYC) courses provided as a result of AB 705 (Mejia et al., 2021). Despite near-universal access to transfer-level courses to English courses, Black students remain the most disproportionately impacted ethnic group (Mejia et al., 2021), especially in FYC/English completion rates. The continued struggle to achieve equity in completion outcomes in a post-AB 705 landscape raises key questions for researchers that highlight a gap between the *college-readiness* of students and *student-readiness* of instructors to meet the needs of a diverse student body: 1). what is the history surrounding opportunity gaps that have prevented Black students from gaining access to *college readiness* resources? 2). How have the long-term effects of these opportunity gaps contributed to the underpreparedness of Black students and exacerbated racial equity gaps in completion in transfer-level FYC courses? 3). How have FYC instructors recentered pedagogical approaches that emerge from students' home communities that have created opportunities in the classroom to reduce those historic gaps in *college readiness* and help students develop *academic knowledge of self*–a strong sense of academic self-perception, sense of belonging, and persistence?

This chapter begins by contextualizing the ideological genealogy of scholarly insight on *college readiness* (CR). First, it explores how research has found that current-traditional measures of achievement and academic success in secondary institutions have been misaligned with knowledge and skills associated with successful college course completion. Next, it

uncovers how researchers have sought to include student voices and have shifted their focus

beyond the achievement gap by addressing academic and *opportunity gaps* impacting college

readiness. Lastly, it synthesizes the scholarly discourse on Hip Hop based education as an effort

to recenter students' *cultural wealth*–ways of knowing, teaching, and learning from their home

communities–as a *culturally sustainable* model for developing *college readiness* (CR)*.* There

exists a continuum in the current-traditional discourse on college readiness, the achievement gap,

and student success. The language and lenses used to perceive indicators of success often mask

the deficit perspective extended to those who experience opportunity gaps and as a result

demonstrate low readiness scores and struggle to achieve success. HHBE aims to flip the script

of language educators use to discuss, think, and teach academic success, and by extension

college readiness (CR). It aims to sustain the cultural wealth that students bring with them into

the classroom.

Scholars, policymakers, politicians, and instructors have deployed a wide range of

competing terms to describe *college* readiness. While there are many different definitions for

college readiness (CR), there are two criteria that are commonly discussed throughout the

scholarship: first, as an *academic concept,* and second, as a *social-cultural construct*. Current

policy and practice initiatives on CR mostly derive from efforts to establish Common Core State

Standards (CCSS). CR was defined early in terms of purely academic skills and behavior. The

adoption of CCSS and Race to the Top Assessment Program established a policy-specific

definition of CR that implicitly focused on knowledge and skills development, which almost

every state in the U.S. embraced: "not in need of developmental coursework" (CCSS, 2010).

Researchers explain that these policymakers designed initiatives to address the acquisition of

academic knowledge and skills to reduce remediation rates among underprepared high school students (Lombardi et al, 2012).

College Readiness as an Academic Concept

In 2014, The College & Career Readiness and Success (CCRS) Center identified two definitions of *college readiness* across 37 states, including the District of Columbia (Mishkind, 2014). Overall, the findings from Mishkind's (2014) brief reveal two things: 1). 13 out of the 37 states had no definition of CR; 2). There is a nationwide trend among some states who commonly recognize CR as a multifaceted set of skills, abilities, and dispositions. Thirty-three out of the 37 identify (Mishkind, 2014) a singular definition for both *college* and *career readiness*, while four states define them separately. Only 21 states, however, share a common set of concrete skills, knowledges, and dispositions that impact academic achievement in their definitions of *college readiness*. CCRS found six actionable domains: academic knowledge; critical thinking/problem-solving; socio-emotional learning/collaboration/communication; grit/resilience/perseverance; citizenship and community involvement; other activities (e.g., knowledge of technology, lifelong learning, responsibility to environment/family).

Such a vast set of definitions have made it difficult for academic and non-academic domains to establish a consistent definition across contexts. Arnold et al., 2012) find a lack of consensus on a singular definition among researchers who employ various terms, including *college choice*, *college transition*, *college access*, *college success*, and *college preparation* to refer to *college readiness* over the past ten years. Early researchers, informed by the states' conception, defined *college readiness* as a student's capacity to enroll and complete credit-bearing postsecondary courses as they persist toward their educational goals (Conley, 2003).

Before the enactment of AB 705, many entering community college students were aware of the once popular testing and placement requirements but were surprised to discover that they are not "college-ready"—able to gain access to transfer-level English, Math, or Reading courses. Ultimately, these students were funneled into highly impacted developmental level classes where they are exposed to the skills and discourse of *college readiness* (Barnes et al., 2010; Brown & Conley, 2007; Brown & Niemi, 2007; Perna & Thomas, 2006). Educators designed a basic skills curriculum that drew heavily on college readiness frameworks like Art Costas' notion of the *habits of mind*, Angela Duckworth's *grit*, and Carol Dweck's *fixed/growth mindset*. The goal of basic skills and developmental education courses, according to education journalist Paul Tough was to give students deemed *underrepresented*, *underprepared*, *unprepared*, and *at-risk*, instruction in "character hypothesis": the notion that because students in developmental-level courses, the majority of which were comprised of black and brown students, noncognitive skills, lacked persistence, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, grit, and self-confidence, because of their need for remediation. Therefore, it was observed that these skills were more crucial than sheer brainpower to achieve success (Tough, 2012).

Underrepresented groups–such as Black, Latinx, first-year, men of color, and foster youth–were overrepresented in developmental education (DE) courses. Statewide 80% of college students are placed into remedial, basic skills, or DE courses in their first year of attendance. Less than half went on to complete a degree, certificate, or transfer. 87% of both Latino and African American students enroll in DE, compared to 70% of Asian American and 74% of white students. Among low-income students, 86% enroll in developmental coursework. Students who enter DE courses endure a prolonged academic journey that on average takes from four to six years to complete (Mejia et al., 2016).

To say the least, the disconnect between state and (post) secondary institutions' conception of CR as the acquisition of concrete academic skills, the overrepresentation of underrepresented students in bottle-neck courses, and developmental education courses were an even larger obstacle to student success and completion as DE courses created an institutional bottled-neck for non-transfer level students. These courses locked them into a holding pattern, which required more time to graduate, and as a result, left many students feeling ever more isolated and disconnected from themselves and their instructors on their academic journey.

Despite researchers having found that remediation needs are significantly higher among aspiring first-generation college students (Mejia et al., 2018), traditional measures of CR championed by states and implemented by districts have been misaligned with the knowledge and skills associated with success in college environments, which has proven to be one of the most persistent obstacles to closing the perceived achievement gap (Achieve Inc., 2007; Brown & Conley, 2007; Brown & Niemi, 2007; Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Conley, 2003; Valencia, 1997). Scholars agree that there are at least three underlying factors that help explain the disconnect: 1). Overwhelming discrepancies in terminology, research focus, and communication between stakeholders (Arnold et al., 2012; Holles, 2016; Perna & Thomas, 2006); 2). Test scores and GPA are poor readiness indicators (Arnold et al., 2012; *Indicator 18: High School Status Completion Rates*, 2019); 3). Over-reliance on decontextualized academic performance statistics and data to tell the achievement gap's story to the exclusion of student voices (Holles, 2016).

This last assumption is particularly notable because student voices in assessment efforts can reveal deeper insights into how their specific experiences have impacted their sense of college readiness. Though there are few studies on student perceptions of college readiness, pockets of studies have mostly explored student services program models of *college readiness*

with underprepared student groups in mind: addressing academic and *opportunity gaps* impacting African American males (Henfield et al., 2014; Johnson, 2020; Petchauer, 2009); a qualitative study on Black female student retention and their ideas of success (Steele, 2017); quantitative studies on building resilience among low-income high school Latinx students (Lombardi et al., 2018); a mixed-methods study on how to effectively prepare and provide meaningful support to college students with disabilities (Francis et al., 2018); a Delphi study where 29 experts rated the importance of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other factors they believe to be essential for students with learning disabilities to be successful in college (Milsom & Lauren, 2009).

However, researchers found differences in academic, social, and career expectations when comparing student and faculty perspectives on *college readiness* (Martin, 2010). On the one hand, findings from a qualitative study on the perceptions of 108 secondary educators suggest that teachers rely primarily on their personal and professional experience to make sense of *college readiness* (Duncheon & Muñoz, 2019). On the other hand, research into student perspectives on CR reveals that faculty who focus on "nonacademic areas of preparedness emphasize the necessity of a broader understanding of college readiness—one that can get at the complexity of the interacting spheres and systems represented in the ecological framework" (Holles, 2016). This shift in focus on college readiness marks an essential first step for academic faculty and administrators to expand their college readiness perspective in a way that recognizes and includes the complexity of students' lives outside of the classroom (Holles, 2016). That faculty rely on their own experiences to inform their perception of *college readiness* is reasonably expected. However, depending on their own personal and professional experience,

faculty perceptions of CR seem to be faculty-centered rather than student-centered. This disconnect reveals the *cultural perception gap* between students and faculty.

College Readiness as a Socio-cultural Construct

The second criterion of college readiness is a *socio-cultural construct.* This criterion has ideological roots going back to the modern Black civil rights movement. Beginning with the passage of Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas in 1954, the ruling to desegregate the nation's schools simultaneously signaled a recognition that *separate but equal* was inherently *unequal* and marked the shift to desegregate schools in the U.S. A recent study found that during the 1968-69 school year, the Department of Education began enforcing Brown v. Board, 71% of Black students and 55% of Latinx students went to public schools where the student population was more than 50% minority. Similarly, 74% of Black students and 80% of Latinx attended schools where the student body was more than half minority. In comparison, more than 40% of Black and Latinx students attended schools that were 90-100% minority (2013). Researchers have found that persistent segregation contributes significantly to racial disparity in educational attainment for Black students, many of whom are from low-income areas where racial segregation in housing is common (Barkhorn, 2013). This analysis reflects a socio-cultural view of CR.

Segregation has particularly widespread effects undermining attempts at the local level to develop and sustain college readiness among primarily Black and brown youth. Scholars find that schools where the most impoverished Black students attend are segregated because they are located in segregated neighborhoods and have long documented the effects of social and economic conditions of concentrated areas of poverty on student performance (Rothstein, 2014). They have identified several key factors that contribute to low achievements, such as limited

access to routine and preventative care, from which disadvantaged students experience greater absenteeism (Aysola et al., 2011; Starfield, 1997); housing instability, lack of access to a quiet place to study, and frequent changes in schools as well as instructors (Mehana & Reynolds, 2004; Raudenbush et al., 2011); fewer family resources (Johnson, 2020); lack of access to college readiness resources.

Given this social-cultural analysis, Black students are systematically underprepared to complete college courses and therefore experience lower college completion rates. These students are ultimately denied access to high-paying, high-prestige careers (Curry & Schillingford, 2015). While traditional indicators of college and career readiness (such as grade point average, college admission exam scores, and secondary graduation rates) show some evidence of predicting college student performance (Camara & Echternacht, 2000; Cimetta, D'Agostino, & Levin, 2010; Coelen & Berger, 2006; McGee, 2003; Noble & Camara, 2003), social-cultural evidence suggests that these measures are not sufficient (Achieve, Inc., 2007; Brown & Conley, 2007; Brown & Niemi, 2007; Conley, 2003). For example, according to a February 2019 report released by the Campaign for College Opportunity California, high schools are graduating more Black students than ever. Results from this study found that while graduation rates overall are higher than they were 50 years ago, Black students are offered fewer courses that expose them to the college-level curriculum. As a result, fewer Black students are "college-ready". Researchers also found that, while more high schools in California offer more college prep courses, only one in three Black high school graduates can apply to CSU and UC schools (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019) because they did complete the requisite A-G requirements. In short, Black students still struggle to overcome barriers that threaten to keep them vulnerable to a permanent class of ineligibility. Even worse, these barriers exclude

them from high school to college pathways, which fundamentally impacts their access to high-paying careers, as well as their earning potential leaving them exposed to a possible lifetime of disadvantage (Curry & Schillingford, 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) study, *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*, researchers found that 85% of Black students graduate from high school. However, only 21% of those graduates attain their bachelor's degree or higher (De Brey et al., 2019). Indicators from this study show that while some Black students have made strides in educational achievement, gaps persist (De Brey et al., 2019).

A growing body of scholarship views CR as formal school-based social capital (Bryan et al., 2017). The central question scholars are concerned with asks how colleges develop a CR strategy that builds academic skills and addresses the structural barriers and gaps extant in current higher education policy and practice.

Shifts in Perceptions about College Readiness

Educators and researchers have recently recognized the complexity of college readiness obstacles (Arnold et al., 2012; Barkhorn, 2013; Fiel, 2013; Rothstein, 2014; Castro, 2015; Holles, 2016; Mejia et al., 2016; Klassik & Strayhorn, 2018). These complexities include systematic group differences in academic preparation for college, knowledge about navigating the college pathway through a successful degree or certificate completion, and the ability to secure the money to fund one's academic journey.

Many scholars acknowledge the field of scholarship for the abstract idea of *college readiness* as complex and disparate. Mapping the conversation has to do with more than just closing the *achievement gap* and preparing students to develop academic skills and drills. For example, in *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the*

Black-White Achievement Gap, Richard Rothstein expands upon the traditional conception of the *achievement gap*, which has almost universally focused on disparities in cognitive or academic achievement. Rothstein makes the case that non-cognitive outcomes — attitudes and behaviors — must be incorporated as well (2004).

CR scholars have recently developed a multidimensional system that accounts for college readiness's socio-cultural complexity without simplifying it. For example, Arnold et al. (2012) argue that "individuals and their environment are inseparable" (12) and have applied human development theorist Urie Bronfenbrenner's *human ecology* theory (1994) to the problem of CR. This theory accounts for the complexity and interaction between individuals and various layers of their environment: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem levels. Bronfenbrenner's theory frames the problem of college readiness as systemic and multifaceted, that is to say not only how individuals get prepared to enter college, but also how colleges structure and support *opportunities* designed to increase success among their most disproportionately impacted groups (Arnold et al., 2012). Bronfenbrenner's *human ecology* (HE) theory is beneficial for reconceptualizing the current-traditional perspective on DI groups, such as Black, Latinx, low-income, and first-generation as "low performers" and "underachievers" (Holles, 2016).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach provides a language for higher education institutions to interlock and coordinate new efforts to close the *opportunity gap*. It examines the interaction between ecological elements—such as *process-person-context-time* (PPCT)—to identify structural gaps and barriers that exacerbate the problem of low educational attainment. Arnold and colleagues offer several reasons why researchers might consider Bronfenbrenner's ecology model: it provides a way for scholars to reconceptualize research, policy, and practice in

a way that accounts for the complexity of CR; offers a clear organizational structure for the field of study on CR; highlights structural *opportunity gaps* in society and colleges; offers a unifying framework that connects developmental, administrative, and policy approaches; and lastly it can inform improvement efforts in its capacity to map socioeconomic gaps in higher educational attainment to guide schools, colleges, and community-based preparation programs (2012).

"Whose Cultural Knowledge Has Value":

Centering Students' Cultural Capital in the Composition Classroom

Since dropping her seminal treatise on *community cultural wealth*, many scholars have taken up the question posed by educational theorist Tara J. Yosso in recent CR scholarship: "whose cultural knowledge has value?" (2005). Yosso posed this question to initiate a wholesale rejection of the current-traditional *deficit thinking* that focused on disparities in cognitive or academic achievement to explain the gap in performance between students of color and their white counterparts. The perspective that Black students, their parents, and communities suffer from cognitive and cultural *deficits* has existed for well over a century (Woodson, 1933/1990; Menchaca, 1997; Patton Davis & Museus, 2019). As Patton Davis and Maseus (2019) explain in their meta-analysis entitled "What Is Deficit Thinking? An Analysis of Conceptualizations of Deficit Thinking and Implications for Scholarly Research", deficit thinking ignores systemic influences that shape disparities in social and educational outcomes (Chambers & Spikes, 2016; Ford, 2014; Valencia, 1997, 2010). In doing so, it leaves the focus on individual and cultural "deficiencies" intact while simultaneously disregarding the historic and structural forces that produce and perpetuate obstacles for students of color, especially Black students.

Over the past twenty years, the work of post-structuralist Pierre Bourdieu has experienced a resurgence in education theory, especially his notion of *cultural capital*. This idea

has often been used by educators to point out the lack of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities that students of color, their parents, and their community are missing. In this way, Bourdieu's work has been used to provide a hegemonic framework that points to a *culture of poverty mindset* (Payne, 1998) to explain the causes of the *achievement gap* and poor academic performance among students of color. Educators and researchers willingly deployed *benign neglect* and turned a blind eye to the significant legacy of systemic and historic racism in shaping student success outcomes. To say the least, the combination of *benign neglect, cultural capital, and a culture of poverty mindset* offered a persuasive outlook and an institutional rationale that educational leaders, practitioners, and administrators used to develop a *color-blind* approach for students of color who did not perform at the same rates as their white counterparts.

As Yosso (2005) explains, the hegemonic interpretation of Bordieu's work centers on white, middle class, knowledge, skills, and abilities as the standard of cultural wealth and normativity by which all others are evaluated. In this way, *cultural capital* is not something groups of people inherit or that is passed down from one generation to the next. Rather, it refers to a collection of behavioral characteristics that are valued by those with privilege and access to an education system that can teach and reproduce particular forms of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Yosso's critique of Bordieu's cultural capital raises a crucial question: "whose cultural knowledge has value?" Yosso (2005) introduces the concept of *community cultural wealth* (CCW) as a model for educators to center teaching and learning opportunities around students' lived experiences, especially students of color who bring with them ways of knowing, skills, and resources that are valuable to the overall classroom community.

Yosso (2005) identifies six forms of capital through which *cultural wealth* is nurtured–*aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital*. Though these forms

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of wealth often intersect and overlap to build on each other, *linguistic capital* stands out as a crucial element through which we can see potential counternarratives to the *culture of poverty* outlook on students of color. Faulstich Orellana (2003) defines *linguistic capital* as the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style. It reflects the idea that students arrive in the classroom already having been shaped by experiences with multiple languages and communication skills. These include storytelling, memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, voice, tone, rhythm and rhyme, audience awareness, and cross-cultural awareness to name a few. Overall, Yosso (2005) explains, *linguistic capital* also refers to the ability to use visual art, music, and/or poetry to communicate.

Yosso's fundamental question is especially useful to consider in the discourse on college readiness, student success, and achievement vs. opportunity gaps. Growing scholarly analyses have compelled researchers, policymakers, and institutions to rethink not only current-traditional measurements of college readiness, rather than continuing to rely simply on high school GPA and college placement exams to measure college readiness (Barnes et al., 2010; Holles, 2016; Lombardi et al., 2012; Martin, 2010). Researchers and policymakers have attempted to expand their perspective to include social, economic, and historical factors that suggest *college readiness* is shaped through a complex set of interactions between students and various layers of their environments (Arnold et al., 2012, Holles, 2016). This shift in focus to include the growing complexity of college readiness and student perspectives reveals a burgeoning area of study in the field: *college readiness as a socio-cultural construct*.

While much of the current-traditional discourse on the *achievement gap* and *college readiness* narrowly advances a deficit perspective of students of color and their lack of

appropriate skills (Dweck, 2013; Duckworth, 2016; Tough, 2012), there have been growing calls by researchers to reject deficit ideology and embrace students' *cultural wealth* and ways of knowing that comes from their home communities. Researchers have shown how instructors who recenter students' *cultural wealth* into classroom teaching and learning practices can unlearn *deficit thinking* and bridge the gap between students' and instructors' perceptions of *college readiness* (Pendakur, 2016; Yosso, 2005).

Researchers and scholars have begun to call for the integration of student perspectives in the discourse on college readiness. Scholars like Arnold, Lu, and Armstrong (2012) have developed models of ecological approaches to *college readiness* that draw on *cultural wealth* from students' home communities to bridge the gap in *college readiness* skills. These models consider the complex interplay of individual, institutional, and social factors in providing CR opportunities to students of color. Laura Perna's college choice model identifies four layers of environmental contexts that influence a student's college choice: 1). Student habitus (internal level); 2). School and community context; 3). Higher education context; 4). social, economic, and policy context. Perna's model of college choice identifies the multiple contexts that shape students' choices regarding college enrollment. Similarly, William Tierney & Kristan Venegas' cultural ecology model features four overlapping contexts: 1). familial environments; 2). educational environment; 3) community environments 4). out-of-class environments. Unlike Perna's model, Tierney & Venegas's cultural ecology model includes interconnected contexts in which students have direct experiences with community institutions–such as churches, schools, and families–and draw on their *navigational* and *familial capital* to connect with college readiness opportunities. Tierney & Venegas's analysis of familial contexts in developing college readiness is important because it draws Yosso's notion of *navigational* and *familial capital* into

alignment with Bronfenbrenner's conception of *instigative characteristics*. Raymond Padilla goes even further in his use of ecological principles. Padilla's expertise model of student success 1). Identifies barriers to college success and readiness; 2). Highlights formal and informal academic knowledge; 3). Synthesizes a set of habits of mind and academic behaviors to overcome barriers to success. Unlike the Perna model or the Tierney & Venegas model, Padilla's (2009) model is based on assumptions about how students experience the campus. Like Bronfenbrenner, Padilla's model assumes that education occurs within the 'life world' of students' everyday affairs and that students engage with 'meaning making' in an ongoing process that seeks out a connection between the ways of knowing taught in school and ways of knowing experienced in their home communities. In Padilla's model, student success is "…an outcome of human interaction in complex educational systems, which in turn are embedded in complex social systems". In this way, Padilla's model parallels the principles of *human ecology* theory more clearly than Perna's or Tierney & Venegas's. The main function of his model aims to recenter students' everyday lived experiences as constitutive components of student success, rather than as something to be excluded from schooling. Overall, Perna, Tierney and Venegas, and Padilla offer human ecological models of student success and college readiness that aim to preserve students' connection with their community and to sustain their *instigative characteristics* as well as the *linguistic* and *familial* capital students bring with them into the classroom–or what H. Samy Alim and Django Paris (Paris et al., 2017) refers to as *culturally sustainable* approaches to student success.

Paris et al. (2017) introduce *culturally sustainable pedagogy* (CSP) in response to the question: "what is the purpose of schooling in pluralistic societies?" (Byrd, 2016; Lexia Learning Systems, 2021). CSP posits that the purpose of state-sanctioned schooling is a kind of extension

of a colonial project that aims to assimilate students into "white middle-class norms of knowing and being" (Paris et al., 2017) with students and families of color being asked to lose or deny their languages, literacies, cultures, and histories to achieve. Paris et al. (2017) conceptualize CSP as "education that sustains the lifeways of communities who have been and continue to be damaged and erased through schooling". It acknowledges that the linguistic, literate, and cultural assets that students arrive with at the classrooms have been shaped by cultural and familial experiences and recognizes these assets as part of schooling for positive social transformation. Scholars of CSP (Paris et al., 2017) reject the current-traditional view of schooling as a site for the simple acquisition of skills to produce the next workforce and instead embrace the vision of "schooling as a site for sustaining the cultural ways of being of communities of color rather than eradicating them".

CSP is built on the intellectual groundwork laid by Gloria Landson-Billings' (1995) article "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy" (CRP), which aims to make teaching and learning relevant by including the languages, literacies, and cultural practices of students of color in course curriculum. Despite the growing popularity of CRP principles and practices by educators across K12 and postsecondary institutions (Will, 2022; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1994), scholars of CSP argue that the work being done under the umbrella of CRP falls short of its goals in pretty significant ways.

As Paris et al. (2017) explain, the term "relevant" does not support social critique nor does it do enough to explicitly maintain students' cultural identities and practices. This is evident in "the way it has been taken up in teacher education and practice" (5). The result has been the simplification of student cultures and even language in a kind of one-to-one mapping of race to language. For example, African American Vernacular English is assumed to be a culturally

relevant resource only for teaching Black students, or Spanglish for Latinx students (Paris et al., 2017). As a result, this kind of oversimplification demonstrated in how instructors have taken up CRP renders notions of culture, identity, and community as flat and one-dimensional. Furthermore, this emerging tendency of neutralizing culture in the practice of CRP entrenches students even deeper in the current-tradition of education as assimilation into white middle-class values. In contrast, CSP is "about sustaining cultures as connected to sustaining the bodies–the lives–of the people who cherish and practice them" (Paris et al., 2017); that is CSP, calls for instructors and researchers to shift towards a more explicit sustaining of cultural ways of maneuvering (*navigational capital*), ways of knowing (*linguistic capital*), and cultural identities (*familial capital*) in the practice of teaching and learning. CSP advocates for theoretical and practical recentering of culture with the bodies enacting culture in the classroom.

