Exploring Hip Hop Pedagogy in the Lives of Four African American Adolescents

Roland Steele
rolandsteele75@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING HIP HOP PEDAGOGY IN THE LIVES OF FOUR AFICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS

Roland Steele, Ed.D.
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Northern Illinois University, 2020
Joseph Flynn, Director

The purpose of this case study was to examine how participation in an after-school hip hop pedagogy program influenced the social and academic lives of four African American male adolescents. The researcher viewed this study through the conceptual framework of culturally relevant teaching that incorporated hip hop pedagogy. Hip hop is currently one of the most popular forms of music and represents the dominant culture of today’s inner-city youth. This study centered on how hip hop pedagogy is being used to educate African American male students.

The study participants consisted of four African American male adolescents who attended an after-school hip hop pedagogy program. The study participants were engaged in the mastery of skills such as beat making, deejaying, photography, video production, social media promotion, and audio engineering in a studio environment that has state-of-the-art recording equipment. The program allowed each participant to select and connect with his interest. The literature review focused on the history and practices of hip hop in regard to education.

Data collection methods included interviews, observations with field notes, and artifact analysis. Once data were collected and coded, it was analyzed and the following five themes emerged:

1) Engaging in activities that accommodate their interests
2) Importance of teaching strategies being anchored in the reality of the participants
3) Importance of student engagement in classroom learning experience
4) Importance of positive peer-to-peer motivation and school climate
5) Need to deconstruct traditional class curriculum through hip hop pedagogy

Three implications for teaching based on the use of hip hop as a pedagogical tool were identified. Ideally, the main principles explained through the research can be taught in urban teacher education programs. This would allow for future educators to learn about hip hop culture as well as the critical roots of utilizing hip hop pedagogy to engage marginalized, African American male students. The second implication would be to teach hip hop pedagogy in educational leadership and administrative programs so that policy and decision makers could become aware of the multiple fields of study represented in hip hop scholarship. The third implication for teaching would be to increase resources for teachers who want to use hip hop, in the form of lesson plans, curriculum, professional development opportunities, and journal articles.
EXPLORING HIP HOP PEDAGOGY IN THE LIVES OF FOUR AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS

BY

ROLAND STEELE
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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Doctoral Director:
Dr. Joseph Flynn
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

If our educational system is serious about addressing this country’s problems with adolescent literacy and equal education opportunities, it can start with young African American males. Historically, African American males have been one of the most marginalized groups in this country. Ferguson (2005) cited how African American male students were punished for behavior infractions such as talking or wearing hats and how listening to music could lead to suspension. Coopersmith (2009) suggested cultural incongruences may be the answer to this misinterpretation because of a lack of teacher diversity in most urban schools, with African American males being taught by a predominantly White female teacher workforce that was unprepared for teaching in urban schools. Lee (1991) asserted that young African American males “in contemporary American society face major challenges to their development and well-being” (p. 1). In disproportionate ways, African American male youth are more often remediated or placed in classes for students with emotional and learning difficulties (Fashola, 2005; Milofsky, 1974). As a group, they are woefully behind other students based on high school graduation rates (Fashola, 2005; Noguera, 2003), being suspended or expelled (Smith & Harper, 2015), and are vastly underrepresented in advanced placement and honors classes (Ogbu & Wilson, 1990). The American Council on Education (ACE) in 2007 reported that only 27.8% of eligible African American males were enrolled in colleges as compared to 41.6% of White males (Ryu, 2009).
Smith and Harper (2015) suggested that school suspension and expulsion rates of Black male students should be alarming to all educators across this country. This appears to be a particular problem in Southern states. The research reported that Black male students in the 13 Southern states comprised 47% of student suspensions and 44% of expulsions, which is the highest among all racial and ethics groups. Nationally, Black males were 35% of student suspensions and 34% of student expulsions from K-12 public schools. In 181 Southern school districts, Black students were 100% of the students expelled from public schools. Smith and Harper (2015) further asserted that faculty in schools of education and other organizations that are preparing teachers for the nation’s classrooms could use their report to “raise consciousness about implicit bias and other forces that cyclically reproduce racial inequalities in school disciplines” (p. 1). They also hope the report is not used to support deficit and crime narratives about Black students. They suggest the data go beyond the assertion that student misbehavior and irresponsible parents are the problems. Furthermore, they believe racist practices and public school policies across the South are the major source of this dilemma.

The African American male’s representation in school suspensions and expulsions reduce their exposure to meaningful educational opportunities (Aud et al., 2010; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Skiba, Micheal, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). A large number of these young men once expelled from school are ending up in our prison systems. Once released from prison, they are relegated to a second-class status for the rest of their lives. Regardless of marginalization within our nation’s school systems, many African American adolescents are utilizing hip hop pedagogy to make meaning in their lives. The students in this study are using hip hop to explore issues of racism, cultural identity, homelessness, and educational inequality. I suggest that hip
hop is appealing to African American youth because it provides them with a voice to address educational inequities they experience as an underrepresented group in our society. One of the participants in my study described how he listens to hip hop music frequently because it relaxes his mind and helps him deal with the stress in his daily life. In my opinion, hip hop music challenges deficit theories about African American culture. It also provides teachers and school administrators with ways to use popular culture as a means to bridge out-of-school and in-school literacies. Irby, Petchauer, and Kirkland (2013) suggested that educators should stop relying on the traditional high school curriculum to engage African American male students. They suggest that educators can learn how to motivate and engage African male students by examining the success of hip hop cultural spaces outside of school. At these sites, Black male youth are enthusiastically involved in hip hop cultural activities such as beat making, teaching dance classes, promoting shows, recording sessions, managing studios, artist development, visual art, and other modes of hip hop cultural production. They stress the need for schools to utilize hip hop culture as a strategy to engage and motivate Black male students.

Problem Statement

Blanchett (2006) and Noguera (2003) have identified structural barriers in urban schools that prevent African American male youth from having their literacy skills recognized. They further asserted that teachers frequently use culturally unresponsive instructional strategies with urban African American males. This practice can lead to a lack of engagement, alienation, and negative attitudes toward school. Emdin (2017) suggested that most White teachers see inner-city youth as being unreachable. There is some truth to this statement because one of the high
schools, where I previously taught mathematics, invited a guest lecturer who emphasized to the teaching staff the importance of teaching from a culturally relevant approach. He was advocating the need for teachers to consider the cultural background of their students because culture plays a role in learning. This includes all of the subjects in the curriculum, such as English, mathematics, social studies, and science. His message was not well received by many of the staff members, especially the more senior White teachers. They rejected his message as being racist, and several teachers walked out in the middle of the presentation.

Additionally, a science teacher at the school later stated that he thought the presentation was weird and the presenter was racist. He was only getting paid to sell regurgitated material. He stated that what these teachers needed instead was professional development training in such areas as how to motivate the unmotivated and deal with chronically truant students. His sentiments were also expressed by a fellow mathematics teacher at the school who indicated that it was the students who needed to change, not the teachers. However, they failed to understand that bringing cultural relevancy into the classroom learning experience has proven to be successful in increasing engagement and motivation in urban schools. Emdin’s (2017) research has shown that teachers would be more successful with inner-city youth by integrating the culture and views of the students into the learning experience.

Irby et al. (2013) suggested that African American male students are engaged in learning but not always the type of learning that an educator values. Heath (1983) asserted that literacy, as practiced by African American male students, is often shaped in tension, while schools and society endorse literacy practiced by White students. In his study on adolescent African American male literacy, Kirkland (2006) noted how a White female teacher characterized
“Shawn,” one of the participants in his study on adolescent African American male literacy, as being illiterate, with limited reading and writing competence. Kirkland’s assessment of the young man’s literacy skills differed substantially from those of the teacher. He asserted that outside of the classroom, in the company of his friends and Kirkland himself, Shawn was always the most driven writer of the African American males in his study. Shawn’s literacy practices consisted primarily of rap texts. Kirkland (2006) noted that Shawn’s writing was mostly autobiographical and served as a counternarrative to the challenges of being raised by his grandmother while having a mother addicted to drugs and a father he never met. Kirkland (2006) suggested that Shawn’s literary style ranged from “academic and non–academic literacy across among the simplistic of Cummings, the complicated tragedies of Shakespeare, and the sobering rhythms of Tupac” (p. 18). Shawn also read books which he viewed as relevant but found traditional school texts to be boring. He expressed his disdain of Shakespeare and wanted to know why Shakespeare was a part of the school curriculum. Kirkland (2006) asserted that the problem was, in many instances, this country’s educational policies and literacy curriculums have failed to give recognition to African American male literacy practices or nontraditional literacy in general. They also have failed to make connections between in-and out-of-school literacies. He suggested that our schools must contend with society’s flawed definition of literacy and its comprehensive misrepresentation of African American males. Kirkland (2006) asserted that most schools have narrow definitions of literacy, which, in many instances, reject literacy practices that do not promote traditional Western ideologies. Kirkland (2006) further stated,
“In order for Black males to find success in school and in society, there is an urgent need to better understand literacy practices from their perspectives so that educators can begin to rethink classroom literacy curriculum and instruction with them in mind” (p. 41).

Campbell (2005) also endorsed bringing nontraditional literacy practices into schools. He suggested that hip hop music and culture can figure into literacy studies and composition pedagogy for all students because of its popularity with a diversity of youth. Nontraditional literacy practices are a staple in out of school settings.

Hull and Schultz (2001) suggested that literacy practices in out-of-school settings have “played pivotal roles in the history and development of literacy research and literacy theory” (p. 576). They also suggested that “studies of literacy out of school have been pivotal in shaping the field. Indeed, to talk about literacy these days, both in school and out is to speak of events, practices, activities, ideologies, discourses and identities” (p. 11). In addition, Hall and Schultz (2001) stated:

Research on literacy out of school continues to be an important and necessary corrective to unidimensional understandings of texts, processes, and contexts. However, the persisting challenge in an age of accountability and testing, narrowing conceptions of literacy, and growing socioeconomic disparities is how to bridge out-of-school and in-school worlds in ways that make discernable, positive differences in youth’s present circumstances and social futures. (p. 239)

Therefore, they suggest there is a need for the active participation of both community organizations and schools working together to promote and enhance the literacy skills of all students, especially those who have been historically marginalized. This is in keeping with the research of Kinloch, Burkhard, and Penn (2017), who have shifted focus from schools as the
primary site of study on literacy practices to multiple contexts which include the family, home, and other non-school environments.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the case study was to examine how participation in an after-school hip hop literacy program has influenced the social and academic lives of four African American male adolescents. The four participants in this study have been expelled from traditional high schools and are enrolled in an alternative high school. They are also enrolled in an after-school program which seeks to provide hip hop literacy instruction. Each of the participants has been writing rap texts for many years. Their high school principal thought the after-school program would be beneficial in getting the young men to begin thinking critically, avoid risky situations, and become more engaged in school. Advocates for after-school programs suggest that these programs can reduce delinquency, increase academic achievement, and promote social and emotional development (Takanishi, 2004). This study further examines the potential for hip hop pedagogy as a curricular foundation.

**Research Questions**

1) How can hip hop pedagogy broaden student perspectives of literacy?

2) What can student participation in an after-school hip hop program tell us about student literacy practices?

3) How can hip hop pedagogy serve as a bridge between out-of-school and in-school literacy practices?
Methodology

A qualitative case study approach was used in this study to examine the literacy practices of four African American male students who attended an after-school hip hop literacy program sponsored by the Dade Foundation (a pseudonym). The foundation meets once a week in South East Alternative High School (a pseudonym). It also meets in various creative workspaces such as film and recording studios for collaborative activities such as hip hop music creation, music video editing, and songwriting. The community where the study took place is located in a county in the southeast part of the United States. The surrounding community is working to middle class, with little industry and mostly single-family homes and condominiums.

I collected data through in-depth interviews, observations, and review of artifacts that were provided to me by the students and director of the after-school program. The goal of conducting in-depth interviews was to gather stories told by the participants of how they describe their engagement in hip hop pedagogy. Specifically, interviews were conducted and audio-taped, and tapes were transcribed into word documents; artifacts were reviewed and data were coded for emergent themes. The data were analyzed to answer the research questions.

Data were coded using open and pattern coding to identify common themes. Open coding was used to break the transcriptions and field notes down into themes (Mertens, 2005, p. 424). The observations, interviews, and reviewed artifacts were coded to find consistent themes. Field notes gathered during observations were analyzed for themes related to the research questions and were also examined for themes that had emerged in the transcriptions from the observations, interviews, and artifacts as well. A thorough exploration of common themes surrounding the
primary research questions took place (Shank, 2006). Collecting information in case studies to uncover common themes via comparison to previous data is thematic by nature (Yin, 2009). Thematic data protocols are particularly useful in case studies because the constant and repetitive review of the information reduces bias and tainted findings and conclusions (Merriam, 2009). NVivo software was used to assist in the thematic analysis of the data. Thematic data analysis procedures took place in the study by comparing, contrasting, and performing regular reviews of transcribed audio files, documents, and keywords and phrases gleaned from the scrubbed texts coded into nodes within the NVivo software (Shank, 2006).

To investigate these research questions, I conducted 3-hour-long in-depth structured interviews with each of the four study participants. There were four 2-hour-long observations of the young men as they are engaged in literacy practices such as writing rap text, reciting this text in a recording studio, performing at concert venues, and creating videos to promote their music. In addition, I also analyzed literacy text documents submitted by the participants and reviewed instructional material from the Dade Foundation. Mainly, I investigated how the participants constructed meaning and their cultural identities from hip hop music. Finally, I allowed member checking (Merriam, 2009) of all qualitative data collected through interviews and observations. All major themes from interviews, events, and observations were presented to the participants for validation. The methodology is further described in Chapter 5.

**Limitations**

Two limitations of the study are that the participant population is small and all participants attend the same music literacy program. As such, the findings of the study may not
be generalizable to other populations (Mertens, 2005). It may only be relevant to participants who reside within urban school districts. Time was also a limitation in the study because the data were collected over a four-week period. This may prevent me from seeing a change in the dispositions and strategies of the participants over an extended period. However, I believe that it is still possible in the time given to obtain sufficient information to answer the research questions. Finally, because the study is qualitative, the background of the researcher influences all of the data collection and analysis; even with reliable data collection and relevant findings, a different researcher might produce different findings.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for the study is based on culturally relevant teaching that incorporates hip hop pedagogy. According to Ladson-Billings (2006), educators can change the academic and social climate in urban schools through culturally relevant and responsive teaching in either a cross-cultural or multicultural environment. This enables students to relate to course content that is his or her cultural context. Ladson-Billing's theory is grounded in several years of research in elementary schools. She identified successful teachers of African American students and highlighted common elements that these teachers shared in their practice (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The most important feature that each possessed was the recognition of making their practice culturally relevant. Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007) asserted that culturally relevant teachers are clear about how their own social identities impact their work with students and parents and are confident about how they view their own identity within the school community.
they teach (Adams et al., 2007). Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) consider teaching to be an art and not a skill.

Furthermore, it is believed that every student, regardless of his status, can succeed academically (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Culturally relevant teachers see themselves as being part of the community in which the school and students exist. They also view teaching as a way to give back to their community (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Culturally relevant teachers help students to make local, national, racial, cultural, global, and social identity connections (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Jordan-Irvine, 2003). They help students to learn and respect their school, classmates, and others beyond the school (Rodriguez, 2009). Culturally relevant teachers encourage students to form learning communities that extend beyond the classroom. These communities lead to collaborative learning in which students support each other (Adams et al., 2007). This collaborative environment is supported by the teachers' belief that knowledge is continuously re-created, recycled, and shared (Akom, 2009). These teachers also share the belief that curriculum content is critical and must evolve to meet the needs of all students (Wink, 2005).

Culturally relevant teachers adapt their communication styles when interacting with their students (Hallman, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2006). These teachers will alter their speech patterns, communication styles, and participation structures to more closely resemble those of their students’ own culture (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Culturally relevant pedagogy continues to build on critical pedagogy. All the aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy apply to a critical hip hop pedagogy because each idea is connected to what is necessary for effectively utilizing hip hop as
a pedagogical approach. Ladson-Billings’ (2006) culturally relevant pedagogy has also been used as an instructional strategy in after-school settings with urban youth. It was employed in an after-school study in Chicago, Illinois, which explored the use of hip hop pedagogy to aid literacy and social justice development in Latino and African American youth.

Kim and Pulido’s (2015) study on the influence of hip hop pedagogy at an after-school center involved culturally relevant teaching (Ladson- Billing, 2006). Kim and Pulido (2015) suggested that, although the study took place outside of a traditional classroom, there are parallels in ways that hip hop pedagogy can be used (Ladson-Billing, 2006) in both traditional and out-of-school settings. They further asserted that “both contexts understand, navigate, and change structural inequities” (p. 25). Therefore, my study meets the criteria as cited by Kim and Pulido for using culturally relevant teaching with hip hop pedagogy.

A growing number of other scholars have advocated for the incorporation of hip hop pedagogy in traditional classrooms (Duncan & Morrell, 2008; Hill, 2009; hooks, 1994). They view hip hop songs and videos as providing needed text featuring counternarratives to traditional social studies and civics classes. They also recognize that hip hop pedagogy can help urban students to analyze the classics, such as Shakespeare’s plays and Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales. The themes of conflict presented in Shakespeare's plays are present in hip hop songs. These themes include murder, deceit, family violence, and lust, among others.

**Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies**

Paris and Alim (2014) recognized the changing demographics of the country are building a strong case for culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) that promote inclusion built around
youth practices. They see advantages in the different racial and ethnic groups learning cultural practices from each other. While extolling Ladson-Billings’ theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, they argue that the basic tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy and the way it’s being used need revisions. They seek culturally sustaining pedagogies that accept the best of all youth cultural practices and identities. While crediting hip hop pedagogy for acknowledgment of social justice issues, they also raise concerns about relying on hip hop as a pedagogy for students of color without it being correctly critiqued. Their concern centers on the homophobic, misogynistic, and racist lyrics that are found in much of corporate hip hop (Paris, 2012).

They further challenged the idea that students of color had to be freed from linguistic, literacy, and cultural practices “brought from their homes and communities and replace them with what was viewed as superior practices” (p. 93). This deficit approach, according to Paris (2012), suggested that a student of color’s culture should give way to dominant ways of thinking. The goal of CSP is “to perpetuate and foster--to sustain--linguistic, literate and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 94). Paris (2012) asked that we inquire whether CRP is sustaining the languages and cultures of communities of color, as is now conceptualized. Furthermore, he suggested CSP is a pedagogy that is not only relevant but also responsive to multiethnic and multilingual communities. Ladson-Billings (2014) also asserted that the concept of CRP needs to be pushed further. She acknowledged Paris and Alim’s (2014) work as an example of such a push. Ladson-Billings (2014) stated:

In developing this theory, culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), these authors use culturally relevant pedagogy as the place where “the beat drops” and then layer the multiple ways that this notion of pedagogy shifts, changes, adapts, recycles, and recreates instructional spaces to ensure that consistently marginalized students are repositioned into a place of normativity –that is, that they become subjects in the instructional process, not mere objects. (p.76)
As part of the “remix” of thinking, learning, and teaching through the lenses of CRS and CSP, Artiles et al. (2019) are serving as academic experts on a committee of the New York State Education Department and developing the framework for culturally responsive/sustaining education which has the following goals:

▪Affirms cultural identities and fosters positive academic outcomes;

▪Fosters and sustains meaningful relationships between schools and communities, with an emphasis on a personal investment in the lives of youth;

▪Develops students’ ability to connect across cultures;

▪Empowers students as agents of positive social change;

▪Contributes to an individual’s engagement, learning, growth, and achievement through the cultivation of critical thinking. (p. 11)

This effort is using elements from the works of leading scholars who have spent their careers in the fight to bring equity to diverse communities. It also affirms the role of culture in education and the need for educators and community leaders to work together in aiding students who have been marginalized.

The four participants in the study are enrolled in an alternative charter high school for students who experienced academic or behavioral problems in traditional high schools and were expelled. In addition to the alternative high school, the research participants were enrolled in a hip hop literacy after-school program for males sponsored by the Dade Foundation (a pseudonym). The hip hop literacy program is an effort by the foundation to provide additional
support for males who are enrolled in the study and have expressed an interest in hip hop rap music. The major goal of the Dade Foundation is to provide young men with hip hop literacy practices that lead to academic enhancement and careers in the music industry.

To accomplish these goals, the program uses a curriculum built around hip hop literacy and soft business skills development in a culturally relevant teaching environment. According to the Dade Foundation director, the hip hop literacy curriculum is designed to increase student engagement and academic skills. He stated that they have high expectations for each student enrolled and offer them opportunities to learn music instruction from professionals in the music industry and video production in a local film school. Students are encouraged to create hip hop text and music that reflects their lived experiences while not relying on negative clichés, stereotypes, and lyrics that promote violence and misogyny. The young men are expected to share their hip hop text by participating in hip hop concerts, community forums, spoken-word events, and other activities that connect to community and literacy development. However, the effort to create an after-school youth program centering on hip hop music and entrepreneurship is not new. Still, one with the expressed objective of providing academic and social support to Black male youth requires research (Ferguson, 2005).

Anderson’s (2000) research suggested that hip hop entrepreneurial after-school programs, in which urban students are engaging in media and music construction, have increased in popularity. Ferguson (2005) referred to these efforts as social enterprises. He asserted that such interventions are a welcome experience for youth because of the involvement of adult mentorship in helping the youth gain knowledge, jobs, and business skills. However, there have been few studies that document the impact of such programs on the participants (Ferguson,
Woodland, Martin, Hill, and Worrell (2009) suggested that African American male youth could benefit from involvement in youth development programs that are designed specifically for them. A search of the literature revealed few solely African American male youth development programs and even less data on the success of such programs (Woodland et al., 2009).

