

ABSTRACT

RICHARDS, RONALD JUSTIN. Teaching Hip hop in the 'Burbs: Using Self-study Teacher Research to Reveal a Secondary ELA Teacher's Role Implementing Hip hop Pedagogy in the Classroom (Under the direction of Dr. Angela Wiseman).

The purpose of this self-study is to investigate how an English teacher who is a hip hop outsider integrates hip hop pedagogy in a public school eleventh grade ELA classroom in a standardized educational setting. Self-study teacher research includes the belief that one uses implementation, reflection, and enhancement to improve one's teaching practice (Samaras, 2011). This self-study teacher research study explored my hip hop based instruction at a high school located in a rural town on the outskirts of a large county in the southern United States. The participating class was an eleventh grade ELA classroom of 34 students selected because it was a convenient sample of one of my classes. Data collection occurred during the semester and consisted of teacher reflections, student assignments and reflections, critical friends meetings, and artifacts. Data were analyzed through descriptive coding (Miles et.al., 2014) and then placed in coding categories (Creswell, 2013) before finally being collapsed into five larger themes (Samaras, 2011). The first three themes focus on my hip hop based instruction. The first theme addresses the power of authentic teaching vs. standardization. The second theme details how Hip Hop-Based Education (HHBE) can overcome instructional fear, and the third theme focuses on building strong student and teacher relationships through hip hop instruction. The last two major themes focus on how students respond to hip hop pedagogy. The fourth theme addresses the advantages of creating hip hop-based dialogue in a democratic space. The last theme focuses on how hip hop pedagogy presents opportunities for student identity development. The findings from this study validate existing research on the benefits and challenges of using hip hop pedagogy in the secondary ELA classroom.

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Teaching Hip hop in the ‘Burbs: Using Self-study Teacher Research to Reveal a Secondary ELA
Teacher’s Role Implementing Hip hop Pedagogy in the Classroom

by
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DEDICATION

To my parents -Betsy and Ron Richards- who provided the love and support during my lifetime to pursue my goals and aspirations. You instilled a drive and grind in me that made this accomplishment possible. You make me proud.

BIOGRAPHY

Justin was born in Raleigh and raised in Wake Forest, North Carolina. During his senior year in high school as the football team's starting quarterback, he tossed three touchdown passes, including the winner in a last minute comeback drive at Harnett Central. It was at this moment a legend was born. He earned his bachelor's degree in Communications from Appalachian State University. After a brief stint in finance, he then returned to Boone get certified to teach secondary English Language Arts at Appalachian State University. After teaching for a few years in the secondary ELA classroom, he attended North Carolina State University part-time while teaching to earn his master's degree in secondary English. Finally, he continued to teach full time ELA while pursuing his PhD at North Carolina University. His research interests include creativity, hip hop, and student engagement in the secondary ELA classroom.

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To the real ones.

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-J. Rich Out

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Background	1
A Hip Hop “Outsider”	3
Problem Statement	4
Purpose Statement.....	6
Research Questions	6
Methods and Research Approach	7
Significance of Study	8
Organization of Study	8
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	9
Dewey’s Conceptualization of Democratic Classrooms.....	9
Democratic Learning: The Anti-Standardization.....	11
Teacher as Facilitator to Create Student Empowerment.....	12
Dialogical Classrooms	13
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	16
Music Education in the ELA Classroom	19
Hip Hop Pedagogy	20
Background of Hip Hop Pedagogy	21
Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE): The Ultimate Hip Hop Pedagogy	26
Hip Hop Pedagogies: <i>Of Hip Hop, about Hip Hop, and with Hip Hop</i>	27
Hip Hop Pedagogy in ELA	29
Using Hip Hop Pedagogy for Fostering Engagement, Critical Consciousness, and Identity.....	32
Using HHBE to Magnify Student Voice through Social Media and Performance.....	36
Incorporating Intersectionality in HHBE.....	38
Summary	44
CHAPTER 3: METHODS	45
Introduction.....	45
Research Method	45
Methods Overview: Self-study as a form of Teacher Action Research.....	45
Defining Self-study	46
Self-study Fits as a Democratic and Dialogical Theoretical Orientation	47
Characteristics of Self-study	48
Self-initiated and focused	48
Improvement-aimed.....	48
Interactive and collaborative.....	49
The use of multiple, primarily data collection sources	49
Trustworthy	49
Significance of Self-study Teacher Research	50
Hip hop Based Self-study for “Outsiders”	51
Description of the Research Site and Participants	51
School and Access	52
Student and Class Demographics.....	52

Self-study Design Cycle	53
Step #1) Lesson Instruction	53
Step #2) Reflection	53
Step #3) Critical Friends Meeting.....	53
Step #4) Data Analysis.....	54
Curricular Focus.....	55
Lesson One: Slave Spirituals	55
Lesson Two: Personal Narrative.....	56
Lesson Three: Writing the Counterclaim.....	56
Lesson Four: Research Essay.....	57
Lesson Five: American Dream Podcast.....	57
Lesson Six: American Dream Song.....	57
Data Collection	58
Teacher Reflection	58
Student Reflections and Assignments.....	59
Critical Friends Meetings.....	60
Classroom lesson artifacts.....	61
Data Analysis	62
Self-study and Critical Friends	63
Coding.....	64
First Cycle Coding Methods	65
Connecting Codes to Themes	66
Credibility and Trustworthiness.....	67
Triangulation.....	68
Positionality Statement	69
Summary	71
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	72
Introduction.....	72
Research Question#1: What happens when a hip hop outsider integrates hip hop pedagogy in a public school eleventh grade ELA classroom?	73
Theme #1: The Power of Using Hip Hop Pedagogy to Achieve Standardized Objectives .	73
Utilizing Literary Analysis for Hip Hop Texts	74
Hip Hop Addresses the ELA Objectives Standards.....	78
Incorporating Hip Hop Pedagogy to Address Writing Standards.....	80
Theme #2: Teaching Scared: Using Hip Hop Despite Instructional Pressures	85
Theme #3: Building Student and Teacher Relationships with Hip Hop Pedagogy	93
Theme #4: Change Over Time: How Hip Hop Pedagogy Changed Me Professionally.....	98
Research Question #2: How do high school ELA students respond to hip hop pedagogy?..	103
Theme #5: Creating a Hip Hop-Based Dialogue in a Democratic Space	103
Hip Hop-Based Dialogue and Hip Hop Controversies in a Democratic Space	105
Theme #6: Hip Hop Pedagogy for Identity Development	108
Hip Hop Pedagogy Fosters a Critical Consciousness	108
Hip Hop Pedagogy Creates a “Knowledge of Self”	113
Hip Hop Pedagogy Instills Confidence to Inspire	118
Individual Hip Hop Identities Create a Collaborative Hip Hop Community	121
Summary	125

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	127
Summary of Methodology	127
Discussion of Findings.....	128
Theme #1: The Power of Using Hip Hop Pedagogy to Achieve Standardized Objectives	128
Theme #2: Teaching Scared: Using Hip Hop Despite Instructional Pressures	129
Theme #3: Building Student and Teacher Relationships with Hip Hop Pedagogy	129
Theme #4: Change Over Time: How Hip Hop Pedagogy Changed Me Professionally	130
Theme #5: Creating a Hip Hop-Based Dialogue in a Democratic Space	130
Theme #6: Hip Hop Pedagogy for Identity Development	131
Discussion	132
Connecting Findings to Previous Research	133
Democratic Classroom.....	133
Dialogical Classroom.....	135
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	138
Hip Hop Pedagogy	138
Implications for Practice	140
The Positive Impact of Self-study Research.....	140
Professional Development with Self-study and Hip hop Pedagogy	142
My Future as a Teacher-Researcher	144
Moving Forward: Hip Hop music and the Community	145
Concluding Thoughts.....	146
REFERENCES	147
APPENDICES	153
Appendix A: IRB Approval	154
Appendix B: Hip Hop Spiritual Activity	155
Appendix C: Narrative Rap Rubric.....	156
Appendix D: Counter Claim Activity: “8-Mile”	157
Appendix E: War on Drugs Research Rubric	158
Appendix F: War on Drugs Hip-Activity	159
Appendix G: American Dream Podcast.....	160
Appendix H: American Dream Performance.....	161
Appendix I: Listening Journal Prompts	162
Appendix I: Audit Trail	164

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 <i>Critical Friends Demographic</i>	61
Table 3.2 <i>The Description of Artifacts Distributed and Utilized during the Semester</i>	62

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 <i>Self-study Design Cycle</i>	55
Figure 3.2 <i>First Cycle of Coding</i>	65
Figure 3.3 <i>Second Cycle of Coding</i>	67

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

English educators and researchers took note when hip hop music began to increase in popularity and infiltrate pop-culture. Hip hop music became a focus of scholarly articles in the late 90s to help reinvent English Language Arts classes (Dethier, 2003; Pechauer, 2009). ELA teachers began bringing in hip hop texts that students were familiar with from their out of school interests leading to student motivation, cultural understanding, and identity development (Dethier, 2003; Petchauer, 2009). Specifically, hip hop-based education (HHBE), also known as hip hop pedagogy (HHP), derived as a form of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP). Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, like HHBE, presents an opportunity that “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge skills and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 18) while increasing student motivation in the ELA classroom (Hall, 2017). HHBE research (Hill, 2009; Petchauer, 2009) has exemplified how using hip hop texts can create impactful learning environments with positive student outcomes through strong teacher and student relationships. HHBE can improve student motivation, increase student achievement, and build a strong sense of community in the classroom (Dimitriadis, 2001; Emdin, 2010; Hill, 2009; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Teachers can connect with students by including these texts in the classroom while also challenging students to think critically about these once “out of school” literacies that have now found a relevant and important place in the secondary English classroom.

In my own situation, I have always listened to hip hop and started incorporating the out of school literacy into my curriculum when I began teaching, 18 years ago. Academic research began highlighting instances of scholars utilizing hip hop in the ELA classroom in the early to

mid 2000s when I started a career in secondary English education. When I began my graduate program in 2010, I began to apply aspects of the published hip hop based research to my ELA instruction. Since I began my doctoral program in Literacy and English Language Arts Education (LELA) in secondary English, I have taken an interest in the way popular culture, especially hip hop music, may be utilized in the high school English classroom. In the past, ELA teachers have used a variety of genres of music to bridge to major themes in the ELA curriculum to help students learn (Dethier, 2003). Music has the ability to motivate, build understanding, and shape a student's identity in the ELA classroom (Dethier, 2003).

Recently our state passed its own standard course of study for students K-12 in all subject areas, including ELA. Since we have adopted the new standards, our English department has been piecing together a curriculum of engaging texts that will cover the new objective standards. Even though standards provide a blueprint for ELA teachers to follow, I have experienced how standards can often stifle creativity in ELA instruction. As a result, I became driven to understand ways that music, particularly hip hop, could bridge cultures, standards, and curriculum goals within the classroom.

My research study utilized self-study as a methodology, which is a form of teacher research (or action research). Self-study research motivates teachers to be “agents of their own reform initiatives while working collaboratively with school colleagues” (Samaras & Roberts, 2011). An aspect of self-study is for teachers to implement pedagogical strategies and examine the impact on student learning. My goal for this study was to understand my own practice and improve my teaching instruction through using hip hop-based education. In doing this, I critically engaged with some of the inspiring and even controversial topics related to teaching hip hop. In addition, my self-study explored the impact of hip hop-based lessons on students.