The central claim here is that instructors who are invested in student success must shift away from current-traditional and business-as-usual approaches to student success; they must shift the way they conceptualize their syllabi, assignment, lesson plans, and activities to include the ways of knowing, student agency, ways of maneuvering, and cultural identities that students bring with them into the classroom. In this way, instructors who actively seek out creative and deep ways to construct opportunities to sustain students' *cultural wealth* within formal academic structures. Doing so offers a promising way to shape a stronger *sense of belonging* especially among those group of students most disproportionately impacted within the classroom. A. Suresh Canagarajah (1997) offers an example of how employing culturally sustainable pedagogy creates opportunities where students feel a sense of belonging in his essay, "Safe Houses in the Contact Zone: Coping Strategies of African American Students in the Academy". Canagarajah examines a range of discourses used by his African American students in an online discussion board he

refers to as a *safe house*. Although he argues convincingly that *safe houses* open opportunities

for Black students to develop confidence in an environment that excludes them, the *safe house* he

constructs is still yet designated outside of the classroom. Creating a more equitable learning

environment requires that instructors make provisions to create those *safe house* conditions

within the formal classroom space. Canagarajah's students participated in an online "hidden

textual space where they secretly communicate oppositional solidarity while 'fronting' academic

conventions" (1997). However, there is little discussion of how students can make use of

personal experiences to avoid having to 'front' in formal academic discourse and settings such as

the classroom. As literacy scholar, Vershawn Young (2007) explains, "once students realize that

their writing is only acceptable in certain instances…they get caught between two worlds,' the

'home' and 'school'". The problem that both Young and Canagarajah highlight: how can

instructors get students to connect their social, cultural, and personal experiences with their

writing in ways that keep them inspired to continue learning?

Scholars such as Gwendolyn Pough (2004), Maisha Fisher (2009), Kermit Campbell

(2005), and Marc Lamont Hill (2009) have laid the groundwork for approaching this problem by

exploring the pedagogical possibilities of Hip Hop in classroom settings. Their work and many

others represent a growing area of research and practice that aims to use hip hop (often rap lyrics

and songs) in classrooms, more commonly referred to as *Hip Hop-based education* (HHBE). The

discourse, insights, and approaches to *Hip hop based education* are derived from studies that use

hip hop, especially rap songs and lyrics, as curricular and pedagogical resources (Petchauer,

2009). Previous research on Hip Hop has consistently acknowledged its African American roots

and even its expressiveness as an extension of the Blues tradition (Alim, 2004; Richardson,

2006; Smitherman, 2000; West, 2011/2021). While recognized as an extension of the branch of

African American aesthetic culture, researchers also emphasize the ways it has been remixed, adapted, and localized by various groups around the world to fit their unique struggle (Chang, 2005; Kitwana, 2003; Pennycook, 2006)

Higher education institutions around the U.S. have been engaging in hip-hop through courses, research, conferences, and symposia. As Petchauer (2009) notes, more than 100 institutions offer courses on Hip Hop. Some even offer multiple courses in various departments. Scholars and practitioners note that Hip Hop has become more relevant to the field of higher education research and the practice of teaching and learning in at least three ways:

1). Instructors are centering Hip Hop texts (rap music, autobiographies, lyrics) and pedagogical practices (ciphers, freestyling, battling) as the central focus of their curriculum (Forell, 2006)

2). As a result, Hip Hop is seen as not only a form of entertainment, but also as a way to empower historically marginalized groups, teach communication skills (Kelley, 2006)

3). Moreover, Hip Hop has been shown to help students develop their identities, both culturally and academically (Hall, 2011; Shanks, 2017)

Using Hip Hop cultural practices in the classroom requires that instructors figure out how to construct a space that can allow for connections across differences to be made. Hip Hop scholar Marc Lamont Hill (2009) argues in *Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life*, that we can achieve this by adopting Hip Hop as a part of how we design our curriculums. Hip Hop practices such as the *cipher* provide a model for teaching that can circumvent this concern for how knowledge is constructed in the classroom. The *cipher* allows individuals to negotiate hostile environments and transform their physical and social spaces to reflect on their collective worldviews. In this way, *ciphers* are connected to what Maisha Fisher (2008) refers to as a

"participatory literacy community" (PLC). She defines PLCs as "institutions created by Black people to provide a forum for Black readers, writers, and lovers of words and language" (90). Like PLCs, ciphers allow participants to sharpen their linguistic skills.

The Bridge [Ain't] Over:

The *Cipher* as a Vestibule Between Academic Culture and the Students' Home Community

Overall, *ciphers* refer to a literacy practice that represents Hip Hop as something more than a form of entertainment. In a cipher, participants engage in a playful ideological exchange of words and ideas that range from spontaneous expression (*freestyling*) of current events and relevant social issues to direct critiques of others (*battling*). In Hip Hop culture, these spaces represent a kind of educational learning environment that emerges organically from the city streets and, for many, marks the starting point of their learning journey. Hip Hop did not spring forth from its nest in the South Bronx magically. It emerged from within a milieu of social and political injustices that restricted access to a full range of educational opportunities and economic resources. These experiences inform a Hip Hop worldview that is governed by a sense of *persistence*—what scholar Cornel West (2011/2021) refers to as a *tragicomic hope* or a keep-on pushing sensibility that emerges out of the Blues tradition and inspires strength of will and optimism in the face of oppression, adversity, and hard times. Therefore, the pedagogical potential of Hip Hop can be seen as rooted in a pragmatic 'learn by doing' approach to facing and overcoming the sociocultural challenges that not only arise in educational settings but also in students' home communities.

In *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*, Linda Flower (2008) notes that "the search for more public forms of engagement has pushed many scholars and students in rhetoric and composition studies into unfamiliar territory" (2). Hip Hop is one such

territory, and the *cipher* represents one such form of public engagement; *ciphers* provide a model for combining personal and public performances that facilitate the integration of students' *socio-cultural capital* with the academic concepts to be learned. Moreover, *ciphers* provide a forum where one can perform their *linguistic capital* to make connections between the ability to play with language, style, and texts that often contribute to one's academic and social successes.

In our *ciphers*, my classmates and I would reflect on ideas and events that shaped our experiences. Scholars such as Linda Flower (2008) and Chris Gallagher (2002) have argued that any call for cultural, social, and political engagement in the classroom should also encourage students to draw on their personal experiences to enhance their writing. Through critical reflection, dialogue, and personal experience, students can learn how to be more self and socially aware. A broader awareness opens the possibility for students to revise and extend their perceptions on issues regarding cultural, social, and political differences through freestyling and battling.

In the documentary *Freestyle: The Art of Rhyming* (2000), emcee Divine Styler defines the Hip Hop practice of *freestyling* in two ways: most commonly it is referred to as "flowing off the top of the dome," otherwise it refers to "a non-conceptual written rhyme." In Hip Hop culture, more credibility is granted to those who can *freestyle* instantaneously because it exhibits one's control and ability with language. However, whether emcees spontaneously construct rhymes or build off of prewritten flows, *freestyling* refers to the kind of intense, quick-witted, playfully vocal, and fundamental practice of emceeing. They constantly work to develop their ability to analyze and respond to new ideas presented to excel in expanding their *linguistic capital*.

In Hip Hop, *battling* refers to one's ability to provide a critique. Battles represent a competition between two emcees that values one-upmanship. Winning does not rely solely on the use of fanciful language and braggadocios rhymes. Rather, the major objective is to sway the audience by showing that you are better than the previous rapper. From an outsider's perspective, the cipher may look like a group of people intensely arguing back and forth; however, there is a general sense of mutual respect among participants that governs battles.

Hip Hop offers youth a new means of negotiating their immediate environment and of motivating individual and collective cultural practices. Moreover, it comprises a deliberate, focused, and often spontaneous array of practices and discourses that are constituted by contemporary youth of color and arise from their home communities. The expressive discourses and practices of Hip Hop offer the possibility for building connections among members of the Hip Hop community. For Hip Hop heads, the city parks, the porches, the basketball courts, vestibules, and even classrooms are spaces where ciphers are formed to facilitate and further enhance the development of self-perception, sense of belonging, and persistence.

The cipher invites scholars of composition to consider the classroom as a space that is situated between students' home communities and academic structures. In this sense, the classroom correlates with the notion of the vestibule. In ancient Greek architecture, a vestibule is understood to be a partially enclosed lobby or intermediate passage between the entrance of a building and its exterior. By reconsidering the classroom as a vestibule, instructors can foster meaningful connections between students and teachers, students and academic culture, and students and their home communities.

I reflect on the experiences of Hip Hop heads, Hip Hop culture, and Hip Hop philosophy to suggest a need to think more deeply about the need to center students' cultural ways of

knowing and the development of safe spaces within academic structures. Sampling the notion of *safe spaces*, this study seeks to introduce the human ecology theory as a theoretical framework in which writing, *academic knowledge of self*, ciphers, rap battles, and freestyling take place. Human ecology theory expands the lens of human concern for instructors to include students' histories, culture of community wealth, and ways of knowing in the classroom. It encourages instructors to shift their perspective of teaching and learning in ways that allow students to practice rhetorical strategies from their home communities without penalty. Many studies have appropriately detailed how the relocation of cultural formations from the margins to the center of the curriculum has engendered feelings of empowerment and possibility among students.

By integrating this rhetorical framework with a human-ecological approach in FYC courses, my study seeks to understand how instructors can 1) help students to develop and enhance their academic knowledge, ways of knowing, identities, and goals; 2) help students to learn about themselves and their home community more fully by leveraging equitable classroom practices; 3) help to inspire a new vision teaching and learning that centers student-belonging as a primary goal.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore how *culturally sustaining pedagogy* (CSP), especially *Hip Hop based education* (HHBE) is enacted in first-year composition courses and potentially influences the development of students' *academic knowledge of self* —especially their sense of belonging, academic self-perceptions, and persistence. *Hip Hop Based Education* (HHBE) offers a promising approach that has the potential to increase student investment and buy-in for teaching approaches that embrace modes of learning that emerge from their students' home communities. collaborative learning, productive struggle, and race-consciousness. Increasing student buy-in may provide an effective approach to reducing the throughput gap in FYC courses and may support the development of *college readiness* skills for those most disproportionately impacted by systemic barriers and obstacles in composition courses. The central questions of this study ask:

1. In what ways do community college instructors who are influenced by Hip Hop culture implement *Hip Hop based education* (HHBE) in their composition courses?

2. From the perspective of the instructor, how, if at all, does their use of HHBE encourage positive development of students' *academic knowledge of self*–sense of belonging, academic self-perception, and persistence?

3. In what ways, if at all, does the instructor's use of HHBE shape the development of students' *academic knowledge of self* through their composition writing process?

4. In what ways, if at all, does the use of HHBE shape how students draw on their own *community cultural wealth* through their composition writing process?

This study employed a qualitative research method to explore how HHBE might influence Black students' development of *academic knowledge of self*–particularly their academic self-perception, sense of belonging, and engagement–in transfer-level FYC courses. This approach was selected for several reasons. Primarily, the qualitative approach allowed for sufficient exploration, from both the students' and instructors' perspectives, of the development of students' academic self-perception with HHBE approaches. Secondly, it accounted for the nuances of student experiences and perceptions within FYC courses. Thirdly, it revealed the deeper complexity of the ways in which Black students experience disproportionate impact from social-structural forces within and beyond the classroom. Lastly, it provided an affective way to examine the potential that HHBE holds in shaping students' development of *academic knowledge of self* and perhaps even their completion rates in FYC transfer-level courses. In this way, a qualitative study allowed me to examine how Black students experienced and responded to HHBE practices in FYC courses.

Educational researcher and executive director of the Othering and Belonging Institute, John A. Powell (2022) defines *sense of belonging* as being included in meaningful ways. Despite the broad abstractness of this concept, he further explains that "sense of belonging can also be understood as a multi-faceted concept that can be measured by one's sense of agency, connection, place, identity, and/or security (Powell, 2022).

This study employs the concept of *academic self-perception* as the perception a student has about their academic ability (Ordaz-Villegas, Acle-Tamasini, and Keyes-Legunes, 2013). Early research on *academic persistence* emphasized the view that it was largely dependent on students' individual characteristics (Tinto, 2006). However, scholars such as Tinto (1975), Bean

(1985), and Arnold, et al (2012) suggest that *persistence* results from a longitudinal process of interaction between the students and the academic/social systems of the institution.

This study grounds its perception of *Hip Hop* in what hip hop scholar Emery Petchauer (2009) describes as "a set of expressive practices created in the postindustrial US and that draw on Black and Latinx cultural forms". These practices are framed by what is often referred to as the *four elements of Hip Hop*—emceeing, djaying, breaking, and graffiti. Underlying each of these practices exists an often overlooked *fifth element* in the cultural formation of Hip Hop referred to by practitioners as *knowledge* or *knowledge of self* (One, 2019). *Knowledge of self* is celebrated in Hip Hop culture as the product of critical and self-reflective study that one develops on the journey of learning and self-discovery (The RZA, 2010). Petchauer (2009) further defines *Hip Hop Based Education* as an approach that uses Hip Hop, especially rap songs and lyrics as curricular and pedagogical resources. To the extent that HHBE is engaged in the project of teaching and learning, *knowledge of self* can be understood as one of its main goals. Scholars and practitioners alike also find that a sense of empowerment is associated with the development of *knowledge of self*, especially metacognitive skills such as *self-perception*, *sense of belonging*, and *persistence* (Gosa, 2015; Perry, 2006; RZA, 2010). In this sense, the development of metacognitive skills such as *self-perception*, *sense of belonging*, and *persistence* can be viewed as critical components that one develops throughout their journey on the path to gaining *knowledge of self* (RZA, 2010). This fifth element of Hip Hop refers to the metacognitive awareness of individual consciousness designed to empower members of historically oppressed groups (Keyes, 2012; Williams, 2015). This study seeks to examine how instructors might enhance students' sense of belonging by integrating pedagogical approaches that draw on HHBE to develop and affirm *knowledge of self* in composition courses.

Methods

Recruitment and Sample

The participants of this study consisted of instructors within the UMOJA program and English faculty instructors across California Community Colleges. To identify community college instructors who utilize HHBE in FYC courses, I sent recruitment emails throughout region four to program coordinators in the UMOJA network. I also recruited from my own personal network of faculty who forwarded the recruitment email and connected me to instructors at colleges across Los Angeles and Riverside counties in Southern California. Faculty who expressed interest were asked to complete a brief survey that was linked in the recruitment email, which asked for their contact email, phone number, and if they had any experience in using Hip Hop based educational approaches in FYC courses and were interested in participating in the study (see APPENDIX A). Faculty who indicated that they had experience in using HHBE approaches and expressed interest in participating received a follow up email to identify the time when we conducted the interview via zoom.

Participants-Faculty

Upon completion of the recruitment survey, I used purposeful sampling to identify four instructors to interview. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 mins in length and were audio recorded electronically on zoom. Participants were given instructions to find a quiet, private location where they would not be interrupted for the duration of the interview/focus group. The identity of all institutions, participants, and instructors were kept anonymous and protected by providing a pseudonym for each, which were used throughout the research process and dissertation. Under no circumstances were officially recognized names, places, or locations connected with any of the participants utilized in a way that reveals the identity of any

participant. Based on participant interview responses, I categorized each instructor's use of

HHBE into one of three variations: 1) those who are influenced by Hip Hop culture, 2) those

who use HHBE in their pedagogical practices, and 3) those who structure their course

assignments, syllabi, grading policies, and pedagogy using Hip Hop principles and practices.

Participants-Students

Once I categorized each instructor's approach based on usage, I asked instructors to

present a flyer (see APPENDIX B) for participation in a student focus group to their classes.

Two out of the four faculty participants had students who responded to the link presented on the

flyer. One student from Professor Bruce Mathers III's (pseudonym) class responded, while 11

students from Carl Ryder's (pseudonym) UMOJA English class participated. The student focus

groups were conducted on two separate days. Both were audio-recorded on Zoom and

transcribed using Otter transcription service. Each student participant was provided an incentive

for taking part in the focus group after its completion.

Data Collection

Four instructors who participated in this study were interviewed virtually on Zoom. The

interviews were recorded using both audio transcripts and contemporaneous notes and memos.

Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and focused on unpacking the experiences of

instructors and students on their journey toward developing *academic knowledge of self*. The

goal of the faculty interviews and student focus group was to gather insight on how instructor's

use of Hip Hop based education shapes the development of students' *academic knowledge of self*

and encourages the use of students cultural capital. Additionally, these semi-structured

interviews gathered insights across three areas of observation: 1). The experiences of instructors

with Hip Hop culture; 2). How these experiences shaped their approach to teaching and learning

in transfer-level composition courses; 3). Instructor perception of the educational benefits of centering student's cultural capital in the classroom. Once each interview concluded, I sent a follow up email to each faculty participant to request syllabi, assignments, lesson plans, and activities (see APPENDIX D).

Interviews with the four instructors were followed by an open call for student participants in focus groups who were currently enrolled in writing courses. Data from these focus groups provided insights from students on how Hip Hop based education shaped their *academic knowledge of self*. The interviews were recorded using both audio transcripts from the online storage cloud provided by zoom and the transcripts provided by Otter AI. While conducting the interviews, I recorded contemporaneous notes and memos on comments that I returned to throughout the data analysis process. All responses were kept confidential and participant faculty and students were only referred to by pseudonyms throughout the coding and analysis process, which I describe below.

Data Analysis

The audio-recorded interviews were reviewed for initial analysis. Each interview was transcribed using Otter AI transcription service. Following the completion and transcription of the interviews, I analyzed instructor syllabi, including their writing assignments, lesson plans, and activities to better identify the method and degree to which they employed HHBE in their pedagogy. Faculty respondents were grouped into one of three categories of usage: 1) those who are influenced by Hip Hop culture, 2) those who use HHBE in their pedagogical practices, and 3) those who structure their course assignments, syllabi, grading policies, and pedagogy using Hip Hop principles and practices. Four out of four faculty-participants' responses corresponded with each category of usage as demonstrated by their syllabi, writing assignments, lesson plans, and

activities. Collecting data from interviews, course syllabi, assignments, and grading policies, it seemed important to examine closely the influence Hip Hop had on instructor pedagogy and how it shaped their approach to developing the elements of *academic knowledge of self*. Student focus group responses were categorized into three descriptive codes: a) Sense of Belonging in class; b). Academic Self-perception; and c). Persistence. Additionally, three subtopics were identified in the larger topic Sense of Belonging: a_1) Sense of Belonging; a_2) Personal Relationships a_3) Validation w/ faculty. Two subtopics emerged in the topic Academic Self-perception: b_1) Identity; b_2) agency. Three subtopics were described in the topic Persistence: c_1) Seek help when needed; c_2) Welcomeness to engage inside/outside class; c_3) action control. Subtopics from student focus groups were indexed using key words associated with each major topic from the scholarly conversation (Powell, 2015; Wood, 2012) to provide further depth and explanation of student experiences with HHBE. After coding student focus group responses, I cross-referenced topics and subtopics with faculty codes, described below.

To better understand this relationship between Hip Hop and instructor pedagogies and how it influenced their approach to teaching and learning, I conducted *first and second-cycle* coding (Saldana, 2021) method. The first cycle of coding was initiated immediately after the instructor interviews were completed. Instructor interview responses were coded into the following categories: 1). Experiences with Hip Hop culture; 2). Impact Hip Hop based education had on teaching and learning in FYC courses; 3). Integrating students' ways of knowing, cultural histories, and ways of maneuvering. In the second cycle I deployed descriptive coding. This allowed me to condense the larger faculty and student codes into subtopics where I observed repeated patterns to develop inductive categories that became the study's major themes, which I describe below.

Following the completion of faculty interviews and student focus groups, I analyzed faculty syllabi, writing assignments, and grading policies to better identify the degree to which instructors implement Hip Hop based education into their pedagogy. Overall, two major themes emerged from the faculty interviews responses, student focus group insights, and document analysis data collected: (a) the *cipher as a vestibule* between academic structures and students' home community; and (b) challenging current-traditional teaching and learning approaches. Three subthemes were also identified in the theme *cipher as a vestibule* between academic structures and students' home community: (a_1) students' sense of belonging, (a_2) validate students' ways of knowing, and (a_3) representation throughout the course curriculum. Similarly, three subthemes were also identified under (b) challenging current-traditional teaching and learning approaches: (b_1) teaching and exemplifying composition/rhetoric concepts, (b_2) including artists and albums in the course curriculum, and (b_3) cultivating persistence among students. Throughout various themes and subthemes, developing composition skills was a common thread identified.

Validity and Credibility

I triangulated faculty interviews with student focus groups, and document analysis to enhance the validity and credibility and to reduce any potential bias in the qualitative portion of the study. I did not anticipate any ethical issues arising out of this study. However, the role I occupy as a fellow English faculty, UMOJA community member, and Hip Hop fan bares the need for transparency as I interviewed fellow English faculty from across community colleges and the UMOJA community who employed Hip Hop practices in FYC courses. Rather than merely highlighting the presence of potential bias, however, I recognize my positionality as a prerequisite qualification to bridge the gap between academic conversations on equity in the

classroom and ways of teaching and learning that emerge from students' home communities. Moreover, it allows me to elucidate the pedagogical significance of the often understudied *culturally sustaining* practices of Hip Hop in the composition classroom.

Prior to the interviews and focus groups participants were given instructions that include finding a quiet, private location where they were not interrupted for the duration of the interview/focus group. The identity of all institutions, participants, and instructors were kept anonymous and protected by providing a pseudonym for each. Under no circumstances were names, places, or locations connected with any of the participants utilized in a way that reveals the identity of any participant. In addition, all participants were given the opportunity to review their transcript to correct any errors that may put their identity at risk of being exposed.

Role Management

I made sure to position myself as a UCLA graduate student, rather than as a fellow English faculty. Because I share an affinity for African American rhetoric and literature, culturally relevant/sustaining pedagogy, and faculty development, and have been teaching English in UMOJA since 2017, I was able to build rapport with faculty-participants. Additionally, I provided small gift card incentives and thank you cards for each participant and interviewee.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how instructors' use of Hip Hop based education (HHBE) shapes the development of students' *academic knowledge of self*, especially their sense of belonging, academic self-perception, and persistence. Research methods included qualitative interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. A call to recruit faculty study participants was sent to five English department chairs, 11 UMOJA Success Program Coordinators throughout Region 4, and the Faculty Association for California Community Colleges, a statewide advocacy group for faculty. Four full-time English faculty volunteered to participate. After faculty interviews were conducted, students from each participant's classes were given a flyer to participate in focus groups. 11 students from one class responded, while one student responded from another.

Research Questions

My study was focused on uncovering responses to the following questions:

1. In what ways do community college instructors who are influenced by Hip Hop culture implement Hip Hop based education (HHBE) in composition courses?

2. From the perspective of the instructor, how if at all does their use of HHBE encourage positive development of students' *academic knowledge of self*—sense of belonging, academic self-perception, persistence?

3. In what ways, if at all, does the instructor's use of hip hop-based education shape the development of students' *academic knowledge of self* throughout the composition writing process?

4. In what ways, if at all, does the use of HHBE shape how students draw on their own cultural capital throughout the composition writing process?

Guide To the Chapter

The following sections include a faculty profile and a description of the findings. The guiding research questions draw their responses from faculty interviews, student focus groups, and instructor-generated course materials, especially syllabi, writing assignment prompts, lesson plans, and writing activities.

Findings

The early entrance of instructors to Hip Hop culture paralleled their journey of literacy development. Interestingly, instructors noted this parallel experience as their primary inspiration for bringing HHBE into their composition courses. Overall, two themes emerged from exploring how instructors implement HHBE from the data collected: 1). The *cipher as a vestibule* between academic structures and students' home community (*familial capital*); 2). Challenging current-traditional teaching and learning approaches (*navigational capital*). Across both themes, developing composition skills was a common thread identified *(linguistic capital)*.

Faculty Profiles

This section first provides an overview of faculty participants' demographics, history with Hip Hop, academic/teaching journey, and ways they integrate Hip Hop into the classroom; and then includes specific profiles for each faculty participant. The purpose of developing faculty profiles was to examine and contextualize the influence Hip Hop has played in shaping instructor pedagogy and how it shapes their approach to developing students' *academic knowledge of self*.

Each instructor has had a unique set of experiences with Hip Hop that have shaped their approaches to teaching and learning. One out of the four participants first engaged with Hip Hop

in the 1980s; two first engaged in the early to mid 1990s; while one instructor reported having

first engaged with Hip Hop in the 2000s. One participant disclosed that they grew up with a

perception that Hip Hop was taboo and as a result had not engaged with it in any meaningful way

until adulthood. Of the four faculty participants, three identified as white and one as Black. Each

faculty participant identified as male. Three of the four grew up in southern California, while one

grew up in Wisconsin. Two of the instructors reported encounters with teachers that negatively

shaped their academic journey, while the other two reported encounters that positively shaped

their learning experiences.

Table 1

Faculty-Participant Demographic Attributes

	Race/Ethnicity	Sex	Home Community	Introduced to Hip Hop	Encounters with Teachers
Bruce Mathers III	White	Male	Southern California	2000s	Positive
Tracy Marrow	White	Male	Riverside, Ca	1990s	Positive
Erik Schrody	White	Male	Wisconsin	1990s	Negative
Carl Ryder	Black	Male	Pasadena, Ca	1980s	Negative

Collectively, these instructors have over 50 years of teaching experience in higher

education; two have taught at California Community College for 20 years, while the other two

have taught for 12 years. Three out of the four instructors reflected on their experiences having

taught non-credit writing courses and tutoring in their respective writing centers. Each

participant discussed their experiences using HHBE across transfer-level composition, advanced

composition, and literature courses for the general population of students. One reflected on their

time as the English instructor for the UMOJA community using HHBE. Three participants developed assignments using Hip Hop songs as texts; three recognized Ice Cube and Tupac as key authors in their Hip Hop curriculum; three reported the use of Hip Hop texts to make their course reading lists more inclusive.