Woodland et al. (2009) were able to locate one program in a significant western U.S. city. This program convened twice weekly with each session involving a critique of popular culture, politics, history, hip hop music, self-transformation, and reliance. The staff used culturally relevant movies, music videos, speeches, and personal testimonies to assist in discussion topics. The staff thought a careful examination of selective discussion topics would assist young African American males in developing skills to navigate a racialized society. These African American males were encouraged to use discussion topics to critically examine their life experiences with the goal of academic success, cultural competence, and overall self-improvement. Woodland et al.’s (2009) data collection and analysis yielded impressive results. The participants interviewed during the study cited how the program had restructured their identities and led to increased academic success. It also eroded class and cultural stereotypes about their experiences and provided feelings of increased agency and accountability (Woodland et al., 2009). At the conclusion of the study, Woodland et al. (2009) suggested that although their research yielded positive results, future research will be required. Then researchers will be able to answer more questions about how such programs can positively influence young African American males and other at-risk youth. By examining out-of-school literacy practices of four young African American males, my study attempted to provide needed research in this area.
The following chapters review the literature regarding the origins of hip hop creation and culture, which began as a reaction to blighted social conditions in the Bronx borough of New York City. This culture rapidly spread throughout the world and gained a prominent role in popular culture. Chapter 5 outlines the study’s research design, contains a lengthy exploration of the study’s participants, and includes the methodological orientation of the study. This is significant because it guides the data collection methodology, the procedures, and the data analysis of the study. Chapter 6 discusses the research findings, and finally, Chapter 7 addresses conclusions, future research, and implications of the study.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, I will be providing an analysis of the literature describing the origins of hip hop culture from its South Bronx, New York, beginnings, its development as a culture with African roots, and its ultimate influence on people worldwide. Through analyzing the distinct styles and approaches that different artists display, I was able to gather a unique timeline that highlights significant occurrences within the genre of hip hop music and its potential in classrooms across the country. The literature review also incorporates a discussion on critical literacy because hip hop music and culture are being utilized to develop a critical consciousness in many of our youth. I have also included critical race theory because of the many similarities between critical race theory and hip hop. Both involve the use of narrative in responding to racism and injustice.

The Birth and Life of Hip Hop

In the early 1970s, hip hop culture originated in the Bronx borough of New York City as a result of blighted social conditions and civil neglect. Researchers suggested that the Bronx had been devastated as a result of the creation of the Cross Bronx Expressway (Chang, 2007; George, 1998; Rose, 1994). The city built a highway, which was seven miles long, that catered to suburban commuters by providing them access to Manhattan and New Jersey. To build the
highway, 60,000 homes and over one hundred streets in the Bronx were plowed through and torn down, which destroyed many neighborhoods. Robert Moses, an influential city planner in New York City, designated the properties in the path of the expressway Title 1 slums; therefore, the government was able to acquire the properties through eminent domain (Price, 2006). The properties formed a dense population of stable neighborhoods, which were mostly Jewish, Italian, German, Irish, and African American. Caro (1975) suggested that racism and class privilege played a factor in the site selection of the highway because 37% of the residents affected by its construction were non-White and, all told, 170,000 people were relocated. Rose (1994) stated Moses could have modified the highway path so it would not affect “densely populated working-class ethnic residential communities” (p. 31). The South Bronx was already a fragile working-class borough before the highway was constructed because of redlining and White flight to the suburbs (Rose, 1994). Chang (2007) and Smith (2005) asserted that following World War II, many White families left the Bronx because they were able to get low-interest mortgages from the federal government and move to the newly developed suburbs. The result was the Bronx became the home of mostly minoritized families. Rose (1994) asserted that residents in the Bronx were also impacted by the movement of blue-collar manufacturing jobs away from New York City and other urban areas. Concerning employment between 1967 and 1987, Chicago lost 60% of its manufacturing jobs, New York 58% and Philadelphia 64% (Nolan & Anyon, 2004). In particular, New York moved toward corporate and information service employment. The loss of manufacturing jobs increased the conditions of poverty for those most marginalized and further contributed to higher drug addiction and incarceration rates (Anyon, 1997). There was also a steep increase in housing costs in boroughs adjacent to the Bronx. This
forced low-income residents away from more affluent sections of the city. New York’s solution to this housing dilemma was to construct densely populated public housing projects.

This led to 15,000 apartments being constructed in massive towers of low-income minoritized residents stacked in the northeast Bronx (Asante, 2008; Smith, 2005). The occupants of these subsidized apartments were mostly working-class and poor African Americans, Latinos, and immigrants from the Caribbean (Asante, 2008; Smith, 2005). The construction of both the highway and housing projects drove down property values in the Bronx and led many slumlords to set fire to their property to collect insurance payments (Asante, 2008; Price, 2006). Every year from 1973 to 1977, more than 12,000 fires were reported, with over 5,000 apartment buildings burned down. Additionally, more than 100,000 individual units were destroyed (Chang, 2007). Cepeda (2004) suggested that this civil neglect and demolition created a cultural environment that led to the youth feeling frustrated, overwhelmed, and bewildered. The youth then formed gangs which had over 19,500 members in the 1970s (Price, 2006). The gangs replaced civil authority, and many of the youth were forced to pledge allegiance to their gang for protection. This resulted in further tension and stress. Many of the youth released the stress by engaging in graffiti art in which dilapidated buildings and burned-out homes were painted over with aerosol paint.

The Bronx has been described as resembling a war zone in the 1970s (George, 1998). It became a place where looting, vandalism, theft, and drug abuse were endemic. The city’s policy of neglect did not attract the attention of media until the New York City blackout of July 1977. During the blackout, gangs of mostly African American and Latino youth looted and vandalized
stores in the Bronx, east New York, Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, Crown Heights, and Harlem. Many fires were set, and prisoners at the Bronx House of Detention set fire to three dormitories (Chang, 2007). Chang (2007) stated that, although Bill Moyers led a CBS News crew across the Bronx and President Carter visited a devastated area, the lack of basic social services and oppressive city policies that led to the decaying conditions in the South Bronx continued. The sinking property values in the Bronx resulted in a deficient tax base, which wreaked havoc on the schools. This meant there were less art, music, and other recreational activities in schools located in the South Bronx (Smith, 2005). The neighborhood gangs played an integral part in the Bronx’s social network. The gangs provided a social outlet, protection, and a sense of belonging for many youths in the Bronx. The gangs also created a fertile environment for youth looking to create a culture and community through the art of resistance. It was through their embrace of hip hop that many of their members found a critical examination of the issues of racism, power, and neglect. This became the perfect setting for the birth of counter-artistic youth culture (Rose, 1994). Rose (1994) stated:

The new ethnic groups who made the South Bronx their home in the 1970s, while facing social isolation, economic fragility, truncated communication media, and shrinking social service organizations, began building their own cultural networks, which would prove to be resilient and responsive in the age of high technology. North American Blacks, Jamaicans, Puerto Ricans, and other Caribbean people with roots in other postcolonial contexts reshaped their cultural identities and expressions in a hostile, technologically, sophisticated, multiethnic, urban terrain. (p. 33-34)

Furthermore, she suggested that New York City leadership had continually ignored the inhabitants of the South Bronx neighborhood. Still, the youth in these communities turned to hip hop as a means to forge their identity.
Where the mainstream media failed, hip hop groups such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five created rap lyrics, which provided a critical critique of the living conditions of Bronx residents who had been rendered voiceless by the powerful and privileged. The group’s rap song “The Message” is an indictment of the malfeasance that permeated both local and city government in New York City during this period. A few lyrics from the song illustrate the plight of South Bronx residents, such as, “Rats in the front room, roaches in the back. Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat. I tried to get away, but I couldn’t get far.” Tanya “Sweet Tee” Winley gave her impression of the government in the rap song “Vicious Rap.” These are two lyrics from the song: “Take a good look at the government. How they sit back, relax and don’t give a damn” (Bradley & Dubois, 2010). These rap lyrics articulated the frustrations of day-to-day residential life in the South Bronx during the 1970s.

Love (2009) asserted that themes and sounds of rap music and other aspects of hip hop provided the youth of the Bronx a healthy outlet to express and protest their concerns for what was happening to their communities. Rose (1994) wrote, “From the outset, rap music has articulated pleasures and problems of Black urban life in contemporary America” (p. 2). She went on to list the problems like unemployment, drug abuse, poor schooling, gang violence, housing, and teen pregnancy. These are many of the same problems faced by many urban youth today. Because of these problems in urban America, many young people have embraced hip hop as their sound and critical voice. Studies have shown that 97% of African American youth are drawn to hip hop, especially rap music (Kunjufu, 1993). Hip hop is a culture with traditions, customs, and a language that have spread across the globe (Alridge, 2005; Watkins, 2005). The
part of the hip hop culture that resonates the most with youth is rap music, which transcends race, class, and gender (Ginwright, 2004). Rose (1994) stated that:

Rappers speak with the voice of personal experience, taking on the identity of the observer or narrator. They rap about how to avoid gang pressures and still earn local respect, how to deal with the loss of several friends to gunfights and drug overdoses and they tell grandiose and sometimes violent tales that are powered by male sexual power over women. Female rappers sometimes tell stories from the perspective of a young woman who is skeptical of male protestations of love or a girl who has been involved with a drug dealer and cannot sever herself from his dangerous lifestyle. (p. 2)

Rose (1994) insisted that rappers took the themes expressed in the Blues, jazz, and Afro-American literary traditions. The work of writers such as Ishmael Reed, Ralph Ellison, Jean Toomer, Richard Wright, and Zora Hurston represent this critical literacy tradition (Gates, 2010). Their themes are being revised, reinterpreted, and reintroduced using contemporary cultural and technological elements by hip hop artists (Watkins, 2005). Gates (2010) connected rap to the Black vernacular that was found in West Africa. He raised the need for more attention to be paid to the Black vernacular and the complexity of the oral tradition of storytelling that has been passed from one generation to the next, first in Africa and then in the Black communities in this country. Campbell (2005) stated, “The vernacular is more than just language-invariant be’s, double negatives, and inverted semantics—it is rhetoric, a highly developed discursive system that claims the oral tradition of rap as its centerpiece” (p. 3). Furthermore, he stated that he was able to “pick up pieces of the vernacular rhetorical tradition from the West African griot to African American street corner rappers, spoken word poets and hip-hop artists” (p. 3). Rap music, with its themes of protest and critical examination of urban life, is part of that oral tradition.
The roots of hip hop linguistic practices can also be traced to slavery and bondage, where slave poets wrote poems and songs in protest of slavery (Campbell, 2005). In his poem “Liberty and Slavery,” George Moses Horton, a slave in North Carolina for 66 years, wrote “Bid Slavery hide her haggard face, And barbarism fly I scorn to see the sad disgrace in which enslaved I lie” (Sherman, 1997, p. 2). One of Joshua McCarter Simpson’s protest poems was set to a popular tune. The song “Away to Canada” was sung to the music of “O Susannah.” The song lyrics, “I’m on my way to Canada, That cold and dreary land, the dire effects of slavery, I can no longer stand,” was sung by many slaves as they made their way to Canada and freedom (Sherman, 1997, p. 6). In many ways, this approach is similar to the sampling techniques employed in the creation of hip hop music.

**The Roots Picnic**

Within music studies, hip hop has generally been considered within a more extensive discussion of Black popular music. Consistently, Black popular music and culture have been aligned together. As Rose (1994) asserted, under social conditions in which continued frontal attacks on powerful groups are strategically imprudent or successfully contained, oppressed people use language, dance, and music to mock those in power, express rage, and produce fantasies of subversion. Black music, such as the blues, emerged from songs of the slave culture because they were forbidden to sing songs of their African past.

Modern hip hop scholarship has revealed itself to be a youth-driven culture that continues to be intimately connected to a past and present social justice movement (Chang, 2007; Rose, 1994). Hip hop culture has had an impact on urban youth in this country as well as those in other countries seeking social justice. Although most of us associate rap music with hip hop, rap music
evolved from the hip hop culture. The definition of rap is a “form of rhymed storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music” (Rose, 1994, p. 2). Hip hop is more than just music. Hip hop is a worldview or culture centered in African and Black traditions of art, dance, poetry, fashion, and experience (Baker, 1993; Neal, 1997; Osumare, 2001; Rose, 1994; Toop, 1984). The endless struggle of oppression, for better or worse, produces hip hop culture in rap music (Dyson, 2007). Dyson (2007) argued that young African Americans once turned to the church for salvation from the frustrations that were in their lives. Now they listen to rappers such as Jay-Z, Nas, Missy Elliott, and Lauryn Hill, who express their struggle of growing up Black and poor in America. Love (2009) asserted that the narrative and images used by rappers link themselves to “larger stories that play out in society such as poverty, crime, and violence.” As referenced earlier, hip hop is more than rap. Other elements will be mentioned in this study, such as DJing, breakdancing or b-boying, graffiti, and fashion (Osumare, 2001). All of these elements play a major role in defining the culture of hip hop over the last 30 years. However, rap leads the way and has become a $1.5 billion-a-year commodity (Crouch, 2006).

Gates (2010) gave credit to the Black arts movement and The Last Poets for providing the conventions of rap music. He also gave recognition to Gil Scott Heron, James Brown, Isaac Hayes, and female poets such as Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez for the spoken-word influence on the genre. Gates (2010) viewed rap as a contemporary form of “signifying” with rhythm and rhyme. From his perspective, signifying “is the defining rhetorical principle of all African American discourse.” Gates (2010) described how young African American males would gather on street corners and in barbershops to engage in verbal duels like a rap cipher. He
asserts that rappers have taken the familiar and made it unfamiliar. The technique of using pieces of older music (sampling) in rap is a common practice and validates this assumption.

**Elements of Hip Hop**

Hip hop historians suggest that the contemporary sound of hip hop started in New York City in 1972 with the arrival of a Jamaican immigrant named Clive Campbell, known in the hip hop world as DJ Kool Herc (Forman & Neal, 2004; George, 1998; Rose, 1994; Toop, 1984). As a youth, he was influenced by reggae music, which infused aspects of African and slave-era music to infectious rhythmic beats (Perkins, 1996). His style of DJing was unique because of the isolation of the “breakbeat” (Perkins, 1996). Rose (1994) stated that “time suspension via rhythmic breaks--points at which the baselines are isolated and suspended--are important clues in explaining sources of pleasure in Black music” (p. 67). Herc would isolate the drum part of the song, which would be the part where rappers would interject their poetic rhythms (Perkins, 1996). He also created rhythmic beats by looping breaks (small portions of songs emphasizing a percussive pattern on two turntables). This was later accompanied by rapping or MCing, beatboxing, and breakdancing (Rose, 1994). The break is also the part of the song where breakdancers or b-boys and b-girls would dance (Rose, 1994).

When he moved to New York City with his mother in the 1960’s, Herc brought his diverse record collection with him, which mostly consisted of disco, soul and rhythm jazz, gospel, and blues, but also country records. His collections contained the music of Nina Simone, Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole, and Jim Reeves of country music. At first, DJ Kool Herc would talk into the microphone but, as time went on, he would only play the breaks of the songs.
Kool Herc and other DJs of this era would concentrate on the music. He hosted parties all over the Bronx (Price, 2006). Kool Herc was the spark that created rap music and hip hop culture, but it was Afrika Bambaataa who is considered its first ambassador (Rose, 1994). Afrika Bambaataa outlined the use of hip hop culture, coining the terms rapping (also called MCing or emceeing); DJing (and turntablism), which is making music with record players and DJ mixers (aural/sound and music creation); b-Boying/b-girling (breakdancing/movement/dance); and graffiti art and knowledge (Brown, 2009; Chang, 2007; Kugelberg, 2007). Afrika Bambaataa stated that “rap music may have started in the Bronx, New York, but it can be traced back to Africa because you had chanting styles of rap” (Keyes, 2008, p. 4). On the other hand, DJ Kool Herc stated, “music was always our way of information- it was the drums. They took it away from us in Africa, now we found it again. The music is our fuckin drums man” (George, 2004, p. 55).

Hip hop music was played at parties throughout the Bronx. Early hip hop shows were communal events devoted to highlighting the talent of various singers, dancers, DJs, and aerosol painters (George, 2004). In the wake of the success of Kool Herc, other DJs began to thrive as well, throwing dynamic parties in their neighborhoods. This group included Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa, and DJ Red Alert. Rappers formed groups in pursuit of greater exposure. In the beginning, groups such as the Cold Crush Brothers, The Crash Crew, The Fantastic Five, The Funky Four plus One, and Treacherous Three were very active in the Bronx party circuit (Watkins, 2005). At this time, the general thinking among hip hop producers was that hip hop is an urban music and not fit for the mainstream market.
Hip hop parties also presented the artistic talents of break dancers (b-boys) and aerosol painters or graffiti artists. Breakdancing occurred in the Bronx and consisted of young people spinning on their heads and backs and doing acrobatic flips while rocking to hip hop beats. The dancing began as a competition of skills at house parties and street jams. It was started by Bronx gang leaders meeting at house parties or discos to challenge one another on the dance floor. Afrika Bambaataa, who once belonged to a street gang in the Bronx, left his gang activities behind to form the Zulu Nation, a collective of b-boys, rappers, DJs and graffiti artists (Watkins, 2005). Bambaataa was an active member of the Black Spades street gang, but, like several of his peers, he was drawn to the hypnotic powers of hip hop. Bambaataa began to believe that the loyalty, energy, and passion that defined gang life could be directed toward more socially productive activities. As Bambaataa developed a reputation and following as a DJ, he utilized that as an opportunity to combine his love of music and b-boying with his desire to improve community life. He began having meetings that provided an open forum to develop ways of eradicating the rising presence of drugs and violence that were crippling New York’s most disadvantaged housing projects (Watkins, 2005). Bambaataa and his Zulu Nation group later performed at several new-wave night clubs in downtown Manhattan and later toured throughout the world with major recording artists. He also became a visiting scholar at Cornell University. The appointment was made in collaboration between the university’s hip hop collection and the Music Department.

Initially, rap music was not recorded, but, in due time, rap artists began recording their music on four-track tapes, which they sold in the Bronx. The first studio recording produced in
the rap genre was “King Timill” by the Fatback Band. The record was released in 1978 by Spring Records but did not generate large public attention (Watkins, 2005).

Joseph Sadler, better known as Grandmaster Flash, emigrated to the United States from Barbados and grew up in the Bronx, New York. His father had a lot of records of Caribbean and African American artists. As a teenager, he began experimenting with DJ equipment and developed three innovations that are considered standard DJing techniques today: the backspin technique, punch phrasing, and scratching. He formed a group called Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, who pioneered the art of MCing and freestyle battling. They were the first hip hop group to become widely successful (Rose, 1994). According to Bradley and Dubois (2010), “Of the group, Melle Mel is the acknowledged master. His best effort under Flash’s name is undoubtedly ‘The Message,’ a dystopian series of urban vignettes which, as observed earlier, remains one of the most affecting raps ever recorded” (p. 65).

Rap music’s first excursion into mainstream America occurred in 1979. This was the year the Sugar Hill Gang, a rap trio, released the song “Rapper’s Delight.” Sylvia Robinson of Sugar Hill Records was searching for a hip hop artist to launch her record label and signed Henry Johnson (Big Bank Hank), Guy O’Brien (Master Gee) and Michael Wright (Wonder Mike). Once the Sugar Hill gang became a group, they recorded their verses over the Chic song “Good Times,” which was performed by the label’s house band (Watkins, 2005). The song “Rapper’s Delight” was influenced by the disco sound. It was built around an infectious beat and fun, lighthearted rhymes. The song became hip hop’s first hit single and sold over two million copies (Rose, 1994), reaching the top of the charts in Canada and doing well in Europe, Israel, and South Africa. Sugar Hill Records launched rap music as a bankable genre (Watkins, 2005). Rose
(1994) further stated that “Rapper’s Delight” has been cited by rappers from all over the country as their first encounter with the hip hop sound and style. She also suggested that the song encouraged rappers to experiment with new facets of rap music in New York City and other areas of the country. Within three years of its release, other artists and their songs, such as Kurtis Blow’s “The Breaks,” Spoonie Gee’s “Love Rap,” the Treacherous Three’s “Feel the Heartbeat,” Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force’s “Planet Rock,” and Sequence’s “Funk You Up,” were successful rap singles that continued to make money for Sugar Hill Records and other small labels (Rose, 1994).

In summary, the review of literature here has situated this qualitative case study in the discussion of hip hop culture, which began in the Bronx borough of New York City in the 1970s. This culture developed as a reaction to the blighted conditions and civil neglect that existed during that period. It created a fertile ground for youth to embrace the development of hip hop culture as a means to fight social injustice. Additionally, the literature review has traced the origins of hip hop in the African and slavery roots and its place in the Black arts movement. It also discussed major hip hop artists and how they impacted the birth of hip hop culture.
CHAPTER 3
THE IDENTITY OF HIP HOP
La Raza

Flores (1993, 2000) suggested that there is another part of hip hop that needs to be explored. They asserted that there is a loud silence regarding the role of Puerto Ricans’ initial and continued participation in this genre. Rivera (2003) suggested African Americans and Puerto Ricans shared similar conditions of deprivation in the South Bronx. Hip hop rose as a voice of both groups to counter “dwindling income, educational access, and job opportunities” (p. 53). She also suggested that the musical interaction between Puerto Ricans and African Americans leading toward the origins of hip hop is evident, with African American and Puerto Rican youth listening to rhythm and blues in the 1950s and 1960s. There were blues singers such as Bo Diddley and Fats Domino who incorporated Latin and Caribbean beats into their rock and roll music. In New York, there were Latino and African American music groups such as the Harptones and Vocaleers and Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers (Flores, 2000). Flores acknowledged that rap music in the 1970s originated from the blues, an African American tradition. He suggested that there were similarities in the vocal styles of the Puerto Rican
decimas, aguinaldos, and trabalenguas (tongue-twisting), containing elements of alternation and improvisation that can also be found in rap music.

Additionally, the Puerto Rican influence is visible in the early graffiti done in the subways and on dilapidated buildings in their neighborhoods. Their graffiti art also became more visible when Hugo Martinez began the United Graffiti Artists. This collective contained a majority Puerto Rican membership, and their mission was to legitimize graffiti in 1972. There are many elements of breakdancing, which include the footwork and upper body movement, that are characteristic of the Caribbean rumba and mambo. In fact, it was the Rock Steady Crew in the 1980s that reinvigorated breakdancing in the film ‘Style Wars’, though certainly shaped by the uniquely African American contributions in martial arts, the jitterbug, and African social dance (Flores, 2000). There are additional, prominent Puerto Rican rappers who have also contributed to the genre of hip hop, such as Fat Joe, Mellow Man Ace, Big Pun, and Kid Frost, among others.