A Hip Hop “Outsider”

When I reflect on my identity as an ELA teacher and a researcher, earlier in my teaching career I would have considered myself a hip hop “insider.” Being naïve at the time, I originally believed I was an “insider” because I was so immersed in hip hop music in my free time that I identified with being a hip hop “head.” A hip hop head is someone who embodies the hip hop culture consisting of an avid participation in listening and consuming hip hop. Since I was a novice teacher looking for a way to connect with my students, I found bringing in hip hop music to the ELA classroom a literacy my students found relatable. Overall, incorporating hip hop was a success in building academic interest as my students loved the fact that I brought in hip hop music and made it relatable to themes of the units we studied. I knew almost every aspect of hip hop from the late 1980s and early 90s; however, I had not explored the many aspects of race, identity, power, and literacy that are entailed in teaching. Many years went by where I surely came across as smug to some of my colleagues because I was using hip hop in my class which my students thought was “so cool.” It was not until I started taking graduate classes a few years ago that I understood what it means to be an “outsider” because I am a White male teaching about a genre of music and culture that originated in the African-American community. Irby & Hall (2013) define an “outsider” as anyone engaging in a cultural project that is not their own, which happens to be the majority of the secondary ELA teaching professionals who are White, middle-class females.

Having been a hip hop fan my entire life, it was hard to admit that I was not a part of this culture I had consumed and considered myself well-versed in and knowledgeable about. So, in order to recognize my position as an “outsider”, I stopped introducing hip hop music in my classroom for a period of time. I realized that I was utilizing hip hop in a superficial manner

instead of using it as a tool that could educate and even inspire my students. My discomfort was a result of me reevaluating my position as a hip hop “outsider” and acknowledging how that impacts my hip hop instruction. In addition, I had to acknowledge the power dynamics in my classroom as a privileged White male. Moving forward with hip hop instruction meant to be transparent with my students about my privileges when instructing with this “outside” literacy that was not my own -so I took a different approach in bringing hip hop back into my classroom. This realization of being an “outsider” was a necessary awakening as an ELA teacher in order for me to truly use hip hop literacies to educate my students and create insightful experiences. This research represents additional reflection and consideration of my role and identity alongside my understanding of student learning in my classroom.

Problem Statement

Hip Hop Education is something that I incorporate into my teaching because of my passion for the genre and how I believe that it infuses creativity. However, as my other teachers are finding, the pressure of high-stakes assessments and standardization can make it challenging to implement teacher-created approaches. One of the main professional challenges is increased teacher accountability due to high stakes testing. ELA teachers currently find themselves teaching in fear because of the high expectations for their students to perform well on the end-of-the-year test (Fecho, 2011). This focus on high stakes assessment has detrimentally impacted how the ELA standards from the Common Core State Standards initiative (CCSS), and in my case, the state standards, are measured; they have been “distorted by a high-stakes environment that discourages balanced, meaningful pedagogy” (Gilbert, 2014, p. 27). The pressure to measure progress and overassess learning has resulted in a “banking” philosophy (Freire, 2000) where teachers fill students’ heads with facts and figures that will appear on the tests, forcing teachers

to focus more on achievement scores than on meaningful literacy practices for students.

Professionally, I have noticed an increase in anxiety and panic from teachers and students during the time period the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS) has been in effect.

The current educational climate of standardization has left ELA teachers searching for ways to make their instruction relevant to students while preparing students for the end-of-the-year test. Implementing these standards presents teachers with a challenge to find relevant pedagogy to engage students in learning. Students are being denied meaningful pedagogy because of the time constraints and the curriculum objectives that teachers need to cover (Gilbert, 2014). Morrell & Duncan-Andrade (2002) claim that a learning problem does not rest on the individual students and their intellectual capacities, but on the teacher's inability to connect with students and develop students' academic skills in order to reach their potential.

Furthermore, when teachers are forced to teach to the test and face assessment pressure, it is difficult to build meaningful relationships around a curriculum that is not relatable to students (Dimitriadis, 2001; Fecho, 2004; Gilbert, 2014). These relationships are often hindered because of the current standardized model that schools have been following the last few decades (Au & Gourd, 2013). Having a pedagogical approach that encourages teachers and students to collaborate could positively affect both interactions and engagement. Hip hop music can be a literacy that teacher and students can build positive learning relationships with.

Many students today are familiar enough with hip hop music to recognize its presence and impact in popular culture, so bringing hip hop into the ELA classroom can be a learning tool to understand the world (Collins, 2016). Hip hop texts can be used by an ELA teacher to increase engagement while making students more culturally aware of the world in which they live (Hall, 2017). When hip hop pedagogy is used effectively by an ELA teacher, it is possible to create an

engaged classroom that is an academic learning environment to develop cultural awareness (Dimitriadis, 2001; Hall, 2017; Hill, 2009). If properly adapted to the classroom, hip hop pedagogy is an opportunity for ELA teachers to bring culturally relevant instruction into the ELA classroom to engage students with texts that relate to their lives (Dimitriadis, 2001; Hill, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and still address state and national standards. Therefore, hip hop pedagogy includes versatile texts that are motivating and engaging, but also present opportunities to fulfill these national and state curricular requirements (Banks, 2010).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this self-study was to explore my use of hip hop pedagogy, despite the current climate of standardized testing, to engage students by making connections to their personal interests and lives while building academic skills. In addition, the ultimate benefit to my research process is that it provides an opportunity to improve my teaching practice (Samaras, 2011). I situated my work in the classroom in hopes that my findings can offer insights to myself as well as other ELA teachers interested in exploring pedagogical innovations and teacher self-reflection. With my identity as a hip hop outsider, I wanted to understand how my instructional abilities impact the classroom when using hip hop based education.

Research Questions

The focus of my research is to utilize qualitative research methods, specifically self-study (Samaras, 2011) to understand my teaching practice in my classroom using hip hop pedagogy with the goal of improving my instruction and pedagogy. Over an entire semester, I conducted a self-study in an academic 11th grade ELA classroom. The following research questions guided my study.

- What happens when a hip hop outsider integrates hip hop pedagogy into a public school eleventh grade ELA classroom?

- § How can I improve the integration of hip hop pedagogy into the ELA classroom in a standardized educational setting?
- § How does self-study help me to understand how I implement Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE) pedagogy?
- How do high school ELA students respond to hip hop pedagogy?

Methods and Research Approach

Self-study methodology is a subset of teacher research and was selected because it allows me to explore my teaching practice while taking into consideration my identity as a hip hop outsider in a standardized educational setting. Samaras (2011) defines self-study as research that “builds on the necessity of a relationship between individual and collective cognition in teachers’ professional development and the power of dialogue in building a learning community of engaged scholarship” (p. 3).

Reflective teaching is an important aspect of self-study and is crucial when trying to improve education (Samaras, 2011). The reflection process allows teachers to restructure future lessons to improve their teaching practice that ultimately benefits students. This self-study includes the utilization of critical friends to help identify through classroom observations the impact that both the identity of the teacher (as outsider) and the setting have on HHBE instruction. Critical friends are “trusted colleagues [that a researcher uses to] seek support and validation of their research to gain new perspectives in understanding and reframing of their interpretations” (Samaras, 2011, p. 25). Self-reflection and critical friends in self-study allow researchers to gain an understanding of themselves as practitioners in an educational setting with the purpose to improve teacher instruction.

Significance of Study

This study is significant in that it offers an alternative pedagogy for English teachers to engage their students while addressing curriculum standards while also demonstrating the power of teacher research and reflection. In my study, I investigated what happens when an English teacher integrates hip hop pedagogy in an 11th grade English classroom. Through self-study methodology, I have built an understanding of the impact of my hip hop based instruction on my high school students. The findings highlight the advantages of hip hop pedagogy, but also present some challenges that teachers may encounter when implementing this form of culturally relevant pedagogy. Moreover, the study extends the research about ELA hip hop outsiders who use hip hop pedagogy in the secondary ELA classroom.

Organization of Study

In the next chapter, I present my theoretical framework based and the relevant literature to guide the study. In chapter three, I explain the self-study research methodology of this study and go into detail about the research site, participants, data collection methods, data analysis, issues of validity and credibility, limitations of the study, and my positionality as a researcher. In chapter four, I answer the research questions with six key findings from the self-study. Finally, in chapter five, I make connections to the findings with the previous research from my literature review in the second chapter and conclude with implications and future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the existing research that presents an argument that leads to some understanding of how hip hop pedagogy can be utilized in the ELA classroom. Previous research suggests hip hop pedagogy is a specific form of culturally relevant pedagogy that creates productive dialogical discussions between teachers and students, forming a democratic classroom. My foundational understanding consists of the democratic and dialogical classroom, culturally relevant pedagogy, and hip hop pedagogy presented in this review of the literature. First, I present the idea of a democratic classroom by introducing Dewey's approach to literacy and schooling through both teacher and students' participation in classroom contexts. For purposes of this study, I define a democratic classroom as one that involves students, on a regular basis and in developmentally appropriate ways, in shared decision making that increases their responsibility within a shared learning space. Second, I include how a dialogical ELA classroom contributes to the forming of a democratic classroom through engagement. A dialogical classroom is a space where all students are encouraged to engage in discussions of timely and relevant topics that impact their lives. Third, I build on how the utilization of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) expands the literary canon and establishes a diverse ELA curriculum and teacher instruction. Finally, I critically examine the research pertaining to the teaching of hip hop pedagogies and Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE) in relation to the secondary ELA classroom.

Dewey's Conceptualization of Democratic Classrooms

At the turn of the 1900s, John Dewey warned educators of the limitations of a dichotomous, standardized curriculum that would limit the growth of students intellectually. Dewey spoke openly against the transition of education becoming too mechanistic where

students were learning subjects that had little to do with their everyday reality, creating an artificial environment where students could apply no useful skills (Dewey, 1964). Not only did schools not provide any practical use for students, the dichotomous model of education did little to inspire. This type of education is in alignment with what Freire (2000) referred to as the *banking model of education* where teachers would just fill students' brains with pointless facts leading to rote memorization, resulting in students only depositing away information learned in school to never be applied. To avoid what Freire would eventually refer to as a banking model of education, Dewey established the idea of the democratic classroom.

Dewey's conceptualization of democratic classrooms are spaces where teachers facilitate learning to encourage students to be creative, explorative learners who utilize experiences from their family, community, and culture to gain academic knowledge and understanding (Dewey, 1916; Kinloch, 2005). Democratic engagement, according to Dewey, involves engaging with literacy through reading, writing, thinking, and doing through the process of idea exchanging between teachers and students (Dewey, 1916; Kinloch, 2005). When ideas are exchanged openly in the classroom and cultural knowledge is shared between students and teachers, democratic engagement can be utilized to enhance personal and academic identities (Dewey, 1916; Kinloch, 2005).

Dewey (1916) advocated inquiry education in which student questions and interests formed the curriculum rather than a ready-made model of learning based on standardization. Adult guidance is needed by the teacher to help students with hands-on learning, like experimenting through creating hip hop songs. A democratic classroom values diversity valuing the belief that "only diversity makes change and progress" (Dewey, 1916, p.90). Teachers help guide students to honor diversity and the importance of living in harmony in a multicultural

society. Students learn to communicate with one another and develop an understanding that can break down the barriers of class, race, sexuality, religion, and nationality. When each student's identity and values are acknowledged, everyone learns how to function in life outside of school by working in unison in the community (Dewey, 1964). The democratic classroom takes on the moral obligation of carrying on a discourse of justice, equity, and compassion to support each student to achieve their full potential.

Democratic Learning: The Anti-Standardization

Dewey viewed democracy as a way of life and students needed to be prepared to function in a democratic society and be empowered to be productive citizens (Dewey, 1916; Kinloch 2005). Schools were meant to create productive spaces where students could learn critical thinking and reasoning skills to make sound decisions and contribute to the democratic principles of the nation (Dewey, 1916, 1964). The democratic classroom provides students the freedom to engage with one another in a social setting that can eventually establish into a community-based educational setting for learning. Democratic classrooms are reliant on teachers having autonomy to make instructional decisions and students responding and guiding the way that materials are learned. Teachers should have professional autonomy to make the best decisions for their students. Dewey was a firm believer that schools should mirror a democratic society. In this instance, schools should embrace the diversity of its students to form a well-rounded understanding of the different cultures that fill out classrooms, which can eventually lead to a tolerant and empathetic society (Dewey, 1964; Kinloch, 2005).