Four faculty agreed to participate in this study under pseudonyms, which include: Bruce Mathers III, Tracy Marrow, Erik Schrody, and Carl Ryder. I summarize a brief profile of each faculty participant's academic journey, experience with Hip Hop culture, motivation to incorporate Hip Hop in the class, and ways of using Hip Hop in the following section. This information provides a richer understanding of the experiences faculty have gone through on their academic journey that shape their perceptions of HHBE and the pedagogical potential that lies at the core of Hip Hop.

Bruce Mathers III

Bruce Mathers III (pseudonym) is a tenure-track professor of English at Afta Math Community College in Compton, California. He was homeschooled until he was 16 years old and began dual-enrollment courses at his local community college. He describes his academic journey as a little bit unorthodox. His mom decided to homeschool Bruce and his siblings because, as he recounts, they 'were really smart but also a handful.' They were constantly getting into trouble. From babysitters to Sunday school teachers, Bruce recalls that teachers and instructors often remarked, "Oh my gosh, he's the greatest kid ever" and some commented, "I hate this child take him home now". As a result, his mom decided to homeschool Bruce and his siblings. She was a teacher by trade. She understood the importance of individualized instruction and he grew up with that being the norm.

The first time he went to public school was college as a 16-year-old doing dual enrollment courses at the local community college. He recalls finishing up high school at the same time he finished college and shared the experience of falling in love with community college as the place where he discovered his love for teaching. He describes being asked in freshman composition English class, "What do you want to do when you grow up?"; he explains,

> You know, I was a teenager, I really liked writing. I loved TV and movies and writing fantasy and that kind of thing. So I really liked writing, but I didn't know what I wanted to do for a living because you know, unless you're JRR Tolkien, you might not make money right? But I saw my college English teacher and I saw him take a stack of papers home with him. I said, you know, 'if I took a stack of papers home with me like that, I'm sure grading those papers is going to be hard, but I don't think I'd hate it

Ultimately, he applied to the writing center as a tutor. While he still did not know if he wanted to be a teacher yet, he reasoned that the worst-case scenario would result in him learning how to evaluate ideas and papers or he could help students write their term papers. Once he started working with students, at 17 years old to improve their composition skills and to enhance their writerly voices, he discovered his calling to become an English professor, which led him to ultimately pursue his doctorate in English. As a self-described fantasy novel, film, and TV enthusiast, Bruce learned to incorporate elements from pop culture into his pedagogy to connect with students beyond the assignment. He explained that he also considers his use of Hip Hop as his approach to providing individualized instruction for his students and his way of honoring the spirit of education instilled in him by his mom.

Bruce describes his reintroduction to Hip Hop as an adult in his twenties as autodidactic and structured by Pandora, at least initially, which helped to guide him as he caught up on 40 years of Hip Hop. As a child, he explains that Hip Hop culture was taboo in his household because, as his mom said, "they use dirty words in their lyrics." He explains that she grew up in the 1960s and was very involved in the civil rights movement and recalls his mom teaching him

how to recite Martin Luther King's speeches as a child. But when it came to rap music and Hip Hop culture, he recalls her protesting, "They say bad words. And they talk about drugs and they talk about sex and so we don't really do that." So musically, he was much more into classic rock, because the oldies songs did not swear as much. He remembers listening to The Beatles because they did not swear as much compared to some of the music that made his mom uncomfortable.

Since rap was considered "taboo" in his household, Bruce acknowledged that he arrived late to Hip Hop, unlike his friends. It was not until he was an adult, married, and teaching that he began to explore his curiosity with Hip Hop on his terms. He specifically credits Eminem and Rihanna's "Love the Way You Lie" on Pandora as the song that captured his curiosity. His friend joked as she said, "Please tell me your first Hip Hop album was not an Eminem album". From that moment, he trained a Pandora station and explored more Hip Hop in search of what he missed over the past 40 years. He recalls, "You know, and I was like, okay, so what is this Wu-Tang Clan? And what do they have out? What are the different genres? Alright, so what is "flow" mean? What is 'sampling'?"

His primary motivation for using rap lyrics as texts in composition courses is rooted in what he explains as "common interests" between him and his students. Moreover, he finds that Hip Hop is an effective way for him to create a welcoming space for students and to show them that cultural artifacts from their home communities belong in academic settings and conversations.

Tracy Marrow

Tracy Marrow (pseudonym) has been teaching for 23 years but started as an English professor approximately 17 years ago at Crenshaw District Community College in South Los Angeles. He did not excel in school, throughout elementary and middle school. After graduating

high school, he attended community college for a brief period but dropped out to work. He returned to college as he described "slightly older", "more focused", and "with a clear goal in mind." He recalls working in the writing center as a tutor where he built most of his relationships by looking at student writing, explaining writing concepts, and helping students feel more confident in their writing. Marrow explains that witnessing his students transform from anxious-avoidant writers to secure-confident writers inspired him to continue to pursue his academic goals. Tracy acknowledges that his time in the writing center and teaching non-credit courses revealed to him that the value of a rich education flows two ways between student and instructor. Moreover, he explains that a deep and meaningful education should challenge the perspectives that students and instructors bring with them into the classroom. He notes that is especially important for students as it pertains to their academic self-perception, confidence in writing skills, and experiences reading and writing college-level texts.

Tracy's primary experience with Hip Hop initially was just as a consumer of the music. However, his experiences with Hip Hop expanded considerably as a drummer playing for emcees, rather than writing rhymes. He played drums when he was in junior high and high school for several friends who were interested in performing. He played drums for a couple of the younger people who were interested in rapping. In this way, he had some experience as a participant in the culture by way of music production. He experienced Hip Hop culture through MTV and the radio. His experience wasn't primary, it was more secondary. Tracy describes that he was a huge fan of the early gangster rap and pre-NWA. He explains that he loved Public Enemy and early Ice-T,

> It's just that's what activated me first. Like many other young white kids like me, it gave us what we thought was a view into this other world that we were living parallel to. It kind of did and it probably didn't at the same time, because there was such a disconnect from the lived experience… I think the second way is to start to approach the classroom

with a sense for linguistic justice and to expose students to these ideas about the rhetorical power of all Englishes or all dialects… Traditionally, composition courses present writing instructors as though they're teaching students to write a certain way, however it's not because this way is inherently superior. There is a historical context to it. Other Englishes provide a really interesting way to critique that traditional narrative of what is the correct way of speaking/writing… So one of the big ways that I use hip hop is in a creative way to interrogate language, but also to use [language] directly. Sometimes it's direct message. It's a direct connection to emotion, but there's also subtle critiques within it. There are also interesting implied ideas or connections and illusions that are really interesting to dig into when students are interested

Marrow makes it clear that his approach to teaching and learning is motivated by a sense of linguistic justice, in which he aims to highlight for students the rhetorical power of what education theorist Tara J. Yosso (2005) refers to as *linguistic capital* they possess. He considers linguistic justice as an intentional and deliberate attempt to repair the harm done by current-traditional practices that frame mastery over Standard English (SE) as the primary goal of writing instruction. Students experience harm when current-traditional instructors reinforce Standard English as the goal of learning. Implicit in this goal, he explains, is a sense of perceived superiority associated with SE to the exclusion of students' home languages and identities in the classroom. He recognizes that there exists an uneven perception of value between the home languages of students, which is viewed as value-less by current-traditional standards, and SE as the language of the institution, which is viewed as inherently valuable. This perception gap, he adds, creates learning conditions that diminish and exclude students' cultural self-expression, while elevating academic language and identity instead. Tracy's compass of linguistic justice has led him to employ elements of Hip Hop culture and rap music as a method to repair the harm done to students' academic self-perceptions. Marrow further explains that composition needs Hip Hop and the rhetorical lenses it provides to interrogate language and to critique the traditional narrative of what is the correct way of speaking and writing. Moreover, he highlights rap music's practice of speaking truth to power and delivering social critique as two primary elements he

uses to exemplify linguistic justice in action. Moreover, he believes that through a Hip Hop lens, composition instruction has the potential to deliver lessons with a greater sense of linguistic justice by juxtaposing students' *linguistic capital*, cultural experiences, and ways of knowing with more traditional academic texts, concepts, perspectives, and values.

Erik Schrody

Erik Schrody's (pseudonym) academic journey began as a high school student growing up in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He recalls how his education in Advanced Placement (AP) Literature did not prepare him for college-level English literature despite having done well in the course. He did not learn anything about thesis-driven arguments, or systematically supporting positions with evidence or defending against counterarguments. Despite being underprepared, the University of Mt. Everlast determined that his AP Literature course satisfied his freshman composition requirement and approved him to begin taking literature courses. Unfortunately, his grades took a dip and he quickly learned how underprepared he was. He describes that like many students he had taken for granted that his performance in AP courses made him college-ready. He figured out that, "to be a good student was not a solitary practice." What he needed to do was draw on both formal—like seeking help during office hours, getting tutoring from the local writing center, attending guest speaker lecture series—and informal—connecting with peers through study groups to exchange ideas and notes—structures of support. He considered his time during office hours with Professor O'Shea Jackson to be invaluable because of the feedback he received and how his writing skills developed because of it. Most importantly, he remembered that period of his academic journey as the time when he discovered his passion to support students on their journey of literacy development. This is when he discovered his passion for teaching and learning.

Schrody began his teaching journey while still an undergraduate student at the University of Mt. Everlast in Minnesota, during a Public Literacy course. As part of a service-learning project, he became a tutor and was paired with an elementary school in Minneapolis, MN during a Clinton-era program entitled America Reads. This was the first experience Erik had where he began to discover the kind of impact he could have as an educator on the literacy development journey of youth.

Erik's entrance into Hip Hop culture began in the 1990s. Growing up in a small rural community in northern Wisconsin, artists like Public Enemy, Dr. Dre, and Snoop Dogg stayed in heavy rotation on his Walkman. He was primarily exposed to Hip Hop culture through mainstream media outlets and films like *Boyz in the Hood* and *Menace II Society*. During the time he began teaching in higher education, Erik credited Ernest Morell and Jeff Duncan-Andrade as major influences on his approach to teaching and learning. He recalls,

> We read the book that [Jeff Duncan-Andrade] did with Ernest Morell at the heart of critical pedagogy. So I was still relatively new at teaching at this level. And those were really influential early texts, in terms of thinking about what I was going to do in the classroom

He explains how Andrade and Morell's *The Art of Critical Pedagogy* expanded his perspective and motivated him to view Hip Hop as something more than merely a form of entertainment. He further explains that it motivated him to modify his approach to teaching and learning in composition, informed by the major tenets of *critical pedagogy*[1], which envisions the role of learners as something more than acquiring skills in writing. Their work highlighted a way of teaching and learning using Hip Hop tropes and ways of knowing to develop self-awareness. One of these key tropes was from rapper Tupac Shakur's poem entitled "The Rose That Grew from Concrete". He began incorporating Tupac's poem into the course reading and even added an

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[1] Cite Paulo Freire- Pedagogy of the Oppressed

audio version read by Nikki Giovanni. His goal was to try to get students to engage in critical self-reflection using the title of Tupac's poem as a metaphor through which student could analyze their academic journey. He added an asset-based self-assessment called Strength's Quest to help students become more aware of the skills and strengths they bring with them into to classroom.

Carl Ryder

Carl Ryder has been an educator for 25 years. He grew up in Altadena, CA, which he described as "a relatively diverse city during the 1970s". His academic journey began at three years old when his parents divorced. He describes experiencing a "sense of urgency to become a self-learner" because he did not have both parents equipped to tend to all his needs. In this way, he describes his academic journey as "a lifelong learner who is self-taught." Ryder's journey as an educator does not begin within the formal structures of academia, but rather with foster youth when he was 25. Many of his youth grew up faced with the challenges and traumas of their own lives that stem from the absence of their biological parents; as a result, they were made vulnerable to the crucible of the foster care system. Carl's vision of a rich education was shaped prior to him becoming a college instructor by the practical challenges of having to prepare foster youth with independent living skills to navigate life and the world on their own.

Ryder's teaching journey, like his academic journey, begins at an early age. It began with what he describes as a very severe first-grade teacher. He recalls Mrs. Karen (pseudonym) "a 45-year-old white lady who was always kind of beet-red and used to yell at the top of her lungs." He observed a confusing sense of pleasure that Mrs. Karen derived from punishing, yelling at, and kicking out Black and Brown children from the classroom. She recalls how she delighted in calling Ryder's father because he would apply spankings every time a behavioral issue would come up. Ryder laments this as one of the worst years of schooling he had ever experienced. He

marks that as the beginning of his teaching journey because it imparted a clear and palpable memory of what "bad" teaching looked and felt like. That experience helped him dedicate his life to doing his best to prevent youth from undergoing any echo or rhyme of his experiences with schooling.

The combination of Ryder's academic and teaching journey led him to conceptualize education in two distinct ways: he explains that on one hand education is part of an entire curriculum of life he refers to as "personal experience"; on the other, there exists what is learned in traditional classroom settings, which he refers to as "academic knowledge." He further explains that while lessons from students' everyday lived experiences (what one might call non-academic experiences), might not be taught in the traditional classroom curriculum, 'a rich education applies practical lessons acquired from everyday experiences in the traditional classroom.' In this way, Carl aimed to develop contextual awareness and a kind of moral compass among his students that empowers them to locate their voice, stance, and perspective on issues that affect their everyday lives. As he explains,

> The things that we see when we drive down the street, the lessons we learn at home, the graffiti you see on the walls, the relationships and tensions that you have with peers, what you see on TV and all of the images and messages in marketing

Carl's view of education was also heavily influenced by the artists and messages he grew up hearing from Hip Hop. They functioned as a curricular resource for him. Carl's entrance into Hip Hop culture is unique among the faculty participants in this study in that he was engaging with it before it was even referred to as Hip Hop in any formal sense. Growing up in Altadena, CA he was heavily influenced by East Coast pioneers, such as Chuck D from Public Enemy, KRS-One, and Rakim. He notes that Ice Cube was one of the few from the West Coast who rivaled those strong messages coming from New York. He recalls a particular moment in Public Enemy's "Rebel without a Pause" where he discovered rap's ability to engage the audience in a

deeper historical analysis of American culture back in 1988 when Chuck D exclaims that he is a "loud and proud supporter of Chesimard." As a 17-year-old high school senior he recalled immediately going to the record store to purchase and crack open the cassette tape, reading the lyrics and liner notes, and relistening to the song trying to figure out "Who the heck is Chesimard?" After doing extensive research unprompted by any teacher educator, Ryder discovered that it was Assata Shakur. He discovered that Hip Hop had the power to teach him about the Black Panther Party on the East Coast, Assata's exile into Cuba, and how Cuba, despite being a political foil of American democracy throughout the Cold War, was the only country willing to give her sanctuary. This experience allowed Carl to discover the artists and intellectual voices that he identified with linguistically, culturally, and historically from within his community. Public Enemy's "Rebel without a Pause" was one of those early songs that sparked the vision Ryder would later develop into his approach for the kind of education that cultivates in learners a compass that empowers them to locate their voice on issues that are relevant to their everyday lives.

Each faculty-participant demonstrated motivations for bringing Hip Hop into the classroom that were connected by three fundamental causes: primarily, Hip Hop reflects many of the topics, issues, and social problems that students experience in their home communities; secondly, Hip Hop's ability to represent cultural identities and self-awareness through everyday practices of language creates a welcoming entrance into the practice of college-level writing where students can explore and develop what could be characterized as their *linguistic capital*; Lastly, Hip Hop helps students to compose their cultural and academic identities in ways that further develop the critical consciousness—ways of knowing—they bring into the classroom. Overall, faculty-participants' motivation for using HHBE in the composition classroom reveal

that their primary role and function is to engage students through their *zone of proximal development*[2] and *scaffold*[3] their learning journey toward critical consciousness. The section below highlights the major themes that emerged from faculty interviews and student focus groups, which show how this motivation shapes teaching and learning in the composition classroom.

Themes

Two major themes emerged from the faculty interviews responses, student focus group insights, and document analysis data collected: (a) The *Cipher as A Vestibule* Between Academic Structures And Students' Home Community; and (b) Challenging Current-Traditional Teaching And Learning Approaches. Three subthemes were also identified in The *Cipher as A Vestibule* Between Academic Structures and Students' Home Community: (a_1) students' sense of belonging, (a_2) validate students' ways of knowing, and (a_3) representation throughout the course curriculum. Similarly, three subthemes were also identified under (b) challenging current-traditional teaching and learning approaches: (b_1) teaching and exemplifying composition/rhetoric concepts, (b_2) including artists and albums in the course curriculum, and (b_3) cultivating persistence among students. Throughout various themes and subthemes, developing composition skills was a common thread identified.

The Cipher as A Vestibule

Using HHBE practices to bridge the gap between students' home and academic communities was a common theme shared among each faculty participant's response. As shown below, faculty shared how they bridged the gap through their use of Hip Hop by (a) enhancing

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[2] Vygotsky, L. (1934/1986). Thought and language. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
[3] Ninio, A. and Bruner, J. (1978). The achievement and antecedents of labelling. Journal of Child Language, 5, 1–15

students' sense of belonging, (b) creating opportunities to validate students' ways of knowing and their interests, and (c) providing a way for students to be represented throughout the course curriculum. Responses from student focus groups support findings from instructors listed above and further illustrate several key revelations from students' perspectives: how their instructors' use of HHBE (a) allowed for students and instructors to relate to each other's lived experiences; (b) cultivated the perception of faculty as authentic and caring for students; (c) edified their sense of identity and connectedness; (d) encouraged them to forge bonds with other students; (e) allowed them to feel the classroom was a safe space; (f) encouraged them to recognize shared common struggles within and across racial/ethnic groups; and (g) broadened their worldviews and perspectives. In these ways, student focus group responses suggest that faculty's use of Hip Hop was centered primarily in *ciphers*.

Based on responses from both students and faculty interviews, the use of HHBE in *ciphers* expanded students' sense of *familial capital* throughout the course to include a sense of connectedness, family, and community with other students and instructors; additionally, responses from both instructors and students suggested that the use of *ciphers* enhanced students' *linguistic capital* as they took part in co-constructing aspects of the course curriculum.

In short, the findings discussed below suggest that instructor's use of HHBE transformed the learning environment from a traditional classroom setting to a space that, while situated between students' home communities and academic structures, functions similar to a *vestibule* that buffers the main entrance to a larger structure (academic culture). In ancient Greek architecture, a *vestibule* can be understood to be a partially enclosed lobby that prepares an individual for the next step into a larger structure (Vitruvius, 2009). This study offers the *vestibule* as a metaphor to clarify how educators might begin to (re)imagine the relationship

between students' home communities (particularly, features of cultural wealth like *familial* and *linguistic capital*), Hip Hop *ciphers*, and the academic structure (classroom/course concepts to be learned).

Figure 1

Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecology Model
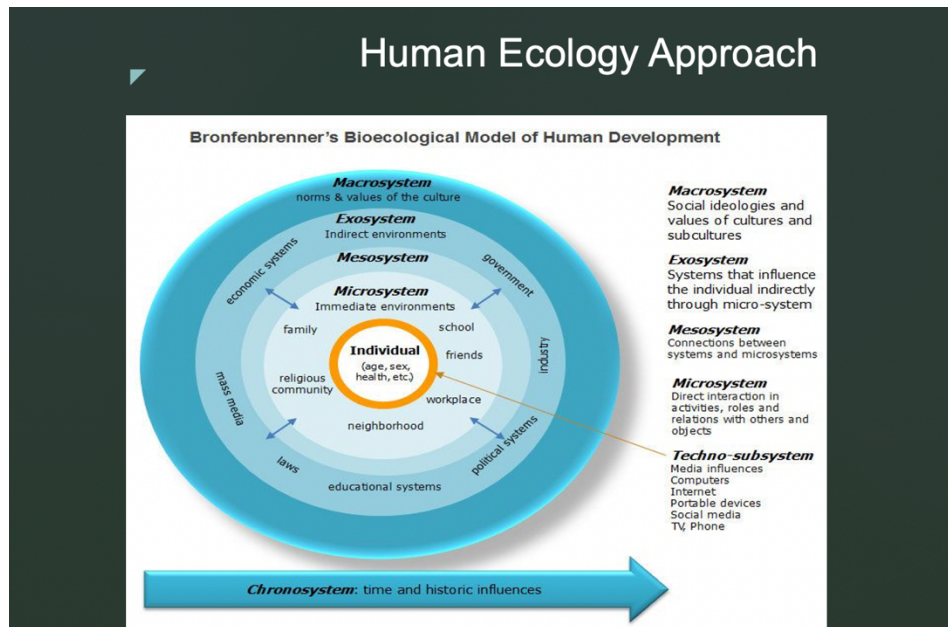
From an instructional perspective, Figure 1 illustrates Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1994) *human ecology* model in which the process of human development occurs across intersecting and overlapping contexts. Similar to the process of human development outlined by Bronfenbrenner's (1994) human ecology model, developing students' AKOS using HHBE requires engagement and deep connection across multiple layers of the human ecology between students' and instructors. The layers of AKOS include the following: a). one's self-perception as developed in relationship to their academic journey—*academic self-perception* (individual-level); b). *the sense of belonging* (pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations) experienced between instructor-students, student-student, and instructor-students' home communities within the direct environment of the classroom (microsystem-level); c). the

combined set of interactions across all microsystems within and beyond the classroom to motivate students toward their academic goals—academic *persistence* (mesosystem-level) (Arnold et al, 2012; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Padilla, 2009; Perna, 2006; Tierney & Venegas, 2009). Potentially, there could be other layers revealed in future research, however the following layers were compiled based on instructor interview responses, student focus groups, and document analysis. These layers also provide a lens to observe and frame the effectiveness of each faculty participant's pedagogical experience using HHBE to shape AKOS. Moreover, it provides greater insight as to what occurs in the classroom using an equitable model of instruction. In other words, Bronfenbrenner's human ecological model provided this study with a conceptual framework for understanding how and why HHBE provides a useful model of practices, strategies, and tools for teaching and learning, as well as how HHBE connects both students and their home communities to the academic concepts to be learned in FYC courses.

Cultivates Student Sense of Belonging

Bruce, Tracy, and Erik suggest that their use of HHBE creates a *vestibule* between students' home and academic communities by cultivating students' sense of belonging in the classroom.

Bruce Mathers III. Bruce reveals based on his own graduate studies research and personal interactions with students that there are several key reasons why students do not feel as though they belong. Bruce describes that these reasons range from "getting chewed up and spit out by K-12," to "family stuff," to "the racial climate on campuses." On the other hand, he also describes his students as feeling like they belong in the classroom most "with people who give a shit." He explains further,

> What I found in my research, and this is also in the literature in my research that I did personally and also often what students will respond to is their belief that their professors

or the people on campus, genuinely care about them. And this can take the form of a lot of ways. Sometimes this is about you know, taking the time to give really good feedback on an assignment. So many students say, You're the first teacher I've ever had who's ever really given me some papers like that, that's, that's how I show that I care. I light your paper up like a Christmas tree.

His approach to fostering an inclusive classroom suggests an expansion of students' *familial capital* as it demonstrates both an *ethic of care*, where he makes students feel that what they enjoy and find intellectually curious matters, and the practice of *mattering and belonging*, which aims to edify the student-instructor relationship through consistent interaction and a feedback loop focused on writing that shows students their ideas are valued and belong in academic discourse. Sometimes as part of the class discussion and other times as part of their writing. His response also suggests that *mattering and belonging* are tied to student-instructor engagement both within and beyond the classroom. Bruce implies that engagement should not be a passive act, but rather it should be intentional and deliberate in ways that show students they matter. Bruce ties in Hip Hop texts to the conversation on *mattering and belonging* as he explains that,

> I think my use of Hip Hop in the classroom is an invitation to get those two [students' home and academic] communities to talk to each other. They can take issues that they're concerned about in their home community. And I am inviting it to the academy, saying, "No, no, no, no, no. Clear the deck. What you care about; what you want to write about, is just as important as Shakespeare." And not that Shakespeare is not important, but that they belong on the same shelf.