**Fight The Power**

Rose (1994) is emphatic that rap music in the 1980s experienced a commercial status increase as rappers began exploring more themes and the music became more complex. The message of rap began to spread out across the nation with stories about Black experiences in such cities and neighborhoods as Houston, Boston’s Roxbury, and Miami’s Over Town. In New York, Run DMC became very popular with White teens. Bradley and Dubois (2010) noted that Run DMC would later become the second rap group after Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five to be enshrined in the Rock ‘n Roll Hall of Fame. They were able to appeal to a mainstream audience without relinquishing their hip hop credentials (Bradley & Dubois, 2010). According to
Bradley and Dubois (2010), “Run DMC brought both orchestrated rhymes and a new sense of style to rap.” This sense of style also matched their clothing, which consisted of Adidas sweatsuits and fedoras. They also included rock music in their songs, which added to their mainstream appeal. They had previously sampled rock and roll records to create songs such as “Rockbox” and the “King of Rock” but had never collaborated in a studio with a rock artist on a record. The song “Walk This Way,” featuring Aerosmith, saw the group fully embrace this aesthetic in its organic creation in a studio. Initially, the rappers in Run DMC were resistant to making a “rap and rock” record with Aerosmith but, upon the insistence of their producer, Rick Rubin, they relented. This record ended up being hugely successful in both the urban radio and rock radio communities (Loudwire, 2016).

Rose (1994) also asserted that it was during this period that Eric B. and Rakim, Public Enemy, KRS-1, LL Cool J, MC Lyte, and De La Soul also emerged as major figures in the rap music “directional shift.” This was a period that contained themes of social justice and political challenges. Bradley and Dubois (2010) suggested that Public Enemy mixed political engagement with significant innovations regarding sound and poetic form. The members of Public Enemy were from Long Island, New York. They consisted of Chuck D as the lead rapper, Flavor Flav as the hypeman, Terminator X as the DJ, and Professor Griff as the Minister of Information. They focused on public issues in the spirit of Gil Scott Heron and The Last Poets. Chuck D’s parents left New York for the suburbs of Long Island. Because of redlining and fear of Black families, some neighborhoods in Long Island quickly turned from integrated to all Black during the 1980s (Chang, 2007). The group’s lead rapper, Chuck D, used his microphone to rage against the social conditions of African American lives (Rose, 1994). Chang (2007) stated that in “Bring the
Noise,” Chuck ripped crack peddling, Black incarceration, and the death penalty. In the first verse, he compared the critical condemnation of his support for Farrakhan to being shot by cops. He further stated that “Public Enemy sounded like the new definition of Black power; smarter, harder, faster, leaner and winning” (Chang, 2007). Love (2014) asserted that when Public Enemy released “Fight the Power,” it helped her understand what she was experiencing in New York. Previously, she did not have words yet to describe racism, poverty, and how to ‘fight the powers that be’ so to speak.

**California Love**

In the late 1980s, the Los Angeles rappers from Compton and Watts developed a West Coast style of rap in the tradition of Public Enemy. Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, Ice-T, Eazy-E, Compton’s Most Wanted, W.C. and the Maad Circle, Snoop Dogg, South Central Cartel, and others represented a “gangsta rap” style (Love, 1994). These rappers from Los Angeles dealt with issues of alienation, unemployment, police harassment, and social and economic isolation. They also used rap music and graffiti tags on trains and buses to communicate their frustration and resistance towards the status quo. In Compton, the group N.W.A. were innovators within this scene. They created a very entertaining version of West Coast “gangsta rap.” Eazy-E, the leader of the group and primary financial backer, distributed the commercially successful album “Straight Outta Compton” in 1988 through the assistance of Jerry Heller, a music manager and businessman. Two members of the group, Dr. Dre and Ice Cube, have become hugely successful artists in hip hop, movies, and other popular media endeavors. Bradley and Dubois (2010) stated that “Gangsta, Gangsta” gave the genre a name and fleshed out its main character: the young,
Black, male gang banger. The Los Angeles style of “gangsta rap” led to other hard-core rappers such as New Jersey’s Naughty by Nature, the Bronx-based Tim Dog, Onyx and Redman, along with female gangsta rappers like Boss from Detroit, New York-based Puerto Rican rapper Hurricane Gloria and Nikki D. There also were Mexican, Cuban and other Spanish-speaking rappers in Los Angeles, such as Kid Frost, Mellow Man Ace, and Cypress Hill. They incorporated English with Spanish in certain songs such as “La Raza” and helped to spread the cultural art form of hip hop inside the Latin community.

**The South Got Something to Say**

The South has influenced the sound of rap music too. At one point, according to Sarig (2007), every rap song that played on the radio had input from a Southern artist, whether through producing the music, shooting the video in Atlanta, rapping on the song, or using dance moves from Atlanta’s urban dance culture. Sarig’s (2007) book, “Third Coast: Outkast, Timbaland, and How Hip Hop Became a Southern Thing,” is a comprehensive text about rap music in the South. He interviewed over 40 Southern rappers and had them reflect on the development of hip hop and rap music in the South. Sarig (2007) asserted that the culture of hip hop might have started in New York City but, because of slavery and emancipation, “its cultural and rhythmic influence originates from the South” (p. 22). He further stated that Southerners’ love for hip hop and rap music is revealed in their being the current home of rap music because, when he published his book, more than half of the top rap songs in the country were the work of Southern rappers. He traced the historical development of hip hop and rap music to slave music and Black spirituals. Bradley and Dubois (2010) gave an example of Southern rap in Goodie Mob, which they
suggested defined “the Dirty South.” According to Bradley and Dubois (2010), “the Dirty South” would come to embody a raw and uncompromising style of rap that stretched from Georgia across the entire South. Bradley and Dubois (2010) suggested Goodie Mob and Outkast represented a Southern rap aesthetic of soulful beats and street-oriented, socially conscious lyrics. Sari (2007) stated that Goodie Mob’s objective was to “capture the struggle of the Black man trying to get by on the land where his ancestors had been enslaved” (p. 24).

Ladies First

An often-overlooked group in hip hop and rap music is the contribution of women to the genre. Although some rap historians have attempted to minimize the contribution of women to hip hop culture, women have been involved in hip hop, and especially rap music, since its beginning (Phillips, Reddick-Morgan, & Stephens, 2005). Women have influenced rap styles, techniques, aesthetic standards, and technological practices that were utilized by both women and men. As noted earlier, the first rap song to achieve mainstream success was by the Sugar Hill Gang, which released the song “Rapper’s Delight” (Chang, 2007; Rose, 1994). Their record label was owned by Sylvia Robinson, an African American singer, musician, record producer, and record label executive who put the group together. Women have served as writers, artists, performers, producers, and executives, but it is also true that the vast majority of individuals in this genre are male (Phillips et al., 2005).

The relationship between male and female rap artists has been complicated. At different times, women rappers have had to speak out against the misogynistic behavior of African American and Hispanic male rappers. There also have been times when these women stood in
solidarity with male rappers of their race or ethnicity when they were attacked because of the content of their music. According to Rose (1994):

Black women rappers interpret and articulate the fears, pleasures, and promises of young Black women whose voices have been relegated to the margins of public discourse. They are integral, resistant voices in rap music and popular music in general who sustained an ongoing dialogue with their audiences and with male rappers about sexual promiscuity, emotional commitment, infidelity, the drug trade, racial politics and Black cultural history. Female rappers differ from male rappers in that the male rapper’s major complaints are against police harassment, incarceration, societal neglect and racism while female rappers are very progressive, anti-sexist, voices in rap music that emphasized sisterhood and high self-esteem (p. 146)

In the song “U.N.I.T.Y” by Queen Latifah, she spoke about women having respect for themselves and their bodies. She also made it clear that disrespect from a man towards a woman should not be tolerated.

Similarly, the male voices in rap music were not uniformly negative and sexist. For example, the rapper Tupac in his song “Keep Ya Head Up” stated, “And when he tells you, you ain’t nothin’ don’t believe him, and if he can’t learn to love you, you should leave him, cause sista you don’t need him, and I ain’t tryna gas ya up.” Phillips et al. (2005) asserted that female hip hop rappers such as Queen Latifah, Lauryn Hill, and Eve represent feminism at the street level. They also suggested that female rappers, through their engagement with street-level communities, have redefined and expanded the definition of feminists. In the song by Queen Latifah and Monie Love titled “Ladies First,” Monie Love raps “Strong, steppin’, struttin’, movin’ on rhymin’, cuttin’ and not forgettin’, we are the ones who give birth to the new generation of prophets cause it’s ladies first.” Phillips et al. (2005) further asserted that African American women have a history of confronting negative, sexual stereotypes while asserting their
independence. Hip hop has allowed women of all economic and social classes to link together and share a common experience that transcends race, ethnicity, and age. They suggested one purpose of female rap is to educate young women and to motivate or inspire them to succeed in the face of problems they are likely to encounter in their lives. In rap music, women speak to each other about various kinds of everyday things as well as recurring issues in the larger sociopolitical domain. They provide support to each other, critique each other, challenge each other, and discuss problems with men (Phillips et al., 2005). One female artist who was able to seamlessly blend rapping with singing in her presentation of socially conscious music is Lauryn Hill. In her 1998 song "Doo Wop (That Thing)" from Hill’s debut solo CD, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, she uses sisterly empathy to make a point and encourage women to increase their self-respect.

Since youth are the predominant audience of rap music, they need role models who can guide critical decisions that adolescents and young adults have to make every day. Young women need counseling on subjects such as proper sexual behavior, drug usage, and other problems. In Eve's rap song "Love Is Blind,” the abuse of women takes center stage. In the song, she rises to another woman's defense and confronts a male perpetrator who uses violence to control this woman. Eve stated, "Hey, yo, I don't even know you and I hate you. See, all I know is that my girlfriend used to date you. How would you feel if she held you down and raped you?” In this case, Eve is concerned about violence being meted out to this woman and addressing his actions accordingly.

Chang (2007) suggested that female rap artists such as Queen Latifah, Salt-N-Pepa, MC Lyte, and Roxanne Shante became popular in the 1980s because of videos. Yet, their popularity
fell off in the 1990s as a result of media consolidation. It was easier to place scantily clad dancers in rap videos than female rappers. He did assert that Missy Elliott and Lauryn Hill were exceptions to this practice. As a counterbalance to the rejection of female rappers in the 1990s, hip hop feminism emerged again (Chang, 2007).

**Mo Money, More Problems**

Hip hop and rap music reached new heights of popularity in the 1990s. Bradley and Dubois (2010) labeled this the period of “rap goes mainstream.” They cited several reasons for this designation. There were influences that the corporate music industry had on rap. In 1999, American sales of music consisted of $1.5 billion worth of rap and hip hop music (Bradley & Dubois, 2010). Bradley and Dubois (2010) reported that this figure increased to $1.8 billion in the year 2000. The money, popularity, and fame created led to an increase in the influence of corporate interests within the genre. Bradley and Dubois (2010) stated that “the risk that corporatized hip hop presented were ones of homogenization and stagnation. With rap viewed as a commodity first, whatever else it might be, it became necessary to brand it to fit a particular image” (p. 326). The rapper Common suggested that when we look back at hip hop in the 1990s, we may see the art form in a stereotypical manner because of corporate interests. Quite often, that image was extremely gangsta, violent, and sexual. Bradley and Dubois (2010) asserted that all three of these elements had always been a part of rap from its beginning, but never were they the only images of hip hop widely being seen. These stereotypes came into existence when corporations started to produce and endorse only one type of hip hop. Rappers were encouraged to dress specific ways, drive expensive cars, engage in misogynistic behavior, wear expensive
jewelry, and use violent lyrics in their music videos. There also were TV stations, such as MTV and BET, that decided to play music that was not always consistently progressive. Their audience was primarily young, White suburban males who associate rap music with rebellion and resistance to their parents’ cultural beliefs. For young urban males, hip hop and rap are the music and lifestyle they are most likely to identify with because of the historical linkage. Bradley and Dubois (2010) quoted Common, in 2007, asserted that the 1990s had diversity in rap music. Common emerged in the 1990s as a socially conscious artist who was not afraid to censor other rappers for what he viewed as excessive behavior brought on by corporate influence. His song “I Used to Love H.E.R.” is a thinly veiled negative critique of what he thinks is happening to rap as it has become more commercial.

Any discussion of rap music in the 1990s begins with Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls. They were arguably the two most popular artists of that era because of their prolific lyrics and imagery displayed in their songs. Tupac showcased both conscious and revolutionary sides in his music, which was creative, engaging, and entertaining for the consumer. His subjects gravitated toward tales of the “thug life.” There is violence, misogyny, and profane lyrics but also positivity, reflection, and sorrow. Unlike many rappers, he studied at a performing arts high school and was well versed in traditional poetry, philosophy, jazz, ballet, and acting. His legacy is a paradox to many. Some people see him as a thug while others see him as a prophet and a poet.

Similarly, the rapper Biggie Smalls was hugely successful and popular. His flow, cadence, and talent for crafting a unique critique of street life were reflected in his music. His storytelling ability was unparalleled among his peers as well. He had witty punch lines that
would be entertaining throughout his music and deeply engage the listener in his songs. Unfortunately, Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls died as young men in their mid-twenties because of a real-life street beef that engulfed them and pitted them against one another, even though they were good friends initially. Two other prominent artists in the 1990s were Nas and Jay-Z. Nas, with his first album *Illmatic*, created arguably one of the greatest lyrical masterpieces ever constructed. His approach to using similes, metaphors, imagery, and clever storytelling to describe his Queensbridge, New York, neighborhood was captivating and well received among the hip hop community.

In the song “New York State of Mind,” he raps, “It drops deep as it does in my breath, I never sleep cause sleep is the cousin of death, beyond the walls of intelligence, life is defined, I think of crime when I’m in a New York state of mind.” Additionally, Jay-Z emerged as an artist with a similarly skillful approach to crafting poignant rhymes about his inner-city Brooklyn housing project environment. He detailed the life of a drug dealer trying to make it out of dire circumstances while evading the police and the violence that underlies such a lifestyle. This was accomplished through the use of witty punchlines, captivating imagery, double and triple entendres. As an example, he stated, “Survive the drought; I wish you well” in the song “American Dreamin.” As identified by Adam Bradley in a Complex Magazine interview, this is a prime example of the use of a double entendre by Jay-Z. Because of the cultural impact and significance of the music written by Nas and Jay-Z, Marc Lamont Hill, a prominent author and educator, created a course built around a critical examination of the lyrics written by these two artists.
An examination of hip hop in the 21st century suggests that hip hop exists as a major feature within a new global and corporate culture. In the past, major labels mostly controlled what artists and music would be produced, marketed, and distributed for mass consumption. However, with the advent of the internet, streaming, social media, and digital distribution, the playing fields have been leveled for independent artists to create music and cater to their unique audiences. Hip hop has remained the critical discourse upon which it was founded. Any restrictions do not burden educators as they search through text and create a pedagogy that engages their students.

In summary, this chapter gives proper recognition to the Latin and Caribbean influence on hip hop culture. Puerto Ricans and African Americans shared similar conditions of deprivation in their Bronx, New York, communities. They used rapping, graffiti, and breakdancing to foster a community and culture. This chapter also explored the rapid spread of hip hop music to other areas in the country during the 1980s. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw an expansion of hip hop for social justice with Public Enemy on the east coast while west-coast rappers such as Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, MC Ren and Eazy E formed a group called NWA that led to the introduction of gangster rap. Rap artists such as Outkast and Goodie Mob dominated the charts and let the world know that the South had something to say. The chapter also gave recognition to female rap artists such as Lauryn Hill and Queen Latifah, who brought attention to feminist issues. Finally, the chapter ended with a discussion about the corporatization of rap music.
CHAPTER 4
CRITICAL THEORY AND APPLICATIONS OF HIP HOP

Hip Hop in the Classroom

Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) asserted that our nation’s classrooms are becoming more diverse, and teachers need assistance in creating learning communities in schools. The ethnic minoritized school population will increase by 41% while minoritized teachers will shrink by 5%. Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, and Papageorge (2017) suggested that assigning an African American male to an African American teacher in the third, fourth, or fifth grade significantly reduces the probability that he drops out of high school, particularly among the most economically disadvantaged African American males. Fifteen years ago in Chicago, Illinois, 40% of the teachers were African American. However, presently the African American teaching staff is 21%, and the African American student population is 39% (Emmanuel, 2018). Many of the new teachers, both African American and Caucasian, are not equipped for the urban classroom and struggle to find curriculum and pedagogical strategies that are inclusive and affirmative yet expedite the critical literacy skills their students need for the 21st century (Morrell, 2002). Professional development must be provided to the teaching staff that starts with the recognition of the role critical literacy plays in their students’ lives. Mahiri (1998) suggested
that the critical teaching of popular culture is one way to make literacy connections that are relevant to students in a diverse urban classroom. Morrell (2002) made the argument that hip hop music is the representative voice of urban youth and therefore has to be at the forefront of a discussion on the inclusion of popular culture in the classroom. Morrell (2002) further asserted many rappers consider themselves educators with a mission of raising the critical consciousness in their communities. Their goal is to bring an accurate depiction of urban life to marginalized youth. Hall (2017) asserted that language and literacy scholars had explored the pedagogical potential of hip hop culture in the language arts classroom since the early 1990s. He further suggests that, in the last 25 years, peer-reviewed research has validated its effectiveness. However, hip hop pedagogies still “continue to be relegated to the margins of English education policy and practice” (Hall, 2017, p. 341). He also asserted that a hip hop-based curriculum has a role in the new era of Common Core State Standards. Hall (2017) observed that hip hop culture and pedagogy could not be categorized as “rap music” alone and textual analysis but “a more complex unit of analysis known as pedagogies with hip-hop aesthetics” (p. 341). Therefore, he calls for additional research on hip hop pedagogies and possibilities in the English language arts classroom.

As referenced earlier, rap music and other genres that are characterized as hip hop literacy texts were first peer-reviewed in the 1990s. Jeremiah (1992) was one of the researchers who discussed the sociocultural dimension of rap music and its literature while also presenting a curriculum model. He asserted that the prevalence of the music form made it a valuable aid in the classroom. Powell (1991), while acknowledging the significance of rap music among Black youth, suggested that all issues within the Black community are subject to exposition in the rap
arena. Powell (1991) further suggested that rap music was a dominant means of expression within contemporary African American adolescent culture, providing them with powerful sources for identity, solidarity, and emotional reinforcement. She saw rap music as an effective teaching tool that can be used to enhance the self-esteem of Black youth. Love (2017) is the founder of Real Talk: Hip Hop Education for Social Justice, a program that provides elementary students with the history and elements of hip hop for social justice through project-based learning. The focus of her research also showcased how teachers and schools can work with the community to build civic engagement by confronting racism, homophobia, and sexism through hip hop. Williams (2007) was able to capitalize on the relationship between youth and hip hop culture through the engagement of high school students in a learning cipher where the purpose was to critically examine the problems in hip hop and propose actions the group could take towards resolving them. For a high school course entitled Hip Hop Lit that he co-taught in Philadelphia, Hill (2009) chose 28 rap songs to be used as texts for the course, divided across six themes. The students read and discussed the texts, journaled, and completed individual and group projects. Students learned traditional literary concepts and strategies, but this was not his focus. Instead, he was interested in the “politics of identity” that were taking place in the classroom. This involved using hip hop culture to increase student engagement and reading skills among high school students. Kirkland (2006) asserted that hip hop resides in the public sphere, and it is not the property of corporations. Educators can create hip hop pedagogy that builds student identities, engages them in the learning process, and teaches about social justice. This can be accomplished without using violent, sexist, or homophobic texts.
Callahan and Granthan (2012) stated, “Because hip hop is a creative and exciting male-dominated culture, gifted males gravitate to hip hop culture” (p. 199). Callahan and Granthan (2012) further asserted that parents and teachers must move beyond negative images of hip hop and see it as a creative text source that is gaining appeal in the language arts. Grantham, Callahan, Harris and Hébert (2010); and Henfield and Washington (2009) observed how hip hop culture had received attention at the National Association for Gifted Children Convention. Bradley and Dubois (2010) made a compelling argument that rap poetry should be taken seriously by publishing an anthology of raps and a critical analysis of each poem’s creation. They have analyzed the works of artists such as Jay-Z, Tupac, Biggie Smalls, Kanye West, and Common. Many of the nation-leading colleges and universities have embraced hip hop. The hip hop center for research and teaching at New York University estimated over 300 classes on hip hop are offered by colleges and universities in the U.S. and abroad (“Hip Hop Dance Culture,” 2020). There are hip hop archives at Harvard University, Stanford University, and Cornell University (Abe, 2006; Morgan, 2009). In 1999, the University of California at Los Angeles hosted the first academic hip hop conference for faculty, staff, students, artists, and activists. In May 2017, the first all-music hip hop dissertation consisting of a 34-track rap album was accepted by Clemson University (Williams, 2017).

**The New Literacies**

Literacy scholars Gee (1991) and Street (1995) represent a new tradition in considering the nature of literacy, focusing not so much on skill acquisition but rather what it means to think of literacy as a social practice. Street (1995) distinguished between two dominant and competing
models of literacy. These models are autonomous and ideological. The autonomous model views literacy as an asset of discrete skills, which he suggested imposes Western conceptions of literacy on other cultures or, within a country, those of one class or cultural group onto others. The alternative ideological model of literacy presents a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices by allowing them to vary from context to context. This model takes the position that literacy is a social practice, not merely a technical and neutral skill, that is constantly embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles.

For Gee (2001), literacy draws on the idea of discourse. Discourse encompasses the particular ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, reading, and writing as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network. Scribner and Cole (1981) introduced the concept of literacy practices. They move away from the idea of individual practices. They believed more in a set of socially organized practices that parallel such practices as religious practices, child-rearing practices, etc., in which individuals engage. This theory of literacy as a social practice draws on theories and methodologies of sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication. As ethnographic studies of literacy practices in an array of contexts accumulated during the 1980s, theories began to systematize new ways of understanding the acquisition, development, and use of literacy. The approach, termed the “new literacy studies” (Gee, 1991; Street, 1995), was based on two key principles: seeing context as fundamental to understanding literacy and ending any clear distinction between orality and literacy.

Gee (2004) suggested a large number of urban students come to school every day to find their culture suppressed, if not rejected altogether. If a student’s social and language practices are
not embraced in school, that student is likely to see school as irrelevant and may become a dropout (Morrell, 2002). Students are often more engaged with the out of school texts they encounter rather than the texts they encounter in school (Gee, 2004; Larson & Marsh, 2005). Hall and Schultz’s (2001) research suggested that teachers can successfully engage students in high levels of critical literacy by drawing on their tacit knowledge about cultural content that occurs outside of school. Furthermore, they believed that a great deal of knowledge learned outside of school could be used to bridge communities to classrooms by acknowledging the expertise of parents and community members. Teachers can bring community members into the classroom to share their knowledge. Rivers, Hutchinson, and Dixon (2000) developed a culturally relevant pedagogy for teaching literacy by examining language practices across contexts in such places as African American hair salons. They used their findings to conduct classroom discussions about texts. Dyson’s (2007) study on early writing in which students are encouraged to describe their social world outside of school is a further example of bridging the child’s out-of-school experiences with literacy development.