Currently our schools are driven by content standards, high-stakes testing, and standardization (Fecho, 2011; Glassman, 2001). Standardization leads to rigid guidelines; with these guidelines and demands placed on educators, most teachers work out of fear of losing their

jobs, leaving teachers obsessively preparing learners for standardized requirements that policy makers have created that do not necessarily meet the needs of students (Fecho, 2011). Instead, students should be given the autonomy to set and achieve their personal goals based on their own interests in the secondary school setting (Glassman, 2001). It is better for the students in the classroom to engage in free inquiry (Dewey, 1916) than be limited by the strictures of standardization (Fecho, 2011; Glassman, 2001) because students need the opportunity to freely explore what is relevant to their own lives.

Teacher as Facilitator to Create Student Empowerment

An important component of a democratic classroom is for students to begin to gain ownership and everyone suddenly becomes an equal contributor to the learning process (Glassman, 2001). The democratic classroom values students' experiences and acknowledges that they are experts in their own lives, so each student should have his or her voice heard (Dewey, 1916; Kinloch, 2005). Through this process, both students and teachers gain a "sense of agency as they become critical citizens participating in the distribution of sharing knowledge" (Kinloch, 2005, p.109).

Establishing a democratic classroom builds "human awareness of social relationships, civic participation, and citizenship in regards to the interconnectedness of life and the appreciation of differences fostered in in-school and out-of-school spaces of learning, talking, reading, writing, interacting, performing, and being (e.g., in a democracy)" (Kinloch, 2005, p. 109). Dewey emphasized that students learn from the social interaction that takes place during schooling where they can openly share learning experiences with other students and teachers (Dewey, 1951). Student empowerment begins with the teacher creating a trusting environment,

so the student takes ownership of their learning through full participation of sharing and learning about various identities in the classroom.

Defining a democratic classroom includes the belief that both students and teachers agree to be listeners, thinkers, readers, and writers while respecting the thoughts and ideas of each other during participation in the learning process. Furthermore, teachers treat students as social beings implementing the goal of strengthening communicative intelligences through engagement with one another (Kinloch, 2005). The best way for a teacher to establish a democratic classroom is to facilitate (Dewey, 1916) rather than take the role of the lone expert. This is also considered a dialogic approach; in order to build a safe, nonthreatening teaching environment, one can empower students by making the teacher and student roles interchangeable (Fecho, 2004; Glassman, 2001).

Dialogical Classrooms

Dewey's educational philosophy is still applicable to modern times and has heavily impacted current educational researchers who talk about dialogical classrooms (i.e. Fecho, 2011; Kinloch, 2005). Fecho (2011) expanded on Dewey's idea of a democratic classroom with the concept of a dialogical classroom. In a dialogical classroom, teachers believe that "students bring understandings, perceptions, meanings and interpretations with them to the classroom" (Fecho, 2011, p.13) and through dialogue, students make meaning through themselves. Fecho described dialogical classrooms as where literacy is used to engage teachers and students in ongoing conversations and interactions focusing on the texts of their lives. Similarly, Kinloch (2005) utilized dialogue in the classroom to help amplify student voices and make meaning with writing.

In addition to the possibilities of a dialogical classroom, students are encouraged to bring out-of-school texts into the classroom in order to create meaningful dialogue around what is relevant to their lives. My study builds on this idea with a focus on hip hop music as a form of out-of-school texts to catalyze dialogical practices in the ELA classroom; specifically, how “discussion of hip hop as literature and culture impacts young people’s self-reflection and awareness, identity development, and understanding the world” (Kelly, 2013, p. 56). A dialogical classroom involves everyone in the classroom, both students and teacher, to be present, aware, open, critical and fully engaged in discussion to create meaning (Fecho, 2016). Similarly to Dewey’s democratic classroom, a dialogical classroom is contextual, personal, social and fluid where one constructs understanding of themselves and others through response, leading to learning and personal growth (Bakhtin, 1986; Fecho, 2016). An instructional belief of a teacher in a dialogical classroom may include that truth is not found outside of the head of an individual person but discovered through collective dialogical interaction searching for truth (Bakhtin, 1986).

A dialogical classroom is different from a monologic classroom because students understand how to ask important questions and then build a bond trying to find answers, creating a mini-community in the classroom (Rosenblatt, 1994). Dialogue is key for a strong democratic classroom and leads to a better understanding of self and the relationship one has with the world. These transactional relationships with texts lead to making meaning (Rosenblatt, 1994) and these conversations in the classroom surrounding the texts help students understand their own identities (Fecho, 2011). Hip hop provides one way of implementing dialogic approaches in the classroom. When popular hip hop texts are brought into the ELA classroom, it is a form of media

literacy education when students begin to analyze how the messages are relevant to their own lives (Kelly, 2013).

Tensions can result from having students co-construct the classroom curriculum because students bring a variety of different beliefs on important social topics that may contradict one another (Fecho, 2011). Therefore, it is important for teachers to be prepared to address these issues. Considering topics like race can lead to breakthroughs when it comes to student identity (Fecho, 2004) and can give a voice to students with differing perspectives of the dominant culture (Kinloch, 2005). However, if not properly addressed, they can alienate minoritized students. In the end, teachers must look to find ways to inspire student voice and growth in order to create a “democratic orchestration of multiple voices” (Kinloch, 2005, p.107). The dialogical classroom creates a space where “student voices, experiences and exchanges, and performances are rooted in the ethics of democracy and education’ (Dewey, 1964). The final goal is to have students engage with these out-of-the-classroom texts to make their own meaning of the world and take action by applying what they have learned to their daily lives (Fecho, 2011).

In the context of the ELA classroom, a dialogical classroom consists of a wide range of what counts as texts, which opens the door for hip hop-based texts. When engaging with these hip hop texts, students are pushed not only to question the beliefs of others but their own beliefs. For example, Bettina Love (2013) addressed the benefits of bringing hip hop in the classroom for African-American females and how it creates a dialogue about how their culture is impacted by hip hop music. In this instance, students from different cultures and backgrounds in an ELA classroom engaged in a dialogue and learned from the African-American female students’ experiences with hip hop music. This open dialogue is important when it comes to students building understanding and empathy for students that represent cultures that are not their own.

An active dialogical engagement around hip hop texts offers opportunities for all students and teachers to participate in a constructive classroom discussion building on a common democratic understanding of how the song resonates with each participant.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CPR) is an important framework for understanding how hip hop pedagogy evolved to become a presence in ELA classrooms. Ladson-Billings (1995) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as a “pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes that connect diverse students with their experiences in school” (p.466). The purpose of culturally relevant pedagogy for students is not only to achieve in school but to accept and represent their own culture while learning about other students’ cultures. Students learn to think critically about their culture and its relation to societal institutions like school (Ladson-Billings, 2017, 1995). In this next section, I will describe how CRP comprises acknowledging and engaging marginalized cultures, instilling critical thought, and contributing to a learning community.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a form of pedagogy that aims for students to recognize and engage with their cultural identity while being successful in the classroom. It functions with the belief that teaching should place the students’ social and cultural identities at the forefront of curriculum instruction. Culturally relevant pedagogy is based in the belief that students learn better when knowledge and academic skills are situated in their lives from their perspectives and cultural experiences (Gay, 2000). Learning becomes more natural, meaningful, and engaging when learning arrives in the form of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Culturally relevant pedagogy recognizes and celebrates the cultural practices of families, ancestries, and communities of students of color in order to bridge the gap between cultural diversity in and out of school. This can be done in a variety of ways, including the way the curriculum is structured and also the texts and materials used in the classroom. Ladson-Billings (1995) encouraged the utilization of texts that represent a student's family and community to gain skill and learn discipline in education. Students are encouraged to make connections to themselves with a curriculum that honors the importance of out-of-school literacies.

Much instruction in schools shies away from addressing cultural diversity where the middle-class, White dominant culture is the primary focus. Policy makers may feel that a nationwide or statewide curriculum similar to No Child Left Behind is necessary to create unity or national identity. The reality is that a one-size-fits-all educational approach by these systems overlooks diverse populations, leaving pockets of students disengaged because they do not see themselves honored or represented in the school curriculum. The continuation of this one-size-fits-all nationwide curriculum approach will only continue to widen the achievement gap between students from diverse cultures and students from the dominant Eurocentric culture (Ladson-Billings, 2017). The acknowledgement of out-of-school literacies like hip hop in the classroom creates a positive, celebratory learning environment.

Culturally relevant pedagogy allows teachers to find ways to improve their classroom environment by helping students increase their critical competence, which in time, develops their critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2017, 1995). Ladson-Billings defines *critical consciousness* as the process whereby students apply critical thinking skills to analyze their current situations, develop an understanding of their reality, and implement solutions to their problems (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Students can begin to develop a critical consciousness by

analyzing culturally relevant texts and applying their critical thinking skills to examine their own relation to depictions these texts convey. This process gets students thinking critically about the challenging realities that oppressed cultures face and how to devise solutions to overcome the problems that plague some cultures. Specifically, culturally relevant pedagogy allows minority students to develop academically by developing a sociopolitical and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Furthermore, teachers who utilize culturally relevant pedagogy in their classroom help students gain and accept their cultural identity as they develop critical perspectives to challenge the unjust practices of established societal institutions, such as schools and their impact on marginalized groups (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In a democratic and dialogical classroom, both students and teachers should build a critical consciousness to challenge the oppressive institutions that impact their lives in order to foster self-efficacy during school and post-graduation.

Teachers who implement culturally relevant pedagogy should prioritize a classroom setting of empathy and acceptance by building strong teacher-student relationships. In order for these relationships to be established teachers should recognize the role race and culture have on students' identity. Since the majority of the secondary ELA profession is White, it benefits teachers to understand their own cultural identity and confront the power of whiteness while establishing a setting of cultural sensitivity so all students feel acknowledged (Hall, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Nieto, 2009). White teachers need to acknowledge their position of privilege and confront how minority cultures can often be oppressed by the dominant White culture (Nieto, 2009). Culturally relevant pedagogy encourages students to use texts to spark their imaginations and be explorative learners in relation to the diverse cultures represented by the students that surround them in the classroom (Kinloch, 2005). A central purpose of culturally

relevant pedagogy is for the teacher to find mediums to connect and engage minority students to the ELA curriculum who have long been subjected to a foreign, Eurocentric curriculum that decenters minoritized students.

Teachers who utilize culturally relevant pedagogy commit to a collective empowerment in their classroom. The academic achievement gap continues to widen between minority and White students and one contributing factor is the lack of diverse cultural representation in the school curriculum (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2017), which means teachers should carefully consider their curricula and incorporate approaches that acknowledge a strengths-based approach. Incorporating CRP can lead to students taking the initiative of their learning through self-efficacy in order to achieve academically (Ladson-Billings, 1995). When culturally relevant teachers recognize cultural identity and heritage as a stable of their instruction, students increase academic competence, self-efficacy, and become motivated to excel beyond the classroom (Gay, 2000). Through a high level of engagement, opportunities to question and contribute to the curriculum, the main benefit that students gain from the use of culturally relevant teaching is how it liberates and empowers them (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings 1995, 2017).

Music Education in the ELA Classroom

Teachers have used different genres of music as a form of culturally relevant pedagogy to expose students to diverse cultures. Students can take valuable lessons learning and engaging with different types of music from all over the world. Research in the field of ELA/Language Arts has shown how music in the secondary classroom can help English teachers motivate students to learn by making connections to major literary themes throughout the semester and become a means of self-expression (Dethier, 2003). ELA teachers can use music to bridge to canonical literature where students make universal connections among different texts (Dethier,

2003; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Teachers can use different genres of music to create enthusiasm in their classroom to learn. In addition, teachers have noticed how music can teach students how to build on the often-underdeveloped communication skill of listening and processing what they have heard (Dethier, 2003). Music and lyrical writing provide students the opportunity to stimulate their creativity in the ELA classroom (Greene, 2001). More importantly, music in the ELA classroom can lead to students' identity growth and create a space where students can engage in dialogue about the relevant themes that are articulated in the music (Dethier, 2003; Fecho, 2004).