One of Bruce's students, Hailey Jade (pseudonym), from his second semester composition course affirms that Bruce's use of Hip Hop invites her to think about connections that exist between both her home and academic communities. As Hailey reveals when asked whether her instructor's use of Hip Hop makes her feel more connected to her home and academic community,

> Yeah, I would say so. It helped remove… I mean, this has been kind of the community college experience for me, in general, but definitely with that Hip Hop album. I'm

removing some of those taboos and removing some of those things. Again, like I was saying earlier, that kind of divides people and makes us safe that there's one perspective that's the ultimate California and or the ultimate American perspective, and seeing that now, there are a lot of different perspectives that comprise a bunch of different stories. It's a mosaic it's not one narrative…

Hailey's comment echoes a discovery that Bruce shared earlier when he narrated his entrance into rap music: exposure to Hip Hop as something more than just a form of entertainment helps to feel as though they have found a place where they not only belong but where their perspective matters and can be further developed and enhanced by others. Additionally, it helps to make students more aware of their cultural identity, helps them to become more inclusive of perspectives that exist beyond their worldview, and it also validates *familial capital.*

Tracy Marrow. Similarly, insight from Tracy Marrow and Erik Schrody also suggest that The *Cipher as A Vestibule* Between Academic Structures and Students' Home Community enhances their *sense of belonging* as an important responsibility of the instructor and the curriculum they create. Professor Tracy Marrow explains how he enacts this responsibility by introducing Hip Hop at the outset of the course to show students that they are going to discuss topics, issues, and subject matter that they are already familiar with. Like Professor Mathers III, Tracy acknowledges,

> However, the fact is, not every student coming into the class knows that much about hip hop, right? Not every student is an expert in it. I'm not an expert, but it's one way to bring them in and try to connect to them

Professor Marrow highlights the common ground that both instructors and students share: both are engaged in a process of learning that aims to develop students' *linguistic capital* insofar as it is rooted in the co-construction of knowledge and meaning-making. Tracy describes that while neither he nor the students are "experts" in Hip Hop, they both bring with them a set of linguistic experiences and knowledges to be exchanged in ways that support students' academic goals in

two ways: a). by retaining students in the class; b) working toward the completion of course learning outcomes.

Erik Schrody. Erik describes his perception of sense of belonging as a campus-wide responsibility to create a "welcoming and inclusive space within which…[students] are going to grow and flourish." Additionally, Erik observes that "when it comes to the actual work of creating that environment, that responsibility largely falls upon the teachers and the classes we create." Similar to Bruce and Tracy, Erik uses HHBE to "create some kind of bridge…between the things that they come to us already caring about and our student learning outcomes and we show them that belongs here as well."

Erik describes how he employs a set of artists in his curriculum that admittedly reflect the interests he grew up with in the 1990s, like Tupac, Public Enemy, and Ice Cube. Although not explicit, he describes feeling as though his use of HHBE does help students feel more connected with their home and academic communities. For instance, Erik recalls students being highly motivated and engaged in a class discussion on a lesson analyzing Ice Cube's "It Was A Good Day." He describes how "We examined what [students] could tell about the narrator's life from the types of pleasures he was pursuing…based on the violence that he has seen and that we see referred to in the song." Additionally, Erik describes how he gives students a sense of ownership of their learning as a way to bridge what they care about with the course texts that he preselects. He explains, "I choose readings to get us started, right? About halfway through the semester, students get to contribute and select texts of their own." Erik describes this process as it begins with student presentations where they nominate a potential text; next they vote as a class on which texts to read for the second half of the semester. Many of the texts students vote on come from Hip Hop culture (either rap texts, short articles, or essays), but it depends on the class. Like

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Tracy, whose approach to using HHBE is rooted in the co-construction of knowledge and meaning making, Erik describes in his approach to cultivating a sense of belonging that he aims to construct a "discourse community" where instructors give students the power to choose things that they want to discuss and the subjects they perceive as worthy of academic discussion. In this way, he explains they may learn to apply different critical lenses and learn to talk about texts, especially rap, literature, poetry, film, etc…differently. For Erik, bridging the gap by using Hip Hop texts in the course curriculum creates the pre-conditions to foster students' sense of belonging in a classroom where their voices, their interests, and their ways of knowing matter.

Validates Students' Ways of Knowing

Figure 2

Layer 1-Individual level
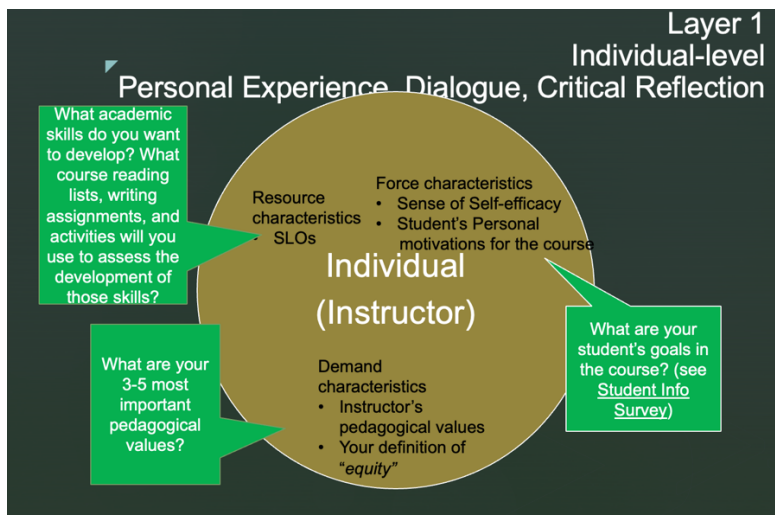
The study finds in relationship to RQ-1 that community college instructors implemented HHBE across the first layer of the AKOS schema to enhance and affirm their *academic self-perception* by intentionally creating opportunities for students to co-construct the course curriculum, which provided a sense of community where students felt like they mattered and belonged. Figure 2 demonstrates a model that synthesizes how instructors described experiences

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in the classroom that enhanced and developed students' *linguistic capital* in *ciphers* by working

together to co-construct a curriculum that was designed to promote collaborative exchange. As

demonstrated by the use of inclusive course reading lists, writing assignments, and "seminar

presentations"/class discussions, this exchange was often grounded in personal experience,

dialogue, and critical reflection.

Bruce, Tracy, and Carl identified that their use of HHBE bridges the gap between

students' home and academic communities by creating opportunities in the composition

classroom to validate students' ways of knowing, everyday modes of communication, and

authors/narratives that emerge from their home communities.

Bruce Mathers III. During the interview, Bruce shared the first moment when he gave

himself a chance to experience rap music as an adult and where he first discovered what Tara J.

Yosso (2005) refers to as the *linguistic capital*—ways of knowing, modes of communication,

and narratives—embedded below the surface of rap songs. He recalls,

> When I teach Hip Hop I often make the joke like 'Yeah, I am White as wonderbread. There is nigh-whiter-guy that you're gonna see.' Then I go into sharing my story of how I got into Hip Hop. Growing up, Hip Hop culture was taboo. And the reason it was taboo is because they use 'dirty words' in their lyrics. My mom was teaching me how to recite Martin Luther King's speeches since I was born. She grew up in the 60s and she was very involved in the civil rights movement. But when it came to rap music and Hip Hop culture, it was like, Yeah, but they say bad words. And they talk about drugs and they talk about sex and so we don't really do that...But then once I got married, when I was like, great. I'm an adult now. I can listen to whatever I want...What was interesting to me was the year Eminem came out with his album Rehab, he had the song with Rihanna "Love the Way You Lie"...And that's when I discovered 'I'm kind of curious about this hip hop thing.'...I curated my Hip Hop experience, sort of from the internet...You know, and I was like, okay, so what is this Wu-Tang Clan? And what do they have out? And okay, so, so, so what are the different genres Alright, so what does "flow" mean? What is "sampling"...And so I realized, 'Oh, now that I'm not getting hung up on the fact that they're saying, words that my mom would cringe at. I can start appreciating what it is they're saying. What it is, they are saying'. Not just the songs, that have social messages

His comments reveal that after listening and connecting with certain artists, Bruce grew curious

and curated a learning experience that led him to discover more Hip Hop artists, texts, practices,

and metaphors. In this way, Bruce's discovery of the embedded *linguistic capital* in Hip Hop

texts suggest that various rhetorical strategies employed by artists "allow one to address various

social contexts and discourse communities" as Hip Hop composition scholar David Green (2017)

explains. Bruce goes on to further explain that,

> I think they are interested in Hip Hop. I think it's validating because the thing is, a lot of students and teachers were like my mom who was afraid of Hip Hop because it used bad words. I think seeing that Hip Hop is something that's worthy of discussion and worthy of being taken seriously, that's validating. It's important to them

> In this way, Bruce's described use of Hip Hop texts is especially validating for students.

His use of Hip Hop in the classroom reveals two important insights: primarily, it represents a

significant mode through which students communicate with each other, their community, and

their culture using poetry and music; additionally, it provides instructors a model for how to

integrate students' *linguistic capital*—the intellectual and social skills attained through

communication experiences in more than one language and/or style (Yosso, 2005). As Hailey

from Bruce's class affirms,

> So our instructor did this before we even started his class last year, when you had like an introduction, and you did this thing where we go through songs instead of...and we have certain poems or stories, but when you look through songs, and we find we usually include the English lesson into a rap song, that's rare for us to learn in school. Like I remember the one from Kendrick Lamar. It wasn't even his song. It was his story post on Instagram. And I remember connecting that to a Nipsey Hussle quote. And I just, I knew from there, like, it was like, Okay, I think I'm gonna learn, I think I'm going to really like this class... But yeah, it's just unique. It's something that you could talk about, like, oh, there is what I'm learning in my English class. And it's something like other people are intrigued by if they seem to connect, or if they listen to hip hop.

> Hailey's response describes the effect Bruce's approach to composition pedagogy has on

her learning experience; when she feels like her cultural ways of knowing are validated and that

they belong in the classroom discourse, it encourages her to *flow*[4] on what she discussed within

the classroom in various social contexts and discourse communities, including her home

community.

Tracy Marrow. Tracy's approach to HHBE also seeks to validate students' lived

experiences. Moreover, he acknowledges the potential contributions they bring with them in the

form of what can be characterized as *linguistic capital* (Yosso, 2005). Tracy described using rap

texts to 'connect the word and the world' (Freire, 2014). For instance, Tracy shared how he

embedded elements of Hip Hop in their lesson plan on the ancient Greek rhetorical concept of

kairos. Tracy recalled creating a kind of healing circle after the murder of rapper Ermias "Nipsey

Hussle" Ashgedom. to address the sense of tragedy and loss that students experienced;

subsequently, he demonstrated the concept of "the right moment" by connecting insights and

reflections that students shared to process their feelings on the tragedy to a lesson on *kairos*. He

elaborates,

> …the biggest example, actually comes from when a student made a suggestion…right
> when Nipsey Hussle died. They told me what was going on and we were just sort of
> sitting and talking about it for a minute before regular class started. I was trying to make
> sure that people knew that it's okay to take a break from, you know, subjects and verbs,
> etc. And I said, "Well, why don't we write a little bit about it?" So we listened to one of
> the songs…and it turned into the next writing project, which was all about art and time
> and place. So I was able to introduce the rhetorical concept of *kairos*. We started with the
> Nipsey Hussle song…[and] we read some articles about his death. Especially at the
> beginning, there was a lot of uncertainty about who did it. That allowed the class to
> discover the dominant narrative and analyze how his death is impacted by time and
> place—what's going on in the world—that makes us interpret this event in a certain way.
> And so that became a great writing assignment.

Marrow described a learning scenario in which he worked with students to draw on "real world"

events to craft a lesson on "real world" literacy skills and rhetorical strategies (Yosso, 2005). In

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[4] Composition theorist David Green defines the Hip Hop metaphor "flow" as a resource for English studies
and rap music "that demonstrates linguistic and symbol-making competence that allows one to address
various social contexts and discourse communities" (Green, 2017, p. 175).

this scenario, Tracy demonstrates how he used Hip Hop and challenged current-traditional teaching and learning approaches as students adopted the responsibility of taking control of their learning by teaching Tracy about a major figure in Hip Hop culture, his philosophy, his life, and his legacy. Despite shifting the focus of the planned prepared lesson away from "subject and verbs," students were not distracted or disengaged from learning. Instead, they were more engaged and even seemed to be described as taking a bit of ownership. Moreover, in co-constructing the lesson they were about to turn this critical dialogue into the "next writing project, which was all about art, time, and place." Tracy introduced a new rhetorical concept of "Kairos" alongside a Nipsey Hussle dialogue. Tracy further asserts that,

> The experiences [students] had in life, the cultures [students] come from, the art that [students] consume, it's not trivial, and [students] shouldn't accept that, people treating it that way…it gives some students a really good sense of ownership of the language used or other the rhetorical strategies used in things like hip hop.

Tracy's insights reveal, why a diverse set of authors who represent communities that students identify with matters: it validates students' experiences and provides a sense of ownership over both language and rhetorical strategies from Hip Hop that they may already feel. These strategies are also critical to develop the skills required to engage with the increasing rigor of academic concepts highlighted in course learning outcomes. In this way, Tracy's observations also suggest an important aspect of students taking ownership of their learning requires instructors to intentionally recognize, embrace, and integrate aspects of students' *linguistic capital*, such as key authors and narratives, into the course curriculum.

Carl Ryder. Carl Ryder describes that he seeks to use HHBE in the classroom to validate students' ways of knowing and lived experiences. He recalls an experience of feeling validated during a professional development training where the facilitator used Hip Hop artists to illustrate the literary concept of *allusion* while working at a local Los Angeles County high school. This

experience, he recounted, was one of the first moments he felt like he had the ability and skills to teach his students something valuable, like he would be successful, and like he had something to offer students beyond what they would traditionally be exposed to in other English courses. He observed that the use of Hip Hop during the professional development day was especially powerful for him as an instructor who values linguistic diversity.

> I think it's validation. I remember my first year of teaching at South PE High School [pseudonym] in Long Island School District. Like typical of English departments, we had a professional development day. They invited a gentleman to come in to talk about writing in a classroom. South PE High School largely taught students who were either Asian and Latino. Some of the Asian students were first-generation Vietnamese, first-generation Chinese, and other English language-learners. We knew as a department there were going to be some challenges about English language access in some of the literature, and then also communicating in a way through traditional forms of writing. So they invited, really good guy that I'm sure you're familiar with and have heard named Quincy Troupe. And Quincy Troupe comes through, and he's teaching writing to this English department. I'm the one Black guy in the department. The rest of the teachers are all white, almost all white, and women, all white women, all of them. And he puts on a Das EFX song. He puts on Das EFX, he puts on "They Want EFX," to talk about literary allusion because that song is full of all of the old cartoons nursery rhymes! Of course, after he plays it, he's asks, "I'd like to discuss this. So, what allusions did you hear?" And I'm just sitting there smiling ear to ear like a Cheshire cat saying again. This is validation

Carl's insights illustrate how important it is for instructors and students alike to engage with new approaches like HHBE, especially as it pertains to instruction. He explains what that does for students from high school to college: "It lets them know that they can see themselves in the curriculum, in a way that's been argued about through multicultural education for decades." More importantly, he observes that instead of doing it just to make everybody feel good, the value for students is doing it within a classroom discourse community like UMOJA where the instructors and students identify with each other in culturally, socially, and ethnically affirming ways.

Students from Carl's class affirm and extend his observations on validation. For example, when asked if their instructor's use of Hip Hop makes them feel more connected to the instructor, one student, Lisa Williamson (pseudonym), affirmed that "…we can relate to the things that we

go through just by the choices of music that he selects." Another of her classmates, David

Reeves Jr. (pseudonym), added that they identified with an instructor who uses Hip Hop, but that

they identified more with an instructor who also shared a common racial/ethnic identity, which

made him feel like he belonged. David explained, "I don't feel like an outcast. Versus like other

teachers, I feel like they can't relate. And I'm not trying to throw race into the mix but it's like,

Black student-Black teacher..." Another classmate, Norman Rogers (pseudonym), agreed,

"Kindred minds think alike." Students across the focus group nodded in agreement, as Norman

further explained, "It's like different you know, teachers from a different race have different

ways how they treat you, you know?"

Findings from students' responses also suggest that Carl's use of Hip Hop validated

students' ways of knowing, while it also allowed them to build a sense of cultural identity and

connectedness to their classroom and home community. In one instance where students were

asked if there was a specific time when the instructor's use of Hip Hop made them feel as though

they belong, Lisa described that,

> I felt like our instructor gives us the hip hop thing the sheets whatever it was to really
> show how we express ourselves. I felt like everything we go through in this class, like,
> the more we come to this class, and how our instructor always compared it to us, in our
> surroundings, in our environment, even back then our ancestors were to do it. I feel like it
> helps us know who we are deep down inside, and be more aware of ourselves and evolve

Another student, William Drayton Jr. (pseudonym), also confirmed that Carl's use of Hip Hop

validated students' ways of knowing, as it also allowed them to connect the journey of self-

discovery that Hip Hop authors employ in songs to the journey of developing maturity that

others go through in their home community.

> Everyone has a time and place. Always gotta be mature and eventually ...Hip Hop and the
> songs that they make it all tunes into what they go through and what we go through as
> one community

Students describe experiencing cultural connectedness with Hip Hop songs as they bring in their sense of contextual awareness, their process of developing maturity, and their sense of what Carl later refers to as the "bildungsroman" or the formation of character for Hip Hop authors. This sense of connectedness is also described as being tied to a feeling that Professor Ryder's classroom is a safe space, according to William who reveals that,

> I was gonna say, well kind of like adding on to what everybody else said. It's like, a safe, safe space, feel me? Like I can be open and honest. But like in other classes in the past, teacher would call on me and I was just like, "call on the next person." And then it be them teachers that know…like, back in my history class in High School, when we covered the Civil Rights unit, calling on every black person in class, and I'm right in front of him… So it's like, no one in here, it don't feel like that. I say something, maybe the next person might add on to it or agree with it. I don't feel nervous to speak up. That's why I'm saying it's a safe space

In this way, students from Professor Ryder's composition course in the UMOJA learning community described that his use of Hip Hop in the classroom allowed them to experience a sense of connectedness with their classroom and home community. Moreover, based on student responses, Ryder's use of Hip Hop seems to validate students' what Yosso (2005) considers *linguistic capital*—students' ways of knowing, students' modes of communication, and authors/narratives from their home communities—as a feature of both "real world" academic lessons and communities and "real world" events and issues from students' home communities.

Representation throughout Course Curriculum

Figure 3

Layer 2- Microsystem- Direct Environment of the Classroom
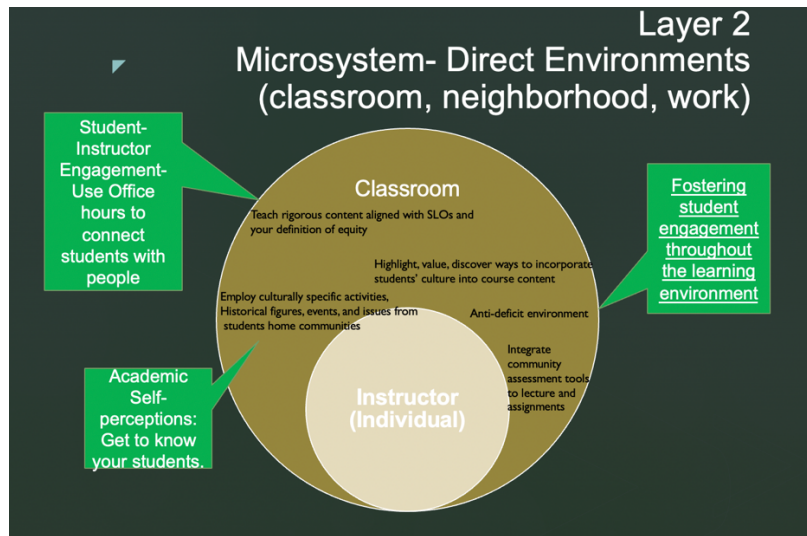
Community college instructors who have been influenced by Hip Hop culture implemented the second layer of the AKOS schema—*sense of belonging*—by creating a classroom community that validated and sustained students' cultural identities and *linguistic capital* throughout the course curriculum. Figure 3 synthesizes the general features reported by faculty participants and expressed as important to validating students' ways of knowing and representing students' cultural identities throughout the course curriculum. Specifically, this study suggests that instructors' use of HHBE empowers the development of students' *academic knowledge of self* particularly (a) students' sense of belonging, (a$_1$) student-instructor engagement, and (b) academic self-perception.

Both Bruce and Carl shared insights that reveal how they aim to bridge the gap between students' home and academic communities by creating inclusive course reading lists and interdisciplinary curriculum that brings Hip Hop artists and narratives into the course curriculum. They describe two different approaches, both of which speak to students' ways of knowing, students' everyday modes of communication, and authors/narratives that are representative of students' home communities.

Bruce Mathers III. Professor Mathers III revealed that he intentionally strived to have a diverse reading list across freshman composition, advanced argument, and critical thinking, as well as his literature courses, where he devoted a whole curriculum to literature that explores the social, economic, and historical milieu of issues/topics that are uniquely relevant to the cultural identity of California; this is also where he introduces a unit that explores rapper Kendrick Lamar's mainstream debut album *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (GKMC). He explained the larger context and highlighted the specific reason that motivated him to make his course text list more inclusive as he explained,

> We've got about an 8% Black student population, but the thing is, bringing in Black artists and black authors is important. I think that having a diverse reading list is important. But being willing to say, 'Oh, okay, so this person who looks like you, is worth studying and is worth paying attention to, and it's worth taking seriously'. It's not necessarily always a clear or tangible impact immediately. But I think that is important.

Bruce revealed that his motivation for creating inclusive course texts emerged from his observation of so few black students on campus, relative to other student populations. Additionally, he shares that it comes from his desire to see students represented in equitable ways. Most importantly, his response reflects a deep sense of passion for student learning, instructor authenticity, respect for students, and the culture they bring along into the classroom. As he explains,

> And I intentionally strive to have a diverse reading list. You know, for all of the reasons why you should and I hope that the way that I do it and I do worry about this, I get a little bit of impostor syndrome, because I am the professorial equivalent of 'wonderbread' I never want it to sound like the meme of the old guy who says, 'Hello, fellow kids, what are the haps'. I hope it comes off as that I'm genuinely interested. And that I actually do really appreciate it.

Students in his freshman composition course not only exchanged and shared music, but they also shared experiences that revealed multiple perspectives on social issues like crime and poverty across predominantly black and working-class communities, childhood exposure to gang

violence, and drug activity. Hailey, a student in Mather's course, recalls one such class

discussion where they analyzed Kendrick Lamar's *good kid, m.A.A.d city*,

> I think I went to LA not too long afterward. It was just an interesting way of looking intentionally at different places that maybe have reputations for more violence or more like drug activity, things like that. And again, more fully appreciate that. Those are people who are trying to survive and they're trying to survive with what they've been equipped with, and what society has assigned them to in a lot of ways as well, which I think was also another theme that you see in the Kendrick Lamar album as well.

Additionally, Hailey described two specific moments in class where she felt a kind of ownership

and empowerment with her instructor's use of Hip Hop. One was when Bruce provided

annotations and contextual notes during his Kendrick Lamar unit to his album entitled *good kid,*

m.A.A.d city. She recalls,

> So there's two times that really stood out to me. The first one was he actually annotated the lyrics for the whole album which I thought was both kind of comical because there was some definitely like, you don't expect these like formal definitions to otherwise sort of crude terms, but he did he annotated them and, and what was helpful about that was you know, when there's like differences, demographic differences, and there's just differences in lifestyles, you know, and I've definitely have done this to where it's just you get distracted by the more apparent things that are different right? And so, being able to see these annotations actually helped me connect not just to the lyrics, but to the stories and the real-life things that were happening behind them and underneath all of them. Helped me to see Kendrick Lamar struggle with poverty and with the struggle of just trying to survive in California.

Another was during one of her classmates' presentations on the same album. Hailey recalls

feeling connected to both lessons as she recalls the discussion on how structural forces and social

conditions of poverty shape varying social outcomes, which both her classmates and Kendrick

Lamar recount. She explains,

> There was one student that picked the Kendrick Lamar album for his presentation at the end of the semester that [Bruce] was talking about. His presentation was focused on the housing issues of California and he was using Compton as an example. I don't remember the exact numbers but it was something to the effect of how the cost of an average one bedroom apartment in Compton is over $1800…[and] was extremely disproportionate to what the average yearly income was, which was like $22,000 a year…that was an interesting connection, because we were able to connect to the real life themes, not the artistic expressions, not the poetic expressions of them, but the actual content that

inspires those expressions... Also, [we were] able to connect with the reasons behind the poetry, the reasons behind the lyrics. And [we were] be able to relate and resonate with the lyrics themselves and their expressions of those things. Everything just seemed a lot more accessible from those two discussions…But I would say what has been added to it is understanding that the cause of a lot of things are again society assigned…society has created these conditions where the people within them don't necessarily want to stay in those situations...There were a few people in my class I remember who liked that album already. They were already fans of Kendrick Lamar. And I do remember in our discussions in our class that they expressed a deeper appreciation for the album because… now they understood the context of everything.

Hailey's observations revealed an important insight into Bruce's approach to drawing on authors that represent students' home communities in his curriculum. Hailey's insights describe how his use of Hip Hop texts gave her a sense of ownership that led to greater understanding about the ways in which her classmates, the author, and even herself have experienced inequities that emerged from social and structural forces. That is, as she explains, the sociological analysis of Kendrick Lamar's *good kid, m.A.A.d* expanded and broadened her understanding of the larger context that shaped Kendrick's message and allowed her to see the reasons why he weaved certain themes throughout the album: how poverty creates uneven outcomes that disproportionately affect the lives of Black, Brown, and poor folks and prevents communities from gaining access to resources they need to live, especially housing.