Morrell (2002) challenged the idea of appropriate genres for instruction in schools. He argued that students should be exposed to more non-fiction texts that deal with issues of race, class, gender, oppression, freedom, and revolution. He stated further that, in the media-dominated world of today, schools need to focus more on media pedagogy and critical literacy with popular culture. By adding media, Morrell (2002) is moving into the heart of the new literacies. Specifically, Morrell (2002) suggested that hip hop culture can be a powerful tool in engaging urban youth and connecting their out-of-school daily lives with their in-school literacy practices. He was critical of the present multicultural education literature, which he characterized
as having “a limited conception of culture as a racial or ethnic identity offering little to help teachers make connections and create learning communities in a multiethnic, urban classroom” (p. 72). McCarthy (1998) also agreed with this assessment. Morrell (2002) saw the bringing of popular culture into the dominant curriculum as a way of “achieving a more equalitarian and inclusive society” (p. 72). He cited the theories of the New London Group. The New London Group supports his recommendations as being viable considerations for curriculum construction. According to Morrell (2002), “These theories believe that such students are literate but that their literacies have little connection with the dominant literacies promoted in public schools” (p. 72). Mahiri (1998) found strong connections between urban youth literacy practices with popular culture and the type of literacies required in schools. The use of hip hop culture and rap music was incorporated by Morrell (2002) into a teaching unit on English poetry.

In compliance with the National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association Standards for the English Language Arts (1996), visual communication is part of the fabric of contemporary life and should be included in the English Language Arts curriculum. Morrell (2002) used the film versions of The Godfather, The Odyssey, Native Son, and A Time to Kill for one of his units on visual literacies. He suggested that this approach motivated young people to examine difficult text and begin to produce their own texts critically.

Finally, as referenced earlier, hip hop pedagogy has proven itself to be profoundly influential in popular youth society, especially urban societies among people of color. Hip hop will likely continue to be a force within out-of-school literacy development as the new literacies expand in importance (Campbell, 2005). With this country having a growing number of the minoritized entering the workplace in the 21st century, schools will be expected to educate
students who are critical and creative thinkers. The existing teaching force is disproportionately unrepresentative of the students they serve in terms of race, class, and gender (Jordan-Irvine, 2003). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2015) reported that minoritized and ethnic teachers are 20% of all the public school teachers, yet 51% of the public school population is non-White. Most of these teachers are frequently disproportionately unaware and unfamiliar with the most profound influences in the lives of the students they try to serve. Educators who wish to use popular culture in the classroom will benefit from a well-researched model that is based on the tenets of critical literacy and its support for students who expect to make a successful transition to college and the 21st-century workplace.

**Critical Theory**

Critical theory is a school of thought which challenges the dominant ways of exploring and explaining the organizational phenomenon. It has its origins in the Frankfurt School, also known as the Institute of Social Research, which is a social and political movement of thought. It is the source of what is known as critical theory. The institute was founded in 1923 to develop Marxist studies in Germany. It was forced out of Germany by the Nazis and relocated to Columbia University in New York. The foundation of the critical theory involves exposing existing modes of domination and oppression while offering alternative possibilities that emancipate those once excluded and silenced (Scherer, 2009). Harvey (1990) suggested that a key to critical theory is to establish dominant modes of understanding by bringing to the surface assumptions and examining existing power relationships. In bringing reform to the education system in Brazil, Paulo Freire (2003) leaned heavily on critical theory. He argued that oppression
is not a “closed world from which there is no exit, but is a limiting situation that can be transformed” (2003, p. 49). Oppression is something that can be overcome, and education is a place for the development of liberation. Education can be used as a tool to “generate societal and individual transformation” (Lynn, Williams, Benigno, Mitchell & Park, 2006, p. 91). McLaren and Giarelli (1995) wrote that “Critical Theory’s purpose is to reassert the basic aim of the Enlightenment ideal of inquiry; to improve human existence by viewing knowledge for its emancipatory or repressive potential” (p. 2). Freire (2003) also saw, through a classed analysis, that liberation can only be achieved through the humanization of the processes by which its members are educated. Similarly, Apple (1990) asserted and acknowledges that knowledge is not neutral and is used by schools in educational settings as a cultural weapon to subjugate the masses through the reproduction of cultural norms and ways of being. Freire (2003) echoed this thought when he called for a more humanizing educational process. Without this, liberation of the mind and body from oppressive constraints is not possible.

**Critical Literacy**

Critical literacy instruction has become popular in the 21st century because it leads students to become critical thinkers who can challenge the power relationships within these messages better. Teachers can facilitate the development of critical literacy by encouraging students to investigate societal issues and institutions like family, poverty, education, equity, and equality. According to Kellner (1990), critical literacy draws from the tradition of the Frankfurt School of social theory that takes the transformation of social inequalities and injustices as its objective. Social critical theories begin from the position that people are never free and live in a world full of contradictions regarding power and privilege (McLaren, 1988). These unequal
power relationships are perpetuated through the legitimatizing of particular forms of knowledge that serve the interests of a dominant culture and ideology. McLaren (1988) also claimed language itself is never a neutral account of the world. Beck (2005) suggested that critical educational theory, or critical pedagogy, applies the principles of critical social theory to an educational system and investigates how schools reproduce inequality and injustice. She further suggested that schools participate in maintaining unequal social relationships through curricular decisions that reflect the political and economic interests of this country. McLaren (1988) regarded school as a cultural space where ideological and social ideals are formed.

As observed earlier, critical literacy takes the position that texts are not neutral. For example, when a female rejects a text that deals with a female athlete in a stereotypical way, she may feel compelled to disrupt this image of a woman and cite the success of numerous female athletes. It is also biased for one not to recognize that rap music can be an effective tool in teaching poetry to urban youth. Delgado and Stefancic (1999) argued that investigating multiple viewpoints “can enable us to frame agendas and strategies that will do justice to a broad range of people and avoid oversimplifying human experiences” (p. 55). Since the young men in this study are using hip hop music to construct their lived reality of themselves and their communities, researchers have proposed that hip hop culture can become a way of providing CRP to urban youth in traditional classrooms.

**Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy**

The essential selection of hip hop pedagogy is not usually found in traditional high school classrooms, but, according to Hall (2017), there are 25 years of peer research documentation on the effectiveness of hip hop pedagogies. Hill (2009) used the reading of critical rap lyrics to
examine poetry terms such as metaphors, similes, personification, alliteration, and rhyme. Callahan and Grantham (2012) suggested that gifted male students, regardless of background, are attracted to the contemporary style and aesthetics of hip hop. They stated that “among their peers, gifted male hip-hoppers can be the most culturally eloquent and socially accepted advocates for topics such as the mistreatment of women and girls, as well as antigay and lesbian attitudes” (p. 201). Alridge (2005) contended that, for many youths, hip hop signifies the cultural, social, economic, and political realities and conditions of their lives. Hip hop speaks to them in a language and manner they understand. It allows them to bring new knowledge into the classroom that the teacher may be unfamiliar with, which provides for a critical exchange of ideas about social justice topics. Hip hop pedagogy can change perspectives by fusing the expertise of both teacher and student (hooks, 1995). Hip hop text also allows media literacy in the classroom, which permits teachers to pose questions that enable students to critique or research the text they are reading (Macedo & Steinberg, 2009).

**Multiliteracies**

According to Morrell (2002), social context and critical diversity significantly affect the literacy process. He stated, “Often, the failure of urban students to develop ‘academic’ literacy skills stems not from a lack of intelligence but from the inaccessibility of the school curriculum to students who are not in the ‘dominant’ or ‘mainstream’ culture” (p. 72). The research of the New London Group (1996) supported Morrell’s view of new literacy practices. Their manifesto introduced the concept of multiliteracies, which included six design elements in the meaning-making process: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial meaning, and multimodal interplay.
This list now also includes multilingual/multicultural inclusion (Cummins, 2006). The New London Group (1996), in particular, made a case for the need to bring new literacy practices into the classroom, particularly at the adolescent level. For this reason, critical hip hop pedagogy is a compelling strategy to utilize for the examination of social justice and inclusion in the urban classroom.

Reform

To accomplish these reforms, it will require dedicated teachers who are willing to alter their pedagogy to reflect better the multiple identities of their students while committing to the successful implementation of individual and systemic reforms. At that point, the educational system can move from the outdated construct that continues to perpetuate the status quo. The goal of critical hip hop pedagogy is overcoming personal, cultural, and societal oppression to make social change a reality for all students. Social change, once initiated, can improve academic achievement because students are exposed to an education that is equitable and just.

Ginwright (2004) suggested hip hop text can be a powerful, culturally relevant tool for social change in the urban environment. He contended that hip hop culture could be used to organize, inform, and politicize youth about local and national issues. The capacity to critique social conditions, a major tenet of critical pedagogy, has been an integral element of hip hop since its beginning (Rose, 1994). Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) suggested that, because of its capacity to critique, hip hop is a powerful artistic medium for use in educational settings. According to Love (2009), hip hop text represents an out-of-school, culturally relevant resource
that can be brought into the classrooms of our urban schools. Two examples of hip hop artists commenting on social conditions in urban schools are Nas in his song “I Can” and Common in his song “The People.” In the Nas song, he stated, “Be, b-boys and girls, listen up, you can be anything in the world, in God we trust. An architect, doctor, maybe an actress, but nothing comes easy it takes much practice.” According to Bradley and Dubois (2010), Nas’s approach to using similes, metaphors, imagery, and clever storytelling to describe his Queensbridge, New York, neighborhood was captivating and well received among the hip hop community.

Additionally, in Common’s song, he stated, “Nobody believe, until I, believe me, now I'm on the rise doing business with my guys, visions realize, music affected lives, a gift from the skies, to be recognized, I'm keeping my eyes on the people, that's the prize.” According to Bradley and Dubois (2010), Common forged a lyrical identity as a socially conscious, emotionally engaged artist who displayed a fondness for playing with words and syllables. These are key literacy skills that are found in hip hop text that can be utilized within an educational setting.

Researchers such as Love (2009), Morrell (2002), Campbell (2005), and Lynch (2007) have utilized the text of artists such as Common, Nas, Jay-Z, Kanye West, Lauren Hill, and Eminem, among others, to integrate hip hop into the traditional language arts curriculum. For example, Morrell (2002) taught urban teens in California using hip hop text in a traditional high school senior English poetry unit. Lynch (2007) has been able to deepen his high school students’ appreciation of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales by drawing a contrast between Chaucer’s travelers and the rapper Eminem’s style of discourse. His students also wrote poems with rhymed couplets about political and social issues that impacted their lives, created a manuscript,
rap CD, a book, and an album. Lynch (2007) recognized that the reading of the Canterbury Tales was difficult for most of his students because it was written archaic. This problem was solved by having them use read-aloud techniques and small group discussions. Lynch (2007) stressed that Chaucer’s use of the populace vernacular language in his poetry was similar to what rappers are doing today. He appears to be committed to integrating hip hop texts into his teaching.

**Critical Race Theory**

Throughout the review of the literature, the need for reform in the way students are educated has become apparent. Before equity and equal opportunity for all students regardless of their race or ethnicity is possible, the issue of race and domination must be addressed. Critical race theory (CRT) is defined as a multidisciplinary movement concerned with providing a way of examining and eradicating racism, power, and privilege within the American legal system (Delgado & Stefancic, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993). As referenced earlier, many African American male adolescents are incarcerated at ages when others in their peer groups are either in high school, college, or starting a career. For many of these youth, the track from school to prison is a possible reality. Western (2007) asserted that “young Black men with little schooling became pervasively involved with the criminal justice system by the late 1990’s” (p. 151). He further suggested that incarceration reduces the life chances of former inmates and weakens their social connections to legitimate employment.

This study takes place in a Southern state where African Americans have been relegated to a subordinate status for decades. Literacy tests and poll taxes that were designed to prevent
African Americans from serving on juries were commonplace. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, aimed to overcome legal barriers at the state and local levels that prevented African Americans from exercising their right to vote as guaranteed under the 15th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution. Legal scholars like Alexander (2010), in her book “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,” asserts that young African Americans have been undermined by mass incarceration, which is a product of the war on drugs. This mass incarceration has resulted in millions of African Americans being arrested for minor crimes and remaining marginalized and disfranchised. They are trapped by a criminal justice system that has forever branded them as felons and denied them basic rights and opportunities that would allow them to become productive, law-abiding citizens.

In November of 2019, Florida approved a groundbreaking ballot measure that would restore voting rights for up to 1.5 million people with felony convictions. However, the Republican-led Legislature voted to impose a series of sharp restrictions that could prevent tens of thousands of African Americans from ever reaching the ballot box.

Additionally, felons who are convicted of drug offenses can’t receive federal grants and loans through FAFSA. These federal grants and loans are providing much-needed aid to minoritized students enrolled in our higher educational institutions. For example, community colleges are where many adults are being retrained for the 21st-century workplace. African American men who have been incarcerated often can’t afford the cost of these opportunities and are being denied the funding sources that would enable them to be productive, employed citizens. In major American cities today, more than half of working-age African-American men
are either under correctional control or branded felons and are thus subject to legalized
discrimination for the rest of their lives. Alexander (2010) concluded:

Once you’re labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination--employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunities, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service--are suddenly legal. As a criminal, you have scarcely more rights and arguably less respect than a black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it. (p. 2)

The fight to end the school-to-incarceration path that many African Americans adolescents fall victim to does not need to be inevitable. Our schools are critical institutions in the fight to end mass incarceration. Instead of maintaining the status quo, they need to become agents of change. The students in this study cited boredom with their school curriculum as a major factor for their difficulties in their previous school. Education that moves beyond simply reading and writing but also understands the relationship between power and domination is critical to keeping students engaged. Morrell (2002) suggested critical literacy can move students away from legal, social, or political restrictions and toward liberation. This path towards liberation starts with a critical examination of the role race plays in the American educational system.

Critical race theory has moved beyond its legal roots and is now being used to examine power relationships throughout American institutions, including those in education, private industry, and healthcare. Critical race theory was developed in the late 1970s by legal scholars Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado. Critical race theory tried to increase the pace of the 1960s civil rights movement by affirming that racism is an incurable illness in American
society, which must be acknowledged to establish equality (Delgado & Stefancic, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The foundation of critical race theory is traced to critical legal studies that focus solely on legal issues. Critical legal studies contend that the outcome of litigatory, judicial, and legislative actions are often political and serve the interests of the powerful and wealthy in this country. Delgado and Stefancic (1999) suggested that CRT draws its conceptual framework and meaning from analyzing race, power and racism, radical feminism, the civil rights movement, and other Black and Brown power movements. It has been linked to progressives such as Martin Luther King Jr., W. E. B. Dubois, Cesar Chavez, and Dolores Huerta (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 1999).

Critical race theory rests on six core tenets that can be used to expose and analyze racial and social inequities that pervade every sector of American society. These include the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, challenges to liberalism, counter-narratives, and commitment to social justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). The first tenet, the permanence of racism, identifies racism in America as a persistent social reality that will remain permanent unless the legacy of racism is acknowledged and placed at the center of a discourse (Delgado & Stefancic, 1999). Here, researchers examine the lived experiences of marginalized individuals who suffer the effects of legal and cultural racialization. This tenet of the permanence of racism recognizes that racism significantly damages marginalized individuals, even if it is often assumed to be nonexistent by America’s majority. In addition to an analysis of race and racism, CRT also suggested that an examination of other historically oppressed and marginalized
groups must also be scrutinized. This would include those of low socioeconomic status; non-mainstream religions; bisexual, gay and transgender orientations; students with disabilities; all racial minoritized; and other marginalized groups. This theory also proposes that it is limiting to examine race outside of how it intersects with different facets of identity. This essential tenet means that the minoritized suffer due to racism. The spread of racism in America means that there must be a hierarchy that renders the practice static. This is explained by correlating the value of Whiteness to those inherent in owning property.

With the second tenet, Whiteness as property, Harris (1993) suggested that holders of Whiteness are afforded similar values, rights, and functions as property. Whiteness can be thought of as being transferable, much like property, and can be enjoyed as either a “passive” characteristic or as a proactive application of power. Since there are deficits associated with belonging to a marginalized and historically oppressed group in America, the corollary of being White must be of value. This tenet implies that the worth of Whiteness manifests as rights and privileges awarded to Whites. Critical race theory contests the assumption of Whiteness as property and the privileges that are associated with being White, which often comes at the expense of people of color. It also suggests that the rights of Whiteness as property have been historically protected by the American legal system (Howard, 2008).

The third tenet of CRT, interest convergence, recognizes that the advances in equity for people of color came about only because they are aligned with the self-interest of Whites (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Bell (1980) argued that interest convergence, which leads to social policy or change that threatens White supremacy, will
soon be rescinded. He suggested that desegregation in America was done in part to gain the support of Third World countries during the Cold War and also to appease African Americans returning from World War II. Donner (2005) suggested that the exploitation of Black male football student-athletes was based on their athletic prowess. While the student-athletes saw athletics as a means of getting an education or becoming a professional athlete, the interests of coaches and college leaders were the revenue from ticket sales, media contracts, merchandising and corporate sponsors.

Another tenet, liberalism, proposes that, although ideally just, the concepts of color blindness, meritocracy, and neutrality are illusionary. People should consider race within the discourse of policy or consider that the law is color blind and ignore the experiences of people of color. One of the core observations of present-day scholars is that subconscious acts of racial inequities occur within a color-blind frame of reference, which Giroux (1999) referred to as an “ideology of racelessness.” Using a color-blind lens allows those in power to assert that racial differences do not impact personal or group outcomes, even when they readily “support and participate in systems that result in grossly disparate outcomes for different racial groups” (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). According to Solorzano and Yosso (2000), critical race scholars further argued that color blindness acts as a mask for the power, privilege, and self-interest of the dominant group in U.S. society. Liberalism ignores the experiences of marginalized people, as demonstrated in culturally insensitive curriculum design, various educational student development theories, and the idea of race-neutral objective research (Decuir & Dixon, 2004). By challenging liberalism, critical race theory brings forth the need for comprehensive reform targeting inequity in this country.
The fifth tenet of CRT, counternarrative, is that the “experiential knowledge of people of color” is necessary for examining racial marginalization (Matsuda et al., 1993; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). Through counternarratives, marginalized people negate racist and majority stereotypes and offer their lived experiences as evidence, informing not only the majority but also other minoritized individuals. Critical hip hop pedagogy has often performed this role. Decuir and Dixon (2004) suggested that counterstorytelling allows for self-reflection as a means to expose the four tenets described previously. Solorzano and Yosso (2000) offered three levels of storytelling: personal stories, other people’s stories or narratives, and composite stories or narratives that all serve to describe a subject’s experiences concerning bias, racism, and stereotypes. Solorzano and Yosso (2000) cautioned that storytelling could be used as a tool to counter the normalized discourse that perpetuates racial stereotypes, as well as to create and frame the experiences of marginalized people. Personal stories are autobiographical, consisting of an author’s account with marginalization in comparison to the subject matter being discussed or researched. Other people’s stories or narratives are third-person accounts, and composite stories are narratives that use data and have the ability to combine the style of the other two types of storytelling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). Storytelling is a powerful tool to analyze individual experiences or combine research-specific data with helping to explore a topic. Stories, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, chronicles and narratives, personal accounts, and shared experiences, beliefs, and perspectives are vital aids in the achievement of social justice (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). The counternarrative provides an important tool for the African American male adolescents in this study to chronicle their various lived experiences in such
areas as teacher relationships, alternative school and after-school programs, school resources, marginality, expulsion, racism, and personal relationships.

Commitment to social justice is the last tenet of CRT and describes the ultimate goal of critical race theory, which is to end injustice and uphold the rights of the oppressed (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). Critical race theories reject incremental changes associated with the civil rights movement, “recognizing that multiple layers of oppression and discrimination need to be met with multiple forms of resistance” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000, p. 26). Ultimately, the establishment of CRT as a movement suggests that social justice must be manifested in the transformation of the policies, practices, and perceptions that sustain the status quo and the “deprivileging of majoritarian discourse” (Decuir & Dixon, 2004).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) were the first to use critical race theory to analyze and conceptualize inequity in this country’s educational system. Researchers have responded to Ladson-Billings and Tate’s (1995) proposal for CRT to be used as a framework when exploring inequities in education based on race and class and as a vehicle to eliminate discrimination through its social justice paradigm. Scholars have used CRT to investigate K-12 educational pedagogy, curriculum, practice, and policy, along with marginalized students’ lived educational experiences, the achievement gap between racial groups, and educational outcomes in general (Decuir & Dixon, 2004). Critical race researchers further suggested that educational institutions in this country have the potential to oppress and marginalize or the potential to emancipate and empower (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) also identified how the legacy of racism in the United States affected the psychosocial, economic, and educational development of African Americans and Latinos. These results bring into question the notion of
meritocracy and liberalism in education. A core tenet of the ideology of “racelessness” is the myth of meritocracy, which asserts that a person’s life outcomes are reflective of his commitment to moral virtue and hard work (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Teachers promote the myth of meritocracy by telling students that hard work will lead to academic success. Still, marginalized minoritized individuals in some of the best U.S. schools are often tracked in classes that result in disparate outcomes. School experiences and performance are a compelling aspect of the argument supporting CRT treatment. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) suggested that the voices of oppressed people within the educational setting must be heard as a means of establishing social justice and reform. As referenced earlier, Solorzano and Yosso (2000) suggested that any educational methodology on critical race theory must recognize that “the experimental knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination” (p. 26). Critical literacy instruction is vital for students if they are to become active and engaged members of their communities. Kim and Pulido (2015) viewed hip hop music as a strategy in helping urban youth become critical thinkers because hip hop text so often addresses the realities of their lives.