In relation to my study, hip hop music has been an integral part of pop culture since the 1980s. Ladson-Billings (1995) recognized hip hop culture as a relatable form of culturally relevant pedagogy by noting students are familiar with its artform through the exposure to pop culture. Hip hop music became popular in the 80s and 90s based on its representation of life in urban cities among marginalized communities (Chang, 1995). ELA students gain all of the educational benefits of engaging with hip hop music as they have with other musical genres including the increasing of motivation, improvement of listening and communication skills, and creativity (Dethier, 2003; Greene, 2001; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). When teachers utilize hip hop pedagogy it presents an opportunity for students to engage with a popular genre of music that is a culturally relevant pedagogy.

Hip Hop Pedagogy

One way that scholars and educators have implemented CRP is through hip hop pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasized the use of the classroom to bring the real-life experiences of students and teachers into the school curriculum. To bridge culturally relevant pedagogy and popular culture, Ladson-Billings (2005) called for an academic treatment of hip

hop, and called out scholars who ignored the movement “out of touch and irrelevant to everyday lives of people engaged in social justice” (p. 294). Teachers who are committed to culturally relevant pedagogy and integrating popular culture into the classroom paved the way for the opportunity for progressive forms of pedagogy, like hip hop pedagogy, to gain momentum in the 2000s (Petchauer, 2009). A hip hop-based curriculum centers around the interests and goals of both students and teachers (Stovall, 2006). The goals of teachers are met by utilizing a curriculum that motivates students to learn by bridging hip hop texts to titles of the literary canon (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). A curriculum that includes relatable hip hop-based lessons can benefit teacher instruction and student learning.

This section defines the qualities of Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE) and hip hop pedagogy. The first subsection offers background information and identifies hip hop culture and its evolution into pop culture. Next, the section focuses on the impact of hip hop pedagogy in the ELA classroom and the major advantages of HHBE, including increased student engagement, fostering critical consciousness, and developing a knowledge of self. The review then covers intersectionality and the criticisms and conflicts surrounding hip hop-based instruction followed by a final section addressing hip hop pedagogy and the hip hop outsider.

Background of Hip Hop Pedagogy

In order to have a well-rounded understanding of the impact of hip hop pedagogy, it is important to become aware of the background, evolution, and definition of hip hop pedagogy. The history of how hip hop culture evolved into such an impactful part of pop culture is a reason why it is a beneficial form of culturally relevant pedagogy. I will provide the background, evolution, and definition of hip hop pedagogy to support how it is a relatable pedagogy in the ELA classroom.

The birth of hip hop began to take form as an artistic expression in response to the social events that led up to the late 70s in the Bronx, New York. Hip hop was a cultural form of expression originating from African-American and Latino youth in response to the oppressive institutions that impacted their everyday lives (Chang, 2005). A common misconception is that hip hop is just a genre of music; hip hop is not merely music, but the culture surrounding and creating the music. Hip hop is a way of life that includes the elements of hip hop culture: breaking (break dancing), emceeing (rapping), graffiti art, deejaying and beat boxing (Chang, 2005). The father of hip hop, DJ Kool Herc is credited in the Bronx in 1973 for being the first DJ to isolate and combine the instrumental portions of funk records to create what would eventually be the “break”, the defining sound of hip hop music. This sound would present a creative outlet for future hip hop artists in urban areas of New York City eventually evolving into a highly influential genre of music. DJ Kool Herc defines hip hop as a unique collective consciousness with the “perceptual ability that causes one to self-create and raises one’s self-worth” (KRS-One, 2003, p. 2).

One of the main reasons so many African-American and Latino urban youth gravitated to the hip hop culture is because it presented an opportunity to rebel against the “hegemonic ideologies, institutions, and systems that were oppressing communities and silencing injustices” (Wells, 2019, p.1). Other people consider the genre as a form of identity. For instance, Rose (1994) defines hip hop as “a cultural form that attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity and oppression with the cultural imperatives of African American and Caribbean history, identity and community” (p.21). Hip hop music articulated the hardships of minorities in oppressive social systems and, as a result, built a sense

of understanding and identity among people of marginalized communities who shared and listened to a distinct genre of music that often depicted the harsh realities of its culture.

When hip hop gained ground and became a part of pop culture in the 80s and early 90s, the messages in the lyrics from prominent hip hop artists were lyrically conscious, focusing on social and political activism of marginalized groups (KRS-One, 2003). Hip hop artists began to define its culture around the subject matter of the raps, the vocal delivery through rhythmic speech, from these prominent artists. These hip hop artists began to form a cultural way of life and the raps in the songs articulated what was valued and dismissed, or “dissed”, as a culture. The raps in these hip hop songs openly expressed an admiration for the dance, graffiti, poetic language, styles of dress, and overall attitude of hip hop culture (KRS-One, 2003). The hip hop culture created an inclusive space that encouraged artistic expression, individuality, and even rebellion against systemic oppressive forces.

Some hip hop scholars would argue that hip hop was created with intentions to communicate a positive message and inspire a generation of youth to rebel against oppressive forces (Chang, 2007). For example, during the summer of 1989, American hip hop group Public Enemy, released their single “Fight the Power” which brought an awareness of unjust institutions, specifically the government and law enforcement, that abuse their power to oppress African-Americans. The hip hop song remains a powerful civil rights anthem for politicized youth and an iconic message from one of the genre’s most prominent, socially conscious bands. Similarly, in 1988, KRS-One formed a “Stop the Violence Movement” and released the single titled “Self-Destruction” in response to violence in the hip hop and African American communities. The movement brought awareness and raised money for organizations trying to prevent crime happening in these communities.

A cultural altering occurrence took place in the late 80s as the birth of ‘gansta’ rap emerged to offset the message of positivity the early artists like Public Enemy articulated. This was the time when the term ‘rapper’ began to gain its own identity separate from the progressive and somewhat wholesome hip hop culture. ‘Gangsta’ rap was a representation of the reality African-Americans experienced daily in poverty-stricken areas of cities around America. Instead of constructing songs that represented the oppressive struggle in these urban neighborhoods that hip hop music had articulated since its existence, these rappers often boasted about a life of crime that was detrimental to their own communities and delivered more of a negative, uninspiring message. More often than not, these raps were filled with profane language that created negative stereotypes of men and women by glorifying violence, misogyny, homophobia, drug abuse, and materialism. For example, being a murderous drug dealer was suddenly romanticized in these raps as a desired lifestyle. After originating as something positive, ‘gangsta’ rap gave hip hop a negative connotation and the media and record companies began to exploit these musical groups for the sake of monetary value (KRS-One, 2003). Lucrative record companies would manipulate hip hop artists into creating content that reinforced the negative stereotypes of African American men and women for monetary gain. ‘Gangsta’ rap records began to outsell the once socially conscious rap artists as record companies began to take artistic control over the content these artists released for increased album sales. Record companies would threaten to not support and pay these hip hop artists unless they released ‘gangsta’ rap that was filled with negative connotations and messages. This period in the industry was a money grab for the record companies that were not concerned about the impact this content had on its audience.

This exploitation of these rappers by record companies created a divide between the authentic hip hop artists who were spreading socially conscious messages. This led to the urban youth being exposed to the glorification of immoral lifestyles and gave hip hop a negative view by the general public. Even though these 'gangsta' rappers were articulating their everyday realities, the movement lacked positive role models for the youth in these poverty-stricken cities. This is not to say that the subject matter was not important for the world to hear and process the oppressive institutional forces against African-American and Latino people, but the content and messages in the music did little to positively inspire the hip hop youth.

Despite the controversy that surrounds the content in hip hop music, it remains a genre that can be used to inform and educate. The current state of hip hop remains impacted by the negative connotations associated with the genre from the late 80s and early 90s. Hip hop purists often argue against how the media sensationalizes the negative stereotypes of urban youth in order to sell records. However, the topics of misogyny, drug abuse and violence in the music led to the question of why it remains so popular to hip hop consumers. Hip hop scholars claim its popularity is credited to the honest depiction of reality and these graphic images of unpleasant portrayals can create a healthy dialogue centering around hip hop music (Rose, 1994). Hip hop scholar Jeff Chang (2007) suggests the authenticity of the genre's culture and the raw depiction of day-to-day reality is an appeal to hip hop fans and creates a level of awareness to its listeners. Hip hop is not just entertainment, but a way of life that consumers want to learn from with an open mind, giving the listener a fresh perspective of society (KRS-One, 2003). Hip hop music can be an informative tool that builds an awareness among its listeners.

Hip hop music was created with the intention to give these artists a voice to share their experiences with the world. An important aspect of hip hop music is how the artists can educate

the public on what happens in marginalized neighborhoods across the United States (Chang, 2007; KRS-One, 2003). Since hip hop's purpose is to not only entertain but to educate, it can be utilized in educational settings to enhance the learning experience. In a Deweyian classroom, it is essential that all voices are heard and become a part of the learning process. People can identify and relate to hip hop culture adding to its appeal in educational platforms.

Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE): The Ultimate Hip Hop Pedagogy

The term *Hip Hop Based Education* (HHBE) is “a prefigured set of strategies or activities for reaching students through Hip Hop culture and reflects an alternate, more expansive vision of pedagogy that reconsiders the relationship among students, teachers, texts, schools, and the broader social world” (Hill, 2009, p.120). HHBE also uses hip hop culture, rap songs and lyrics as the center of curricular resources (Petchauer, 2009). Kirkland (2007) and Dimitriadis (2001) argued that hip hop could be studied and analyzed as a stand-alone text. In some ELA classrooms, hip hop has had an influence on teaching and learning. For example, Hill (2009) centered his study in a literature class that mainly focused on listening and interpreting strictly hip hop texts. Hill described his approach as a form of Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE) as a product of both a democratic and a dialogical classroom. The utilization of HHBE by high school teachers allowed hip hop to become a valid literary text and an impactful instructional tool in secondary education.

Educators who implement HHE viewed hip hop education as a transformative process of improving schools mainly through teachers in urban settings becoming more aware and responsive to the needs of students (Hill, 2009; Petchauer, 2009; Seidel, 2011). HHBE research focuses on how its use as a student-centered and culturally relevant pedagogy can transform a classroom into a healthy learning environment where students' interests are honored

(Dimitriadis, 2001; Hill, 2009; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). In addition, HHBE focuses on building quality relationships through positive interaction and dialogue among the students, teachers, texts, schools, and the communities. These relationships create an engaging educational setting that can improve student motivation, develop a critical consciousness, and transmit disciplinary knowledge in traditional and non-traditional K-12 learning environments (Hill, 2009).

Hip Hop Pedagogies: *Of Hip Hop, about Hip Hop, and with Hip Hop*

HHBE provides a blueprint for educators to take a progressive approach to transforming schools where students have more authentic, democratic, and productive opportunities because it tailors to their cultural needs and interests (Hill, 2009). Hill proposed the term to show the three different pedagogies in the classroom, explicating the types of pedagogies as being *of*, *about*, and *with* Hip Hop. The definition of pedagogies *of Hip Hop* “reflect the various ways that hip hop culture authorizes particular values, truth claims, and subject positions while implicitly or explicitly contesting others” (p. 120). Hill (2009) defines *about Hip Hop* pedagogy as when “students and teachers operate as cultural critics who deploy critical literacies in order to identify and respond to structures of power and meaning within hip hop texts” (p. 122). Finally, Hill defines *with Hip Hop* pedagogies as “using hip hop texts to enhance student motivation, transmit subject area knowledge, and develop habits of mind appropriate for learning” (p. 123).