Carl Ryder. Professor Ryder, like Bruce, takes an interdisciplinary approach to creating inclusive course reading lists that brings Hip Hop into the course curriculum. He describes that his approach begins with the foundation of basic concepts and skills for freshman composition. Ryder describes how he embeds elements of Hip Hop into the curriculum, specifically through course texts, to gain a greater understanding of those core basic concepts and skills even though Hip Hop was not native to Composition. One of the things about Hip Hop he finds intriguing is that it pulls from so many different traditions. And it also uses history as a weapon to teach and understand modern-day realities. He remarks, "I think there is a song, a piece of art, a graffiti

piece, some type of component of Hip Hop that connects to all of those different concepts of composition and the skill of writing that can be applied." Ryder describes his main goal is to develop the critical thinking skill of contextual awareness by having students excavate historical and cultural references in Hip Hop songs when describing how he uses songs/texts to bridge the gap between students' home and academic communities. He explains,

> Modern-day Hip Hop culture ties back to those moments where they're referenced and is able to draw those parallels between things that are being said today and why they're so important. Especially in the context of Black Lives Matter and the legacy of the struggle for Black self-determination. Hip Hop offers a window through lyrics into the narratives and experiences of black leaders many of whose voices have been left in the past. Instead of learning about leaders like Ella Baker, Malcolm X, Gabriel Prosser and so on…we are only taught about King's Dream speech every year. Hip Hop offers lyrical content to connect to them to the past and being able to find the bridge between the two and then also between students themselves. That's empowering. When you see the connection between your history and your present.

Ryder describes how his curriculum offers students to consider how voices from the civil rights movement might function as counternarratives to hegemonic schooling. Putting the ideas, messages, and strategies for self-determination of Black authors and historical figures that lead the movement for full inclusion into American society in conversation with Hip Hop authors is especially noteworthy. Ryder observes that there exists a connection shared by both group of authors in that they spring from the common well of the Black rhetorical tradition. Ryder emphasizes that Hip Hop culture itself is tied to the legacy of struggle and Black leadership that has left behind a wealth of lived experiences in the form of narratives, lyrics, and speeches. Additionally, he describes how Hip Hop texts provide a window into the past where authors provided both cultural affirmation and a counter-hegemonic visions of Black self-determination that is not only relevant but vital and necessary to the current lived experience that youth are faced with today. Ryder further explains,

> I think there's a way of using the backgrounds and the Bildungsroman of a lot of our hip hop artists, their formation of character, to understand how people learn in different ways

and also to give value and respect to it. And I think the reason why this is important for me is that I feel like it's important not to always privilege certain types of education because it's given the stamp of approval by the powers that be. But we have to privilege knowledge and information and wisdom because it's valuable in the development of the human condition. And I think that's where the opportunity is with hip hop music, to help us all kind of humble ourselves a little bit more. It's not to say that one is better than the other, but to value all of it, no matter what shape and form it comes in.

Students from Carl's class reported feeling a sense of ownership and representation within the curriculum because he included them to pick and share Hip Hop texts. When asked to recall a specific time when they felt recognized and that their voices were being represented during class, one student named Keith Shocklee (pseudonym) described, "when he let us pick our own type of music we like. I like to share it out with other people." Keith, a recent high school graduate, grew up between Los Angeles and Long Beach and is the first in his family to attend college. He described that his goal in Freshman Composition is to "get better at public speaking around folks, so when [he] get to the NFL, [he] can speak fluently." He recalled being exposed to Hip Hop in other classes throughout high school but acknowledges that Professor Ryder is different. Keith elaborated further and explained how he felt his interests were represented more in Professor Ryder's class than in other courses, "because with other teachers, they will want you to pick like a certain type of genre of music for them…not the type of music we listen to." This comment seemed to indicate a general consensus among students who were present in the focus group as the majority of participants nodded in agreement with Keith's comments. His observations highlighted three implied needs that seemed important to students in their attempt to co-construct course curriculum: a). the need for students to have freedom of choice when selecting songs/texts, b). the need to engage in self-reflection, and c). the need to share out. These foundational needs are valuable to student sense of ownership and representation within their learning as he observes, "And if we try to do that we wouldn't know what type of music we'll like." Keith's observation speaks to a kind of self-awareness that is first

developed through critical reflection and enhanced through the exchange of ideas and perspectives with others in the classroom discourse community.

Students also shared that Carl's use of HHBE within the classroom encouraged them to recognize the common struggles they share within and across racial/ethnic groups. Keith Shocklee and Khari Wynn (pseudonym) from Carl's class agreed that the use of Hip Hop authors who share similar racial/ethnic backgrounds as they do helped to enhanced their worldview to be more inclusive of those who experience similar social issues, even if they are not Black. Keith explains,

> Because everybody in here, well not everybody, but we're all black. Most of us. But I mean, a lot of people that are not black experience the same thing that black people are experiencing. So like other colored people, and if they live in the same environment it's them too.

Khari further explains that,

> Well culturally, that goes to, I guess, my black side…for example, I could remember when we heard that Tupac song "Me Against the World" our instructor tied that into what it's like being a black man in America? Oh, well, not everywhere. But you know, in these countries where we're all diverse, and what we go through, and that's common amongst people our age and our culture, in our community.

Overall, The *Cipher As A Vestibule* Between Academic Structures And Students' Home Community suggests that students identify with the lived experiences of rap artists as they are presented by instructors. Bruce, Tracy, and Erik shared that students felt they belonged most when faculty curated opportunities for students to participate in the co-construction of course curriculum and when they connected with instructors who genuinely care. Bruce, Tracy, and Erik believe that students feel validated when instructors at least featured, if not centered, curriculum around their everyday interests and ways of knowing connected to their home communities.

Challenging Current-traditional Teaching & Learning Approaches

Figure 4

Layer 3-Mesosystem: Students and communities connected in the classroom
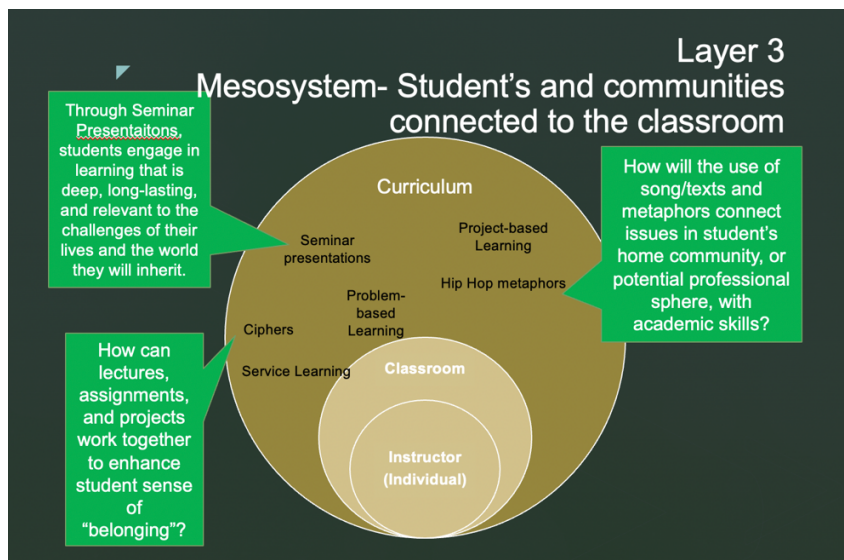
Situated across the second and third layer of the AKOS schema, one of the most consistent ways instructors shaped students' AKOS throughout the writing process was by *challenging current-traditional teaching perspectives and approaches*. Within the second layer, instructors in this study described how they (a) drew upon *linguistic capital* from students' home communities to teach traditional composition and rhetoric concepts, (b) that sought to include voices from the Hip Hop community that embody elements of *familial capital* to disrupt cultural deficit narratives that surround Black and Brown communities, and (c) that motivated their students toward their academic goals. Additionally, Figure 4 demonstrates the third layer in which instructors' use of HHBE throughout the curriculum intentionally tapped into students' sense of *familial capital* both within and beyond the classroom, as it evoked a sense of community and belonging and motivated them to work toward their educational goals—

academic persistence. A common thread throughout all of these is developing composition/writing skills emerged and is explored throughout each finding.

Additionally, student responses suggested that their instructor's use of HHBE (a) enhanced their willingness to seek help, (b) enhanced their connection with instructors, and (c) helped them to develop a range of skills associated with student success—(c_1)increased participation in class discussion, (c_2) comprehension of course concepts, (c_3) tendency to elaborate, (c_4) connection between experiences and writing tasks, (c_5) willingness to engage in research beyond the assignment. In these ways, student responses acknowledged how faculty used Hip Hop to develop composition/writing skills and to challenge current-traditional teaching and learning approaches.

Using Hip Hop Texts to Teach Composition/Rhetoric Concepts

Figure 4.5 shows which Hip Hop texts Erik, Bruce, and Tracy used in their courses to build specific composition skills. While Erik's responses describe his use of a Hip Hop metaphor to craft a pedagogical framework, Bruce and Tracy explain how they employ rap texts to exemplify composition skills, such as thesis statements and supporting details, juxtaposition, signification, and code meshing, and interpretation and analysis.

Table 2

Hip Hop Texts and Composition Skills

	Thesis Statements & Supporting Details	Exemplification	Signification	Allusion & Juxtaposition	Linguistic Power/Tone	Audience Reception	Content & Form	Storytelling	Academic Self-Perception	Knowledge of Self
Bruce Mathers III	"Today Was A Good Day" by Ice Cube	"Started From The Bottom" by Drake "Juicy" by Notorious B.I.G.								

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	"Changes" by Tupac	"This Is America" by Childish Gambino	"Express Yourself" by NWA "Change" by J. Cole "King Kunta" by Kendrick Lamar	"Express Yourself" by NWA	"Express Yourself" by NWA "Change" by J. Cole	"To Pimp A Butterfly" (Album) by Kendrick Lamar	"Mother I Sober" by Kendrick Lamar "Mirror" by Kendrick Lamar
Tracy Marrow	"Changes" by Tupac	"This Is America" by Childish Gambino	"Express Yourself" by NWA "Change" by J. Cole "King Kunta" by Kendrick Lamar	"Express Yourself" by NWA	"Express Yourself" by NWA "Change" by J. Cole	"To Pimp A Butterfly" (Album) by Kendrick Lamar	"Mother I Sober" by Kendrick Lamar "Mirror" by Kendrick Lamar
Erik Schrody						"Today Was A Good Day" by Ice Cube	"The Rose That Grew From Concrete" by Tupac (poem)/ Nikki Giovanni (audio poem)

Erik Schrody. Professor Schrody described how he deployed the use of a Hip Hop metaphor as a pedagogical framework to situate his approach to teaching and learning. Drawing on his book of poems, Erik got the from rapper/poet Tupac Shakur, which he referred to as "The Rose that Grew From Concrete." Erik describes that his use of the metaphor derived from being first exposed to it through the research of Jeff Duncan-Andrade. Erik first encountered the work of Duncan-Andrade in a professional development workshop that featured his journal article and lecture at Harvard entitled "A Note to Educators: Hope Required When Growing Roses from Concrete." In both the article and the lecture. Duncan-Andrade uses Tupac's titular book of poetry as a central metaphor to reimagine the current-traditional deficit framework used to explain poor academic performance associated especially with Black students from elementary through college, and students of color more generally. He recalls a peculiar fascination with Duncan-Andrade's use of Tupac's metaphor as it gave him a starting point to center Hip Hop in his course curriculum. Erik elaborates,

> One of the first things I did in terms of incorporating hip hop purposefully into the readings for the class was bring in the poem entitled "The Rose That Grew from

Concrete." And I also use, like, the audio recording of the Nikki Giovanni, like reading of it as a way to start to think about that metaphor with the students and really trying to understand it.

Erik describes how he exemplified Tupac's metaphor with activities/assessments like StrengthsQuest, extending the metaphor while using personal development self-assessments to help students develop a language to describe the sense of strengths, cultural knowledges, and cultural intuition (roses) they bring with them into the classroom. He recalled making parallels between students' strengths and the petals that helped to make them beautiful and bloom. Although he admitted that he may have tortured the metaphor through overuse, it exemplified a framework rooted in a Hip Hop metaphor to discuss *familial capital* that were relevant to students' academic journey. Figure 4.6 shows how Erik employed Tupac's metaphor in their final writing assignment/project where students demonstrated multiple composition modes in response to interrelated prompts. He explained that,

> The two different strategies [Duncan-Andrade] sometimes talked about back then, the idea of picking flowers or growing garden…taking the beautiful flower, out of that environment, the picking of the flower, versus staying in that environment that was hard to grow in, but making a garden for others…I started to think about doing the rose that grew from concrete imagery…I started asking [students], "how are you going to use your strengths? How are you going to use these things? Are you going to use it to pick flowers or grow gardens? Do you need to leave the place where you emerged from? Are you going to stay there and make it a better place?"

Table 3

Hip Hop Writing Assignments – Final Project ("The Rose That Grew from Concrete"*)*

Assignment	Requirements of Essay Sections				
Final Essay Prompt	Section One: "This Is the Concrete" *(Description)*	Section Two: "We Are the Roses" *(Interpretation)*	Section Three: "These Are [Our] Petals" 23 *(Definitions)*	Section Four: "These Are the Gardens Where We Belong" *(Cause-and-effect analysis)*	Section Five: "We Gotta Start Makin' Changes" *(Process analysis)*

Erik Schrody	"Well, *we* are the roses," Tupac Shakur reveals in the last stanza of his poem "The Rose That Grew From Concrete."…. For our Final Projects, we will employ all five of the types of thinking and writing we have discussed in English 72: *description*, *interpretation*, *definition*, *cause-and-effect analysis*, and *process analysis*. While we will craft *transitions* to connect them, we could conceive of this Final Project as an essay with five separate – yet related – sections. To structure these sections, respond to these specific prompts.	Because we want to connect this metaphor to our personal experiences, we will start this Final Project by writing a *description* of the "concrete" that we encountered in our respective environments while growing up – that is, the specific challenges and obstacles that threatened to prevent us from transforming into the "roses" by realizing our true potentials.	In the second section of our Final Project, we want to help our readers to understand the meaning of the metaphor of "the rose that grew from concrete." So we will write an *interpretation* of the metaphor as it's used in Shakur's poem "The Rose That Grew From Concrete."	Now that our readers understand that we are Shakur's "roses," we will use the information in Donald Clifton, Edward Anderson, and Laurie Schreiner's book *StrengthsQuest* to create **definitions** of our "petals" – that is, the talents that have helped us to grow.	When writing the fourth section of our Final Project, in which we will practice *cause-and-effect analysis*, we will all take our inspiration from Shakur's song "Changes." Attempting to apply cause-and-effect analysis to our own lives, we will tell our readers whether we want to transplant ourselves from the "concrete" to better environments ("pick flowers") or to transform our "concrete" into better environments where other "roses" can more easily grow ("grow gardens").	In the fifth section of our Final Project, we will practice *process analysis*…our focus will be on *how* we will make the changes that will enable us to either transform our respective "concretes" into better environments or transplant ourselves to better environments.

	Requirements	***Length and Source Requirements***	***Format Requirements***	***Citation***	
		Your essay should be at least 10 pages in length	The essay should be typed in a 12-point font – preferably Times New Roman – and double-spaced	All material needs to be cited according to Modern Language Association (MLA) guidelines Each sentence that contains a quote or an example should end with a parenthetical citation listing	

Erik raises several key observations that call students to consider the ways in which they might use their academic journey to develop their *familial capital* not only for the purposes of attaining their educational goals, but also how they might return to their and using the full breadth of their resources, including their *familial capital*, to enhance their home community; in other words, Erik posed the question to his students that asks: in developing their *familial capital* throughout their academic journey, will students make the return to enrich their home community after educational goal attainment? Or will students continue their journey of self-development beyond their home community?

  Bruce Mathers III. Professor Mathers described how he employed Ice Cube's "Today Was A Good Day" as a rap text to connect with students and exemplify a lesson on developing thesis statements and using supporting details to develop the core of an argument. As Bruce recalls,

> I started more intentionally bringing hip hop in to teach a couple of concepts in freshman composition that I still use. I got this one from a friend of mine. When I teach an essay, what is an essay? I use Ice Cube's song "Today Was a Good Day". And it's a little bit of a joke. But so it's part of it is I like to be kind of self-deprecating when I'm teaching, but it's joking in the sense that really, that whole song is he has a thesis: "It was a good day". And then the rest of the song is all these reasons why it was a good day. And so what I will do is I will play that song and I will introduce the concept of an essay that you know, you have a point and you are backing this up with it. And so Ice Cube's point is that it was a good day. And you know, he's got supporting points which are: "no barking from the dog" and "momma cooked the breakfast with no hog". It's silly enough that the students are kind of relaxed.

Bruce identifies a simple yet effective strategy to introduce two core fundamental techniques of writing. Thesis statements are generally defined across college composition courses as the combination of an arguable claim supported by key details, including logical reasons (Lundsford, 2020). Thesis statements in college-level writing form the core of an argument and can be

difficult for students to successfully develop an argument without one. As a defining feature of college writing, students need to demonstrate satisfactory application of it across multiple modes of writing both with and beyond composition courses throughout their academic journey.

Professor Mather's approach breaks away from traditional lessons on thesis statements in that he employs Ice Cube's "Today Was A Good Day" as the context for the lesson itself. Bruce explains, "I'm not sitting up there being like, 'Now class, this is what an essay is'. It's silly because it's not an essay it's a song. But it allows me to kind of contextualize it, and say 'Look, this is what you're doing.'" He further explains,

> So if you're writing an essay about climate change, you're going to be making a point about climate change and you're going to be bringing supporting points for it. Just like Ice Cube has a point about how it was a good day and all of the other supporting points for it. And really, that's in essence what an essay is, and the students usually have a good laugh with that conversation. But sometimes even sort of toward the end of the course. I hear the reference that, so I know that it's working.

In reframing the lesson on thesis statements, students learned to engage with Ice Cube's "Today Was A Good Day" as a text from which key composition skills are developed.

Bruce further describes how he draws on the larger online rap community to show students a variety of learning tools as he employs rappers Notorious BIG ("Biggie") and Drake in a lesson on exemplification. He shares that,

> I found a YouTube rap critic called the Rap Critic, and he did a comparison and contrast about two autobiographical songs "Started from the Bottom" by Drake, and "Juicy" by Biggie Smalls. And he makes this great comparison and contrast about how Drake is very repetitive. He doesn't give a whole lot of details about his life. He talks about how he's struggled. He's true to himself and he's never changed his story. But it didn't really provide any specific examples. Whereas "Juicy" is just specific example after specific example…of ways that he struggled… "Born Sinner, the opposite of a winner, remember when I used to eat sardines for dinner"…it's like, Whoa, I can picture that… "We used to fuss when the landlord dissed us, no heat, wonder why Christmas missed us…" Wow. That's something that I can relate to.

In exploring the differences between repetition and specificity (as represented by Drake and Biggie respectively), Bruce highlights how rap artists employ various modes of rhetorical

strategies even when they speak from similar rhetorical situations. In this way, he invites

students to consider their rhetorical purpose when writing as well. This sense of purpose is

important as he explains,

> So especially when they're applying to transfer and they're filling out their UC Personal
> Insight Questions, I will say, "Look, your reader, the person who works at UCLA is going
> to be going through 1000s of these. They're going to see 1000 students who say, 'I
> struggled, like just trust me, like I totally struggled. I started from the bottom.' But what
> you're going to want to try to do to make yourself stand out of the stack is try to give them
> a specific examples. You know, tell them how did you struggle? How did you learn? Tell
> them that Christmas missed us. And that's going to help them understand your story versus
> other people's stories. In my Freshman Composition course, those are kind of the two
> main lesson plans that I have kind of perfected over the years integrating hip hop and
> composition.

Bruce's observation highlights how his use of HHBE to teach and exemplify composition

concepts is directly tied to students' transfer goals. In this way the composition skills described

in his responses provide deeper insight into how his use of HHBE empower students to develop

navigational capital that can shape how they persist toward their academic goals.

    Tracy Marrow. Professor Marrow, similar to Professor Mathers and Professor Schrody,

draws upon a similar belief that the literary richness of both Tupac and Shakespeare should be

placed on the same academic shelf. One of the ways Tracy describes using HHBE,

> …is in terms of rhetorical choice and then examples, especially for key rhetorical
> concepts. I think that you know, Hip Hop has such a rich history of rhetoric that it's almost
> impossible to ignore. Even if you don't know that there's a connection there, when we
> discuss rhetorical devices in class, I often talk about signification or juxtaposition.

Tracy alludes to the rich history of rhetoric Hip Hop has with juxtaposition and signification and

draws on theorists and scholars to contextualize the intellectual and cultural conversations. Tracy

explains,

> I talk a lot about signification. I use a lot of Tupac for that. Because he signifies on
> current social issues, but he also signifies on things like Shakespeare. I think one of the
> big tools I use in the classroom is the beginning of his song "Changes", which so heavily
> signifies upon Hamlet's soliloquy "to be or not to be." So I talked to students about how
> art talks to itself. This idea of signification depends on the class, usually in my

composition class, I don't bring up Henry Louis Gates directly, but if I'm in my lit class, or my critical thinking class, I'll bring in Henry Lewis' essay entitled "The Signifying Monkey and the Language of Signifyin(g)..." directly, and then I'll use hip hop as some examples. And so that's one of the big things I do when I'm teaching rhetoric or analysis or styles

Tracy discusses his use of Hip Hop music videos to illustrate the concept of juxtaposition,

So when we talk about juxtaposition, we'll talk about you know, putting things together that seem not to match it first. But then create a space for you to think about things. That's a very common tool. There are also really interesting, implied ideas or connections and allusions that are really interesting to dig into when students are interested. When it comes to rhetorical strategies, that's kind of one of my purposes. When it comes to providing things to write about, I think a good example from a few years ago was, "This Is America" by Childish Gambino. This was a really good example to talk about juxtaposition especially when you combine it with the music video. There's so much in the video that shows things that seem disparate, such as the smile with the pain at the same time and the dancing after the gunshots, and the pause in the middle with the smoke. The visuals provide a template to discuss complicated topics, but it also exposes the complicated topics. It's not that students aren't fluent in them, it's that maybe the language they use to talk about what they see happening in the video is in a different area. And it's just as valid. The composition classroom provides an academic context, academic language, and rhetorical tools, like juxtaposition, to sort of merge it into a wider concept. So that's an example of a specific hip hop text that I use to teach juxtaposition.

Fig. 4.6.1 shows Tracy's use of a Synthesis writing assignment to assess students' application of juxtaposition by putting Childish Gambino's "This is America" in conversation with an op-ed and news article to persuade an undecided audience on an effective approach to the issue of gun-control.

Table 4

Hip Hop Writing Assignments –Synthesis

Synthesis	Thesis Statement	Supporting Details	Sources	Format
For composition 2, you will be writing a multi-source essay synthesizing the OP ED, "I used to think gun control was the answer. My research told me otherwise" by	Your thesis will focus on the "best strategy" plan, where you claim that one of the examples, a combination of the example, or	Use at least 2 quotes from each source to support your thesis and main points (6 total).	Make sure you identify each source's strengths and weakness (you may think a source has only strength or only	Approximately 5 pages long

Use MLA format |

Libresco, the article, "States With Tougher Restrictions on Gun Ownership Experience Fewer Domestic Violence Murders" by Shaw, and the music video, "This Is America" by Childish Gambino	an entirely different way of communicating is the best way to reach a skeptical audience.	Remember to practice synthesis by having the sources "talk" to each other (like we did in class)	weakness, but still comment on it)

Tracy describes his use of rap texts like NWA's "Express Yourself," J. Cole's "Change", and Kendrick Lamar's "King Kunta" to exemplify the composition practices of *code meshing*. He explains,

> I'll remind them of the lessons on rhetoric from earlier in the semester, like code meshing or rhetorical choices, and point out to students, "Hey, if you want to make a point, and you are feeling like standard or academic English just isn't cutting it think about what are some ways in a discourse that you already understand that you could interject yourself in a stronger way." And Hip Hop is an example of that, that I often use.

Tracy's reflection highlights his emphasis on public spheres and contextual awareness, two other concepts, which are more often explored in upper-level graduate courses on rhetorical theory. *Code meshing*, public spheres, and contextual awareness, Tracy explains, are important composition skills that he teaches in class to unpack issues of power dynamics and language in students' first Analysis writing assignment, as shown in Figure 4.6.2.

Table 5

Hip Hop Writing Assignments – Psychoanalysis

	Writing Assignment Prompts Psychoanalysis	Requirements for Writing Assignments		
		Thesis Statement	Supporting Details	Source Requirements
Tracy Marrow	For your first composition, you will be analyzing the one or more of the poems and one (or more) of the songs from the Poetry for Composition 1 page using the framework of Psychoanalysis (Chapter 2 in *Critical Theory Today*). Choose one or two poems and songs and then select a prompt from the list below: 1. **What feelings, ideas, or past experiences are being repressed by the speaker of the poem/song?** What parts of the poem represent the speaker's id, ego, or superego? What parts of	Your thesis will answer the question you choose directly. Your thesis will answer the question you choose directly.	Use extensive quotes from the poems/songs to support your claims (8-10 short quotes).	Use quotes from the textbook to define, explain, and support your connection between the poems/lyrics and the psychoanalytic principle(s) you choose (4-6 short quotes).

the poem/song represent the conscious or unconscious (Remember, the unconscious consists of repressed wounds, fears, unresolved conflicts, and guilty desires).