In summary, this chapter began with a discussion about the increase of diversity in this nation’s classrooms and the need for a teaching staff that reflects that diversity. This includes an increase in minoritized teachers as well as a curriculum that promotes inclusion and culturally relevant practices. Chapter 4 also contended that hip hop pedagogy can be used to promote inclusion in urban classrooms because of its role in bringing authenticity to the learning process. A discussion of the new literacies followed that. These literacies have broadened the definition of literacy, along with adding to practice and context. Critical theory was also discussed, which
is a school of thought that has its origins in the Frankfurt School. Critical theory digs beneath the surface of existing modes of domination and oppression seeking to provide an emancipation for the marginalized.

Furthermore, this chapter included a discussion on critical literacy because hip hop music and culture are being utilized to develop a critical consciousness in many of our youth. Critical hip hop pedagogy, with its ability to speak in the language of urban youth, informs and enables students to examine and investigate serious societal issues. The section on multiple literacies identified the six elements of meaning-making processes that guide literacy practices today. Finally, the chapter ended with a discussion of critical race theory because of the many similarities between critical race theory and hip hop. Critical race theory recognizes that we do not live in an era of color blindness. Storytelling and personal narratives are suggested as a way of counterbalancing the consequences of racial injustice.
CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the rationale for a qualitative case study, states the study’s research purpose, presents the questions, and justifies the sample selection used. The interview protocol, data collection, and data preparation are explained and detailed, including an identification of the data analysis procedures used in the study. Finally, there is a discussion of the study’s limitations.

The study used a case study design to examine the literacy practices of four African American male students who attended an after-school hip hop literacy program. Since the study is concerned with the questions of “how and why,” the most appropriate research design is a case study. Another benefit of case study research is that it allows the researcher to obtain the language, or voice, of the participants (Creswell, 2009). The emphasis on the participant’s personal voice was important since the empirical goal was to understand the actual experiences and beliefs of the participants. Merriam (1988) stated,

The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meaning that expand its readers’ experiences. These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research; hence, case study
plays an important role in advancing a field’s knowledge base. Because of its strengths, case study is a particularly appealing design for applied fields of study. (p. 32) The design “seek(s) to explain some present circumstance” and “requires extensive and ‘in-depth’ description of some social phenomenon” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). Yin (2009) further suggested that a case study is defined as an “empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon in “a real-life bounded setting” (p. 13). The present circumstances at hand are those of the personal experiences related to hip hop musical practice, particularly teaching and learning within the genre. Patton (2002) explained that a case study approach allows for the focus on analyzing the process of a product. Patton (2002) also asserts that a case study engages the reader in a specific situation. The focus of inquiry should be on allowing the reader to understand the case in every aspect.

This study was concerned with the socio-cultural contexts within which hip hop musical literacy practices occur, specifically in an after-school program in an urban setting. In this setting, “the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Therefore, a case study design was best equipped to explore both the personally experienced phenomenon of hip hop musical literacy practice as well as the specific contexts in which these practices take place. In this way, this study was not limited to asking how hip hop affects the lives of the study participants but rather was concerned with exploring the ways that sociocultural contexts affect and are affected by their hip hop musical literacy practice. I intended for the exploration of the case to inform the broader experiences of in-school and out-of-school hip hop literacy learning as well as the socio cultural issues surrounding these practices.
Yin (2009) named five components of effective case study research design: (1) research questions, (2) propositions or purpose of the study, (3) unit analysis, (4) logic that links data to propositions, and (5) criteria for interpreting findings. Yin (2009) named these five components of effective case study research design, attempting to add clarity to the research process. There was no existing set of research strategies for the case study research design; therefore, he committed himself to this development. The appropriate questions for this type of qualitative case study research were “how” and “what” forms of questions. These research questions are as follows:

1) How can hip hop pedagogy broaden student perspectives of literacy?

2) What can student participation in an after-school hip hop pedagogy program tell us about student literacy practices?

3) How can hip hop pedagogy serve as a bridge between out-of-school and in-school literacy practices?

The third component of the case study research design is the unit of analysis. Yin (2009) described the unit of analysis as the area of focus that a case study analyzes. Yin (2009) wrote that an appropriate unit of analysis occurs when primary research is accurately specified. The unit of analysis is tied directly to the research questions developed by the researcher. This study’s units of analysis, per Merriam (1988), were the students (cases to be studied) who attended an after-school hip hop literacy program in an urban school district in the southeastern United States. The fourth component of the case study research design is to connect data to propositions. This connection is made following the data collection phase, as themes emerge. As
data are analyzed, the researcher attempts to match patterns that appear in the data to the theoretical propositions of the case study. The themes that emerged in this study served as answers to the research questions posed in Chapter 1. The fifth component of the case study design is the criteria for interpreting findings. Commonly, the case study researcher codes the data before developing themes (Yin, 2009). Following the theme development stage, I carefully extracted meaning from the findings to determine recommendations for practice and future research.

There is also a need to clarify the difference between methods and methodology. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2011), “methodology” is a generic term that refers to the general logic and theoretical perspective for a research project. On the other hand, methods refer to the specific techniques used in research, such as surveys, interviews, observations, and the more technical aspects of the research. Bogdan and Biklen (2011) stated that methods “in good research” should be “consistent with the logic embodied in the methodology” (p. 35). They also suggested qualitative research is a methodology that if “you want to understand the way people think about their worth and how those definitions are formed, you need to get close to them to hear them talk and observe them in their day-to-day lives” (p. 35). This study used interviews for targeted and insightful responses and direct observation for contextual clues. The study also featured extensive use of narrative to situate the study in a thick descriptive environment (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). Other characteristics that make this appropriate for qualitative methods include it being a naturalistic inquiry, participant observations, and the researcher as the primary data collection instrument (Patton, 2002).
Since cases are bounded by time and activity, researchers must collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period. For the study, I collected data through in-depth interviews, observations, and artifacts that were provided to me by the students and director of the after-school program. Specifically, interviews were conducted and audio-taped, and tapes were transcribed into word documents; artifacts were reviewed and data were coded for emergent themes. Another component of case studies is the unit of analysis, defined as the area of focus of the study (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2009). For this, the unit of analysis was the four students who participated in the study.

**Data Collection**

Green, Camilli, and Elmore (2006) stated that a carefully conducted case study benefits from having multiple sources of evidence, which ensures that the study is as robust as possible. My intent for using multiple data collection methods was to triangulate my data (Flick, 2006). Triangulation illuminates the study by using multiple sources to lead to a fuller understanding of the phenomena (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Therefore, my data collection plan consisted of three 1-hour-long in-depth structured interviews with each of the four participants. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. There were four 2-hour-long observations of the participants in their after-school setting and during field assignments. These observations took place in the classroom at their school, recording studios where they create music, and concert venues where they perform. The observations were videotaped, and field notes were taken. Through observation, the researcher “records situations as they happen” as well as the meaning of these events at the time (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, p. 175). In this after-school
setting, these observations focused on “activities, setting and participation structures, behavior of persons and groups, conversations and interactions” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, p. 175). Also, I assessed artifacts from the participants to conduct document analysis. These artifacts consist of curriculum assignments given to the students by the program director and the lyrics for songs the participants created. Data can also serve as evidence and clues to help one better understand unfounded speculation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). Therefore, my data will serve as a guide by which to see the world through each student participant.

Data Analysis

This section of the chapter provides information about the data analysis techniques that were used in the study. It starts with the transcription of procedures. In the case of studies, data analysis and collection procedures occur simultaneously (Babbie, 2012; Bryman, 2012; Cozby, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Shank, 2006; Yin, 2009). Concurrent data collection and analysis for the study began during the participant interviews and observations. Interview data were collected using a digital voice recorder. During the observations, field notes were handwritten and later recorded using a digital recorder. The two sets of data were later transcribed. Four students were chosen to participate in the interviews based on Merten’s (2005) indications of what is a suitable number of participants in a case study. Each student was given a pseudonym to protect his interests. I interviewed each student until saturation occurred. Data saturation occurs when no new information pertinent to the study is revealed (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The process allowed me to dig deeply into the thoughts and perceptions of the participants. Each individual’s interview was structured and lasted approximately one hour. There were three separate
interviews like this for each participant. Although there was not a time constraint on the interviews, the young men had busy schedules with school, homework, and after-school hip hop literacy activities. The amount of time spent with each participant (Kvale, 1996) did allow for an in-depth discussion. The interviews began with guided questions that progressed into more specific questions, depending on the responses (see Appendix A). I observed the four participants in their natural setting as they participated in hip hop literacy activities. This consists of one afternoon at a music festival, three classroom meetings, a meeting at a film production house, a studio music setting, the program director’s home, and a local park where they created a music video. The observations took place during a four-week period.

**Research Questions**

1) How can hip hop pedagogy broaden student perspectives of literacy?

2) What can student participation in an after-school hip hop pedagogy program tell us about student literacy practices?

3) How can hip hop pedagogy serve as a bridge between out-of-school and in-school literacy practices?

**Researcher’s Role**

Creswell (2009) stated that when discussing the role of the researcher in qualitative studies, one should include statements about past experiences of the researcher that demonstrate familiarity with the topic, setting, or informants. In researching an after-school program along with the social and educational benefits of such a program, my youth can serve as a guide. I grew up in a predominantly African American inner-ring suburban community. Hall and Schultz
(2001) suggested that out-of-school literacy practices play a crucial role in literacy development and that community organizations should work together with schools to advance literacy skills of students. My early activities and practices helped to promote my literacy development. I started writing poetry in elementary school, and my sixth-grade teacher encouraged my parents to enroll me in a writing class that Triton Community College offered on Saturday mornings for elementary school students. In the class, we dealt with the mechanics of creative writing as well as took tours of the local neighborhood in search of writing subjects.

Today, I still write poetry and recently published a book of poems through Amazon Books about my family, titled *We Are Connected*. Tragically, the last poem dealt with the shooting death of my younger cousin. As a youth, I was interested in sports as well. There was a Boys Club two blocks from my home and a YMCA twenty minutes away. I played organized basketball at the Boys Club and attended a summer camp at the local YMCA. The basketball team was under adult supervision, and there were many lessons other than sports being taught. People were expected to get good grades, and there was a strong emphasis on respecting your teammates and opponents. The importance of teamwork and discipline was instilled in us. I was the point guard and the team leader on the floor. Because of my position, I was able to see where each of my teammates was on the floor and guide our actions. During the summer months, I spent time at the YMCA summer camp, where there were various activities to be learned, such as swimming, character building, and nature appreciation. Years later, in college, I would participate in rap ciphers with other African American students. We were inspired by listening to the music of successful rap artists such as Tupac, Nas, and Ice Cube. Although I did not grow up in the inner city, my race and interest in hip hop have allowed me to be able to relate to the study
participants. I understand common gestures and phrases that are used when they are communicating.

Moving forward, my role in this case study was shaped by my experience as a high school mathematics teacher for eleven years in urban public school districts and my graduate study. These experiences provided me with a unique insight, understanding, and knowledge about teaching urban students. This belief system aligns itself with how information is gathered and interpreted by the researcher. For two years, I taught freshman mathematics in the same district where the study high school is located. My students were mostly African Americans and Haitian immigrants. The Haitian students had limited English language skills. The Haitians may have had language challenges but were highly motivated and took advantage of before-and after-school support. While teaching in this district, I was recognized as the most successful teacher in the Mathematics Department at the high school where I taught because of improvements that my students made on their yearly standardized examination. The assistant principal shared data with the department that found my students made what she suggested were remarkable gains each year of my employment. For my effort, I received a small stipend at the end of the first school year. Many of the students’ past teachers had performed poorly in preparing them for high-school-level mathematics. I was also shocked and dismayed at the literacy skills of the students during the first weeks of school. Most of my students had difficulty reading and understanding the mathematics text and lacked basic knowledge of mathematics concepts that should have been acquired in elementary school. Without knowledge of basic mathematics concepts, it is almost impossible for students to succeed in higher level mathematics classes. There were a few
disciplinary problems initially, and that is common with first-year students. However, I was able to gain the control and respect of the students by emphasizing all the roles in the classroom.

My classroom was built around culturally responsive teaching practices with my African American and Haitian students. I designed problems that dealt with real-life situations they encountered in their daily lives. Once I began to get the students engaged and motivated, they began to excel. The interesting outcome was after two years in this district; the new state governor instituted severe budget cuts resulting in the layoff of junior teachers. Following my experiences in this district, I decided to fulfill a goal of pursuing doctoral studies in higher education. After taking a class in literacy, I became interested in how the concept of new literacies was impacting education and communication. The impact of the changing definition of literacy can transform how we view teaching and learning. Researchers’ new approaches to literacy pedagogy (such as Gee, 2004, and Street, 2005) recognize and give legitimacy to a diverse view of literacy that extends beyond the pen and paper. Today, with the advances in technology, students can use cell phones to search the internet for help and information about a host of problems. They can also consult a variety of sources before making critical decisions. This has made websites, videos, newspapers, and professional journals immediately available.

Every semester, I introduced my students to the Khan Academy, which is an excellent out-of-school source for mathematics assistance. I have been intrigued by the research of Emdin (2014), Kirkland (2006), Campbell (2005), and others on the possible impact of hip hop being utilized in the classroom with urban students, especially in the promotion of social justice. Ginwright (2004) suggested hip hop text can be a powerful tool for social change in the urban environment. He contended that hip-hop culture is used to organize, inform and politicize youth
Campbell (2005), and Bradley and Dubois (2010), hip hop text represents an out of school
culturally relevant resource that can be brought into the classroom of our urban schools.

Many of the students I have taught excluded mathematics from their self-concept and are
under-represented in the STEM fields. Beasley and Fischer (2012) suggested that
underpreparedness is a major reason for minoritized attrition in STEM college courses. Emdin’s
(2017) research and that of others revealed that students could gain in mathematics with the aid
of hip hop texts. Hip hop should not be restricted to the language arts curriculum and can
facilitate learning throughout the school curriculum. The problem is that most public schools are
not receptive to bringing hip hop into the classroom. This is not the situation in after-school
programs. Therefore, I was fascinated by the possibility of adding to the research in this area.
The recognition that school is not the only place where students gain information has to be
acknowledged. The principal at South East High School has been working with the director of
the Dade Foundation after-school hip hop literacy program to see if hip hop literacy can aid the
academic achievement of her Black male students. The rationale for selecting only males for the
hip hop literacy after-school program was that the male student completion rates in South East
High School were lower than female students. Also the school staff was searching for ways to
encourage males to become more engaged academically. She also recognized this partnership as
an opportunity to provide her students with enhanced self-esteem, along with a high school
diploma. She reasoned that writing rap texts and producing music videos would instill a sense of
agency in her male students. The director of the Dade Foundation is a pioneer in the southeastern
music community whom I met while employed in the district. As a friend of the foundation
director, I was challenged to recognize my role as an observer of his work with the study participants. He, along with the South East High School principal, expressed full support for my research. Although they have been supportive of my study, I made every effort to remain neutral as a qualitative researcher and allow the data to shape my analysis and interpretations.

**Participants, Selection, and Schooling Context**

The participants in the study consisted of four African American male youth who are enrolled in the Dade Foundation after-school hip hop literacy program. Purposeful sampling was used to select the study participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). This sampling technique involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are exceptionally knowledgeable about or have experience with a phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). In addition to knowledge and experience, Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) noted the benefit of availability and willingness to participate and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate expressive, and reflective manner. The four young men in the study were recommended by the after-school program director as having worked very diligently in becoming knowledgeable about hip hop literacy and its possibilities as a career choice. He further stated that they have expressed regrets about past academic failures and are committed to self-improvement. As referenced earlier, the participants in the study were African American male students who were deemed unable to function in regular high schools and given little chance of academic and social success. As discussed in the first chapter, research has shown that many young African American male students begin to become less engaged in school in the ninth grade, and 40% will either drop out or be expelled after their freshman year (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011).
Moreover, minoritized students continue to maintain lower graduation rates compared to White students (Greene, 2016). There were several reasons suggested for this, such as socioeconomic status, home life, and underperforming schools (Williams, 2015). The four Black male students in the study have had past academic struggles and behavioral difficulties in regular high schools. They also have challenging home lives and have been homeless for periods in their lives. The alternative school classes are small and contain between 10 and 20 students. They have a choice of attending a five-hour morning session of classes or a five-hour afternoon session of classes. The curriculum is mostly computer based and utilizes the Apex learning program. The Apex learning option is a digital curriculum designed to provide a self-paced, standards-based curriculum for students who are enrolled in alternative education programs. Although the lessons are computer based, some teachers assist students having difficulty with a particular subject.

Basic literacy in reading comprehension, mathematics, and language arts are areas of emphasis within the school (“Where Opportunity Thrives,” 2020). There is also a literacy coach available for teachers and students. The school population is diverse; there are four hundred students who attend the school, and the students are mostly African American, Hispanic, Haitian, and Afro-Caribbean. The principal decided to enhance the school’s curriculum by adding activities designed to motivate the students in areas such as time management, daily attendance, identity construction, encouragement, and future planning as they navigate through the school. The partnership between South East High School and the Dade Foundation is one result of this effort. The foundation’s goal is to provide a targeted group of male students an opportunity to
explore their interest in hip hop literacy. The program allows for the creation of music with the help of seasoned professionals.

**School and Community**

The community where the study took place is located in a county in the southeast part of the United States. The surrounding community is working to middle class, with little industry and mostly single-family homes and condominiums. The space where the program meets is a classroom at South East High School. There are five computers lined up against the back wall of the classroom that are accessible and internet ready for any students who require online access to research a subject or topic. The students sit at desks in a circle, surrounding the program's director. This setup is similar to the cultural ciphers that take place where artists have freestyle sessions and rhyme hip hop lyrics around a circle while taking turns expressing their thoughts. Within this construct, the program's director provides discussion topics and assignments for the students to complete that build upon their organizational, professional, and hip hop literacy skills. This program meets once a week on Fridays after school in South East high school. However, there are multiple opportunities for field studies and further enrichment that take place in various spaces outside of the school building through creative partnerships provided by the program’s director. For example, the participants have the opportunity to record music in state-of-the-art studios while also learning about the technical skills involved in the production, mixing, and mastering of music. They have a relationship with a local film school that provides training in digital literacy.
Additionally, they are privy to guest lectures from prominent artists who have been successful within the music industry. They also have multiple opportunities to perform their music in public at various concerts and festivals that the program's director facilitates. These opportunities are in addition to the weekly Friday meetings and can occur on various days of the week.

**Theme Development**

A thorough exploration of common themes surrounding the primary research questions took place (Shank, 2006). Collecting information in case studies to uncover common themes via comparison to previous data is thematic by nature (Yin, 2009). Thematic data protocols are particularly useful in case studies because the constant and repetitive review of the information reduces bias and tainted findings and conclusions (Merriam, 2009). Thematic data analysis procedures took place in the study by comparing, contrasting, and performing regular reviews of transcribed audio files, documents, and the keywords and phrases gleaned from the scrubbed texts coded into nodes within the NVivo software (Shank, 2006). In this manner, the rich data obtained produced common themes surrounding the primary research questions of the study (Babbie, 2012; Bryman, 2012; Cozby, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Shank, 2006; Yin, 2009). Data analysis in qualitative research occurs concurrently with the collection, unlike quantitative methods, where data analysis occurs after collection via some statistical measuring of variables (Babbie, 2012). Qualitative data analysis runs adjacent to the collection and differs from quantitative research, where data analysis runs in a linear sequence after collection procedures (Merriam, 2009). Another term for thematic data analysis is constant comparison analysis, where
collected data are analyzed many times to uncover common ideas involved in a primary-research, phenomenon-based study (Cozby, 2009). Continuous and exhaustive thematic reviews included data from subject responses and observations and keywords and phrases coded within the NVivo software on my locked and password-protected personal computer.

As the manual coding of data into NVivo proceeded, a continuous review of transcribed audio files, scrubbed documents, and keyword and phrase creations occurred. I reviewed transcribed data and my interview recordings at least three times to ensure the accuracy of participant responses (Boe, 2013; Bryman, 2012; Cozby, 2009). Labeling separate NVivo nodes, coded with keywords and phrases relating to the transcribed and scrubbed documents created from recorded audio interviews with the subjects, offered significant study evidence. The coding of data from the interview questions into NVivo on my personal computer sufficed for confirmation in this study (Babbie, 2012; Bryman, 2012; Cozby, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Shank, 2006; Yin, 2009). Manual labeling of nodes in NVivo involves assigning keywords or phrases of text that would imply meaning to data by aligning the data to the interview questions in the study (Boe, 2013; Bryman, 2012). Using features in NVivo, data were analyzed to determine if repeating themes emerge from the evidence. Frequency or pattern matching is an appropriate case study data analysis technique with subject responses to open-ended questions and other types of qualitative information, a feature of the NVivo software (Yin, 2009). The process of determining codes, matching patterns, and recognizing emerging themes was the same for all four participants (Shank, 2006).
Validity

An important task of qualitative research is the employment of the validation procedure to ensure that data collection and analysis are as accurate as possible (Creswell, 2009). The data for the study was triangulated. Studies use the triangulation of data collection to limit the weaknesses inherent in each method (Patton, 2002). For example, reviewing artifacts is different from interviewing the participants and conducting observations because I am not directly involved in the data collection.

In addition, I allowed member checking (Merriam, 2009) of all qualitative data collected through interviews and observations. All major themes from interviews, events, and observations were presented to the participants for validation. In member checks, the interpretation and report (or a section of it) were given to sample participants to verify the authenticity of the work. The participants’ comments act as a check regarding the viability of the interpretation. The member checking process can occur during the interview process, at the close of the study, or both for increased credibility (Merriam, 2009). The interviewer should endeavor to build rapport with the interviewee to acquire honest and open responses. During each interview, I restated or summarized information and then questioned the participant to determine accuracy. Member checks after a study is completed allow participants to analyze the findings and comment on them critically. The participants either affirm that the summaries reflect their views, feelings, and experiences or that they do not reflect these experiences. If the participants affirm the accuracy and completeness, then the study is said to have credibility. These member checks are not without fault but serve to decrease the incidence of incorrect data and the incorrect interpretation.
of data. The overall goal of the process was to provide findings that are authentic, original, and valid.

Finally, a peer examination of the data occurred after the conclusion of the transcription and data analysis. Interview transcripts were provided to a peer examiner who is familiar with qualitative research. The examiner provided feedback on the findings and the coding; this was an attempt to ensure that the themes I found in the data are accurate and valid (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

**Summary**

This study was designed to collect data from four student participants in an after-school hip hop literacy program. The case study intended to examine how these African American males use this hip hop music program to develop their literacy skills. The data were gathered through structured participant interviews, observations, and related artifacts. The results of the data were analyzed. Data were coded using open and pattern coding to identify common themes. The data were also checked for threats to validity by using triangulation, member checking, and a peer examiner.