By integrating aspects of a culturally relevant classroom, teachers and students using HHBE can listen and communicate to create a community (Hill, 2009; Dimitriadis, 2001). In addition, teachers create opportunities for cogenerative dialogues where teachers and students share both positive and negative classroom experiences and focus on finding ways to transform instruction, curriculum, and learning environments based on their shared positive experiences

(Emdin, 2016; Stovall, 2006). This connects with the idea of having a dialogical classroom. Teachers that utilize hip hop pedagogy give students an opportunity to bring their lived experiences into the ELA classroom by having critical discussions about hip hop culture (Hill, 2009; Petchauer, 2009). Critical discussions about hip hop culture in the classroom exemplify characteristics of Fecho's (2017) dialogical classroom. When students engage in a dialogical classroom, they share their cultural experiences, bringing their identity into the ELA classroom (Fecho, 2017). The learner benefits from a democratic classroom when they engage in open discussion about texts and topics that concern their personal lives (Dewey, 1964). Students contribute democratically through a collective dialogue that addresses the hip hop-based themes allowing students to make connections to their own realities (Dewey, 1964, Fecho, 2017; Hill, 2009). When students are encouraged and share their cultural experiences, the class learns in a democratic fashion through a critical dialogue. HHBE can provide opportunities for cogenerative discussions to help build a strong sense of community in the classroom where students feel supported and utilize *liberatory praxis*, the term Freire (1995) uses to describe the practice of resisting the forces in the world that attempt to dehumanize us. In one study, Dimitriadis (2001) used rap songs that addressed how African-Americans can overcome the oppressive forces that they face to become proud, self-reliant citizens.

HHBE is intended to increase student motivation, transmit subject area knowledge and develop habits of mind appropriate for learning (Hill, 2009). Overall, HHBE is a progressive approach of strategies and activities for students to engage with hip hop culture and "reflects an alternate, more expansive vision of pedagogy that reconsiders the relationships among students, teachers, texts, schools, and the broader social world" (Hill, p.120). By moving away from some of the more traditional forms of pedagogy, teachers hope to inspire students to make sense of the

world and find their purpose for the greater good of society. The hope is that students are able to apply HHBE to benefit their education while they are in school and are able to take this form of critical thinking with them post-graduation (Hall, 2017).

Hip Hop Pedagogy in ELA

The early acceptance of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in the ELA classroom was important for the emergence of hip hop literacies because it allowed “out-of-school” literacies to have a place in classroom instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995). By beginning to utilize CRP’s in the ELA curriculum, hip hop literacies began to evolve as a credible resource to guide ELA instruction. In the ELA classroom, hip hop pedagogy became a transformative element that led to critical thinking and teaching in schools (Stovall, 2006). The presence of hip hop in the ELA classroom has been researched since hip hop took the forefront in the late 90s, the time referred to as the “golden age” (Petchauer, 2009).

The majority of research that has been conducted with hip hop in the secondary classroom has taken place by African-American scholars in an urban or “at-risk” context where students are marginalized (see, for instance Dimitriadis, 2001; Morrell, Duncan & Andrade, 2002; Hill, 2009). The earliest studies documented how hip hop can help students learn to identify literary devices and figurative language and understand their purpose (Alexander-Smith, 2004; Morrell, Duncan & Andrade, 2002). Researchers also documented how hip hop music could be foundational to the writing process (Cooks, 2004). The earlier studies used hip hop music as supplementary texts; eventually research and pedagogy reflected how hip hop could function as stand-alone texts to teach literacy (Dimitriadis, 2001; Kirkland, 2007, 2008). As hip hop became more commonly used in the classroom, teachers began to use Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE) and its pedagogies of *Hip Hop*, *about Hip Hop*, and *with Hip Hop* to

empower students in the ELA classroom (Hill, 2009). This eventually led to the expansion of pedagogical possibilities in the ELA classroom as the twitter handle *#HipHopEd* ballooned in popularity as a social media phenomenon. Students and educators were finding themselves engaging with hip hop literacies even when they were not in the school setting.

In the early 2000s, researchers suggested that a hip hop text no longer needed to be studied as a supplementary work along with a canonical text to be “valid” but had benefits as a stand-alone, primary text as initiatives were taken to legitimize it as a focus in ELA (Kirkland, 2007, p. 74). David Kirkland’s research (2007; 2008) took on the challenge of using hip hop music to meet the NCTE/IRA Standards for English Language Arts, specifically regarding the standards concerned with students reading across genres, time periods, and subjects, including both print and non-print texts. The results from his studies suggested that ELA teachers can use hip hop texts that represent the realities of student’s lives to revise reading and writing instruction in the ELA classroom. As a result, more researchers were finding that hip hop could be studied on its own and not only used as a supplementary text (Dimitriadis, 2001; Hill, 2009; Kirkland, 2007).

Hip hop texts can be studied as a primary text because they provide highly engaging themes relevant to students’ lives and, in some cases, are more relatable than the texts that are required to read from the ELA literary canon (Petchauer, 2009). Kirkland concluded hip hop’s influence “transcends race” (p.72) in that people with different social and cultural backgrounds listen to the music. Interestingly enough, 70 percent of hip hop music is purchased by White, middle-class teenagers, so it is not only African-Americans who are identifying with a “sense of deep alienation, despair, uncertainty, loss of a sense of grounding, even if it is not informed in a shared circumstance” (Kirkland, 2007, p.72) when listening to the music. This insight by

Kirkland resulted in the idea that students view hip hop as a universal language that goes beyond race because all genders, races, socioeconomic backgrounds are directly related to the songs. Hip hop culture has such a presence in society that teenagers have a tendency to gravitate toward its music and customs because it is so relatable. Researchers discovered that if students do not find the curriculum culturally relevant in the classroom, they may become alienated and adopt the hip hop culture outside of the school because it welcomes them (Emdin, 2016). Kelly (2013), a former ELA teacher turned researcher, recognizes that hip hop education can take many forms of pedagogy in the classroom and critical engagement with hip hop texts not only gives the student a better understanding of society, but of themselves. If hip hop is a part of the pedagogy that a teacher establishes in the class, some students may find it relatable because it is a culture with which they are familiar.

Research suggests that hip hop outsiders can successfully utilize HHBE in schools. (Hall, 2017). A concern in research is that HHBE is not being utilized by enough educators who are not hip hop insiders, impeding its progression as a valid pedagogy. Irby & Hall (2013) feel in order for HHBE to evolve fully, work should be done toward “narrowing the chasm that exists between the black men who tend to dominate HHBE research and the White women interested in practicing HHBE” (p. 74). This should invite all teaching practitioners to share their experiences when trying to utilize HHBE in the ELA classroom in order to find out which hip hop-based interventions work best. (Hall, 2017). The only way to accomplish finding out what types of HHBE instruction work in the ELA classroom is for there to be an open dialogue between both hip hop outsiders (researchers and practitioners who are not a part of the culture) and hip hop insiders (Hall, 2017).

While most of the studies on HHBE are teacher-researcher-based that take place in low-income, urban schools, a limited number of hip hop studies have emerged from White scholars in rural educational settings. My study is important because it highlights my identity as a White, hip hop outsider teaching HHBE in a rural educational setting.

Using Hip Hop Pedagogy for Fostering Engagement, Critical Consciousness, and Identity

Secondary ELA teachers often used hip hop literacies to create an interest in students. Hip hop culture can be used as a bridge in the secondary classroom to help instill the skills required to fulfill the curricular standards. However, it is important to note that HHP can serve and own text or genre rather than simply as a “bridge” to the traditional canonical texts. More often than not, these hip hop texts lead to a high level of engagement and critical analysis as do traditional texts from the literary canon.

Research reflects hip hop pedagogy can be utilized in the secondary classroom for fostering engagement, a critical consciousness and identity. Two foundational researchers who collaborated to research the integration of popular culture, especially hip hop, were Morrell & Duncan-Andrade. Both were known to use ethnographic approaches in urban settings to tie rap texts to canonical works with minority students in ELA classrooms. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) used an Advanced Placement level ELA class to read canonical poets such as Frost, Whitman, and Shakespeare and compare their works to hip hop musicians such as Public Enemy, Grandmaster Flash, and Nas. Using a framework of culturally relevant pedagogy and critical literacy, they incorporated these hip hop artists to support students’ development of a critical consciousness of the ways oppressed groups are treated by those in power (Freire, 2000). The common theme discovered in the lessons identified how there are oppressed cultures that have limited freedoms against dominant institutions, school being one. Morrell & Duncan-

Andrade (2002) used hip hop music to scaffold how to critically analyze how corrupt systems oppress its people. Students analyzed both the canonical work and hip hop song and made comparisons. They were asked to create a poem and provide social commentary about the ways they would encourage a movement for social justice. In this study Duncan-Andrade and Morrell used hip hop music as a medium to identify critical literacy skills and taught the students to transfer these skills to engage with the texts found in the literary canon. Their findings indicated that students found hip hop pedagogies more engaging than studying canonical texts alone, leading to an increase in critical literacy skills.

Research from Morrell (2000) and Morrell & Duncan-Andrade (2002) that had shown the impact of hip hop developing literacy skills, researchers began to ask important questions and investigate “why” it worked in the classroom (Dimitriadis, 2001, p. 161). One of the criticisms that Dimitriadis (2001) brought up is why these scholars were so focused on literacy development in students (p. xv), rather than on engagement. Dimitriadis did not agree that hip hop lessons were successful based only on how students later performed on a measurable form of assessment, such as a standardized test (p.162). Hip hop literacies engage students at a high level where authentic learning can take place. Hip hop educators have suggested that the main objective for teachers is to understand the lives of young people, so it is important for teachers to present opportunities to make connections in order to build this trust and understanding. Utilizing hip hop texts can be that opportunity (Dimitriadis, 2001). Also, students can work collaboratively through writing and performance. Students acquire knowledge by engaging with one another when they analyze and create hip hop music together, and, according to many teachers, this form of democratic interaction outweighs how a student may perform on an end-of-the-year test (Dimitriadis, 2001). This educational priority runs in opposition to the “drill and test”

environment where students are being denied the opportunity to use their critical thinking skills to build connections with their fellow students and teachers through hip hop (Hill, 2009).

Hip hop education began gaining the attention of academia when educators began using hip hop songs to engage youth in order to increase their critical consciousness. Hip hop scholarship advanced in the education field when it took the form of culturally relevant pedagogy and critical pedagogy to bring an awareness to marginalized groups and increase academic skills (Petchauer, 2009). Instead of accepting these oppressive forces that are dehumanizing, developing a critical consciousness has students use hip hop music to look at these conflicts with a critical lens and relate the lyrics to their personal lives (Stovall, 2006). Students can develop a critical consciousness when they develop an awareness of how lived experiences shape the world in which one lives, learns and works (Freire, 2000). When students directly relate hip hop music to their personal lives, they begin to learn how to “read the world” (Freire, 2000) and perceive their direct relationship to these realities critically (Stovall, 2006). This approach to ELA instruction provided students with the opportunity to compare the themes expressed by oppressed groups from early history to current forms of popular culture through hip hop music. By being encouraged to acknowledge their culture in the midst of dominant forces, students were able to have their voices heard and valued in the classroom. In addition, Bettina Love (2015) went as far as to argue that hip hop pedagogy helps develop a sense of a double consciousness as students become aware of their position and identity in hegemonic K-12 schools. Rethinking one’s position not only in society, but in the school system can create constructive conversations. Using hip hop pedagogy to develop this sense of critical consciousness in schools begins the process of identity formation of how both teachers and students position themselves in their relationships with each other and the world around them (Crooke & Almeida, 2017).

Hip hop culture gives marginalized students an outlet to develop critical stances and authentic voices (Ladson-Billings 2015; Wells, 2019). Teachers of hip hop pedagogy encourage students to develop a critical consciousness in the classroom while experimenting with aspects of their own identities by engaging with people in their own community that share similarities (Dimitriadis, 2001). Teachers can create a safe and supportive learning environment that allows students from marginalized communities to openly express their opinions in relation to the themes in hip hop music. A medium like hip hop music can create a conversation between hip hop outsiders and hip hop insiders that enlightens all participants. This process is especially important when building empathy for people in marginalized groups because more privileged students gain understanding of the plight of oppressed groups through an open dialogue. The secondary classroom is a space where students have the freedom to construct their own identities through high level engagement in a democratic classroom. As mentioned before, when teachers create a therapeutic classroom environment, a community begins in which students are encouraged to use forms of self-expression that mold their identity (Crooke & Almeida, 2017). When engaging with an ELA classroom with such a positive community culture and where all voices are valued and held in high esteem, multiple identities can emerge.