2. **What core issue might explain the speaker's point of view, mindset, or decisions?** Is there evidence of fear of abandonment, fear of betrayal, fear of intimacy, unstable sense of self, low self-esteem, or Oedipal fixation? What defense mechanisms does the speaker (or character) use to avoid facing these fears?

3. **How do the speakers or characters attempt to deal with their psychological problems, and are they successful?** Do the speaker or character face their fears directly, or do they use defense mechanisms? What parts of the poem represent anxiety, crisis, or active reversal?

4. **If the poem is the 'dream of the author,' what does their dream mean, psychologically?** What are the key dream symbols present in the poem, and what do they represent? How can dream distortion, primary and secondary revision, condensation, and other dream concepts explain what the speaker shares?

Tracy explained one of the most effective teaching activities he uses to develop critical thinking skills of interpretation and analysis among students are "seminar presentations." He describes using these presentations as an example of how he promotes reading engagement and critical dialogue in classroom discussions. Tracy describes,

> I think, one of the other things is that I do things called "seminar presentations." It's where we take the concepts we're discussing in class or the book we're discussing in class and then in groups, they create responses to those. Some of those responses are visual, for example, they'll make memes. But a lot of the responses are sort of creative and a lot of the creative responses people will create raps and it's really, really great. This is not something I assigned them that they have to do. But it's something I provide an example of to demonstrate various linguistic strategies. They can use those, they can signify on them, they can juxtapose them. Even though it doesn't always work perfectly, I think it's a really good learning experience. Even when it's the final product, I kind of don't care. It's like the final product might be awesome. It might be a little dry. There may be issues with it. But it's not that big of a deal because the goal is to go through the process and learn about how to not only interpret and analyze something but then use the elements from what you're analyzing to comment on it. This is how student learning becomes recursive. That's the goal. Anyway.

Like Erik and Bruce, Tracy connects with students by inviting them to bring in rap texts to contribute to the course curriculum. In this way, Tracy invites students to take some ownership of each other's learning, which he describes as "a cool bonding experience with the

class." By creating the opportunity for students to shape their learning in this way, Tracy

highlights yet another potential way instructors can diversify their course text and enhance

student agency. He describes,

> People share what they like and we get to dissect and discuss different ways that Hip Hop can be analyzed for rhetoric, it could be analyzed for anything. And so a lot of it comes down to student choice rather than a lesson that I provide. I give them some examples first, just to show them this is what you know what an example of something that might be interesting sounds like. Every now and then, a student will make a choice and give us a Lil Uzi Vert song, although it's not necessarily as rich right as some of the others. I try to provide a little guidance, but I don't necessarily require that they use my examples.

In short, Tracy explains that his use of HHBE empowers student agency in ways that encourage

students to persist throughout the course.

Employing Artists and Albums to Connect with Students

Carl and Bruce describe their use of key artists and album artwork to create an inviting

classroom space to connect with students.

Carl Ryder. Professor Ryder describes how he used artists' album artwork to connect

with students. While Carl described employing songs with a powerful political message and

insightful social commentary like KRS-ONE's "You Must Learn" and Public Enemy's "Rebel

Without A Pause", his connection with students using Hip Hop did not happen instantaneously.

He portrays the initial struggle of connecting with students as he recounts,

> One of the things I saw was that some of the reactions to using Hip Hop in the classroom weren't immediate, but they did start to materialize over time. In my classroom, not only did I use Hip Hop, but I also made sure that there were elements of Hip Hop throughout the classroom. Sometimes around my desk, if a new album came out, I'd put up a collage of album artwork on the projector. So, it's on the wall. And so, people who may be curious say, "Well, who's that?" Or "Yeah, I heard that album came out. How is it?" And then it strikes up a conversation. And maybe those who are not as vocal may see it and then go and explore it on their own, and then come back later and say, "I listened to a piece of that album. And I thought that was interesting." Or there might be another moment where...some music is playing in my classroom, and people wandering down the hallway stop and hear the music, and some of them like, "Man, who is that playing?" And then start listening to the lyrics…And before you know it, students start to come to me with music…And before you know it, we're all listening and analyzing and critiquing and

talking about the art form, the information that's embedded in it…we all walk away much stronger afterward.

Carl describes a process of connecting with students that is slow and gradual, yet also organic. One of the most important features in Carl's description is his use of space in the classroom. By projecting album artwork in the composition classroom, Carl subtly transforms the traditional classroom space through the careful use of sound and image display. Carl's insights reveal that this subtle shift in the learning environment opens an invitation to dialogue with all students, even "those who are not that vocal," about topics that exist beyond the traditional curricular subject matter. Moreover, Carl's observations suggest that shifting the learning environment to connect with students can establish the foundations for personal connections, positive instructor-student relationships, and even a kind of trust that makes a classroom environment conducive for using Hip Hop texts to teach and exemplify composition concepts, such as critical interpretation, textual analysis, and critique of art forms. Bruce's approach demonstrates this more concretely.

Bruce Mathers III. Bruce's ability to use HHBE to teach composition skills is predicated on his ability to bridge the gap between students' home and academic communities and to connect with students, as described earlier. Similar to Carl, Bruce notes that neither the connection between his students and him nor between his students and Hip Hop was not established immediately. Instead, it occurred over time. Sometimes it took the whole semester. As Bruce describes,

However, I try to choose a variety of different topics that might connect to different people when it comes to Hip Hop. So for instance, I teach in my Intro to Literature course. I teach Kendrick Lamar's *good kid, m.A.A.d city*…one thing that's really cool is that when we get to Kendrick we go to chronological order so we get to Kendrick toward the end of the semester (see Table 5). There are some students who just have been hanging out in the course not quite really responding… [but when we get to Kendrick Lamar] they light up…because for some students this is the first time encountered something they're interested in... and for the students to be able to use Shakespeare and Kendrick Lamar in the same sentence like they belong to the same syllabus was a big deal. I personally think that they belong in the same syllabus.

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Bruce's comments reveal that at the core of using HHBE to teach composition skills, the instructor must establish and develop a connection between students' interest and more traditional composition/rhetoric elements. Figure 4.4, below, shows how Bruce used Hip Hop texts, like Kendrick Lamar's *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, to generate a persuasive argument assignment. This assignment offered several prompts for student to choose on a variety of topics that focused on issues relating to conflicting images of masculinity in popular culture, conflicting values between family and community, and the conflict between class identity and socioeconomic power in the neighborhood. In short, Bruce used timed writing tasks to assess students' persuasive writing skills focused on analyzing Hip Hop texts and topics pertaining to their home communities and issues they are intellectually curious about. For Bruce, this assignment demonstrates one of the main ways he engages students in writing tasks. Moreover, it exemplifies the ways in which he initiates the process of bringing Hip Hop into the academic conversation and gets to know his students.

Bruce describes that his use of HHBE to teach and exemplify composition concepts and to connect with students leads to increased engagement with specific assignments. He reflects,

It's usually the paper we write about in one version of the course. I have everybody write an essay about Kendrick, but then in another version of the course, where there's a research paper, I allow students to choose their topic. And that's the one where I've seen pay the most dividends is when students get to choose the topic.

He goes on to further explain the mode of writing being assessed, as displayed in Figure 4.7, and elaborates on the specific project,

Okay, so the specific mode that I do with that assignment where they choose their topic is a research paper because, in that particular one, it's an honors course. We've read texts throughout the semester. And the theme of that course is California. So, the assignment is, to pick a social issue facing California. Sort of define what the social issue is, and then apply the text to the question that asks basically 'What does California need to learn from this text?' That's kind of the structure of these assignments.

Table 6

Hip Hop Writing Assignments – Timed Textual Analysis

Unit/Assignment	Requirements for Timed Writing			
Course Theme: California Dreaming- Critical Thinking and Literature in the Golden State **Timed Writing #3: "Seem Like the Whole City Go Against Me" – Hip Hop and Comics**	**Thesis/Focus**	**Length/Source Requirements**	**Audience & Tone**	**Structure & Miscellaneous**
Bruce Mathers III	**Context:** While literature in literature classes is traditionally classified as poetry, drama, and fiction, these are hardly the boundaries of what makes a text worthy of study. The mix of music and poetry in Hip Hop, and the mixture of image and text in comics both provide for unique opportunities for study. For this reason, you will write an essay about Kendrick Lamar's *good kid m.A.A.d. city,* Fraction, Pulido, and Wu's *Hawkeye*, or both. 1. Many songs on the album make reference to what it means to be a man with Kendrick receiving many messages from many different angles giving him a conflicting picture of masculinity. Write an essay in which you explore the album's argument about what it means to be a man. 2. One of the most consistent themes in *good kid, m.A.A.d. city* is the influence of his family, friends, and community, whether that be positive or negative. In your essay, explore the album's argument about the influence of friends,	Make sure your thesis statement is a clear answer to the prompt, with a clear, arguable thesis. Here are some examples: *good kid m.A.A.d. city* argues that for good or bad, people, like Kendrick, are a product of the people who they interact with, as demonstrated by when he succumbs to peer pressure, or listens to his parents	Every student must include several quotes from the album/comic they are referencing to support their arguments. As Lamar's album is a musical piece, and Fraction/Pulido/Wu's comic is visual, make sure you reference at least one audio element (tone of voice, beat, sample, etc.) or visual (color, page composition, etc.) element in your analysis of the album or comic. Timed Writings have no minimum length requirement; most Timed Writings are 4-6 paragraphs total.	Your audience is the general academic audience. Imagine they are familiar with both texts, but not so much so that they won't need careful analysis of your examples. If you bring in an outside source, imagine your audience has never heard of it. Use of first-person words, such as "I," "me," or "my," is not the most appropriate for this essay. Focus on the class readings/outside sources and the authors' ideas. Avoid using the word "you" at all costs, as you do not know your audience personally.	I expect your essay to have a clear introduction and conclusion, along with several body paragraphs in between. Here's a sample outline: I. Introduction: get my reader's attention, give a bit of background on my topic, and state my thesis. II. Main point 1: State one supporting point for the thesis, provide an example or two from the album/comic(s), and explain the significance of the example(s). III. Main point 2: State another supporting point for the thesis, provide an example or two from the album/comic(s), and explain the significance of the example(s). IV. Main point 3 and/or 4 (optional): State another supporting point for the thesis, provide an example or two from the album/comic(s), and explain the significance of the example(s). V. Conclusion: wrap up my main points, restate my thesis,

family and/or community.	and show my reader "so what?"
3. Kendrick sings, "All my life I want money and power." In many ways, the m.A.A.d. city he describes revolves around money, or the lack thereof. Write an essay in which you explore the album's argument about socioeconomics.	

His ability to connect with students and to bring out the topics that matter to them during class activities was effective at empowering students to persist throughout the course.

Bruce's insights overall suggest that instructors play a much more significant role than expected in shaping students' persistence, specifically when it comes to engaging with specific assignments. Cultivating positive relationships, while they do not guarantee successful course completion, seems to increase the likelihood of long-term student success outcomes (Amerstorfer & Von Münster-Kistner, 2021). This could be due at least in part to instructor-student trust and personal connections.

Cultivating Persistence Among Students

Bruce and Tracy shared from the faculty perspective how their use of Hip Hop helped to cultivate elements of persistence among students. Persistence refers to a set of actions and engagement taken primarily by students to continue toward their educational goals (Wood, 2012). Based on student and faculty responses, there are several key elements that are rooted in affective perceptions of students' classroom experiences, which shape students' persistence in the classroom. They include (a) directing attention toward engagement with assignments, (b) interactions with faculty in educationally meaningful ways, and (c) cultivating a sense of student agency.

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Bruce Mathers III. Bruce describes how he uses HHBE through artist Kendrick Lamar in a specific assignment for his honors freshman composition course by introducing students to the process of developing arguments, supporting their position on social issues with evidence, and engaging with primary and secondary sources. He explains that,

> Particularly how I use it, it's more so on the specific assignment…it tends to be a specific assignment. It's usually the paper we write about in one version of the course. I have everybody write an essay about Kendrick, but then in another version of the course, where there's a research paper, I allow students to choose their topic. And that's the one where I've seen pay the most dividends is when students get to choose the topic.

Bruce's observation suggests that his use of HHBE in course assignments enhances student engagement with assignments by using Kendrick Lamar's album to examine social structural issues that persist historically in California. This is supported by Hailey, one of Bruce's students from this course, who observes that Bruce's use of Hip Hop texts like Kendrick's *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (GKMC) creates opportunities for thinking beyond the 'taboo perceptions, understanding our own situation, understanding our own cultural identity as a Californian.' She further explained that Bruce 'uses this album to reflect more critically the places where we grew up and to think about those areas, more critically.' Moreover, she explained that it helped to motivate her to engage in research beyond the writing task,

> I would say that it was inspirational in the research, part of writing, where I'm a pretty inquisitive person and so having studied that specific album, it directed me to my online library at my school, more than a couple of times. I see this theme and it's like 'Let's learn more about this.' When [my] classmate gave his presentation about the different costs within Compton and the average income, I definitely looked it up and it's something that has been on my mind actually since then…In a way, it inspires research, it has definitely propelled my writing because it helped me consider other areas of research that…I might not have encountered.

Hailey observes that Bruce's use of GKMC inspired her to be more engaged in writing tasks. Particularly of note is that Hailey was also inspired by one of her classmates' presentations on GKMC to engage in research beyond the assignment. In this way, the discourse community

created particularly around Hip Hop texts seems to generate motivation that inspires activity and

engagement in the form of engaging with the assignment and engaging with outside sources

among students to continue toward their academic goals.

Tracy Marrow. Tracy describes how he intentionally creates a classroom environment

where students exercise agency and engage in educationally meaningful interactions with faculty

to cultivate persistence. Professor Marrow describes how he cultivates a classroom environment

where students' choices help to shape the curriculum and provide a sense of ownership, as he

explains,

> I think another level, when it comes to a student's self-academic image in the classroom
> is how much agency they have in the class. How much of the curriculum do they get to
> choose? How much of it do they get to influence? How much does their opinion matter
> when it comes to what we're doing today? How much direct control do they have over
> their grade or over what we discuss in class? And so part of that is a negotiation. It's like,
> 'Hey, I'm a teacher. I have these goals in mind. And you're a student you have these goals
> and let's try to make sure we can find where those have common ground'. I think it all
> works better when they end up taking some ownership of the class. What I'm getting at
> here is a sort of flattened classroom authority structure. We'd have a structure where, you
> know, I come in and My main goal is just to give some advice, just to facilitate if there's a
> pause and conversate, whatever it is, and then have the students be the most active part of
> the course.

Professor Marrow's observations regarding student persistence resonate with earlier points

faculty raised regarding validating students' lived experiences and representing student ways of

knowing throughout the course curriculum. Marrow's insight suggests that student persistence,

like validation, requires that instructors focus on centering student voices in ways that show

students they matter and belong in the curriculum. Student persistence calls on instructors to

create classroom conditions and to develop assignments that bring students' academic and

cultural identities into conversation with academic texts. Figure 4.6.3, below, features an

example where Tracy weaves the conversation between academic and cultural identities into the

assignment as it encourages students to engage in *code meshing* between standard English and

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their home discourses. The assignment calls for students to analyze and evaluate the authors'

rhetorical use of language in Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands: La Fronteria* and Kendrick

Lamar's *Mr. Morale and The Big Steppers*, texts that explore issues of language, cultural

identity, hybridity, and family dynamics. Especially noteworthy is how Tracy specifically

includes certain parts of the essay (introduction, supporting details, counterarguments, etc…) for

students to write in both codes.

Table 7

Hip Hop Writing Assignments –Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical Analysis	Thesis Statement	Supporting Details	Source Requirements	Audience & Tone	Format Requirements
For composition 4, you will be writing a multi-genre essay with, similar to the style Anzaldua used in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. This means that some of it will be in traditional, academic essay style, using an academic English code, but at least three parts (supporting points, counter argument, etc.) will be adapted into a non-traditional genre (or several non-traditional genres) using other codes or meshes of codes. The book *Borderlands/La Frontera* and the Album *Mr. Morale and Big Steppers* both deal with generational and cultural trauma through the medium of language: **Did Anzaldua and Lamar's rhetorical use of language help or hurt their arguments?** *focus on how they succeeded or failed to appeal to logic (logos), authority (ethos),*	Your thesis might argue that the use of language helped in both cases, helped in one but hurt in the other, or hurt in both cases.	Remember that you still need to include claims, evidence, and analysis no matter what genre you're using (You'll practiced this in Multi-Genre Practice Discussion)	Use at least 4 quotes from the book and 4 from the album to support your thesis and main points (8 total).	Also consider the codes you use carefully: what type of language would work best for each part? Academic English? regional dialects? mixed language [e.g. Spanglish]? group-specific vernacular? Generational or regional slang?	Approx. 4 pages long (longer if you use a genre like poetry or a meme, which take up more space) Use MLA format (except for parts in a new genre) and include a works cited page at the end

Tracy elaborates on how cultivating student agency in the classroom can positively shape

lesson plans and assignments when interpreting and analyzing Hip Hop texts in the classroom

discourse community,

> People share what they like and we get to dissect and discuss different ways that hip hop can be analyzed for rhetoric, it could be analyzed for anything. And so a lot of it comes down to student choice rather than a lesson that I provide. I give them some examples first, just to show them this is what you know what an example of something that might be interesting sounds like. Every now and then, a student will make a choice and give us a Lil Uzi Vert song, although it's not necessarily as rich right as some of the others. I try to provide a little guidance, but I don't necessarily require that they use my examples.

Professor Marrow's insights described an example of a meaningful educational interaction with

students that affirms their choice and allows the class to have a rich dialogue on topics that are

relevant to students. It suggests that integrating student choice and extending opportunities for

students to exercise agency in shaping the curriculum in the classroom regularly can help to

cultivate student persistence. Particularly of note, is how Tracy describes the impact that

meaningful interactions with faculty can have on student persistence through Freshman

Composition to completion within one year in a post-AB705 landscape. He explains that,

> Making it more meaningful is great, but I think a lot can be gained from having a student who is willing to engage… we're doing all this research into co-requisite courses and AB 705... What we want to do is make sure that students are completing but we're caring less about whether it is in one semester or two. Well, hey, if it's in two, who cares, right? One of the things we're finding is that students who stay throughout the whole course and receive a D or an F are more likely to succeed next time than students who withdraw. And I think that withdrawal can be avoided because if they've built relationships with me, and especially with each other, they might just show up because their friends are there. And then even if they don't pass the class, you know, which is usually because they end up not turning in the last couple of essays, right? Even if that happens, which I don't love. I do feel better that they built some relationships, and they feel like they belong there at least enough to come that next time they'll have a higher chance of success.

Tracy's insights echo Bruce's observations which suggest that instructors play a much more

significant role than expected in shaping students' persistence, not only in completing specific

assignments within the course, but also in completing the course within the first year. Tracy's observation further reinforces Bruce's observation that cultivating positive relationships, while they do not guarantee successful course completion, seems to increase the likelihood of long-term student success outcomes. In the following section, student focus group responses indicate that trust and personal connections with instructors influence a wide range of actions that shape student persistence.

Student Responses. Student focus group responses from Professor Carl Ryder's class confirm that instructors' use of HHBE also empowers students to engage in acts of persistence as students pursue their academic goals. As indicated by their responses, these acts included (a) willingness to seek help, (b) a strong connection with instructors, (c) increased participation in class discussion, (d) comprehension of course concepts, and (e) an increased sense of student agency.

Responses from student focus groups described how their instructor's use of HHBE left them feeling empowered to engage in acts of persistence throughout the course. For instance, when asked if they feel more connected with their instructor, and are more willing to seek help when they need it, Lisa explained that,

> If we feel more connected to our instructor then you don't have to feel like you can't come for answers and stuff. If you feel more connected with somebody, in general, you won't feel shy or anything to come to them.

William agreed that,

> I feel like we are all one nice big happy family and you know it's always good for us to get something if we don't know something; if we might have any questions. But don't feel afraid to speak your opinion. Don't be afraid to voice your questions so that you can receive answers.

Responses from both students revealed that feeling more connected with their instructor,

building familial bonds in the classroom, and overcoming the fear of asking questions improved

their willingness to seek help.

Additionally, student responses indicated that their instructor's use of Hip Hop helped

strengthen their connection with instructors Khari directly stated, "I personally feel and think that

I can learn about our instructor through the way he expresses the music that he teaches us."

When asked if they find that they discuss nonacademic matters outside of class with their

instructor, several students affirmed and nodded. Keith explained,

> He makes it an open space for anything when we have time. He asks us about our goals
> that we have outside of school. Well, he tries to make sure that our health is okay so
> whenever we have a break or whatever he tells us to do this and that. He asks us about
> our vitamins. I don't know it's like he's our uncle.

Lisa added,

> No, no, you know what made me take him so seriously. When it was the first semester
> and then all of us went to that UMOJA meeting. Our professor was like 'this is y'all
> journey to success; I'm right here for y'all.' I was like... and he was so serious. He was
> showing us...remember that? He was showing us Jay-Z videos and everything. He was
> like 'this is how you get on the road to success.' He said, 'I'm going to be there for y'all."
> I was like, this man did not come to play.

Following observations on students feeling a stronger connection with instructors, they

also describe feeling empowered to participate particularly during class discussions. When asked

if they felt more connected did they participate in class discussions, five students quickly

responded in rapid succession, "Yes"; "Obviously"; "It's comfortable"; "If naturally a teacher's

awkward, then the whole classroom is going to be awkward"; one student noted that the size of

the class as a notable factor in participating in class discussions as they explained, "It's more

comfortable because this is a smaller class you don't have as many people". One student recalled

the first day of class, "Like with the professor on the first day of class everybody was so

awkward and he was like everybody just relax. Sooner or later you guys are gonna be like best

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friends with each other and that's literally what happened." Focus group responses suggest that

there exists a connection between students strengthening their trust and relationship with

instructors and an increase in participation during class discussions.

Students also described feeling empowered to persist through writing tasks as their

instructor's use of Hip Hop helped them to gain better comprehension of course concepts. As one

male student explained,

> I think I'm gonna just go with the learning techniques the textual analysis, the critical
> thinking, and the biography of the artist...because the textual analysis is a good way of...
> what's the word? The word? Oh, it's a good way of paraphrasing and coming to a
> conclusion of what the topic is about. The biography of the artist is basically who the
> artist is, what they used to do, and their background, so I feel like that gives us a good
> way to know about them

 Students reveal that comprehension was shaped by their ability to make more connections

between ideas introduced from class discussions and course concepts explored in texts.

The combination of a willingness to seek help and making strong connections with

instructors that empower increased participation in class discussion and comprehension of course

concepts, according to student focus group responses, brings into focus how their instructor's use

of Hip Hop shaped an increased sense of student agency and a sense that they can complete

writing tasks. As David described that his instructor's use of Hip Hop increased his sense of

agency by helping him become more self-expressive,

> Mine is gonna be off-topic off the rip. But I mean, when our instructor plays certain
> music or when we play hip hop and the music, I feel like when those artists express how
> they feel, and how they write things, I feel like that can help us to discover how we want
> to express ourselves. And how we want to…put ourselves out there when we're
> writing…how we want to display ourselves…because I feel like the more we listen
> to…those artists and their music, I felt like when we listened to it, it helped us to discover
> new ways to express and display ourselves in writing and music and other categories to
> the world.

Keith also explained experiencing an increased sense of agency as they grew more comfortable

speaking for themselves. He described that,

> This course, like to help us feel more comfortable speaking. Because as we grow, we're like scared to speak at certain altercations. It helped us feel more comfortable with ourselves.

Lisa agreed that,

> Because as I grew up, I was nervous every time I stepped on stage, so as we went, I didn't really grow up talking as much. So as we speak, live class, it helps us practice more when I'm speaking about other peers. Help us become better with it.

This is significant because students describe overcoming limitations that have affected them on a long-term scale.

Overall, participant faculty described using HHBE in ways that not only foster a sense of student belonging, but also teach *navigational capital* (Yosso, 2005) in the form of composition skills. Faculty participant responses highlighted three key areas that affected students' *navigational capital* including teaching and exemplifying composition concepts, employing artists and albums to connect with students, and cultivating persistence among students. Student focus group responses confirm that instructors' use of HHBE also empowers students to develop *navigational capital* in the form of composition skills; subsequently, students also describe feeling empowered to engage in acts of persistence throughout the course. As indicated by their responses, these acts included a willingness to seek help, a strong connection with instructors, increased participation in class discussion, comprehension of course concepts, and an increased sense of student agency.