From this categorical round of open and pattern coding, the following five concepts became visible themes: engaging in activities that accommodate their interests, the importance of teaching strategies being anchored in the reality of the participants, importance of student engagement in classroom learning experience, importance of positive peer-to-peer motivation and school climate, and the need to deconstruct traditional class curriculum through hip hop pedagogy. These five themes were developed to aid in the interpretation of the meaning of the
data as a means of best arranging the material into a narrative account of the findings. Findings related to these five prevalent themes are explained in Chapter 6.
CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS

This chapter will examine the research findings of this case study and include a description of the participants as well as answers to the three research questions that guide the study. As the researcher, I identified themes as they related to the study. Thus, the findings from the interviews, observations, and documents are presented in narrative form to support the themes that emerged. The five themes that were recognizable in the data are 1) the importance of engaging in activities that accommodate their interests, 2) the importance of teaching strategies being anchored in the reality of the participants, 3) the importance of student engagement in the classroom learning experience, 4) the importance of positive peer-to-peer motivation and school climate, and 5) the need to deconstruct traditional class curriculum through hip hop pedagogy.

The following four African American male students agreed to participate in this study.

Participant Profiles

Walter

Walter (pseudonym), age 18, smiles easily, is good-natured, and is a natural leader. He is adept at code switching because he can communicate with his urban peers by using the
vernacular that is common on the streets of his urban neighborhood but can also discuss the goals of the Dade Foundation music program with a corporate funding source. Because his parents served in the military, they lived in New York, California, Texas, and Germany during his youth.

After leaving the military, the family settled in south Florida. His father was born in south Florida, and his mother was born in the northern part of Florida. Once settled in south Florida, they also moved often, which led Walter to attend five elementary schools. He started writing rap text in middle school and stated that the messages of his early raps did not contain lyrics with negative stereotypes and clichés. Walter also stated that his music interest ranged from jazz to blues to hip hop. Walter has struggled academically in most of the schools he has attended and was expelled from two high schools for disciplinary reasons. This includes fighting and selling t-shirts that he had personally designed. He sold the t-shirts on the school campus, which was a violation of the school's policy. The after-school director had high praise for Walter’s ability to organize his classmates and lead in classroom discussions. Walter is also president of the after-school student music production company.

**Larry**

Larry (pseudonym), age 18, is a quiet young man who is popular with his peers. He was born in south Florida but spent one year, at the age of six, in Massachusetts with his mother and her boyfriend. His mother did not like living in Massachusetts and moved back to Florida with Larry. When they returned to Florida, Larry and his mother moved in with his older brother. Larry struggled in school and, when asked to sign his name, he could not do so in cursive. He can only print his name in the section marked “sign.” Larry does not like to read school books
but does keep up with the news about rap artists. He considers himself a rap artist and enjoys expressing himself through rap text. He was expelled from high school after his freshman year for fighting and poor academic achievement. Because of this, Larry was advised that he should enroll in South East High School. Upon enrolling in the school, the staff recommended that he participate in the Dade Foundation hip hop literacy program. He has become one of the most prolific writers of rap texts in the after-school program.

Paul

Paul (pseudonym), age 18, was born in south Florida to a single mother. He did not meet his father until he was eight years old. He has struggled academically since elementary school and continued to do so in high school. Paul found school to be boring and did not attend on a regular basis. By the time he enrolled in his local high school, he was heavily involved with the youth drug culture that was prominent in his neighborhood. Because of fighting with other classmates and failure to attend school regularly, he was expelled from his local high school. At that point, he made the decision to enroll in South East High School. Even though he commended the efforts of South East High School to assist him initially, he was not serious about his education. He did not attend regularly until he became enrolled in the Dade Foundation music program. Currently, he is no longer regularly using drugs but is focusing on finishing high school and writing rap text.

Sydney

Sydney’s (pseudonym), age 18, parents were together until he was nine years old. Disagreements, arguments, and quarreling over the years finally pulled them apart. Sydney and
his sister then began to live only with their mother. At some point, the grandmother moved in with them as well. Sydney would frequently visit his father and recently, at age 17, moved in with him. During his youth, he loved to play football, go to parties, and write rap songs. He also spent a great deal of time with his friends. He had a general dislike for school and therefore struggled academically. In middle school, he got into several fights but overall avoided getting into trouble. Once he arrived at high school, the frequency of fighting increased exponentially because of the students he associated with. With their encouragement, he also stopped attending school regularly. After being expelled from his local high school for fighting, Sydney decided to enroll in South East High School. One positive outcome of his enrollment at the high school was a teacher informing Sydney about the after-school hip hop literacy program. The teacher knew he was interested in rap music and thought it would be beneficial for him to participate. Sydney has made a diametrical change in his attitudes towards school as a result of his involvement in this hip hop literacy program. He attends school regularly and can complete high school by passing a few classes.

**Engaging in Activities That Accommodate Their Interests**

The Dade Foundation hip hop literacy program has created a pedagogical space where young African American males can embrace hip hop culture and the learning opportunities that it offers as they broaden perspectives of literacy. Specifically, they are using hip hop pedagogy to build a learning community, develop positive identities, and foster social consciousness in students who have been expelled from traditional high schools. All study participants were broadening their perspectives of literacy by engaging in hip hop-centered tasks. During the
interviews and observations, the participants were engaged daily in learning and sharing elements of hip hop culture such as DJing, editing videos, writing rap text, performing at concerts, music production, and audio engineering.

Paul stated that he loves to engineer, but before he enrolled in the Dade Foundation hip hop literacy program, he did not have decent music equipment. Now he is provided with up-to-date production equipment, as well as a state-of-the-art studio space to create rap music. He stated,

My mom’s sister gave me a bunch of mixers, speakers, and mics but I can’t use em because like it’s kind of old type studio equipment from decades ago. I can’t do nothing with it with modern type of stuff. I got a lot of interest in the studio. I like to rap and engineer. I been engineering and people say it sound good. When I mix my stuff, I always want it to sound good in a way. To be honest the favorite song I ever made in history is called Moonwalk. It’s like the vibe and the lyrics and shit and the way we harmonizing over the track. Paul’s engagement in music production has been a powerful catalyst for change in his life. He’s no longer abusing drugs because of his interest in hip hop production.

The studio is where the real work of the Dade Foundation hip hop literacy program takes place. The participants are fortunate to have the support of a recording facility that is jointly owned by former National Football League players who are community residents as well as hip hop artists and enthusiasts. They allow the participants to create music in their studio as a way of providing opportunities for young, aspiring hip hop artists. As witnessed during one of my observations, I recall the four participants sitting on a gray couch inside the control room of a state-of-the-art recording studio. They were busy discussing the next song they wanted to complete and the roles each one would play. Walter led the conversation and joked about how this song would be the one they would get their Grammy for. Paul smiled nervously as he twisted
the back of his hair and slowly nodded. Sydney smiled as well while looking off in the distance as he bobbed his head to the beat playing in the background through the speakers. Larry had his phone out and had already begun writing lyrics inside it. Larry stood up and started pacing back and forth while feverishly typing. At this point, Walter stood up and pointed over to Paul, letting him know he was ready to rap. Paul stood up from the couch and seated himself in front of a big mixing board sitting in the front of the room. He seemed very familiar with how to operate the board because he immediately began adjusting knobs and clicking on the computer sitting above it. Paul asked Walter to email him the beat, and Walter reminded him that he sent it last night. Paul looked at the computer intently with a sly smile on his face as he navigated through the ProTools session, looking at the wav. files from a previous song. ProTools is the computer software that the students use to record, mix, and master the sonics of their music. I can tell this was Paul’s happy place to be as he clicked the mouse, adjusting the settings on the computer screen in front of him, and prepared to record Walter.

Another participant, Sydney, has an interest in being an entrepreneur who markets and distributes music through his label. Therefore, he formed a group to market future rap music videos and profit from concert performances. He stated:

I have my own artist group. My main role in the group is an artist but I also produce. The group name is RSO and it stands for Real Soldiers Only. I want to be the best I can and I’m doing something I always wanted to do.
The Dade Foundation hip hop pedagogy program has provided Sydney with an opportunity to pursue his dream of becoming a music entrepreneur. At the completion of my research, Sydney had acquired the necessary items to build a home studio.

Once they leave the studio, every aspiring hip hop artist wants to perform before a live audience of fans. They need their fans to “vibe” with them as they get the crowd involved in their performance. For them, stage presence is everything. They often will spend hours practicing their show routines and perfecting their vocal delivery on stage. It is essential to know how to hold the microphone, command the crowd, and perform on stage collectively as a group. During one of the observations, I recall watching the participants perform at a yearly local event in their neighborhood. As they stood off to the side of the stage, I watched the director talk to the participants about the importance of being on time and professional. Walter nodded his head anxiously with nervous energy you could feel. There were vendors lined up on both sides of the street serving favorite local dishes like seafood, jerk chicken, and conch salad. I walked over to one of the vendors and placed my order for ten wingettes and fries. The weather was 90 degrees but felt like 100 degrees. I sweated profusely and began using my t-shirt as a towel to wipe my face. As I rejoined the group, I ate my wings and munched on my fries with hot sauce dripping from my fingers.

Walter, Sydney, and Larry were in a circle with each other exchanging “yo momma” jokes back and forth. Paul stood off to the side, talking to the program director about one of his songs called “Moonwalk.” Paul told the program director that he could moonwalk better than Michael Jackson if he put his mind to it. I walked over and asked the program director if he was hungry. He replied, “Sure,” so I handed him the rest of my food, which was five wingettes and a
few french fries. After that, I walked away to glimpse the front of the stage and the other artists lining up to perform. The stage was square with big speakers on both sides, and various cords strewn across the stage, some plugged into the microphones that would be used for the performances. I began wondering if having cordless microphones would be a better idea to keep the stage cleaner for group performances. As I looked back, I saw the program director sharing the five wingettes I gave him with Larry, who, in hindsight, must have been very hungry. I considered getting more food, but before I could, they were called to the stage to perform. Walter led them to the stage, and Sydney picked up from there. He grabbed the microphone off the stand and energetically announced that “RSO is in the building.” The music started, and he began to rap at the top of his lungs while gesturing for the crowd to get involved. He jumped up and down happily as he watched people from his neighborhood nod their heads to his music. Walter, Larry, and Paul joined him in exciting the crowd and providing energy for him to perform his solo song. After his song, Sydney joked with the crowd, “Ya’ll better get me before my price go up.”

The music program has enabled Walter to become more sophisticated in hip hop production. Walter stated that he has been writing rap text since he was 13 or 14 years old, in junior high school, but his involvement in the music program has helped him gain the knowledge he needed to become a rapper. Walter stated that “at first I did not know how people became rappers but being a part of this has allowed me to grow up and make music.” He has discovered that many rap songs are produced collaboratively. Walter described how he and others in the program would meet in the studio to discuss the concept for a new song. Next, they played with sounds on the computer program Logic to construct a beat for the rap lyrics to be recorded over. Very few songs begin with just the lyrics. Usually, the beat plays for 4 to 8 bars before the rapper
comes in. Finally, they either write the lyrics on paper or use their cell phones to record the lyrics. The lyric development can also start when one person in the group orally comes up with an idea for a subject that he is interested in. After agreeing about the subject matter for the song, they come up with a hook, which is a catchy phrase of rap text that is the idea for the song. Walter also stated there are times when he likes to create music alone.

I’m a visual person. That’s why I ride my skateboard so much. While riding, I think about my past. It could be my family, school or something that happened to me, good or bad. Sometimes, I can see a whole song in my head, video and all. I wanna be able to know how to create what’s in my head basically. And if no one ever shows you, you gotta teach yourself. Now I’m around people learning how to do stuff I’m gon need for my own career.

This statement is very important because it shows a direct link between the skills that the hip hop literacy program provides and the motivation Walter displayed to learn as much as possible through the program. After all, he enjoys the process and is naturally engaged in it.

In addition, Paul described how his traditional public school did little to help him when he struggled academically. He stated that the music program staff helped him to become serious about his education, rap music, and aided him in ending his substance abuse. He stated he had become a student who is looking forward to high school graduation and a career in music. Paul, referring to his previous high school stated, “I didn’t like being there; I missed out on a lot of work and then I got my grades, it would be a lot Fs.” When questioned about the Dade Foundation after-school program, he stated, “the music program is A-1 because first of all it helped me like I get to do stuff I never did and they also teach me like it’s good to learn something every day because you gon need it.” He also acknowledged that the after-school director “put me on track. Now I’m about to graduate though cause I had to put in the work.”
Once again, the connection between the motivation to graduate and the hip hop literacy program has created buy-in for the students because they also get to do activities that involve hip hop literacy. They have a natural interest in them based on their environment, influences, and early exposure to music. Hip hop has a very special place in their hearts, and they actively engage in listening to music as well as writing, producing, or mixing it on a consistent basis.

**Importance of Teaching Strategies Being Anchored in the Reality of the Participants**

Paul’s assessment of the after-school director is pertinent to the second theme that emerged, and that is the importance of healthy adult-youth mentorship. The after-school hip hop literacy program has partnered with other community organizations to provide these healthy youth-adult relationships. For example, to provide professional training in film production, the program has a partnership with local friends of the director who have shot music videos and movies. The participants are learning to produce and edit music videos through this partnership. Larry stated that he is “always on my phone, on Instagram and Snapchat making videos, just doing fun stuff. I also help out when we are shooting videos, moving equipment to different filming places, and setting up the tripod.” The participants also provide feedback on camera angles. Another observation occurred at a networking event inside a local film school that partners with the Dade Foundation. The director of the Dade Foundation took the four participants with him to network with film industry professionals, and I came along as well to complete an observation. It was a rectangular room with bright splashes of paint on the walls and a diverse group of individuals, which consisted of African Americans, Whites, Asians, and Haitians, among others, networking inside the cozy studio space. From the outside, the film
school looks like a one-story building in the heart of the community art district. There was a side entrance to the building where people congregated on the steps smoking cigarettes and chatting. Upon entering the venue, one is greeted by a host for the event who asks everyone for their name and email information. Various individuals in the film industry, such as actors, actresses, producers, writers, investors, and cinematographers, were all networking with each other and discussing upcoming projects. There was also a bar serving complimentary cocktails for individuals who were 21 and over. Most of the people there were casually dressed in jeans and t-shirts since it was a warm sunny day.

While Larry, Sydney, and Paul stood in a circle communicating with each other mostly, I watched as Walter worked the room. He made it a point to introduce himself to as many people as possible as he walked around the room, exchanging his social media Instagram information with anyone he could. Walter posed pointed questions at the different individuals present and inquired about internship opportunities that would allow him to keep busy doing something he loves. As he spoke to one of the actresses present, he inquired about her rates for being in a music video. They exchanged information, and she said she would consider it if the “treatment” is right. After she walked away, I asked him what a “treatment” is, and he explained to me that it’s the concept of the video. He smiled and told me, “Beautiful women will always make your videos better because people want to see them, and it makes you look more important being with them. I am about to write that treatment tomorrow.” After that, he walked away and continued looking for anyone he could meet and exchange communication with as he maneuvered around the event.
The director’s principal assistant also has a vital role in the after-school hip hop literacy program. He is a popular DJ in the area and often uses a narrative of his past to inform students how they can change the trajectory of their lives. While observing my participants in one of his class lectures, I noticed that he stressed how important it is that they take advantage of the after school hip hop literacy program and use the alternative charter school to become high school graduates. He further lectured the young men on how the after-school program is placing them in touch with hip hop history, its role in hip hop literacy, and the rich oral traditions of the African American community.

The director’s assistant included details on his background and how his DJ career developed after he had been expelled from high school and served time in prison. He explained that once released from prison, the program’s director changed the course of his life by encouraging him to pursue his dream of becoming a DJ. The director explained to him that he was a “product” that had to be developed and marketed. The assistant furthered stated that he listened to the director because of his reputation for developing talent and that, through hard work, he has been successful. He used the term “sustainability” to describe what he had achieved and what the young men should aspire to. The assistant also stated that the participants should not let labels such as “not able to function in a classroom setting” prevent them from accomplishing their goals. He explained that they should use their creative talent in hip hop to develop narratives of their past mistakes and use them as teaching tools for other youth. The assistant suggested that urban students would be likely to listen to and be receptive to positive hip hop messages from the participants because they share similar experiences with them. He further suggested they critically examine the lyrics of rap artists who write songs that positively
influence their communities. The hip hop literacy after-school program wanted them to perform their music at school pep rallies and other all-age events. Therefore, they should stay away from words that denigrate women in their songs. The assistant asked them to “show your personality. Project what you want to be about, what made you come here [music program]. Talk about your background in education.” Paul stated, “I see what you want, what happen when we got here, and a testimony of our turnaround.” The assistant acknowledged Paul’s remarks and ended by again strongly encouraging the students to write and produce positive music that addresses real issues in their lives and community.

At the end of the lecture, he passed out a sheet of paper that contained music literacy theory, terms, and definitions he expected them to study and be able to discuss in their next session. This use of positive messaging can be seen in their rap text and music videos. The following is an excerpt from one of Larry’s songs. He stated:

Stand-out help out spread from the ground help out help now stand yo ground, gotta move gotta choose either win or lose, stay cool too smooth, bullets ain't cool, they pimp on weak, they never try me, hold gees I'm sleep, no befriending me, for we all see, death on the scene, crying, dying, but I'm a still try to show love, some love and fly like a dove, for what guess what, we all number one under God for God that's all that I got, for God what the plot but I'll give a shot KBE, SAB, we all leave the scene spread peace, only peace, we all want a piece, fly together, one another and hold hands together.

Judging from Larry’s rap text, it can be seen that the lecture pushed him to view himself as a teacher, with hip hop as a teaching tool of other urban youth who may be struggling to avoid trouble. They are more likely to listen and find relevance in a message from a person who has faced similar challenges. Larry’s message in the song is positive, thought provoking, and useful in any setting where young people are discussing gun violence.
In summary, hip hop pedagogy can broaden student perspectives of literacy by encouraging critical thinking, exploring social identities, and promoting engagement in learning. It can also assist students in sharing various aspects of their lives through the music that they create. The Dade Foundation has used hip hop as a vehicle to help the study participants establish positive identities. This is occurring as participants master skills within hip hop culture such as music production, engineering, and writing rap text in culturally relevant ways. This creates an instant connection to each participant’s interests. It provides them an opportunity to define themselves through their creativity, which is a positive motivator. This is especially true for youth who were once deemed “unable to function in a classroom” by traditional high schools. The after-school hip hop literacy program has become a learning community where collaboration and an increased feeling of personal agency is the norm.

**Importance of Student Engagement in Classroom Learning Experience**

All four of the participants in the study cited a lack of interest in academics until they enrolled in the hip hop literacy program. Classroom engagement occurs when students are psychologically invested in learning. Once engaged, students will make a concerted effort to learn classroom material. Students are motivated and take pride in understanding the material and internalizing it in their lives. They were in an environment with peers who had shared interests. According to Kim and Pulido (2015), culturally relevant learning strategies are an effective way to increase student engagement in urban students. Their research in an after-school program noted how positive hip hop rap messages could lead to increased student engagement,
academic success, and critical thinking (Kim & Pulido, 2015). This also appears to be the situation with students enrolled in the Dade Foundation hip hop literacy program.

According to Larry, his entry into the music program has been life changing. It appears that the involvement in the after-school hip hop literacy program has been the motivation that Larry needs to become engaged in academics. He shared:

The program has been a good experience. I mean life changing for me. I'm glad I got the opportunity to do this stuff. Like not many people graduating to be honest (He was referring to his peers who were also expelled from a traditional high school.) Without the program, I was not even doing my back work to be honest. I would go get it but it's like I'll get to school and not want to do it and just chill. Yeah, but now it's like okay. These are my last few months at high school in my last year at high school. I want to graduate on time. I'm going to put in the time and work to do this. That means less outside or activity. I stopped doing basketball for a little minute. I stopped boxing for a little minute. I'm a stop basically my outdoor activities just to take time out of my day to do my work so I can get out of here.

The ability for Larry to recognize the importance of sacrificing his time doing outdoor activities that he enjoys and using that time to focus on his schoolwork is very interesting. It shows how much influence the program director has over him as a mentor. Additionally, it shows that the hip hop literacy program is so important to him that he will push himself to be successful in other areas of education that will lead to his graduation because that is required to participate in the hip hop literacy program. In his present attempt at completing high school, Larry appeared to be motivated by the enthusiasm, work ethic, and support of his fellow students (whom he refers to as brothers) as well as the staff of the after-school program.

Paul was not a stellar student before he entered the after-school hip hop literacy program. Like so many young Black male adolescents, Paul was on the path to likely become an inmate in a penal institution or worse, an opiate addict, rather than a young man who is working toward a
career in music production. He was being influenced by peers and a school system that appeared unable to provide help for students who were alienated from school and had an addiction problem. Paul was using addictive drugs, failing classes, and misbehaving in high school; he only attended sporadically. His consumption of codeine cough medicine mixed with soda (street name “lean”) and Percocet (acetaminophen/oxycodone) posed the greatest threat to his health and future. Paul stated that:

Back then I use to drink lean and pop Percocet and shit. So I wasn’t making money at that time specifically so I started selling weed. This was my sophomore year. So I got kicked out after half of my sophomore year for fighting with the same person twice. We had a disagreement, but you know, I forgive it the first time. I guess it was the drugs and shit. I got kicked out of school from that.

Paul continued and listed his grades as an additional factor to his expulsion:

Well it was that but it was also from something else I used to skip class a whole lot to and when my grades came I always had straight Fs and one A . The A was in performing arts. I didn’t like being around people and shit and being there [school]. I miss out on a lot of work and then when I got my grades it would be a lot of Fs. Year, but I forgot I did Percocet but I was drinking lean. I actually drunk it at school once.

He expressed boredom and a lack of support from the school staff and in his home life as other factors for lack of engagement in the traditional high school he attended. As for Paul’s home life, he did not meet his father until he was eight years old and then only once. He indicated that growing up in a single mother home was tough, and he had missed meals as a child. Paul stated his mother still pressures him to provide for the family. He stated, “You know, I’m 18, so I got to help put cash on the table. I mean like I do be getting money but not as much as she needs. I work with her boyfriend every now and then cutting grass.” When questioned about how the Dade Foundation hip hop literacy program has impacted his life, Paul stated:
I wasn't on track like I would come to school but not be doing shit at school. Now I’m about to graduate though cause I had to put in that work. I understand like what the fuck is going on. I don't know to be honest why they don’t have more programs like the one at school. I like to rap and engineer. I been engineering at home and people say it sound good.