One of the most important elements of hip hop education is its power to develop a *knowledge of self* (Wells, 2019). Knowledge of self is positioning oneself as a member of a collective culture, e.g., of the classroom as a close community requiring a “deep command of hip hop histories and traditions that convey largely unspoken but intuitive understandings of collectivity, history, and inherent cosmopolitanism, meaning that every individual is and should be connected to one another based on shared history, culture, and identity” (Wells 2019, pg. 2). ELA teachers can provide a space where students can develop an identity through engaging with

other students in the class with diverse backgrounds, creating a knowledge of self. All of the students in the class openly share and support one another creating a community of learners. Building a sense of self among a group of peers in the classroom helps students openly question and negate building a negative sense of self through false narratives and media stereotypes. Students realize that they have a sense of agency when it comes to forming their own identity in a classroom that welcomes hip hop literacies. When a teacher encourages thoughtful and meaningful engagement with hip hop literacies, students are more willing to participate because it is an out-of-school literacy they can identify with and see themselves in. Identity formation is an important task I encourage teachers to explore in the classroom by taking into consideration each student's culture and what helps shape each one as a person.

Using HHBE to Magnify Student Voice through Social Media and Performance

In relation to hip hop education and the democratic classroom, Dewey (1964) acknowledged that a democratic classroom is based on the development of the student's needs in order to function and succeed in society. When students are allowed to engage in dialogue over the major themes in hip hop music, they build on their own sense of self and their own beliefs in an educational setting (Fecho, 2017). In a democratic classroom, students work collectively as a class to listen, challenge and support each other's values and beliefs in the ELA classroom (Dewey, 1964; Fecho, 2017). In order for students to gain a knowledge of self they need a supportive and collaborative space that thrives on the idea of engagement where students take responsibility for each other's learning in and out of the classroom (Wells, 2019).

Social media is a commonly accessible, innovative medium that has presented teachers opportunities to bring different forms of culturally relevant literacies in their classroom. Social media platforms have broadened developments in hip hop pedagogy. For instance, hip hop

scholar Christopher Emdin began the twitter handle *#HipHopEd* that features an ongoing discussion of the development, advantages and challenges of utilizing hip hop education in the classroom. This platform was created to discuss important controversial themes appearing in hip hop music such as violence, misogyny, and drug addiction. The twitter handle *#HipHopEd* allowed students, educators, and scholars to join a live online discussion beginning at 9:00 p.m. every Tuesday night to debate a variety of topics focused on HHBE. I have personally engaged with some of the intriguing topics that reflect both my research and my profession. Hip hop scholars Bettina Love and Emdin are recruiting learners and educators at a successful rate to become a part of social media to get productive discussions going about their own identities relating to hip hop culture with people from around the world (Love, 2015).

An example of a productive discussion through *#HipHopEd* twitter page was a trending thread by English teacher Brian Mooney (2015). Students were noted in the article as making impressive connections with both the novel *The Bluest Eye*, a novel by Toni Morrison which is a standard in many ELA classrooms, and Kendrick Lamar's album "To Pimp a Butterfly". The students noted that in both the novel and the music, the characters experienced oppression trying to live up to the standards of White society. Mooney commented "If we don't ask them to critique different kinds of media, to 'read' the world through a critical lens, we aren't teaching literacy at all. They must become producers of new knowledge and new understandings, new texts and new meaning" (p. 3). Mooney (2015) utilized HHBE to get his students to recognize the racial injustices in society and how and why it remains a common theme in hip hop music.

When ELA teachers give students the opportunity to perform hip hop music in the classroom, it allows students to build their voice (Mooney, 2016; Hill, 2009; Dimitriadis, 2001). When students have opportunities to perform hip hop, they can artistically engage with the

classroom audience and get immediate feedback from their peers. Creating hip hop music with classmates can be a catalyst for cooperative learning where students work closely with their peers to accomplish an engaging task as a group or team of hip hop performers. Teachers can use hip hop songs to create an art space in the classroom to build a “wide awakesness” (Green, 2001) that forms a “metaphysical coming together of bodies, ideas, artwork, voices, and experiences” (Mooney, 2016, p. 30) with the common goal of creating an artistic presentation. Hip hop performance can build a student’s confidence and opens the doors of possibility and imagination in the community (Greene, 2001). Students can get an authentic experience of reception from their peers through a healthy presentation of wit, bravado, and intellect in a therapeutic, artistic ELA space (Mooney, 2016). Hip hop performance can champion the voice of young people and is a way that students can officially publish their work (Hill, 2009).

Incorporating Intersectionality in HHBE

When it comes to utilizing hip hop pedagogies in the ELA classroom, teachers and researchers have acknowledged major obstacles one must overcome. As discussed before, the subject matter in mainstream rap music entails mature topics from pimps, gangsters, misogyny, violence and drug abuse. Rowland (2011) identified how some educators are overwhelmed by the mature lyrical content and how it negatively impacts student attitudes and overall academic performance. Hip hop pedagogies are regulated to the guidelines of English education policy and practice, so teachers can feel restricted when bringing these titles in the ELA classroom (Croke & Almeida, 2008). Scholars have also identified the possibility that some young students have a negative relationship with hip hop culture, and this can add to the anxiety of both students and teachers when engaging with hip hop pedagogy (Croke & Almeida, 2008). In order to overcome this obstacle, teachers should collaborate by working with hip hop insiders to find hip

hop titles and approaches to lessons that can lead to positive and productive classroom discussions with HHBE.

Hip hop presents opportunities for teachers to have discussions with our students addressing the oppressed nature of the communities and people represented in the music. Students find the genre relatable because among the youth, hip hop remains one of the most popular forms of music and has a universal following. Consequently, the mature themes in hip hop music attract controversy to the point certain educators feel it does not have a place in secondary education. For example, just by observing the Billboards' top hip hop songs, the messages of hyper-masculinity, misogyny, and homophobia remain present in hip hop music. Instead of attacking hip hop music and criticizing it as a whole, conversations in the ELA classroom should “engage the contested politics of gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity” (Collins, 2016, p. 11) that are present in today's hip hop music. Since hip hop music brings up several different controversial topics, intersectionality can be used to address the discrimination occurring across ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality and race in the ELA classroom. Professional development is a viable solution to enhance hip hop-based instruction for teachers K-12 (Love, 2015). Teachers need guidance on what songs to select to bring in the classroom and how to instruct using these titles in order to give students an understanding of the impact societal forces have across intersected identities (Love, 2015).

One way to understand how power relations depicted in hip hop mirror the power dynamics in the real world is through the lens of intersectionality. Intersectionality is a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of one's social and political identities might combine to create unique modes of discrimination. Intersectional frameworks illustrate power relations whereby “people's lives and identity are generally shaped by many factors in diverse

and mutually influencing ways” (Collins, 2016, p. 64). For example, Collins (2016) emphasizes it is not pure racism or sexism, but power relations, that cross both categories and have impact on one another. Using hip hop as a medium when addressing intersectionality is ideal because people who have experienced discrimination of race, class, age sexuality and citizenship have been instrumental in creating both intersectionality and hip hop and using them as forms of critical inquiry and praxis (Collins 2016, 2004).

Since ELA teachers engage with youth that often have a different cultural identification than themselves, hip hop is an engaging medium to bring issues of inequality into the classroom discussion because students are familiar with this form of popular culture. Teachers can help students develop a critical consciousness about how intersecting systems of power are “organized within and across the structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal domains of power [that] can result in new and powerful perspectives on social inequality” (Collins, 2016, p. 163). Hip hop music tells the story of how the youth battle neoliberal forces and share the truths of their own experiences. These songs constitute identity politics that “inform contemporary instructional praxis” (Collins, 2016, p. 118). When given the opportunity in the ELA classroom, students can find their voices in hip hop, and use that voice as an analytical tool to solve problems that others face. Collins (2016) is a firm believer that everyone can learn from analyzing hip hop through an intersectional lens by breaking down the power dynamics and the impact one’s identity has in relation to the world. Instead of students waiting until post-secondary education to become introduced to and apply the ideas of intersectionality, it is important to begin in the secondary ELA classroom.

When a teacher allows out-of-school literacies in the classroom, they hand a portion of the teaching and learning responsibilities over to their students in class because now that teacher

is engaged in the discussion as a participant rather than leading the discussion as an authoritarian. When teachers bring in out-of-school literacies like hip hop in the classrooms, students become more motivated to learn and participate, building a democratic classroom (Dewey, 1964). The discussions students engage with involving hip hop culture present authentic learning opportunities that directly reflect student's interests in the ELA classroom (Fecho, 2017). In a dialogical classroom, teachers are more of a facilitator of the classroom and encourage everyone to participate (Dewey, 1964; Fecho, 2017).

When controversial topics can emerge from the HHBE curriculum, the teacher can use that as a teachable moment. For example, it may not sit well with a teacher when a student begins to validate the hip hop artist's message of the importance of materialism to define self-worth. But in actuality, teachers utilizing hip hop pedagogy can present this as a teachable moment where the utilization of a democratic and dialogical classroom can flourish. Students and the teacher could take the time to debate if material wealth is a confirmation of success and leads to happiness. Moving forward, the class could then investigate how hip hop often falls victim to having a negative perception from corporate marketing through the exploitation of their hip hop artists (KRS-One, 2009). ELA teachers should establish a democratic classroom setting where celebrations and critiques of hip hop culture is welcome in the ELA classroom. By addressing the violent, materialistic, and misogynistic messages hip hop artists convey, students begin to ask critical questions that contribute to their media literacy and cultural understanding (Dimitriadis, 2001; Hill, 2009).

In order to increase the utilization of hip hop based education in a majority White, middle-class teachers, there will have to be proper instruction, via professional development, from hip hop insiders and researchers to make it a stable for ELA classrooms. When it comes to

the challenge of expanding the use of hip hop pedagogies to White hip hop outsiders that make up the majority of the teaching workforce, certain challenges have to be addressed. Rodriguez (2009) conducted a hip hop based study that claimed White preservice teachers held stereotypic preconceived notions toward their minority students, negatively perceiving their character and academic ability. This group of pre-service teachers training to be classroom teachers had to address and attempt to overcome the stereotypes they held based on mainstream media, including hip hop music's portrayal of minority youth. Addressing the invalid racial and sexist stereotypes from mainstream hip hop songs is another obstacle that hip hop educators have to consider when encouraging the pedagogy to be implemented by White, ELA teachers. When taking on a new pedagogy of this magnitude, teachers should be knowledgeable with the types of popular culture that help form their students' identities (Dimitriadis, 2001). Teachers are going to have to be knowledgeable about the complexities of hip hop pedagogy and the impact it has on mainstream popular culture.

It is important for a hip hop outsider to be able to commit to a democratic classroom that values hip hop literacies and experiences in order for authentic learning to take place. For instance, Hill (2009) documented in his study how his co-teacher Mr. Colombo was a hip hop outsider facing challenges engaging with their ELA classroom. Mr. Colombo was a thirty-year-old White classroom teacher with four years of English teaching experience that originally expressed the desire to engage with the students using hip hop music and culture. When time came for Mr. Colombo to share with all of the students his experiences using hip hop pedagogy, he would retreat and only play the role as the observer (Hill, 2009). Even though Mr. Colombo established an expectation for the class to participate in the hip hop based activities, he hypocritically separated himself from the experience causing the class to shun him and treat him

with resentment. Hill (2009) noted how this marginalized Mr. Colombo from the class because he refused to participate in the dialogue around the hip hop texts and just acted as an observer who had little interest to genuinely learn from his students and their hip hop based narratives.

The cultural background of a classroom teacher matters when it comes to CRP instruction in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2016). It is important for the classroom teacher to openly express their own identity and culture in the classroom. An integral part of the studies conducted by hip hop scholars is the way hip hop music is a representation of the culture of its African-American people. Unfortunately, a disconnect often occurs when White teachers do not acknowledge culturally relevant pedagogies like hip hop in their classroom. It is important for these teachers to not make assumptions and blindly accept the stereotypes associated with students from other cultures because these students will feel marginalized and isolated leading to academic failure (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2002). When conducting my self-study, it will be important to identify my position as a White, male teacher in the classroom that accepts diverse cultures and the hip hop based texts that represent these cultures by demonstrating hip hop pedagogy.