Conclusion

Findings from this study suggest that if the use of HHBE positively shapes the development of students' *academic knowledge of self*, then its insights can provide a model that might inspire more research into how first-year composition instructors can apply other forms of culturally relevant teaching and learning approaches that bridge the gap between students' home and academic communities and challenge current-traditional teaching and learning approaches,

especially as it pertains to the development of composition skills. Further study is required to see if culturally relevant approaches like HHBE can impact persistent racial equity gaps in course completion and student success of those most disproportionately impacted by racial equity barriers.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Overall, the focus of this study was to explore how instructors' use of Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE) in first-year transfer-level composition (FYC) courses shaped the development of student's *academic knowledge of self* (AKOS). By exploring how instructors implemented HHBE in their courses, and how their use of HHBE shaped the development of students' AKOS the study revealed how instructors used Hip Hop to create opportunities to sustain students' cultural wealth within academic structures as they bridged the gap between students' home and academic communities, created more inclusive curriculum, and enhanced student academic confidence.

This chapter contains the discussion of findings, implications/recommendations, conclusion, and suggestions for future research possibilities in response to the following:

Research Questions

1. In what ways do community college instructors who are influenced by Hip Hop culture implement Hip Hop based education (HHBE) in composition courses?

2. From the perspective of the instructor, how if at all does their use of HHBE encourage positive development of students' *academic knowledge of self*—sense of belonging, academic self-perception, persistence?

3. In what ways, if at all, does the instructor's use of HHBE shape the development of students' *academic knowledge of self* throughout the composition writing course?

4. In what ways, if at all, does the use of HHBE shape how students draw on their own cultural capital throughout the composition writing course?

Summary of Findings

The findings from this study described a multifaceted process for how *academic knowledge of self* is developed in FYC courses. It started with educators unpacking how their experiences and connection with Hip Hop and education began. Two faculty participants reported a personal connection with Hip Hop culture as participants in its early days. While the other two described a personal connection with Hip Hop as a consumer of the music. Both sets of faculty described their initial experiences with Hip Hop as engaging and transformative, which also helped to shape their motivation to draw on Hip Hop in their courses. Over the course of analyzing the data and coding interview responses, I found two themes: a). the *cipher* as a vestibule between academic structures and student's home communities; and b). challenging current-traditional approaches to teaching and learning.

Each instructor shared a passion for challenging current-traditional *deficit* approaches to teaching and learning. As a result, they reportedly sought to use Hip Hop in their curriculum and pedagogy in ways that radically shifted away from *deficit* approaches. This was demonstrated by their use of collaborative learning techniques, the inclusion of authors and texts from Hip Hop culture, and the integration of social issues that arose from students' home communities with the more formal academic concepts to be learned. This radical shift, I argue, introduces a way for instructors of college composition to expand and extend the ways they might currently implement *culturally relevant pedagogy*. Resisting the neoliberal tradition of buying into the latest educational fad through cultural appropriation and boutique multiculturalism (Giroux, 2005; Hill, 2009; Perry, 2005), faculty participants in this study revealed how their history with

Hip Hop began as participants within the culture before becoming educators. Even those who did not grow up performing Hip Hop described an immersive journey of learning about Hip Hop practitioners, history, music, cultural practices, spaces, and places as *students of the game* (Green, 2017).

The instructors' use of HHBE in first-year composition (FYC) courses to shape the development of student's *academic knowledge of self* is multilayered and functions in two major ways: (a) The *cipher as a vestibule* between academic structures and students' home community and (b) challenging current-traditional teaching and learning approaches. Additionally, this study found multiple subthemes within the two broader main functions: (a_1) cultivates students' sense of belonging, (a_2) validates students' ways of knowing, and (a_3) represents students' *linguistic capital* throughout the course curriculum. Similarly, three subthemes were also identified under (b) challenging current-traditional teaching and learning approaches: (b_1) teaching and exemplifying composition/rhetoric concepts, (b_2) integrating artists and albums from the Hip Hop community, and (b_3) encouraging persistence among students. Developing composition skills was a common thread identified and is consistent throughout each theme and subtheme. Across both themes, some elements relate to the instructors, some to the students, and some are relevant to the successful relationship of both.

Interpretation of the Findings

While the syllabi, assignments, and activities/lesson plans include variations among each faculty, the analysis suggest that both major themes were factors in shaping students' *academic knowledge of self*. Embedded within both themes are constitutive and overlapping elements that demonstrate a *culturally sustainable* model for equitable teaching and learning rooted in HHBE

for FYC instructors. Each theme and subtheme is described in detail below in the following sections. Lastly, RQ. 4 will be answered throughout each of the following sections below.

The *Cipher as A Vestibule* Between Academic Structures and Students' Home Community

RQ. 1- In what ways do community college instructors who are influenced by Hip Hop culture implement Hip Hop based education (HHBE) in composition courses?

The reality that Hip Hop has become more relevant to the field of higher education research and the practice of teaching and learning continues to be substantiated by scholarly research (Akom, 2009; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Campbell, 2022). Each of the four instructors used *ciphers* to enhance the *familial capital* of students by creating a space in the classroom that provided a sense of extended family, community, mattering and belonging, and an ethic of care; additionally, in this space instructors extended opportunities to affirm and develop students' *linguistic capital*[5] as they engaged in the co-construction of knowledge and meaning-making by contributing to the course curriculum (reading lists, assignments, and lesson plans).

Hip Hop scholars Emdin (2017; 2013), Forell (2006)*,* and Hill (2009) have long recognized *ciphers* as a literacy-building practice where participants engage in a playful ideological exchange of words and ideas that range from spontaneous expression (*freestyling*) in response to current events and relevant social issues to direct critiques of participants ideas (*battling*), as demonstrated in this study by the seminar presentations and classroom discussions that Tracy, Bruce, and Erik recounted. This study also found that, faculty used *ciphers* to validate students' *linguistic capital*—ways of knowing and communication skills from their home community—within the course curriculum.

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[5] Tara J. Yosso (2005) defines this aspect of cultural wealth as the intellectual and social skills that Students of Color arrive at school with and have attained through communication experiences with multiple language and communication skills.

Findings from this study agree with Hip Hop historian, curator, and founder of Freestyle Union[6] Toni Blackman (Fitzgerald, 2000) who theorized that the one of the primary functions of the *cipher* is to bring about completion of thought and unity between participants through collaborative learning. That is, as a literacy-building practice that faculty in this study demonstrate, the *cipher* allows instructors to make careful assessments of what knowledge students begin with and builds from there (Landson-Billings, 2017). Each faculty participant expressed affinity for identifying issues of importance that impact students individually, academically, and socially (beyond the campus). The sense of unity between participants that Blackman describes was achieved by addressing those issues through collaborative learning techniques like Socratic dialogues and class presentations, which Bruce, Tracy, and Erik described. During these activities, students describe not only experiencing a connection with other students and faculty by learning about each other's home communities, but they also described feeling more socially and historically aware about and more connected to their home communities. At the core of collaborative activities within *ciphers* exists what Tori Blackman (Fitzgerald, 2000) describes as "It's about completion of thought and a circle of unity. And the circle's infinity. It's always going. And when everybody's focused on what they are supposed to be focusing on, it's like next-level spirituality". Between this collaborative co-construction of knowledge and circle of practice Hip Hop scholars have linked Freire's (2014) concept of *conscientzacao*.

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[6] Freestyle Union was founded in 1994 in Washington D.C. by California native Toni Blackman as a "rigorous training ground" where MCs could hone their skills. MCs would freestyle (spitting extemporaneous rhymes) for one- to two-hour jam sessions where group members passed the lyrical baton back and forth. Journalist Natalie Hopkinson (2000) describes, "They told stories, analyzed ancient proverbs and riddles and debated current events. Audiences were an integral part of the shows, shouting out topics for a freestyle or throwing objects onto the stage for the artists to rhyme about".

Findings from this study affirm what Hip Hop scholars (Emdin, 2013; Newman, 2005; Rose, 2018; Williams, 2015) have found that the bi-directional dialogic processes of Freire's culture circles strongly mirror literacy-building practices of Hip Hop *ciphers*. As a primary feature of the Brazilian educator's approach to critical pedagogy, Freire (2014) identified *conscientzacao* as a fundamental shift in one's academic and social self-perception toward the development of critical consciousness that moves students and instructors toward action for change. The change Freire alludes to strongly reflects the kind of "next-level spirituality" Blackman (Fitzgerald, 2000) describes as a deeply spiritual and intellectual paradigm shift that affects participants' propensity to make change within themselves and the community around them. While the findings from this study did not record any deeply spiritual revelation among participants, they did parallel what Hip Hop scholar Courtney Rose (2018) recognizes: that *conscientzacao* is developed by instructors who, similar to Freire's *problem-posing praxis* model, engage students and instructors in collaborative exchange between home community issues/experiences and academic concepts and goals through dialogue, and critical reflection. It also confirms findings from scholarly literature that Hip Hop, when used as a form of *critical pedagogy* in the classroom, becomes a transformative space for Black youth to speak to their Black experiences in multiple forms of expression (Campbell, 2022; Emdin, 2016; Hill, 2021; Kruse, 2020; Macdonald, 2012; Parris, 2016). In considering the *cipher* as a *vestibule*, this study finds that instructors can foster meaningful connections between students and teachers, students and academic culture, and students and their home communities.

This study invites scholars and practitioners of composition to consider the classroom as a space that, while situated between students' home communities and academic structures, functions similar to a *vestibule* that buffers the main entrance to a larger structure in three ways:

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(a) provides enrichment for students' cultural ways of knowing; (b) challenges perspectives and beliefs that students bring into the classroom; and (c) protects the sense of community developed throughout the course between students and instructor as they exchange personal experiences, dialogue, and critical reflections. In ancient Greek architecture, a *vestibule* can be understood to be a partially enclosed lobby or intermediate passage between the entrance of a building and its exterior that provides protection and a momentary reprieve in the face of harsh external conditions. It also provides a space that allows an individual to prepare for the next step into a larger structure (Vitruvius, 2009). In this sense, this study offers the *vestibule* as a metaphor to clarify how educators might begin to (re)imagine the relationship between students' home communities, Hip Hop *ciphers*, and the academic structure (classroom/campus).

Developing Academic Knowledge of Self in Culturally Sustainable Ways

> *RQ. 2- From the perspective of the instructor, how if at all does their use of HHBE encourage positive development of students' academic knowledge of self—sense of belonging, academic self-perception, persistence?*

Cultivates Students' Sense of Belonging

Executive Director of the Othering and Belonging Institute at UC Berkley, John A. Powell (2022) defines *sense of belonging* as a multi-faceted concept relating to multiple factors including agency, connection, place, identity, and/or security. Moreover, Powell explains that the core element of *belonging* can function either expressively or implicitly. On one hand, it can be expressed explicitly, through representation, or by signaling that members of a particular group are welcome in a particular space, institution, or community. On the other, it can also be expressed implicitly, as when accommodations are made to provide increased accessibility (Powell, 2022). Each of the faculty participants used HHBE to explicitly cultivate *sense of*

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belonging in line and connect with at least one of the multiple factors (Powell, 2022) mentioned above with their students. Three out of four of them used Hip Hop "cultural codes" (Rose, 1994) or metaphors to teach and exemplify composition/rhetoric concepts. Two faculty employed artists and albums to connect with students. Moreover, at least four student responses support such an observation and describe their experience with sense of belonging in the classroom in detail.

This study's findings are consistent with the current scholarly literature on fostering a *sense of belonging*. While each faculty participant described different approaches to cultivating a *sense of belonging* in each course, one aspect they all had in common was that they demonstrated an *ethic of care*[7] (UMOJA Statewide Community, 2022) where they make students feel that what they enjoy and find intellectually curious matters. By extension, they also describe demonstrating the practice of *mattering and belonging*[8], which aims to edify the student-instructor relationship through consistent interaction and feedback on their writing. shows students their ideas are valued and belong in academic discourse. By demonstrating the *ethic of care* and enacting *mattering* and *belonging* for students, faculty participants confirmed research from Wood (2012) that students are more likely to perceive a stronger *sense of belonging* with faculty members who connect with them, who demonstrate an authentic interest in their academic success, who communicate messages of validation, and who encourage them to persist despite academic life challenges. Culturally sustaining approaches actively seek out creative and deep ways to

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[7] According to the statewide UMOJA Community as one of the 13 UMOJA Practices, the *ethic of love* is defined as when practitioners move with an ethic of love they touch their students' spirits. Moving with an ethic of love means having a willingness to share ourselves, our stories, our lives, our experiences to humanize and make real the classroom. This leveraging of the affective-emotion, trust, hope, trauma, healing-moves the discourse deliberately as an inroad to the cognitive domain. Approaching one's practice with an ethic of love implies a holistic approach-Body, Mind, Spirit (*UMOJA Statewide Community, 2022*).

[8] Mattering aims to create learning experiences that give agency to students. It integrates students' experiences and perspectives become a critical resource to the knowledge and analyses emergent in the class and in the program .

construct opportunities for students to see their *cultural wealth* not only acknowledged, but embodied within formal classroom structures (course texts, assignments, and activities). This kind of co-creation allows instructors to shape what Powell (2022) refers to as the most radical and transformative aspect of *sense of belonging*—agency.

Fosters Student Engagement. Initially, I had not included *student engagement* as a key finding in this study. However, one of the major interpretations from this study observes that *student engagement* was fostered within the second level of the AKOS schema. While instructors implemented HHBE in their courses for a variety of reasons, it was unanimous among each faculty participant that one of those reasons was because they were motivated to *foster student engagement*. Participants shared concrete examples that illustrate a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced primarily between instructors-students-home communities within the *microsystem* of the classroom. In this sense, efforts to foster student engagement are embedded as a feature of *cultivating a sense of belonging*.

From lesson plans to assignments, instructors shared how fostering student engagement required a level of vulnerability, transparency, and conversations about matters that occurred beyond the classroom in students' home communities. For example, one instructor shared how they diverted class time and shifted from the original lesson plan after being led by students to open dialogue about the tragic passing of Nipsey Hussle, which they used to teach the concept of "Kairos". In another instance, faculty shared how their use of Kendrick Lamar not only increased the level of engagement for a student who was not initially engaged but also encouraged the formation of a mentoring relationship that extended beyond the course. In fact, at one point during the faculty interview, we were interrupted by a knock at the door. It turns out that very student just stopped by to catch up with his faculty mentor. This affirms previous studies that

show instructors are centering Hip Hop texts (rap music, autobiographies, lyrics) and pedagogical practices (ciphers, freestyling, battling) as the central focus of their curriculum (Leigh Hamm Forell, 2006).

Expands Students' Academic Self-perception

Academic self-perception in this study was developed through the first layer of the AKOS schema. It refers to how students see themselves on the *individual-level*, particularly their academic abilities, knowledge, and skills that enable them to engage in developmentally more complex interactions within their *microsystem* (Arnold et al, 2012; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Hip Hop scholar Marc Lamont Hill (2009) argues in *Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life*, that we can expand students' *academic self-perception* by adopting Hip Hop as a part of how we design our curriculums. Insights from this study demonstrate that instructors adapted Hip Hop metaphors, like the "Rose That Grew From Concrete", and self-assessments, like StrengthsQuest, to make students aware of their individual *resource characteristics*[9] (Arnold et al, 2012), thereby expanding their *academic self-perception* and creating greater opportunities to *foster student engagement* in the classroom. This study also confirms research from Wood (2012) that students are more likely to perceive a stronger *academic self-perception* from faculty members who are interested in their academic success, who communicate messages of validation, and who encourage them to persist despite academic life challenges.

Challenging Current-Traditional Teaching & Learning Approaches

RQ. 3- In what ways, if at all, does the instructor's use of HHBE shape the development of students' academic knowledge of self throughout the composition writing process?

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[9] Arnold et al (2012) explains *resource characteristics* as the abilities, knowledge, and skills that enable individuals to engage in developmentally more complex interactions with their environments through an iterative process that leverages prior learning, experiences, and skills.

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By (a) using Hip Hop texts to teach composition/rhetoric concepts; and creating opportunities within the curriculum to (b) cultivate elements of persistence among students, participants shared how they challenged current-traditional deficit approaches to teaching and learning.

Using Hip Hop Texts to Teach Composition/Rhetoric Concepts

Insights from this study suggested that instructors challenged deficit perspectives of teaching and learning by employing Hip Hop artists and albums to center the experiences of students of color in the curriculum and classroom context. In centering the experiences of their students, instructor responses revealed an accumulation of *familial capital* in the histories and lives of communities of color (Yosso, 2005). This was featured across their use of Hip Hop metaphors like "The Rose that Grew from Concrete", in students' cultural knowledge of *code meshing*, and even students' sense of affective strengths[10]. As Professor Schrody described how he uses the Hip Hop metaphor of 'growing roses from concrete',

> The two different strategies [Duncan-Andrade] sometimes talked about back then, the idea of picking flowers or growing garden…taking the beautiful flower, out of that environment, the picking of the flower, versus staying in that environment that was hard to grow in, but making a garden for others…I started to think about doing the rose that grew from concrete imagery…I started asking [students], "how are you going to use your strengths? How are you going to use these things? Are you going to use it to pick flowers or grow gardens? Do you need to leave the place where you emerged from? Are you going to stay there and make it a better place?"

Centering students' experiences and *familial capital* required instructors to construct a space where instructors empowered students to develop critical thinking skills like *interpretation* and *analysis* as a way to connect two forms of cultural wealth—*familial* and *linguistic capital*. For example, one faculty's reflection suggests that activities like the "seminar presentations" provided a space for students to expand their *linguistic capital* as they were presented with

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[10] These strengths were particularly derived from the StrengthsQuest assessment, as described by Erik Schrody.

composition concepts like juxtaposition, signification, interpretation, and analysis. Central to the function of these spaces where students and instructors exchange *familial* and *linguistic capital* is the dialogue between the student and the text that occurs within the *cipher*. As Tracy described,

> I think, one of the other things is that I do things called "seminar presentations." It's where we take the concepts we're discussing in class or the book we're discussing in class and then in groups, they create responses to those…But a lot of the responses are sort of creative and a lot of the creative responses people will create raps and it's really great.

In critically reflecting on the text and how it might connect with their own personal experiences, Tracy reveals that "seminar presentations" provide students a space to demonstrate various linguistic strategies, both those that they arrive with and those that they learn from the text or class discussions. The goal for students is to innovate creative responses that they can use to demonstrate how they applied the course concepts.

> This is not something I assigned them that they have to do. But it's something I provide an example of to demonstrate various linguistic strategies. They can use those, they can signify on them, they can juxtapose them. Even though it doesn't always work perfectly…But it's not that big of a deal because the goal is to go through the process and learn about how to not only interpret and analyze something but then use the elements from what you're analyzing to comment on it. This is how student learning becomes recursive. That's the goal. Anyway

In this way, Professor Marrow challenges current-traditional approaches to teaching and learning, which envision students of color as lacking basic skills to demonstrate comprehension of core course concepts (Yosso, 2005). His insights demonstrated alignment between his approach to HHBE and a key function of the *cipher* that embodies reflexive and recursive learning between students, the text, and course concepts. Additionally, by creating the opportunity for students to shape their learning by including rap and rap texts throughout the "seminar presentations", Tracy empowered students to take ownership of their learning, which he described as "a cool bonding experience with the class."

Similarly, insights from Professor Ryder's interview suggest that he and his students challenge the current-traditional deficit perspective as he subtly transforms the traditional classroom space through the careful use of artists' album artwork. This subtle shift in the learning environment by displaying new artists' album artwork frequently throughout the semester invites both vocal and non-vocal students to dialogue about topics that exist beyond the traditional curricular subject matter. Carl's display of Hip Hop album artwork creates opportunities for personal connections, positive instructor-student relationships, and trust to be developed with his students in ways that acknowledge and expand on their *familial capital*. This subtle transformation of the classroom learning environment also suggests a subtle subversion of the *deficit* values of current-traditional teaching, which privileges a transactional relationship between student and instructor (Freire, 2014; Yosso, 2005). That is, by employing artists and albums to connect with students, Professor Ryder creates the conditions for teaching and learning to become more meaningful than transactional for both students and instructors. Instead, it becomes, as Carl's student David described,

> …when our instructor plays certain music or when we play Hip Hop…the music, I feel like when those artists express how they feel, and how they write things, I feel like that can help us to discover how we want to express ourselves. And how we want to…put ourselves out there when we're writing…how we want to display ourselves…because I feel like the more we listen to…those artists and their music, I felt like when we listened to it, it helped us to discover new ways to express and display ourselves in writing and music and other categories to the world.

Students described feeling more connected with instructors, which they reported led to increased engagement with specific assignments. Evidence from this study indicates that instructors' ability to connect with students and to bring out the topics that matter to them during class activities was effective at empowering students to persist throughout the course.

Cultivates Persistence Among Students

From the faculty perspective, their use of Hip Hop helped to cultivate *elements of persistence* among students. *Persistence* refers to a set of actions and engagements taken primarily by students to continue toward their educational goals (Wood, 2012). A similar parallel can be drawn to Yosso's (2005) notion of *navigational capital*, which refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions with a kind of *resilience* that demonstrates a set of inner resources, social competencies, and cultural strategies and that permit individuals to not only survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience so that they might improve. Based on student and faculty responses, there were several key elements rooted in the third layer of AKOS that shaped how students developed *navigational capital* and demonstrated *persistence* in the classroom. They include (a) directing attention toward engagement with assignments, (b) interacting with faculty in educationally meaningful ways, and (c) cultivating a sense of student agency. Faculty interview insights suggested that instructors played a much more significant role than expected in shaping students' *persistence*, especially when it came to engaging with specific assignments. This is demonstrated most clearly for example, when Hailey described that Professor Mathers's use of *good kid, M.A.A.D. city* inspired her to be more engaged in writing tasks. Hailey recalled how she was also inspired by one of her classmates' presentations on GKMC to follow up on key statistics and claims that were made during the presentation. Of particular note, was that Hailey was not researching to fact check claims of the presenter, but rather they had mentioned several things that connected her community history (*familial capital*) and she decided to look it up on her own, similar to Carl when he first heard Public Enemy's Chuck D. exclaimed "I'm a supporter of Chesimard." Hip Hop sparked her intellectual curiosity.

Insights from Hailey's anecdote demonstrates that positive relationships between faculty and students can nurture the *navigational capital* of students, they can also nourish the inner resources of students' resilience in ways that affirm their individual agency and help to cultivate *persistence* (Yosso, 2005). Developing positive relationships between faculty and students, while they do not guarantee successful course completion, seems to increase the likelihood of long-term student success outcomes, as the example above suggests (Amerstorfer & Von Münster-Kistner, 2021). This could be due at least in part to instructor-student trust and personal connections.

Insight from this study suggests that student *persistence*, like validation, requires that instructors focus on centering student voices in ways that show they matter and belong in the curriculum (Emdin & Adjapong; 2018; Paris& Alim, 2017; Wood, 2012). Moreover, this study reveals how participating instructors created classroom conditions to develop assignments that brought students' academic and cultural identities into dialogue with both traditional and Hip Hop authors. It suggests that integrating student choice and extending opportunities for students to exercise agency in shaping the curriculum in the classroom regularly can help to cultivate student persistence.

These experiences inform a Hip Hop worldview that is governed by a sense of *persistence*—what scholar Cornel West (2011/2021) refers to as a *tragicomic hope* or a keep-on pushing sensibility that emerges out of the Blues tradition and inspires strength of will and optimism in the face of oppression, adversity, and hard times. In this way, the pedagogical potential of Hip Hop aims to determine points of intervention to overcome the challenges that not only arise in educational settings but also students' home communities.

Limitations of the Study

While sense of belonging and engagement of Black students has been studied in student services, counseling, and student development literature, there currently exists no scholarship focused on academic instruction that explores issues of engagement and belonging of Black students in FYC courses. This study provides an initial foray into exploring the role that HHBE plays in shaping students AKOS in community college composition courses, however it does not provide a wide sample of instructors who use Hip Hop. The sample size from students is similarly small in that there were only responses from two out of four of the instructors' courses. 11 students from one class responded, while one student responded from another. Unfortunately, there were no responses from students from the other two courses. The relatively small sample size strains the generalizability of the results.

Implications for Practice

Implication #1- Shifting the lens toward human concern

Since the passage of AB705, more students have been enrolled in transfer-level composition courses within the first year of attendance than they have since the introduction of developmental education courses (Mejia et al., 2021). Despite providing near-universal access, equity gaps persist across multiple ethnic groups[11], especially for Black students in first-year composition courses, leading researchers to explore the role that equity plays within the classroom, especially as it pertains to teaching and learning, methods of instruction, and curriculum design. The prevailing logic of current-traditional deficit perspectives suggests that

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[11] As mentioned in earlier chapters, between 2015-2019, a statewide analysis found that transfer-level course enrollments increased by 51%, while students across the board saw an 18% gain in throughput rates Researchers found that in the fall 2015 cohort, the gap in throughput rates was greatest between Black (32%) and White (61%) students at 29% points, and in 2019 it decreased to 21%; similarly, the gap between Black and Asian (60%) students was 28% points, while in 2019 it decreased slightly to 24%; the gap between Black and Latinx (41%) students was 9% points, and fell to 7% in 2019 (Browhawn et al., 2021).

the most disproportionately impacted groups of students, particularly Black students, continue to

lag due to poor high school preparation and impoverished cultural habits that leave them not

college-ready and place the burden of readiness and preparation squarely on their shoulders.