It has impacted Paul’s life by getting him to end his drug usage and graduate from high school. He has also developed an increased interest in hip hop music by helping to mix and engineer different songs. When questioned about the impact of the after-school hip hop literacy program, Sydney declared:

The music program means a lot to me though. I was introduced to it by a teacher at South East High School when I first got in there, you know, it's hard for every normal person. You don’t want to hear nothing about business and all that. But you know, I actually sat down, listened and did a lot. Before the program, I ain't never like school. It was just like I was going to work. I was just like it wasn't meant for me. But since the program it was like it gave me the opportunity to rap. So it's like you want to do this. You gotta do this always because I always loved rapping. So I was like, I got to make time for school. I mean where I live now I stay in the house most of the time if I ain't with certain people that I hang around, I’m in the house.

For many adolescents like Paul and Sydney, who never particularly enjoyed school, this is a very telling statement. Before enrolling at South East High School, they expressed boredom and frustration with going to school because it did not feel important or connect with them. However, their mutual interest in hip hop music and being afforded the opportunity to create music and participate in a program like the Dade Foundation hip hop literacy program have created a newfound motivation to succeed, work hard, and focus on the creation of future business opportunities because of it.

Walter enrolled in South East High School and shortly after that became active with the hip hop literacy program. His assessment of the music program on his life is positive. He stated,
“It's a big impact. Everybody is like in such a good mood and having fun learning more. Yeah, we just a bunch of kids and that's just how we viewing it as we go up, you know as we do more we learn and we growing as artists as people and as a brotherhood.” He is also the president of a student-run business venture.

It appears that each study participant has profited from bonding with other young African American males in the program who also are striving to fulfill their potential in hip hop music. They are achieving this through the support of concerned adult mentors who are providing them with support and life-changing advice. The young men refer to each other as brothers and are often seen together. They work collaboratively on music projects and display support for each other’s individual projects.

Larry noted:

It was the people around me. Everybody had that attitude that they gotta get it while they can right now so they can't be messing around. So I guess hanging around those type of people. They are not fighting all day. They put me in that mind set, they getting it. I know they ain’t gonna be here forever. I might as well get on it too and having the program director and his assistant, it encouraged me so that I wouldn’t just be left behind. I gotta get it while I can.

Larry indicated that the director’s assistant lectured him on the need for young artists like himself to move away from misogyny and rap text that promotes violence. It has inspired him to use positive themes in his rap text and music videos. He also stated that he now listens to more positive music. Larry reflected on how the recording of a rap song by his favorite artist has
heightened his attention to the consequence of school shootings. He contended that his favorite artist is XXXtentacion, whom he likes because he’s diverse. You don’t really hear the same thing from him. You don’t really hear the same thing that you hear about everyone else talk about he’s different. He don’t go with the same flow and all he also uplift people. So more than any other rapper I know of right now, he simply put his fans in front of him. That’s what he also did and really he’s my reason to rap because I felt like I was needed to be I’m I was supposed to be there and of course life had different plans. So every time I like to listen to him it tells me like now I gotta keep good man. This what I want to do. I’m a change just like you want it.

Larry also gives credit to the music director for respecting and fostering his interest in music and academics. The program’s director was very supportive of his after-school students but also appeared to be very demanding and did not tolerate academic indifference as well. During one of my observations of Larry and two of the other study participants, which started at the director’s home and concluded at a music studio, the director reprimanded Larry for not completing a series of classroom assignments. He handed Larry makeup assignments and expressed disappointment that Larry was returning to his old habits. He further stated, although the last public school Larry attended had written him off as “not able to function in a classroom setting,” he and the principal of South East high school had higher expectations for him. Larry later stated, “He’s been helping me get my packages and stuff because I’m not even on the list to graduate. I’m about to get ready to get this stuff done so that way I graduate.” Larry and the other participants in the study are engaged in learning because the teaching strategies of the Dade Foundation hip hop literacy program are anchored in the realities of the young men. Emdin (2017) referred to this teaching approach as “a process of learning and/or utilizing the complex
nuances of communication in hip hop and valuing of student culture” (p. 69). The support of the
director and Larry’s peers in the music program appears to be working because he is now on the
list to graduate.

**Importance of Positive Peer-to-Peer Motivation and School Climate**

All four of the participants cited fighting in their respective high schools as factors for
their expulsion from traditional high school. The after-school program provides a positive peer-
to-peer learning environment in which they can concentrate on hip hop literacy without the fear
of conflict with other students. When asked about the influence of the after-school program on
learning, Larry revealed that he had struggled most of his life academically and displayed little
interest in academics until his involvement in the Dade Foundation hip hop literacy program.
Larry stated that, in his freshman year of high school, he was not interested in academics and
attended school only sporadically. When he did attend school, Larry was often involved in fights.
He contended:

> I was fighting a lot and stuff. Sometime, if a fight was going on, I actually would jump in
> and would be fighting in crowds like that. I was just being stupid to be honest. I was
> flunking also, my grades wasn’t good so they decided that it was time to remove me from
> that school and actually sent me to South East, which is a charter school.

Larry has abandoned his self-destructive behavior and appears to be taking his education more
seriously. This a direct result of the Dade Foundation hip hop pedagogy program.

Sydney loves to write rap songs but found regular school boring and not relevant, thus he
was a poor student. His background may have contributed to some of his problems, which he
mentions in his music. Sydney stated that one of his favorite songs is called “Pain.” He declared:
I feel like I really spoke the truth in the song. My stories like where I come from, where I’m at now and like how did I get here. I make music about the struggle. The pain I talk about is being betrayed by people because everybody I hung around or whatever like mainly my cousin’s I was hanging around in jail now. So back when I was staying with my mom and her mom I came home one day from school and my grandmon died in the house and stuff like that. It was kind something was wrong with her so we call the paramedics and she just died in there. After a while, my mom ran off with her new boyfriend out of town and my dad was living by himself so I moved in with him. I’m glad I decided to do it.

Sydney also contended the breakup of his parents early in his life was difficult and added to his early pain. While feeling betrayed by the last regular high school he attended before enrolling at South East High School, he acknowledged misbehaving throughout middle and high school. He stated:

There were a lot of fights there, but I definitely got in a lot of trouble mainly because the people I was hanging around with were not going to class. Yeah, and I got into a lot of trouble up here, certain people felt some type of way and wanted to fight me. It was kind of like a gang thing or crew thing. That led to me getting kicked out cause in school I got in a fight and I got kicked out from there. I went to Benjamin High School [a pseudonym]. I got kick out of there to because my grandpa he dropped me off to school because I was living with him. Then they said I fit the description of somebody that was breaking in cars but really I wasn’t breaking in cars because the jail is right there near the school. So I got mad you know ended up cussing the principal out and he suspended me but later told me I could come back to school but I just left and I went to South East High. I like it cause I can work on my own pace not like with other schools.

The following are a few lines from Sidney's song “Pain.” He raps, “It’s kind of hard to be a thug when you feel pain my granny died I probably never feel the same had to fight so a nigga never try my face, so much pain pray to God I don’t catch a case.” Sydney’s attempt to overcome the pain of personal loss can be vividly expressed in his music. The Dade Foundation hip hop pedagogy program has been therapeutic in this process.
The environment created by the Dade Foundation hip hop literacy program in conjunction with South East High School is one of brotherhood, friendship, and camaraderie. Because of the special skills and learning opportunities the program provides, there is a focus on positive development and growth. The students know that discipline issues will not be tolerated, and therefore they make it a point to work together and communicate about any differences that may occur. All four of the participants have experienced difficulties in traditional high school and displayed behavioral problems. By placing them in a nurturing environment such as the Dade Foundation hip hop literacy program, the participants rely on each other for support to pursue their dreams of being recording artists as well. When the school climate and peer-to-peer motivation are both positively influenced, the behavior is productive and goal oriented as opposed to violent and disruptive. School climate and the influences of others can move one towards either a positive, desired outcome or a negative, undesirable one.

Walter is a leader among his fellow students in the hip hop literacy program. After attending several high schools for short periods, Walter finally decided on a permanent school. The primary reason for enrolling at that school was that 40 of his friends from middle school were enrolled. Most of the high schools in the area had neighborhood students who united for protection or to fight students from other neighborhoods. He stated:

I didn’t really like high school. It was pretty wild at my high school. Let’s start off with I spent a lot of time bouncing between high schools because I couldn’t find one that I liked. One was gross. It was dull and boring. Everybody is the same and it was in the hood so I can understand that. I went to another school for two days. It was the craziest thing. I finally decided on one because all my friends went there. Man, that school was so rowdy. It was mainly my class to like the ninth graders. We were crazy. Like there was always either riots, fights or food fights every week. The biggest fights that use to get out of hand were people throwing chairs. At one point, our assistant principal got hit with a
ladder bro. Oh my goodness, I didn’t fight a lot because if you jump me, bro, you gonna have to fight like 40 people. I didn’t have to fight a lot but my friends did.

He and some of his friends did get expelled later for fighting. Walter stated that one of the reasons the students were so disruptive had to do with the school climate. During the first freshman assembly, one of the administrators told the students to look around at your classmates because only one in ten of you will graduate. Walter enrolled in a second school and also was expelled from that school for selling t-shirts on school property. Walter sold t-shirts that he designed to earn some money because his mother had to help support his sister’s children, and his father was between jobs. He sold shirts at school because, once students left school, it was more difficult. The school also sold t-shirts, but Walter stated his designs were more popular, and so he was selling more shirts.

During one of my observations, I witnessed an interesting interaction between the program director and my study participants. We were all sitting in a cramped office space listening to and reviewing music that the study participants had created at the studio. The program director spoke to me about how the students needed to learn how to make hip hop music that was not negatively influenced and instead could be used to uplift the community. The room contained empty boxes of pizza that the participants were actively eating. With each new track that the director played, he pointed out the progression in the subject matter the students wrote about in their rap text. Larry and Paul, both dressed casually in jeans and t-shirts, smiled as they nodded their heads to the beat of their collaborative song. I was seated next to Walter. When his song began to play, he started to rap along. At the end of the song, the program director asked the study participants what grade they would give the song on a scale of 10. Walter and Larry agreed
that it was an “8” while Sydney said it was a “9” in his opinion. Paul declined to rate it with a number but acknowledged that this particular song was not one of his favorites. When asked to expand on that point of view, Paul explained that he felt the mix could be better. In unison, Walter, Larry, and Sydney agreed with this assessment of the song. The program director further prodded them, asking if the participants knew why it is so important to be honest with themselves about the quality of their music. He explained that music is the first thing people will hear and know an artist for, but the image they create with their music is just as important in establishing a fan base.

Furthermore, he detailed how authenticity is important for an artist to have, and speaking about scenarios that they are not personally familiar with will only disinterest the listener. At that point, Sydney replied, “But not everything in movies people did in real life either.” This caused the program director to readjust his stance. He reminded them that there are great artists with vivid imaginations who have been successful in making music about controversial topics, but his goal was for them to understand how to make music that is authentic to their experience. He stated to them, “Ya’ll already know how to lie in your music, let’s learn how to tell the truth.”

After that was said, he pressed play on his computer, and the next song began playing out of the Bluetooth speaker sitting on a cramped desk beside him. He instructed them to discuss their feelings about that song and write down any notes for things that they can improve. All four participants smiled gleefully and continued to bop their heads as the song was played. In this particular song, Sydney begins with the hook and a first verse that details pain, struggle, and hope to receive a brighter future for his life. He slowly leaned over to me and said, “I don’t know how I be coming up with this stuff. It’s top of the head. I just say what the beat tells me to.”
this point, Larry shouts out in a playful manner that he can’t wait to diss him. Walter laughed along with Sydney. I look at the program director, and he explained to me that they came up with the idea of starting a fake “beef” or problems with each other as a marketing tool because people love drama. In their opinion, it would create more attention for their music and give people the opportunity to analyze their different lyrical styles and choose their favorites from the group. I couldn’t help but nod and reply, “Great idea. Marketing is everything.”

In summary, this after-school hip hop literacy program benefitted the study participants by providing positive peer-to-peer motivation and a positive school climate where they can experience support in both academic and hip hop literacy development. The program provided the study participants with opportunities to develop relationships with positive adults and others in their age group.

**Need to Deconstruct Traditional Class Curriculum Through Hip Hop Pedagogy**

Bringing hip hop pedagogy into urban classrooms, it involves taking the urban student’s cultural realities and experiences into consideration while developing the curriculum. My study participants are using hip hop pedagogy, which can easily be transferred to the classrooms of our urban schools. There are multiple contexts in which this can occur creatively, and my study participants spoke about several ways that they believe hip hop literacy and pedagogy can be used to make the traditional high school learning experience more engaging.

Walter spoke about different ways that hip hop can be incorporated into the daily school curriculum. He recalled how he and his friends had no idea about what the math teacher was explaining when discussing mathematical concepts such as addition, subtraction, multiplication,
and division. Walter often sat in the back of the classroom to avoid being called on to answer a question. He found the word problems in his textbook to be confusing and difficult to read. He expressed how hip hop pedagogy created a classroom learning environment where he was no longer in fear of mathematics. Walter described how he was a terrible math student until rap lyrics helped him concentrate better on math concepts. He stated:

It was this dude who had a DVD and it was hip hop and he was rapping math. That’s how I passed. I don’t remember who it is but I still got it at the crib. It was all that. That’s how I passed math in the third, fourth and fifth grade, cause I was terrible at math, now, I’m pretty decent.

Through the use of hip hop, Walter was making use of a mnemonic device to understand mathematical concepts. Hip hop music has mnemonic devices that make it easier to recall information. One can use rhyme to memorize important concepts and build upon them. This is especially true for subjects like mathematics that involve remembering the steps of a problem to solve it. Essentially, this is a big reason why Walter became successful in this mathematics class.

Because hip hop music is so popular among his peers, there are multiple ways that it can be used as a tool of engagement from a cross-curricular perspective. For example, the language arts curriculum contains units focused on poetry. The different structural elements of poetry can be understood and analyzed from a culturally relevant perspective by using the lyrics from hip hop artists as the guide of examination. Walter recalled taking his yearly writing assessment, which requires a five-paragraph analysis and response to a given topic. He chose to write his five-paragraph response in rhyme form because he is heavily influenced by hip hop expression, and he enjoys similarly expressing himself. His final writing assignment was more exciting and relevant to him because he was able to utilize a hip hop writing style. Walter also felt safe in the
English class because his teachers accepted his use of hip hop pedagogy to fulfill his assignment. The teacher created an environment where the students were allowed to take risks, make mistakes, and explore their cultural context through rhyme. In science, Walter believes that the mnemonic devices contained in hip hop rhymes can be used to help students memorize important topics such as the breakdown of certain chemicals or elements in the periodic table. These mnemonic devices aid in the retention of information and are always present throughout hip hop lyrics. Walter stated, “I learned about the chemical composition of THC through a Snoop Dogg song.” Once again, hip hop music can be used in the science classroom to increase engagement.

Another example of the use of hip hop pedagogy would be in a health education class. Discussions about healthy male and female relationships can lead to a critical examination of teen dating violence using multiple sources. Paul stated that, because of his interest in this subject, he wrote a song that could be used to start a critical examination of teen date violence. It could also lead to students expanding their interest and consulting multimodal sources such as professional journal articles, other rap songs such as 2Pac’s “Brenda’s Got a Baby,” books, the internet, and other experts. When asked what the writing process was like for his song, Paul responded:

I was just thinking of stuff that people actually went through. Like, I got the story from things that actually really happened but it didn’t happen exactly like that. I know people who went thru stuff like that. It’s crazy like that. I just put it together.

In his song, Paul stated:

Let me tell a story about this girl named Lori, she fell in love with a thug nigga named Corey, he just want to hit, he never cared for shorty, now little Lori end up pregnant and he telling her abort it, she ain't listen though now lil Lori got a shorty, he don't think the baby his denying like they on Maury, couple months go by and her stomach poking out
still ain't told her mama cuz she might get kicked out, she took another route start staying at Corey house, his homies picking at him like what that be about, he know the baby his but he won't say it out his mouth he coping with the shit cuz he can't kick her out, his hustle fucking up so he's putting his hands on her Lori scared to death but she still won't tell her mama months go by and Lori got Black eyes tired of getting beaten so she leave Corey house she living with her friend and Corey come bust in asking where you been and hit Lori in her chin she retaliated hit that nigga right in his face he pulled out a 23 That's Another Cold Case.

This song has the elements of violence--physical, relational, and psychological — as well as an unhealthy sexual relationship that resulted in the birth of a child. Greene (2016) asserted that rap texts such as Paul’s could be used to engage African American females whom she found to be often disengaged with more traditional school text. They do appear to be more engaged by the culturally conscious form of texts, specifically hip hop text that allows them to engage in lived experiences and language practices rooted in their cultural backgrounds. She further stated, that despite Black girls’ appeal to street literature texts, there continues to be contention between their out-of-school and in-school literacies and devaluation of street literature in school spaces. As stated above, it could be the bridge for a healthy discussion on a subject that is very much needed.

In the classroom, hip hop can be used as a compare or contrast model to describe current events and make connections between our past and present for better understanding. Walter stated, in his new song “One Day:”

We never gon fake it, we always gon make it, if you out here faking, you can not hate us, we just some young kids tryna come up, most of us young kids either die young or we live to see handcuffs, but they tryna brand us, but we is not property nigga so stand up.

According to Walter, this verse was intended to encourage others to look beyond labels placed on them, such as not being able to function in a regular classroom. By using hip hop text to describe events that relate to social justice, one can engage the students with the information
presented as well as give them a motivating reason to be creative in a format familiar to them. The four young men in the study are committed to writing songs that resonate with marginalized students like themselves. For example, all four students have been homeless, experienced poverty, and dealt with difficult circumstances at some point in their lives. Their message is that they have often been labeled as incorrigible, yet society cannot fully understand what they have experienced. In their song “Walk A Mile,” Sydney states on the hook, “You can’t walk a mile in my size 9’s, even if we wore the same size, cause you don’t know nothing about me, and you don’t know what I been through.”

Also, Larry makes a case for bringing hip hop to the classroom by suggesting rappers and their lyrics have a big influence over today’s youth. Adjapong’s (2017) research indicated that, for urban students, listening to low-volume rap music increases their engagement while they work independently. This is because they are able to connect the music to their lives outside of school. Larry added a rationale for including hip hop in his life:

Yeah, I'll do feel like hip hop should be used more often in classes because we coming from an era now that all we know is music. Even in the past all they really knew was music. It is a kind of pathway to get all your answers and everything that you're looking for. It don't matter what type you listen to, you know, it helps you like even Kodak has his times in my opinion that he can help you gain knowledge.

Larry is using hip hop music as a form of therapy. His statement also gives recognition to previous music genres such as the blues, soul, jazz, spiritual and gospel.

In summary, hip hop pedagogy can be an important tool in bridging the gap between out-of-school and in-school literacy practices. This is particularly noticeable in urban school systems where student engagement appears to be a problem with many young African American males.
By connecting the participants' classroom activities with concepts steeped in hip hop literacy and pedagogy, one can understand how engagement increases, and the learning experience becomes more enjoyable.
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this case study was to examine how participation in the Dade Foundation after-school hip hop literacy program has influenced the social and academic lives of four African American male adolescents. The young men, like so many of our nation’s African American male adolescents, were expelled from traditional high schools for academic and disciplinary reasons. They were then labeled as “unable to function in a classroom.” Tragically, the nation’s prison system is filled with such young African American males. The U.S. Department of Justice (2002) documented 50% of the nation’s prison population consists of African American males. The study participants all have relatives and friends who have dealt with the criminal justice system. For example, Sydney spoke about the pain he has endured in his life from having his cousin incarcerated. This statistic indicates that there is a need for better solutions to the multiple challenges marginalized young men face in our schools and society.

Educators such as Campbell (2005) and Kirkland (2006) have suggested our schools need to expand the curriculum to include popular culture in the form of hip hop pedagogy within urban schools to increase the engagement of young African American males. Kirkland (2006) suggested that most traditional schools have narrow curricula that fail to affirm the literacy of African American males, such as his study participants. This has resulted in young African
American males being labeled as “illiterate” and, as is the situation of my study participants, “unable to function in a classroom.” This negative characterization of African American male adolescents has led to a lack of engagement in traditional schools by many gifted and capable students.

The success of my study participants in the Dade Foundation after-school hip hop pedagogy program validates that, given the right environment, African American male adolescents can excel. Unlike many of their peers, the four young African American male study participants are not in the criminal justice system, and they have rejected the hideous reality of incarceration. Walter stated that a large percentage of the students attended junior high school with are now incarcerated in the criminal justice system. It is a direct result of the Dade Foundation hip hop literacy program that Walter is focused on his path to graduating college and becoming a successful musician. They are productive members of their communities as well as role models for other marginalized youth. The Dade Foundation after-school music literacy program is designed to help young African American males reach their full potential in hip hop culture while also enhancing academic achievement. The study participants are engaged in the mastery of skills such as beat making, DJing, photography, video production, social media promotion, and audio engineering in a studio environment that has state-of-the-art recording equipment. The program allows each participant to select and connect with his interest. Since all four participants have a love for hip hop culture, the foundation’s staff is well equipped to aid their passion. The director remains popular in the national hip hop community, and his principal assistant is a noted local DJ. Their daily involvement in the lives of the study participants extends to helping them realize the need to end self-handicapping behavior. The program places
a strong emphasis on the study participants having their voices heard positively. They are encouraged to create and perform music that serves to uplift other youth in concerts and videos. They are inspired to view themselves as sources of information for other youth in their age group who may have also dropped out of high school and need guidance and support to turn their lives around. The study participants often lavish praise on the staff of the Dade Foundation for helping lead them away from the mass incarceration that is gripping many of their male friends and family members.