My self-study focuses on the experiences of being a White, middle-class male in a hip hop friendly classroom. The majority of hip hop research has been ethnographic or case studies sharing the experiences of African-American hip hop insiders in an urban setting of a public school or community-based program. I venture into the experience of a hip hop outsider in a rural setting to learn the possibilities of expanding hip hop pedagogies beyond African-American led instruction in urban areas. Hall (2017) acknowledges that HHBE has an impactful presence in secondary ELA and Emdin (2016) and Love (2015) wants to continue to expand HHBE instruction throughout all grade levels and school subjects from K-12. In relevance to the

methods of my study, self-study research allows me to examine the possibilities and make note of the obstacles a secondary ELA hip hop based curriculum expansion may face in the current standardized educational climate. As much of it is important to bridge the demographic divide between the White teaching force and minority students, there are also benefits of narrowing the divide between hip hop insiders and White teaching force outsiders that are open to accepting hip hop pedagogy in their teaching instruction.

Summary

From the review of literature, the concept of a democratic classroom that incorporates dialogical teaching and hip hop pedagogy guides this study of the secondary English language arts classroom. The constant pressure that ELA teachers face from high stakes testing and national standards have them teaching in fear. One way to address these pressures and expectations is by utilizing a culturally relevant pedagogy like hip hop education that can be relatable to both teacher and students. By incorporating hip hop based instruction, the research suggests ELA teachers can find ways to engage their students, increase their academic skills, and discover their voice while building a critical consciousness. While the majority of hip hop based research focuses on African-American males in an urban setting, this self-study will pursue the impact of a White male teaching hip hop pedagogy in a rural ELA setting. Further research needs to be done on the benefits and challenges of a majority White, female teaching workforce utilizing hip hop based education in the secondary ELA classroom.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Introduction

The focus of my research is to utilize self-study to understand my teaching practice in my classroom using hip hop pedagogy with the goal of becoming a better English Language Arts teacher. In this chapter, I will explain how self-study research is an important and beneficial form of teacher action research. The following research questions guided my study.

- What happens when a hip hop outsider integrates hip hop pedagogy into a public school eleventh grade ELA classroom?
 - § How can I improve the integration of hip hop pedagogy into the ELA classroom in a standardized educational setting?
 - § How does self-study help me to understand how I implement HHBE pedagogy?
- How do high school ELA students respond to hip hop pedagogy?

In this chapter, I begin by defining the characteristics and rationale of a self-study and outlining the design process. I explain how reflection and using critical friends (fellow teaching colleagues) for collaboration are a crucial aspect to self-study research and then transition into describing the research site along with the participants. Next, I will explain the steps of self-study used for this research, including details concerning data collection and data analysis. The chapter will conclude with a section on trustworthiness & credibility, limitations of the study, and my positionality.

Research Method

Methods Overview: Self-study as a form of Teacher Action Research

I used methods of qualitative research, particularly self-study, which is a form of teacher action research. Teacher action research involves practitioners systematically looking for ways to address issues they engage with on a daily basis in an educational setting (Hendricks, 2013). Instead of choosing participants randomly or systematically, teachers work with the students and

colleagues they engage with on a daily basis in their schools. Teacher action research differs from research with a controlled context because it occurs in the teacher's classroom and is conducted with the goal of informing practice (Hendricks, 2013). The teacher action research cycle includes time periods of reflection and planning focusing on the "what" and "how" of classroom instruction, so the practitioner can put into place action strategies in their practice.

Defining Self-study

This project uses Samaras's (2011) cycle of self-reflection, which is an adapted subset of teacher action research. Self-study connects with action research because it represents an inquiry-oriented stance toward examining one's own practice and is driven by the desire to improve one's own practice (Ovens and Fletcher, 2014). This type of research allows teachers to implement their pedagogical strategies while analyzing the overall impact it has on student learning (Samaras, 2011). Self-study builds on the "necessity of a relationship between individual and collective cognition in teachers' professional development and the power of dialogue in building a community of engaged scholarship" (Samaras, 2011, pg. 3). This process of "self-study" (Hendricks, 2013, p.3) allows a teacher to find ways of identifying and analyzing teaching challenges which possibly can result in the increase of student learning in the classroom, focusing on "his or her intentions, methods, and desired outcomes" (Hendricks, 2013, p.3) as a part of the study's focus.

Foundational to self-study is the idea that people who are faced with a specific problem should be the people who are researching the problem and finding ways to improve their practice in an educational context (Samaras, 2011). When conducting a self-study, the educational setting should not be manipulated in any form and remain in its natural state in order to get an accurate understanding of the impact of teacher instruction. In addition, there is no set correct way of

conducting a self-study because various forms of qualitative research methods can be utilized depending on what aspect of teaching instruction is being researched (Samaras, 2011).

Practitioners benefit the most from self-study because they get an understanding of what works in the classroom and begin to ask questions of “why it works”; however, the implications in one classroom can also be informative to educational research as a whole since teachers provide important insights into their classroom practices. Meanwhile, self-study also addresses real-life problems, and this directly benefits the classroom teacher who is trying to improve his or her practice.

Self-study Fits as a Democratic and Dialogical Theoretical Orientation

Self-study relies heavily on reflection as a meaning-making process and depends on gaining a deeper understanding of the relationships and experiences the researcher has in an educational space (Samaras, 2011). For my study I utilized the educational concepts of Dewey’s democratic classroom and Fecho’s dialogical classroom because both rely on collaboration similarly to self-study methodology. Dewey (1964) was a proponent of reflection happening in interaction with others as a part of a democratic classroom in order to ensure the progress of the individual and students as a whole. Dialogical teaching by its very nature involves reflection and is grounded in research on the relationship between language, learning, thinking and understanding; therefore, the dialogical experiences that teachers have with students are valuable (Fecho, 2011; Samaras, 2011). Reflection is a valuable tool used in self-study and can be used to consider how a democratic learning environment works because the teacher can assure all students are given an equal opportunity to contribute and learn as a classroom community.

Characteristics of Self-study

Self-study research has five integral characteristics that contribute to defining the methodology (LaBoskey, 2004); they are as follows: 1. Self-initiated and focused 2. Improvement-aimed 3. Interactive and collaborative 4. Relies on the use of multiple, primarily qualitative data collection sources 5. Trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When utilizing these characteristics, self-study researchers can improve their teaching craft, validate their findings, and contribute to one's educational field. In this section, I will explain these integral characteristics.

Self-initiated and focused: In an educational classroom setting, self-study research begins with a teacher closely examining specific aspects of one's own instructional practice. It is important to identify "who" is completing the research and being studied (LaBoskey, 2004). In this instance, I am both the classroom teacher and the researcher; therefore, I will have to thoroughly explore my own positionality because my views are a determining factor of the findings of the study. Since I am the classroom teacher, I am considered the expert of the study as my actions are closely self-examined throughout the study. The primary goal is to get a thorough understanding of my teaching practice and then to improve. When it comes to helping my fellow ELA colleagues, hopefully, my findings may transcend just being a theoretical contribution to the field of research, but additionally, benefit other teachers and practitioners in applicable ways.

Improvement-aimed: The ultimate goal of self-study research is to improve one's practice implementation, reflection, and enhancement (Samaras, 2011). The theoretical lens of the study is a key element that has to be taken in consideration in order to get a thorough understanding of one's ELA instruction. Self-study is designed to take the teacher through cycles

of reflections in order to make improvements to teaching instruction. Self-study methodology can create breakthroughs in educational fields that can lead to the improvement of institutional practices as a result of analysis and reflection of one's teaching practice.

Interactive and collaborative: Collaboration among teachers and between teachers and students is a key component to self-study. When applying self-study in a classroom setting, analyzing interactions with students is key to getting a more comprehensive understanding of the impact a teacher has on students. During data collection, interactions with students are recorded and analyzed which leads to a reflexive collaboration with other teachers (critical friends), leading to insights to improve one's practice. Collaboration and interaction in a self-study provide the researcher with more varied and dynamic perspectives on their practice.

The use of multiple, primarily qualitative data collection sources: Self-study builds on qualitative traditions that incorporate multiple sources and is flexible based on the nature of the research project. As long as the data collection sources used are understood by the researcher and thoroughly explained for the reader, self-study research allows for a mix of qualitative data collection methods to gather and analyze data which allows the researchers to work within a flexible framework. This works well for my research. For example, I used the dialogue from class interaction and journal reflections as a main source to gather data.

Trustworthy: Trustworthiness in research addresses the question of whether the findings are clearly documented, transparent, and replicable. Trustworthiness is the way that a researcher can convince readers that their findings are worthwhile in the designated field (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln & Guba (1985) defined trustworthiness as having the characteristics of being credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable. Self-study uses critical friends as a form of collaboration to help assist the researcher to increase the study's credibility, which is determined

when readers engage with a similar experience and they recognize it (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Overall, in order for a self-study to be trustworthy, the researcher must clearly document their practices so the reader can thoroughly understand the reasoning behind the findings so it is both transferable and confirmable (LaBoskey, 2004). The researcher conducting the study needs to be transparent with the specific steps taken so it can be replicated if desired.

Significance of Self-study Teacher Research

Self-study is an important research method that can bridge discourse and understanding between researchers and practitioners. Practitioners, specifically classroom teachers, feel that much of the educational based research being conducted in academia was not representative of their day to day experiences. Academic researchers have excluded teacher's classroom experiences as they conducted research, resulting in teachers dismissing the research being conducted (Hendricks, 2013). As a result, academic research can devalue teacher judgement and can be disconnected to the everyday realities of a classroom teacher. Samaras & Freese (2006) criticized the futile practice of academic research being conducted outside of the classroom by "experts" in academia when the real professionals and experts were the teachers.

Such criticisms of academic research are the reason why self-study research in education appealed to teacher researchers because it gave them a voice in academic research. Self-study makes the teacher the researcher and practitioner. One of the main reasons why self-study increased in relevancy in the school setting was to improve teacher instruction. School improvement has resulted in the union of researchers and "action takers" through action research in order to bring about positive changes in the school setting (Hendricks, 2013, p.10). Self-study gives the teacher a voice as both the researcher and the educator to explore and contribute to both fields.

Hip hop Based Self-study for “Outsiders”

For my self-study, I focused on the culturally relevant pedagogical approach of my teaching practices; therefore, having a Hip Hop Based Education (Hill, 2009), or HHBE, framework helped me get a thorough understanding of a White hip hop “outsider.” This self-study contributes to understanding the advantages and challenges for other ELA hip hop “outsiders” who are willing to bring hip hop pedagogy into their classrooms. When utilized effectively, hip hop “outsiders” can use hip hop-based instruction to become agents of change in their classrooms (Ball, 2000; Wang, 2007) by getting their students to think critically of themes articulated through the music. In my literature review, I demonstrate how HHBE (Hill, 2009) is increasing in popularity for teachers that are not hip hop “insiders,” meaning there is a larger demographic of White, female and male teachers wanting to incorporate hip hop in their classroom. Since there is an interest for hip hop “outsiders” to utilize hip hop, this led to a great opportunity for a hip hop “outsider” like me, to conduct a culturally relevant pedagogical-based study that explored the teaching of hip hop in the ELA classroom. Mainly, self-study methodology presented opportunities of teacher-reflection and improvement. The reflection process moves an individual from a puzzling state to one of clarity through finding a possible explanatory solution to the problem (Dewey, 1910).

Description of the Research Site and Participants

The context of the study took place in an 11th grade ELA academic classroom at Forest Hills High School. All names and locations have pseudonyms to protect the identity of the students. My research participants included one English class of 34 students as well as three critical friends that taught in the English department. In this section, I will provide information about the school and student class demographics.