With AB 705 yielding only slight decreases in equity gaps, while still providing nearly

unfettered structural access to transfer-level composition courses, there are two potentially

underlying structural issues that shape their persistence: 1). The lack of exposure to consistent

professional development in teaching and learning has left composition faculty underprepared to

meet the needs of a diverse student body (Murray, 2002); 2). Composition programs and

departments have yet to craft pedagogical and curricular strategies that connect *culturally

sustaining pedagogy* with the academic concepts to be learned (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2017).

These two factors suggest a persistent issue in the struggle to reduce throughput gaps in FYC

courses across racial/ethnic groups in community colleges: faculty who rely on current-

traditional approaches to inform their grading policy, pedagogy, and curriculum are not *student-

ready* despite near universal access afforded by AB 705 (McNair et al., 2022).

Just imagine if college researchers, administrators, and instructors shifted from focusing

on 'Why aren't students college-ready?' to reconsidering "Why aren't colleges *student-ready*[12]?"

This study draws its inspiration from the latter question to explore how faculty who use Hip Hop

in the composition classroom shape students' AKOS using equity-based approaches to teaching

and learning. It offers something more than an abstract vision of how the ideal student is made

ready for the immutable, unchanging, traditional rigors of college. It offers a set of practical

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[12] A *student-ready* college is defined as a college that strategically and holistically advances student success, and works tirelessly to educate all students for civic and economic participation in a global, interconnected society (McNair et al., 2016).

implications that acknowledge how a healthy and empowering classroom learning environment is built on trust between learners and instructors.

Implication #2- Develop equity response teams to determine points of intervention

Being aware of who our students are and where they come from is not enough in and of itself to build an ecology of *student-readiness* that supports students' sense of belonging, positive academic self-perception, and academic persistence. Creating a space for students to develop AKOS in my experience as an English faculty and campus equity leader requires a systematic intervention that calls college administrators, department leaders, and faculty to work together to foster and promote the advancement of racial equity literacy in the areas of student belonging, faculty welcomeness, and student development.

In December 2018, the Student Equity Committee's executive leadership called faculty, staff, and administrators across campus to participate in an Equity Retreat. Employees were introduced to definitions of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), invited to identify examples of structural equity gaps across Cerritos College, and called to actively share insights that would form a new approach to how the College responds to structural gaps in access, completion, transfer, and retention. The discussion from the Retreat revealed several key equity issues, including a culture of deficit thinking, that highlighted a need for a professional development activities and opportunities. As a result, the Liberal Arts division created an equity response team to learn more about EDI issues that pervaded throughout the division and in courses to determine points of intervention.

In my experience as a founder and coordinator of a division-wide equity response team, college educators at multiple levels of the institution including division leadership, department chairs, and instructional faculty (both part-time and full-time) must be in community and

dialogue with each other to determine points of intervention where equity gaps persist within the classroom microsystem to support faculty in their effort to develop AKOS and to build culturally sustaining classroom learning environments.

Division leaders are important figures in this first attempt to coordinate department-level efforts that aim to identify 3-5 (at least ONE "Black or African American" and at least ONE "Hispanic or Latinx" DI group) most disproportionately impacted groups in the following areas: a) access, b). retention, c). course completion, d). deg/certificate completion, and e). transfer to a 4-year institution. Disaggregated data—by race/ethnicity, gender, first-generation status, etc—from division leaders and the local institutional research effectiveness and planning department, can help the equity response team gain a better perspective on what work the current program structures are doing at the program level that either contribute or hinder students from attaining positive outcomes in the areas listed above.

Next, the equity response team needs to compose a standardized definition of "equity" across the division. This can help to codify and communicate the mission and vision of the division-level efforts to build an ecology of *student-readiness* to students, faculty, staff, and the campus abroad.

The third step should find faculty and department chairs planning, coordinating, and conducting a division-wide classroom climate audit. This step is significant to assess student perspectives on teaching and learning approaches within the classroom. The classroom climate audit can be very useful in identifying leverage points, particularly in the areas of classroom teaching and learning, methods of instruction, curriculum, and delivery. Department and division leaders using the data from the climate audit can recommend responses at the program-level to address persistent equity gaps.

The primary focus of this equity response team should be to serve as a catalyst that improves the quality of academic life for students and to provide the tools for faculty to become more equitable, inclusive, and community-minded within and beyond the classroom. Below, I will discuss one of the main ways the equity response team can help faculty develop equity capacity-building strategies and develop culturally sustaining pedagogy to coordinate a series of professional development pathways to onboard, continue, and certify faculty training as Equity allies and ambassadors.

Implication #3- Build faculty professional development pathways to increase student-readiness, welcoming, and belonging among faculty instructors

To foster equity-building strategies and to develop culturally sustaining pedagogies, the equity response team should construct a pathway—sequence and series—of workshops focused on equity-minded professional development (PD) opportunities. This pathway should provide HHBE or asset-based approaches where faculty can learn to create a classroom ecosystem that is s*tudent-ready*. As a PD institute, it is necessary to address the pedagogical barriers—such as deficit-mindedness, punitive syllabus policies, and implicit-bias grading practices—that affect the most disproportionately impacted groups based on the classroom climate audit. The goals of the institute should aim to a). increase student sense of belonging within and beyond the classroom—referring to students' perceptions of whether or not faculty members value and care about them; b). foster meaningful relationships between faculty-students—referring to students' perceptions of the degree to which faculty members know them as a person and form positive pedagogical relationships; c). increase the amount of faculty who complete at least 5 hours of PD rooted in EDI and anti-racial Bias (which can be part of 25 flex hours for faculty).

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The Institute for Transformative Teaching and Learning (ITTL) pathway will help to fill the gap of equity-minded PD opportunities for faculty who are interested in learning equitable and culturally sustaining teaching strategies in the classroom. By offering a certified series of PD modules that focus on increasing students' sense of belonging, fostering meaningful relationships between faculty and students, completing anti-racial bias training, and enhancing faculty welcomeness and validation, the ITTL should aim to equip instructors with the skills necessary to develop a more ecological view of student learning and development. Structural support for the ITTL will provide participants with the resources necessary to further enhance student success at its source—the classroom.

Throughout the pathway, Faculty will gain access to a networked improvement community as a resource for developing pedagogical tools to enhance students' sense of belongingness within and outside the classroom, as well as tools for equitable assignments, grading policy, syllabi design, and cross-disciplinary connections.
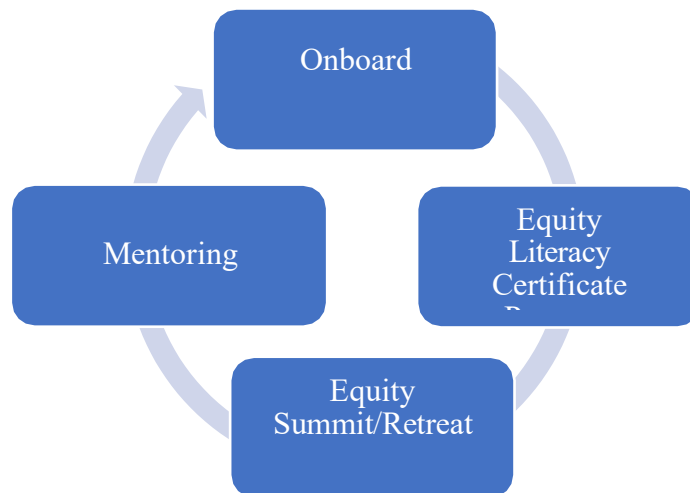
Figure 5

ITTL Pathway Model

Figure 5.5 features a model of the ITTL pathway, which can also be found in Appendix F. This pathway is based on a series of five courses rooted in Critical Race Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and the Human Ecology Theory. It primarily aims to connect participants to a new cohort of instructors from across the disciplines into a common learning experience; to develop skills and tools to present their own approaches and strategies for employing culturally sustaining and equitable practices at The Summit or The Retreat; and to empower faculty to recruit others by starting faculty inquiry groups (FIG) or book clubs exploring equity issues in their respective departments. FIGs and book clubs can be utilized to invite new participants to the onboard points of the PD pathway. The long-term outcome of this Institute provides a viable capacity for the institution to create "equity allies" and "equity champions" across campus.

Future Research

In a post-AB 705 educational landscape, where college institutions have implemented multiple measure assessments, dual enrollment, and learning community pathways to provide students increased access points to transfer level composition courses, there remains racial equity gaps in completion for Black and Latinx student groups. Areas for further exploration should consider how an ecological approach can enhance college readiness and transform the insights of practitioners, faculty, and instructors. One area, in particular, might focus on measuring the impact of HHBE on FYC course completion. Another might compare the completion rates of students in HHBE courses to those in non-HHBE courses and disaggregate the results based on several demographic indicators: race/ethnicity; gender; first-year generation status; and family income level.

Conclusion

The motivation for conducting this study that calls for instructors, department leaders, and division administrators to develop curricular and pedagogical strategies that enhance teaching learning by drawing on students' cultural ways of knowing, cultural histories, and ways of maneuvering through institutions that emerge from their home communities is deeply intimate and personal for me as a Composition instructor.

A *community of cultural wealth* lies at the intersection between students' home and academic communities. My journey that would later grow to shape my understanding of my community's *linguistic*, *familial*, and *navigational capital*, while catalyzed in a formal high school English classroom, is rooted at a particular intersection of my childhood. Reading Carter G. Woodson at 12 years old in the Ralphs parking lot off the intersection of Crenshaw and Slauson was not what I had in mind when my dad offered to take me to Eso Wan's bookstore for my 6th grade book report. I sat in that parking lot alone; my dad went inside the store leaving me struggling to decipher what Dr. Woodson meant when he said, "If we can finally succeed in translating the idea of leadership into that of service, we may soon find it possible to lift the Negro to a higher level." *What did he mean by "leadership"? What did he mean by "service"? "How do you translate "service" into "leadership"?* I only saw a few words that I recognized on that first page of the book. *"What was a "Teuton"? Ok I recognize the words "Greek" and "Latin" from Ms. Livesay's religious studies class," and "what the heck is a Doctor of Philosophy?"* After a while I just flipped through the pages.

My dad returned to the car and saw me flipping through the book, still confused. He asked what I thought about the quote, and I shared the same questions. He took his time to break down how Woodson articulated a vision of a Black leader as a figure who serves to meet the

needs of the people, one who is focused on building community through self/collective determination, and one is committed to putting in the work of building new habits that encourage a strong sense of belonging, an empowered self-cultural perception, and persistence.

He went on that night to help me do the work of reading and writing my book report on Carter G. Woodson's *Miseducation of the Negro*. If you ask him today "what were you thinking to give a 12-year-old kid a book on miseducation for a Catholic school book report?", he would say simply, "because the books from the school were not interested in teaching my son about our own history." By allowing me to struggle with the scholarly ideas, cultural history, and knowledge outside the mainstream flow of school ideas from figures like Woodson, my dad showed me that I could experience rich intellectual engagement with learning tools that existed beyond school. With learning tools that could be found right in my own neighborhood backyard.

The study finds that instructors' use of HHBE fosters the positive development of students' sense of belonging. It also preserves and sustains students' connection to their home community by including Hip Hop texts to represent the cultural ways of knowing, cultural histories and relevant social issues, and ways of maneuvering that students bring with them when engaging academic structures (curriculum, assignments, lesson plans, and activities). It finds that HHBE validates students' academic self-perceptions. It also finds that instructors who use HHBE in the classroom challenge deficit thinking and approaches to teaching and learning by developing culturally sustaining practices that connect the curriculum to the issues, authors, and texts that represent their home communities. Additionally, Hip Hop messages and practices are woven into the process of identity formation of instructors and students alike.

It also finds that instructors' use of HHBE aids in developing students' sense of academic confidence, which as a result, evokes a sense of community and belonging. This study motivates

them to work toward their educational goals. Additionally, this study finds that students

perceived the use of HHBE creates opportunities for them to draw on their cultural capital,

especially their *linguistic*, *familial*, and *navigational capital*.

Moreover, findings from the study seem to ultimately suggest that students and

instructors who engage with HHBE approaches in deep and meaningful ways experience

teaching and learning as rich and empowering.

APPENDIX A

FACULTY RECRUITMENT LETTERS

SUBJECT: Research Study- Hip Hop in the Composition Classroom- Your help is Needed

General Faculty Recruitment-Department Chair

Dear Fellow Colleagues,

I hope this message finds you in good spirits. I am a professor of English, interim coordinator of the UMOJA Success Program at Cerritos College, and a UCLA Doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program. I am currently conducting a research study to better understand how **instructors in California Community Colleges** who use Hip Hop Based Educational practices in first-year composition courses might encourage positive student development, sense of belonging, academic self-perception, and persistence.

I am hoping you will help me by sharing this email with your community college professional development networks, English department Chairs and colleagues, local campus Professional Development coordinators, and/or UMOJA English instructors. The study includes a short screening questionnaire. In addition, some participants will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview. The questionnaire and subsequent interviews can help shape colleges' understanding of what they can do in English classrooms to enhance teaching and learning experiences and engagement of all students.

The survey will take approximately 1-2 minutes to complete. If selected, study participants will receive a **$20 Amazon gift cards**. The survey is totally voluntary. Responses to this survey will only be used to follow up with participants for a possible faculty interview.

Click here to take the survey.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

-Damon Cagnolatti
UCLA Doctoral Candidate

Faculty Specific

Dear [Faculty name],

I hope this message finds you in good spirits. I am a professor of English, interim coordinator of the UMOJA Success Program at Cerritos College, and a UCLA Doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program. I am currently conducting a research study to better understand how **instructors in California Community Colleges** who use Hip Hop in transfer-level composition courses might encourage positive student development, sense of belonging, academic self-perception, and persistence.

I am hoping you can help me, by sharing some of your experiences with teaching and learning while using Hip Hop texts, songs, practices, and/or authors in your composition courses. The study includes a short screening questionnaire. In addition, some participants will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview. The questionnaire and subsequent interviews can help shape colleges' understanding of what they can do in English classrooms to enhance teaching and learning experiences and engagement of all students.

The survey will take approximately 1-2 minutes to complete. If selected, study participants will receive a **$20 Amazon gift cards**. The survey is totally voluntary. Responses to this survey will only be used to follow up with participants for a possible faculty interview.

Click here to take the survey.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

-Damon Cagnolatti
UCLA Doctoral Candidate

STUDENT RECRUITMENT LETTER

Hi [faculty participant]

Thank you for taking part in the *Qualitative Study on Recentering Hip Hop Based Education in First-year Composition courses.* I'm going to need your help one more time. If possible, I would like to set up a follow-up interview with 3 of your students to better understand students' experiences with the use of Hip Hop in the composition classroom.

I have attached an Information Sheet, which details what student-participants should know about the research study, the purpose, benefits, and length of time required.

I am looking for students from composition courses that use HHBE to participate in a focus group. The survey will take approximately 1-2 minutes to complete. If selected, study participants will receive a $20 Amazon gift card. The survey is totally voluntary. Responses to this survey will only be used to follow up with participants for a possible student focus groups.

-Damon Cagnolatti
UCLA Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C
CONSENT LETTER

Instructor-participants

Dear [Faculty particpant],

Thank you for participating in my study to uncover more insights on how Hip Hop Based Education shapes African American student identity development. The data from this interview will be integrated in my study. The content of this interview will be confidential and your identity will not be revealed.

You will receive a $20 gift card for participating in this interview If you choose to opt-out at any time, you will still receive the gift card.

Our purpose today is to explore how Hip Hop Based Education may influence students' academic self-perception, sense of belonging, and persistence in first-year composition courses. If there is a moment at any point throughout this interview where you wish to pause or stop, then please alert me. Your responses will be kept confidential since I will use an alias for you and any other individuals that will be named. Are you okay with me recording our conversation?

This interview will be approximately 60 mins. It will be recorded, in order to provide the highest quality of accuracy for the transcriptions of our conversations. Before we begin, I would like to ask if you have any questions?

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the research, you can contact me, Damon Cagnolatti, the principal investigator, at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or dcagnolatti@g.ucla.edu.

Thank you

Damon Cagnolatti
UCLA Graduate Student

No data collected during this study, including de-identified data will be shared for future research. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions, and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

Student-participants

Hi [Student participant],

I'm your friendly neighborhood Professor Cagnolatti. You can call me "Cag"! I just want to ask you a few questions about your experiences with Hip Hop in the composition course and how it shapes your view of learning, your abilities with writing, and how you see yourself as a student.

Your feedback will help instructors to learn from a students' perspective how to make first year composition more engaging, culturally relevant, and more connected to your everyday lives. You will not get in trouble for anything you mention here; in fact, at no point in time will you be identified by name.

You will receive a $20 gift card for participating in this focus group. If you choose to opt-out at any time, you will still receive the gift card. Your responses will be kept confidential since I will use an alias for you and any other individuals that will be named. Are you okay with me recording our conversation?

This interview will be approximately 60 mins. It will be recorded, in order to provide the highest quality of accuracy for the transcriptions of our conversations. Before we begin, I would like to ask if you have any questions?

Thank you

Damon Cagnolatti
UCLA Graduate Student

APPENDIX D

EMAIL REQUEST FOR COURSE DOCUMENTS

Hi [faculty name],

Thanks so much for participating in our faculty interview to uncover more insight into how Hip Hop Based Education can potentially shape students' academic self-perception, sense of belonging, and persistence.

I wanted to ask if you could send me a couple of items from your course to help me further explain some of the insights you shared during our interview:

1. Course Syllabus for English 1A (nonfiction based course) &1B (more fiction-based/literature and composition course).
2. Any writing assignment prompts that include hip hop or where students often choose to write about texts or topics related to hip hop.
3. Any lessons plans, teaching practices, or activities where you use hip hop texts or topics

I have attached a copy of the transcripts from our interview for you to review. If there are any changes or clarifications you would like me to make, please let me know.

Peace and blessings

-Damon Cagnolatti

UCLA Graduate Student

APPENDIX E

FACULTY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol for Instructors in FYC courses:

For the Proposed Study: *Between the Academic Culture and Students' Ecology: A Qualitative Study on Recentering Hip Hop Based Education in First-year Composition courses*

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: to examine closely the influence Hip Hop has on instructor pedagogy and to explore from the instructor's perspectives how it shapes their approach to developing students' *academic knowledge of self*.

60-75 Minutes

Pseudonym of Interviewee:	
Pseudonym of Institution:	
Role:	
Date:	
Time:	
Course Title:	

Introduction
Thank you for participating in my study to uncover more insights on how Hip Hop Based Education shapes student identity development. The data from this interview will be integrated in my study. The content of this interview will be confidential and your identity will not be revealed.

You will receive a $20 gift card for participating in this interview If you choose to opt-out at any time, you will still receive the gift card.

Our purpose today is to explore how Hip Hop Based Education may influence students' academic self-perception, sense of belonging, and persistence in first-year composition courses. If there is a moment at any point throughout this interview where you wish to pause or stop, then please alert me. Your responses will be kept confidential since I will use an alias for you and any other individuals that will be named. Are you okay with me recording our conversation? [*Pause for verbal consent*]

This interview will be approximately 60 mins. It will be recorded, in order to provide the highest quality of accuracy for the transcriptions of our conversations. Before we begin, I would like to ask if you have any questions? [*Pause for response*]

Opening (Background questions)
1. How long have you been an educator?

Introduction
2. Where did you begin your academic journey?
    a. What challenges or obstacles did you have to overcome along the way?
3. Where did your teaching journey begin?

Transition
4. What has been your experiences or history with Hip Hop culture?
5. In what ways do you use Hip Hop culture in your first-year composition class?
    [**PROBE**]
    a) Do you employ specific Hip Hop practices? [Tell me more]
    b) Do you employ specific Hip Hop philosophies? [Tell me more]
    c) Do you employ any of the 5 Hip Hop elements?
    d) In your experience, do you find that you rely on any one of the 5 elements of Hip Hop more than the other to deliver a lesson?
6. What motivated you to bring Hip Hop into the classroom?

Now I'm going to ask several questions about the use of Hip Hop in the classroom:
7. How do you think the use of Hip Hop benefits students in the classroom, if at all?

Key-Sense of Belonging in class (Sense of Belonging + Personal Relationships + Validation w/ faculty)
8. How would you describe your understanding of the concept of students' sense of belonging in a classroom?
9. Do you employ a specific set of rap artists in your curriculum?
    [**PROBE**, if needed: Describe the impact that this artist has, if any, on students' sense of belonging.
    [If they describe affecting students' sense of belonging] Can you tell me about a specific time when you observed how your use of Hip Hop made them feel that way in this class?
10. Do you think your use of Hip Hop makes your students feel more connected with their home community, the academic community, or both? [Tell me more]
    a. [**Probe-**]In what ways if at all does your use of HH connect to students' cultural identity in the classroom?
    b. [Probe- tell me more, which specific practices from HH do you use

Key-Academic Self-perception (cultural Identity +academic identity + agency)
11. Does your use of HH introduce your students to academic values, beliefs, or traditions?
    a. If yes [Probe- tell me more, which specific practices from HH do you use and which specific academic values, beliefs, or traditions]
    b. **If no [Probe- have you observed anything that does help them to develop these values, beliefs, or traditions]***

12. Do you think your use of HH helps them to engage in more writing tasks throughout the course?
    a. If yes [Probe- tell me more, and how it helps them engage]
    b. **If no [Probe- is there anything that supports their ability to engage]***

Key- Persistence (Seek help when needed + Welcomeness to engage inside/outside class + action control)

13. Do you think your use of Hip Hop help your students feel more connected to you as an instructor?
    a. If yes, [Probe - tell me more] [Probe- tell me more, which specific practices from HH do you use and if they feel more connected do they…
        i. …seek help from you when they need it?
        ii. …participate in class discussion?
        iii. …talk about non-academic matters outside of class?

Ending (*If time permits*)

14. Were there any songs/techniques/practices you employed that stood out as helping them to develop a stronger sense of knowledge of self more than others?

Thank you so much for taking the time for this interview. I was able to learn more than I came in knowing.

*If time permits

APPENDIX F

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Focus Group Prompts- FYC Students

For the Proposed Study: *Between the Academic Culture and Students' Ecology: A Qualitative Study on Recentering Hip Hop Based Education in First-year Composition courses*

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: to gather insight from students on how Hip Hop based educational practices in composition courses shape the development of their academic self-perceptions, sense of belonging, and persistence.

45-60 Minutes

Pseudonyms of Interviewees:	
Pseudonym of Institution:	
Role:	
Date:	
Time:	
Course Title:	

Introduction

Hi! I'm your friendly neighborhood Professor Cagnolatti. You can call me "Cag"! I just want to ask you a few questions about your experiences with Hip Hop in the composition course and how it shapes your view of learning, your abilities with writing, and how you see yourself as a student.

Your feedback will help instructors to learn from a students' perspective how to make first year composition more engaging, culturally relevant, and more connected to your everyday lives. You will not get in trouble for anything you mention here; in fact, at no point in time will you be identified by name.

You will receive a $20 gift card for participating in this focus group. If you choose to opt-out at any time, you will still receive the gift card. Your responses will be kept confidential since I will use an alias for you and any other individuals that will be named. Are you okay with me recording our conversation? [*Pause for verbal consent*]

This interview will be approximately 60 mins. It will be recorded, in order to provide the highest quality of accuracy for the transcriptions of our conversations. Before we begin, I would like to ask if you have any questions? [*Pause for response*]

Review the ground rules.
1. Respect your peers.
2. One person talking at a time
3. Participate and share
4. Be mindful of time. "It's easy to get off-track. We only have 45 minutes so there may be times when I lead us back to the questions. And we want to make sure everyone has a chance to share."

Opening (Background questions)
1. Tell us what year you are, where you grew up, and what you hope to accomplish after taking first-year composition? [pause for each participant's responses)]

2. How do you feel about the professor's use of hip-hop in your course?
   [probe – "Tell me more?"]

Key-Sense of Belonging in class (Sense of Belonging + Personal Relationships + Validation w/ faculty)
3. How would you describe your sense of belonging in this course compared to other courses?
   > [**Prompt if needed:** Do you feel like you belong more, less, about the same?]
   > [Probe – why? Tell me more.]
   > [**Probe**- connections to HHBE]
   a. [If they describe feeling more belonging] Can you tell me about a specific time when your instructor's use of Hip Hop made you feel that way in this class?
4. Do you feel your instructor's use of Hip Hop makes you feel more connected with your home community?
   a. Why do you feel (or not feel) this is so?

Key-Academic Self-perception (Identity + agency)
5. In what ways if at all does your instructor's use of HH connect to your cultural identity in the classroom?
6. Does your instructor's use of HH help your ability to engage in a writing task throughout the course?
   a. If yes [Probe- tell me more, and how it helps them engage]
   b. **If no [Probe- is there anything that helps your ability to engage]***

Key- Persistence (Seek help when needed + Welcomeness to engage inside/outside class + action control)
7. Does your instructor's use of Hip Hop help you feel more connected to the instructor?
   a. If yes, [Probe - tell me more] if they feel more connected do they…
   b. …seek help from your instructor when you need it?
   c. …participate in class discussion?
   d. …talk about non-academic matters outside of class?

Ending (*If time permits***)**
    8.   Were there any songs/techniques/practices that stood out more than others?

Thank you so much for taking the time for this interview. I was able to learn more than I came in knowing.
*If time permits

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