The work that is taking place in the foundation could be replicated in a traditional high school that is serious about improving the education of marginalized students. At present, our traditional high schools are having difficulty in providing the nurturing environment and artistic stimulation that so many of our most marginalized youth need to thrive academically. Jenkins’s (2011) article on African American male intellectual identity and hip hop culture suggests that our classrooms are underserving African American male youth while channeling them to prison. Jenkins (2011) further suggested that hip hop is a cultural space that African American males and other marginalized and oppressed individuals have created where they can share success. A young Latino male adolescent interviewed by Pulido (2009, p. 68) described hip hop as “music fit for us minorities” to stress his affiliation with positive hip hop messaging. Nieto (1999) argued that the inclusion of popular culture into the curriculum could be of immense benefit for marginalized students who are more likely to become more engaged in school when their cultural realities are affirmed and appreciated.
These are reforms that educators can initiate to bring about change in the education of marginalized students. Hip hop pedagogy and the integration of popular culture into the classroom reflects a continuation of the progressive movement in education. In this system, education is provided in an atmosphere that gives students a sense of self-direction, personal pride, and ambition. The teacher serves as the facilitator, not the dictator. It also includes culturally compatible instructional strategies. Gay (2000) found that “African American students prefer learning situations that are active, participatory, emotionally engaging, and filled with visual and physical stimulation” (p. 169). The Dade Foundation hip hop pedagogy program provided a learning environment that is active, student driven, and engaging. Ladson-Billings (2006) advised teachers to alter their speech patterns, communication styles, and participation structures to more closely resemble those of their students’ own culture as they practice culturally relevant pedagogy. When communicating with my study participants, I noticed how the Dade Foundation staff utilized hip hop slang that is common with urban youth while critiquing their work. I’m thoroughly familiar and fluent with the hip hop slang of the southeastern region of this country. I have found their styles of communication to be expressive, creative, and inventive. Campbell (2005) asserts that, “because Hip Hop has breathed new life into language learning and literacy for many urban and suburban youths, it demands to be recognized. And I propose that we do just that in a place where it is most fitting—the writing and rhetoric classroom” (p. 4).

After being expelled from their traditional high schools, the participants were sent to one of the school district’s alternative charter schools. The district funds the charter schools but they are corporate run and vary from good to very poor. One of the participants in the study, Walter,
described the first alternative school he attended after being expelled as “about the money.” He also stated that the school has since been closed. After enrolling in the South East alternative school, the school staff encouraged him to become a member of the after-school hip hop pedagogy program. He made it clear that the hip hop pedagogy program has been life changing and the reason he will be graduating from high school soon.

Hip hop is seen as negative by some educators because they do not understand what attracts urban youth to the genre. According to Johnson (2017), hip hop pedagogy is a way of authentically and practically incorporating the creative elements of hip hop into teaching and inviting students to have a connection with content while joining them on their cultural turf by teaching to, and through, their realities and experiences. In urban public schools, the vast majority of the students share a personal connection to hip hop culture (Adjapong, 2017). By utilizing an alternative approach to teaching, which includes hip hop pedagogy, educators such as Emdin (2017) have increased interest and engagement among urban students in science and other STEM-related fields. Emdin (2017) asserted that hip hop culture, aligned with the social and aesthetic interests of urban students, can be a powerful tool in promoting academic engagement. Emdin’s (2017) work is evidence that one can broaden student perspectives of literacy with hip hop pedagogy.

Issues of social justice can be discussed freely and given a voice with the use of hip hop pedagogy. The rise of hip hop was due in part to the effects of discrimination and the need for a counternarrative to an inequitable society. The Dade Foundation hip hop pedagogy classroom created a space where students feel free to discuss social justice issues such as racism, sexism, school shootings, homelessness, and personal safety. These issues impact their lives, and the
participants are using their voices individually and collectively to create music projects that connect to the above personal and community issues. All these activities create literacy skill building and critical thinking. In these endeavors, participants are learning to evaluate sources of information, challenge assumptions, understand the context, and analyze arguments.

Hip hop culture provides the voice of resistance in urban communities and belongs in the category of critical literacy. It is often used to inform African American male adolescents that a lack of hope should not characterize their lives by giving a counternarrative to the deficit ideology that has been placed on so many African American male adolescents. This was the message that the director’s assistant was conveying to my research participants in one of his lectures I taped. He suggested young people in urban communities do not need to become recruits for the prison-industrial complex. The assistant director also used his background to overcome incarceration to inspire and urge the use of positive messaging in their music. He explained that, contrary to belief, many urban youths are more persuaded by positive messaging of upliftment and not hip hop music clichés about materialism and sexual violence. They want to hear messages that are socially conscious and related to their lives. The audience for their music may have themselves faced problems in their traditional public schools. There is a deficit ideology that views many of them as lacking in skills and the knowledge to become successful. He emphasized that messages of success in their music can lead to a critical examination of their lives by listeners and aid in the development of personal agency. Finally, he stated that if the opportunities offered by the Dade Foundation had existed in his youth, he might not have ended up being incarcerated. This emphasis on socially conscious hip hop pedagogy can lead to
students valuing social justice and caring for each other. Also, it can lead to enhanced classroom engagement in our traditional public school students who have been marginalized. These students need the support of community activists who can advocate for real solutions to the marginalization of African American male adolescents.

The Dade Foundation hip hop literacy program has continued to expand and provide new opportunities for the participants since the beginning of this study. They have partnered with a record label, which has resulted in the marketing of the students’ work and copyright protections. They also have secured a music deal with an entertainment company named South Republic Korea for worldwide digital distribution. They recently started learning how to operate and broadcast their radio podcast where various social, hip hop, community, and popular-culture issues are discussed. Because of the above, the four participants are enthusiastic and motivated about their future opportunities in hip hop culture. The above activities could be used in our nation’s traditional public school classrooms to enhance student literacy learning and create relevancy.

The participants indicated their relationships among each other and the staff members of the hip hop literacy program were important factors that determined their engagement and retention in the program. This is one of the critical themes that emerged from the research. Although all four of the study participants were drawn to the after-school program by an interest in rap music, they are being exposed to other aspects of the entertainment industry. However, rapping still has a strong appeal with the study participants. When asked about how often they listen to hip hop music and why, Larry stated:
I listen to it. Mostly all the time every time I got a chance to listen to it. Like right now, I probably would be playing on my phone listening to it. I feel like it’s one of my key ways to get away from where I’m at right now. If I’m going through something, I just listen to some music and get completely spaced out. It’s like I’m not even worried about it anything anymore. I’m just I’m gone.

This statement shows how important hip hop music is in the daily lives of my participants. It engages them on a constant basis and can be a form of stress release as well. This engagement can be used to bridge the gap between what they learn in school and the cultural context that is reflective of their out-of-school literacy practices.

**Student Engagement**

Hip hop pedagogy can lead to greater student engagement and enhanced academic achievement. For youth who displayed little interest in school and academics, the participants validate research findings that after-school programs and activities, such as learning how to create a record and being able to perform, can create a high degree of self-efficacy and a sense of accomplishment for youth. My participants work together and provide positive feedback to each other on various projects. This has led to increased self-esteem, which also coordinates well with effort and mastery of a goal. Involvement in the Dade Foundation after-school hip hop literacy program has led my study participants to increase their effort and commitment to completing their daily work at South East High School. The director is the driving force and motivator in the program. He freely offers guidance, schedules important meetings, and encourages the participants to increase their academic focus at South East high school. Additionally, it helps that students are encouraged to accept and affirm their cultural identities. The enrollment in the hip hop literacy after-school program has fostered new levels of growth, focus, and engagement among the study participants. Larry is more engaged in his education and is attending school
regularly. He said the music literacy program had provided the motivation he needed to be successful. He acknowledged the program director’s assistance in getting him to change his behavior and concentrate on becoming a hip hop artist who creates music that reflects favorably upon himself and his community. He stated that his favorite artist, XXXtentacion, has inspired him to critically examine social problems in his community, such as school shootings. He now wants to be viewed as an asset to the African American community. As a condition of being in this program, he understands that he must work on his school assignments diligently. Because of this opportunity, he has become a better writer and a role model for other African American males who connect with his lyrics.

Of the four participants, Paul could be considered the most volatile. He was deeply immersed in the drug culture at his previous high school. Because of this, he was failing classes and fighting classmates. He was expelled after two fights with the same person. He was bored with school and consistently bonding with negative influences in his neighborhood. Paul’s father was not in his life. He did not meet his father until he was eight years old, and then only once in his entire life. He indicated that his family situation has been inconsistent. Through the hip hop literacy program, Paul found a positive adult mentor and young men he could bond with who had similar living experiences. The hip hop literacy program instilled academic discipline into Paul, and he stated, “It is good to learn something every day.” He also believes that similar programs do not exist in traditional schools because they don’t want young African American males to succeed.

Sydney has a love for hip hop music but found school to be boring and irrelevant. Therefore, he was a poor student. His lived experiences are often displayed in his music. He
stated that he wrote the song “Pain” because of things he had experienced growing up. These experiences include the breakup of his mother and father as well as the death of his grandmother. He expressed his disappointment with the insensitivity he experienced in public school when he was accused of stealing cars out of the school parking lot by his former high school principal. He was expelled for swearing at this principal as a result of those accusations and enrolled in South East High School, where he became a member of its after-school music literacy program. He stated he prefers this school because “everyone is friendly, and I can work at my own pace.” He is no longer engaged in disruptive behavior and on track to graduate. He established a subsidiary music label, where he plans to release additional artists under his brand.

Walter is a very bright young man with multiple talents. He has been writing rap music since middle school, comes from a two-parent household, and expressed a great deal of admiration for his father. He considers him to be his biggest supporter. He was also expelled from high school. However, unlike the others, he was expelled for selling a specially designed t-shirt on school grounds without the school’s permission. Walter had earlier sold Pop Tarts at the school and has a knack for entrepreneurship. He found designing and selling his t-shirts to be more lucrative. He also is a very introspective young man who appears to enjoy creative endeavors. He is at his most creative when riding his skateboard along a downtown waterfront park, where he can take out his cell phone and create hip hop text based on his daily reflections. He did express some resentment toward his mother, whom he thinks did not always spend enough time with him or share the same affection for him as his father did. He does acknowledge that this could be because his mother had to take care of his sister’s two children. Walter has bonded very well with the program’s director and believes that the program has inspired him to
pursue his passion for hip hop music. It has also allowed him the opportunity to build close bonds with the other after-school music literacy program participants, whom he refers to as his “brothers.” The most important contribution that Walter fulfills in the program is he is often called upon to lead presentations for potential investors and donors who may be able to provide financial resources. This was on full display in the event that took place at the local film school that the four participants and I attended, where Walter was very astute in networking with other individuals present.

Hip hop pedagogy is a culturally relevant approach to teaching that has worked very well in after-school programs and has been successful in urban classrooms that have initiated such approaches. An important theme that has emerged throughout this research is how hip hop pedagogy could be used to deconstruct the traditional high school curriculum. Hip hop pedagogy can enable teachers to construct lessons that connect students to their community. The application of a culturally relevant curriculum appears to engage students, increase learning experiences, and stimulate their critical consciousness toward the lesson (Ladson-Billings, 2006). It creates more teaching options within the learning environment. Additional benefits of hip hop pedagogy are increased levels of classroom dialogue and intellectual participation. One of the participants in the study stated that he had a terrible time learning mathematics until his grade-school teacher utilized a hip hop rap song to engage the students. Since he had a strong interest in rap, he was drawn to the beat and message of the song. Because of this, he was able to concentrate better on the concepts that were being delivered. He now states that he is much better at mathematics. I have also found that my female students pay more attention in class when listening to low volume rap music. This assertion will require more research in the future.
For his yearly summative essay in his language arts class, Walter's teacher allowed him to utilize a hip hop writing style to express his thoughts on the given topic. It is a culturally responsive connective approach that builds a trusted relationship between students and their teachers. Another theme that has emerged is the importance of creating intergenerational spaces that allow young African American males to develop relationships with positive older youth, community members, and other caring adults. The hip hop literacy program has provided adult mentorship and counseling to the study participants. They are encouraged to write music with socially conscious messaging that strays away from misogynistic topics. An additional theme is the need for the study participants to be in a creative space. The participants in the study needed to feel that they had space where they could express themselves, develop agency, and not feel intimidated. Students have to believe their teacher has their best interests in mind when they interact with each other. This interconnectedness is what builds a bridge between in-school and out-of-school literacy practices. In the interactions between the study participants and their adult mentors, trust has developed and the participants have reacted accordingly. The central draw for the young men is hip hop music. Still, the staff has expanded their critical understanding of hip hop by connecting it to a broader mission of linking academic achievement with positive hip hop literacy development. The hip hop literacy program fosters know-how of the students’ world and how they can become role models for other youth who have struggled in school. They do not need to accept the label of “unable to function in a classroom setting.” This hip hop literacy program promotes agency in the youth and encourages them to spread a message of caring and self-worth.
Implications for Practice

I have identified several implications for teaching based on the use of hip hop as a pedagogical tool. Hip hop pedagogy could be added to a teacher education program, as an elective, for students who are interested in teaching within urban schools. This would allow for future educators to learn about hip hop culture as well as the critical roots of utilizing hip hop pedagogy to engage African American male students. The next implication would be to offer a hip hop pedagogy class for future educational and administrative leaders who aspire to work in urban school environments. Thereby, policy and decision makers could become aware of the multiple fields of study represented in hip hop culture. Another implication for teaching would be to increase resources for teachers who are interested in using hip hop in the form of lesson plans, curriculum, and professional development activities. Through analyzing the lyrics of such hip hop artists as Lupe Fiasco, Common, Kendrick Lamar, or Nas, significant steps can be made to validate hip hop pedagogy as an innovative, engaging, and valuable teaching practice.

Implications for School Administrators

It is important for school administrators to recognize that, despite the mainstream media portrayal of hip hop culture as violent and misogynistic, there is another side to hip hop culture. Hip hop culture is vibrant, highly intellectual, and recognized for opening dialogues that facilitate student engagement with classroom topics. It has made lessons relevant to a student’s real-world experiences. An implication for practice is that schools could offer a career development program based on elements of hip hop culture such as production, social media marketing, engineering, video production, editing, graphics, and DJing, where students can learn the trade and entrepreneurial aspects of hip hop.
Implications for Teachers

Hip hop is a rich culture with many relatable aspects that can be explored inside the classroom. It is pertinent for future practice to have teachers begin to investigate the students’ lived culture and incorporate their findings into their classroom and curriculums. If teachers haven’t had a discussion about the connections between hip hop culture and their subject matter, they probably haven’t had the opportunity to see the students discuss the material in a way that actually connects to something they love. Hip hop music and culture is something the students in the Dade Foundation program love every day so they can quote every song for you and bring some validity to it. There needs to be an integration of hip hop culture, not just the music, inside the classroom. Too often, hip hop is brought into the classroom and used by a teacher in a way that is not engaging or connective. Many educators who do not value or respect multiculturalism try to incorporate hip hop culture in the classroom without knowing how to properly utilize it. They just want to say they did not ignore it. Students know if you respect their culture, and teachers need to find authentic ways to integrate hip hop into their classrooms. Hip hop culture has the potential to be used as a pedagogical tool through which they could scaffold the mandated materials. This would have to be paired with teachers changing the power dynamics in the classrooms. As Freire (2003) mentioned, too often it is the teacher in a position of authority and the students as passive recipients of the knowledge that is being deposited. The students need more of a voice in the process of incorporating hip hop culture in the classroom. Some students today see school as irrelevant and if school is going to continue to serve students in an age where
technology has replaced the teacher as a disseminator of information, we are going to have to find new ways to engage the students.

For example, in a social studies class on culture, one could incorporate the use of current hip hop videos that depict material and nonmaterial culture, letting the students make notes, define, and categorize what they view accordingly. In English class on a poetry section, the lyrics of their favorite artist could be used to decipher meaning, context, and create meaningful discussions about social and cultural issues as well as deal with traditional literary devices such as the use of similes and metaphors.

**Implications for Policy Makers**

Often, diversity courses tend to be one dimensional, less interdisciplinary, and feel obsolete in a fast-paced youth-driven culture. In addition, colleges and universities can be ahead of the curve by institutionalizing hip hop studies programs that cut across disciplines such as political science, gender studies, American history, economics, and ethnic and cultural studies, which could then further support teacher education programs.

**Implications for Further Research**

This case study examined how participation in the Dade Foundation after-school hip hop literacy program influenced the social and academic lives of four African American male adolescents. Further research is needed about participatory programs for African American male adolescents. Additional studies conducted at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels that incorporate the students' perceptions and practices are recommended. A breadth of data would provide a broader view of hip hop pedagogy, and the impact of a positive school climate
with peer support on African American male student retention, and graduation rates. It would provide vital data about how or whether the patterns of practice change at the various education levels. These studies would provide a wealth of useful information to guide teachers' instructional practices and drive district personnel's programmatic initiatives.

Future research needs to be conducted on the role of hip hop pedagogy and identity construction of African American male adolescents. Love (2008) described how hip hop artists such as Nas, KRS-1, and Outkast helped cement her identity as an African American adolescent female. She stated, “KRS-1 became my history teacher who told me about my ancestors and Outkast told me that I could get up, get out and get something. I knew at that point in my life, it was up to me to make something of myself. In short, I wanted more out of life” (p. 14). She also described how her neighborhood was being taken over by drugs and hip hop led her to seek a better life. This is a prevalent theme with my study participants as well. They all have gained positive confidence and motivation from hip hop pedagogy.

**Summary and Conclusions**

Hip hop culture has eclipsed rock and roll as the most popular and impactful form of popular culture. Hip hop is a culture with traditions, customs, and a language seen as countercultural that now speaks to youth around the globe (Love, 2009). According to the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress, African American and Latino students make up 70% of the student body in New York City. However, only four percent of African American seniors nationally were proficient in science. Emdin (2017) has been very successful at merging the teachings of science with hip hop pedagogy to create a more engaging learning experience.
for urban youth. Emdin (2017) recognizes the connection between 21st-century skills and science education. Science education assists in the development of critical thinking, problem solving, and digital literacy. Furthermore, it enhances understanding of content knowledge and student engagement. Hip hop has been a similarly effective culturally responsive teaching pedagogy in mathematics and the language arts classroom because it speaks to the students’ social practices, experiences, and values. This study on using hip hop text to explore out-of-school literacy practices should be invaluable to those who are interested in addressing this country’s need to provide equal educational opportunities for African American male adolescents. African American males are having a difficult time navigating the American educational system. They are underrepresented in all the categories that measure academic success, yet they are performing well in many of our after-school programs. In after-school programs, their literacies are being recognized. This has led to greater engagement in both the after-school program and traditional school for study participants. They appear to now consider themselves to be role models for other students who attend their charter schools.

Researchers such as Campbell (2005) and Kirkland (2006) have suggested that traditional schools need to rethink the classroom literacy curriculum and unlock the door for out-of-school literacy practices. They appear to recognize the important role that culture and educational relevance play in keeping students engaged in school. The use of hip hop pedagogy seems to have a future in this search for relevancy. In conclusion, only through future research will researchers be able to answer questions regarding how hip hop pedagogy can serve as a bridge toward positively influencing young Black males and other groups placed at risk. Data from this
study can offer educators new strategies for engaging young Black males in the traditional high school curriculum.

Hip hop pedagogy has mainly been used in the language arts curriculum and needs to be expanded in other areas of the curriculum, such as science and mathematics. There is also a need for more research on the effectiveness of after-school programs coordinating with public schools to assist in bringing out-of-school literacy practices to those urban schools. Often, schools in our urban communities have limited resources and could use the expertise of the after-school staff, as was the case with the Dade Foundation and South East High School. There is a need for teacher education programs to assist their students who will be employed in urban schools to become familiar with the functions and principles of hip hop pedagogy. This can occur with the assistance of hip hop scholars. The literature supports the need for teachers in urban schools to teach in a culturally relevant manner. It would be helpful to have statistical and qualitative data to learn about program and course outcomes with educators who are currently using hip hop pedagogy. A study on how students accessed being in a classroom where an educator is implementing hip hop pedagogy would be beneficial. Additionally, one can document how it is different from other classes the students have been in. Finally, there is a need to research how popular culture, in general, can be used to develop critical thinking in our secondary schools.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

CONSENT AND ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY
Consent Form for Adult Participants

Hello,

I am working on my dissertation for a Doctorate degree in Curriculum and Instruction. I am investigating how participation in a music literacy program can influence the social lives of four African American male high school students. The results of this study will help determine if hip hop pedagogy can enhance the literacy development of the four African American male participants. This after school music literacy study can inform both traditional and after school teachers with the effects of using out of school literacy practices with their students. I would like to invite you to participate in this study by signing your name and giving full consent. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in three one-hour long structured interviews and four two-hour long observations in various after school settings. Participants agree to allow their interviews to be audiotaped. Your decision to participate is voluntary. Confidentiality will be maintained and participants’ identities will be protected by using a pseudonym in place of your name and having other identifying factors removed from any documents produced from this research. You have the right to refuse to answer any question or to terminate your participation in the study at any time with no penalty or prejudice to yourself. In addition, you have the right to review any of the materials to be used in the study, and a summary of the findings will be made available to you at your request. There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study. If you agree to participate in the study, please sign the enclosed consent form. If you have questions, please contact me at (630) 272-
0744 or at rolandsteele75@yahoo.com. In addition, if you desire more information regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at 815-753-8588.

Sincerely,

Roland Steele
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Interview Protocol

Time of Interview _____________ Date __________

Place _______________________

Interviewer ____________________

Interviewee _______________________

Interview Protocol 1:

1) Please tell me about your background and when you started writing hip hop lyrics?
2) What is your favorite type of music?
3) What motivated you to start writing hip hop lyrics?
4) Who are some of your favorite artists?
5) What two-three songs would help me understand more about you?
6) What do you find as motivation for writing hip hop lyrics?
7) How does your background influence your writing?
8) What are your favorite subjects to write hip hop lyrics about and why?

Interview Protocol #2

1) How would you define hip hop literacy? Why or why not?
2) Please walk me through the process you take when writing song lyrics? Why or why not?
3) Describe the process between you and your peers when collaborating on a hip hop literacy project? Why or why not?
4) Do you read about hip hop culture and where does this reading occur? Why or why not?
5) Do you think hip hop can be used in a school setting to teach and how? Why or why not?
6) What role has the hip hop literacy program played in your life? Why or why not?
7) How often do you read, write or listen to hip hop lyrics? Why or why not?
8) Has your participation in this hip hop literacy program enhanced your knowledge of such literacies as print, digital, computer, media, cultural, and/or visual?

Interview Protocol #3

1) Describe the meaning behind the lyrics of a song that you wrote? (They will bring lyrics to an original piece they have written and will be asked to give a lyric analysis in real time)
2) Do you have any additional comments or ideas to add that have not been discussed in our other interviews?