School and Access

The study took place at Forest Hills High School in a rural town located in the south of the United States. The total enrollment equals 2,200 students and 140 teachers. The breakdown of the school includes roughly 61% White, 22% African-American, 11% Hispanic, 2.5% Asian, and 4% other. Thirty-two percent of students are classified as having free or reduced lunch. The school was chosen as a convenience sample because it's where I have taught for 17 years. The self-study focused on one of my 11th grade academic ELA classes during the length of a semester. The demographics of the class was representative of the makeup of the school. During the study, I worked to protect the identities of the students.

Student and Class Demographics

The specific class used is an academic English Language Arts section that consists of 34 students. Currently my classroom consists of 34 students: 12 students are female (one student is White, seven students are African-American, three students are Hispanic, and one student is Asian); 22 students are male (11 students are White, eight students are African-American, two students are Hispanic, and one is Asian). The class had 65% minority students and 35% Caucasian. I chose this group of students because it was a diverse class that would give me a transparent understanding of my position as a hip hop “outsider” instructing in an academic ELA classroom because of how the students bring unique cultural perspectives to the classroom. The diverse demographics reflected what an ELA academic class typically consisted of during my tenure at the school; therefore, documenting this class reflects an authentic teaching experience at my high school. The class also presented convenient access since it was one of my classes assigned for me to teach by my administration during the semester.

Self-study Design Cycle

The research cycle that I implemented resembled Samaras's (2011) Self-study research approach. My self-study included four steps that were completed to make up one complete cycle. There were six cycles completed in all. Below is a diagram (*Figure 3.1 Self-study Design Cycle*) of the general process followed to conduct the study. For this particular study, there were four different recursive steps.

Step #1) Lesson Instruction: I composed and instructed a lesson centering around hip hop music. I taught six, one to two class periods of a lesson that reflected the major objectives of the overall unit.

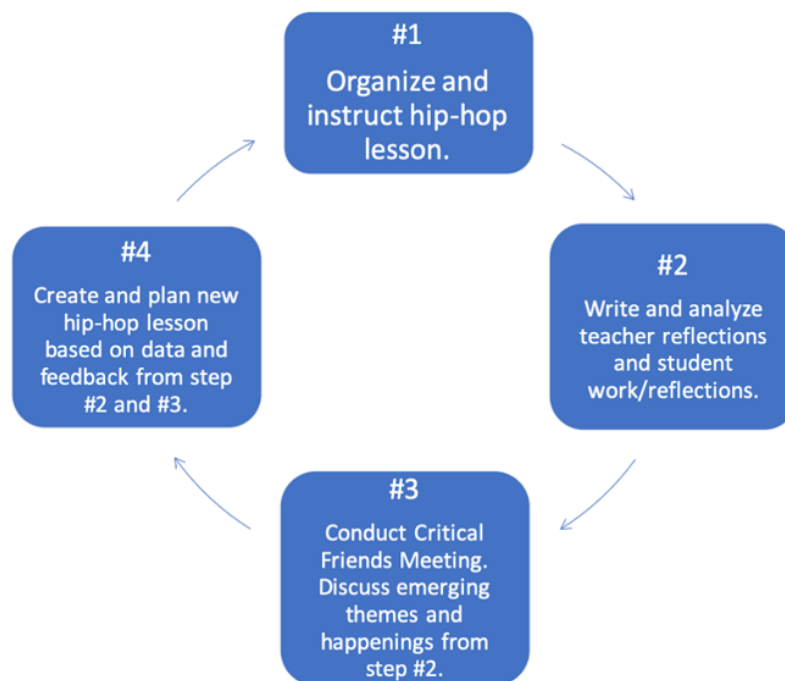
Step #2) Reflection: I wrote and analyzed my teacher and student reflections/work along with my classroom observations to identify common themes through a coding process. During this second stage, I identified both strengths and concerns from conducting the lesson in order to address them as I began to plan for my next hip hop-based lesson. I personally completed a reflection on my experiences before, during, and after the lesson was taught. I also had the students complete assignments and reflections based on the lesson. After the reflections and assignments were finished, I entered the data into Atlas Ti and began coding the sources to find insightful conclusions.

Step #3) Critical Friends Meeting: I inquired with critical friends about the strengths and concerns from my reflections and experiences from instructing my hip hop lesson. I had 20 minute meetings with one of my three critical friends, where I shared my experiences from teaching the unit and asked for insights to consider for the next hip hop-based lesson. I was able to ask for feedback and confirm recurring themes from the coding process and asked for advice dealing with any challenges faced or ways to reiterate positive learning experiences in future

lessons. For example, during one critical friend meeting, I shared how during the analysis of the hip hop songs students regularly identified examples of how repetition emphasized themes from the songs and my critical friend suggested the students should emulate repetition in their own hip hop song for the next lesson, which I eventually applied to the assignment. I met with a critical friend to share my major takeaways from conducting the lesson along with reviewing and coding data from step #2. This meeting was recorded and also coded for major themes and occurrences to help plan for the next lesson of the unit.

Step #4) Data Analysis: Finally, I analyzed the data through an “improved learning” (Samaras, 2011) lens. This stage involved reflecting on the strengths and shortcomings of the hip hop lesson, determined from the data gathered and analyzed from conducting the lesson. I would finalize each cycle by taking feedback from critical friends and the improved learning phase to plan the next hip hop lesson (Samaras, 2011). This process was repeated on six separate occasions throughout the semester.

Figure 3.1 Self-study Design Cycle



Curricular Focus

I conducted six lessons that were integrated throughout the school year. This allowed me enough time to create the lesson, analyze the data, meet with critical friends, and then create a new lesson. The following descriptions summarize my hip hop lessons which were implemented across the 2019-2020 school year.

Lesson One: Slave Spirituals. My first hip hop lesson involved studying slave spirituals while reading the novella “The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass.” First, we analyzed the different aspects of the songs including the structure and repetition used throughout. We then looked at the different themes that were repeated among five different slave spirituals-the main theme was the desire to acquire freedom. Next, we looked at a modern day hip hop song by Kids See Ghosts called “Freee (Ghost Town Pt.2)” that emulated the same structure of the slave spirituals along with the major theme of acquiring their mental freedom away from the strictures

of society. Students were then asked to compare and contrast the rhetoric and themes of both types of songs and write a personal reflection on how the songs resonated with them personally.

Lesson Two: Personal Narrative. My second hip hop lesson involved having students listen to several hip hop songs that described a personal experience in a narrative format. The class analyzed each song and documented the various forms of rhetoric the song writers used to share his/her experience through song. Students annotated the lyrics and made notes of examples like metaphors and symbols that the artists would use. Next, students were asked to reflect on what songs resonated with them and what approach they would take when writing their own memoir. This student reflection was used to process the songs they listened to while beginning to prewrite for the memoir. Students were even asked to complete a prewriting that included a hip hop-based verse to help set the stage for the memoir that they planned to write.

Lesson Three: Writing the Counterclaim. This lesson involved the art of persuasion and teaching students how to write a counterclaim. This unit focused on how hip hop songs can utilize rhetoric to make an argument involving a political or personal cause. We read Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and then listened to hip hop songs that make similar political statements like Public Enemy's "Fight the Power." Both texts addressed the inequalities and unjust laws in a society. We analyzed the rhetoric and explored how hip hop artists use these songs to form an argument. When learning how to write a counterclaim, we analyzed a clip from the film *8-Mile* that stars the hip hop artist Eminem. The scene was used to demonstrate the proper way to conduct a counterclaim in argumentative writing because it logically disproves the opposition's strongest argument. Students watched the scene and wrote a reflection on how Eminem conducts the perfect counterclaim against his opponent in a rap-battle.

Students then used similar rhetorical techniques to outline their own counterclaim for a writing assignment that featured an argumentative prompt.

Lesson Four: Research Essay. The research essay lesson was a HHE modification I made on the required research essay assignment that all juniors enrolled in ELA write. Building off of lesson three, students analyzed hip hop songs that address the current state of the war on drugs in America. Students listened to, annotated, and analyzed the hip hop artist's argument addressing the impact of the war on drugs in America. The research essay requires students to analyze several texts and build an argument whether they would like to continue, reform, or end the war on drugs that has been enforced since 1971 in the United States. The purpose is for students to practice synthesizing different types of texts in order to form one common argument while citing different types of texts. Students were encouraged to utilize hip hop songs to synthesize a concrete argument for their research essay.

Lesson Five: American Dream Podcast. During this lesson, students were asked to create a short podcast on a song and artist of their choice to analyze. Students selected a song that represented the American Dream and analyzed the artist's interpretation of that dream. Students worked in groups and selected a song that addressed the current state of the American Dream. Students studied and analyzed the song's lyrics and recorded a podcast to highlight the artist's interpretation of the song.

Lesson Six: American Dream Song. For the final lesson of the semester, students reflected back on the school year and wrote and performed a song for their final project. The prompt asked, "What is your American Dream?" Students worked in groups and had the option to work alone to write a one to two verse song defining his/her American Dream. The students had the option of recording a video of them performing or recording in front of the class. During

the unit, we had examined several different hip hop artist's versions of the American Dream and wanted students to create their own vision of what it meant to them through song. This was an opportunity to synthesize all of the hip hop music we listened to and create their own type of song. Students sampled and even created their own beat to the song.

Data Collection

Data collection included 1) my teaching reflections 2) student reflections and assignments 3) transcripts from meeting with critical friends 4) classroom lesson plans and artifacts. I used these four sources of data and created an audit trail to increase my study's trustworthiness and confirm the major findings and themes of my data (Samaras, 2011). The audit trail documented the date and type of data source, so I could go back to compare and contrast the different data sets that I collected throughout the data collection process. The audit trail documents the data collection process in a transparent manner in order to document how I came to my findings (Samaras, 2011). In order, the main forms of data collection included:

Teacher Reflections: The teacher reflections were a guide through my research process. In my teacher reflections, I recorded notes of artifacts, interactions with students (formal class discussion and informal one on one conversations), and personal reflections about my experiences (Stringer, 1999). The reflections included observations and insights that I made about instruction including class discussions, insightful, informal interactions with students, and conversations with critical friends. This teacher reflection was kept throughout the research study and included 18 entries.

Each day that I instructed a hip hop lesson, I wrote reflective notes in my teacher journal. I used rich, thick description (Creswell, 2013) to document everyday occurrences in the classroom. There were also sections of interpretations where I included personal reflections of

my thoughts and ideas about what I encountered daily through data collection. Each entry included two sections: 1) the descriptive recording of what happened during the school day and 2) an interpretive section of where I openly reflected with my own thoughts and feelings on those occurrences during the day. For example, this included analyzing the meaning behind a conversation between two students or a conversation that I had with a critical friend that provoked a change in future instruction. I recorded questions that I had and made notes of any events that I found confusing or unexpected that may have needed to be addressed in future lessons. The journal included a balance of both description and interpretation in order to get a well-rounded reflection of data.

Student Reflections and Assignments. After each hip hop lesson, I assigned students to reflect on any personal connections and/or rhetorical, thematic observations of the hip hop songs included in the lesson. The format consisted of having students reflect on writing prompts where they made observations and submitted the assignment to be graded. The reflection prompts helped me understand the research questions and focused on using hip hop pedagogy for classroom engagement, thematic unit connections, and skill development.

In addition, various types of assignments were given to the students during the lessons utilizing hip hop pedagogy. All assignments were created around the county's guidelines under the curriculum framework. These assignments consisted of comprehension questions that focused on how rhetoric was used to convey the major themes during the song. Students were also asked to write argumentative essays (concise and thoroughly developed) synthesizing the hip hop songs that were listened to in class. The assignments were collected, graded, and used to collect data surrounding hip hop literacies the students were exposed to in the classroom during the semester lesson.

Critical Friends Meetings. I met regularly with critical friends for feedback after conducting my hip hop-based lessons. For each session, I had a 20 minute meeting with one critical friend, where I shared my experiences from teaching the unit and asked for insights to take into consideration as I planned my next hip hop-based lesson. Specifically, I asked my critical friend about recurring themes from the coding process and asked for advice dealing with any challenges faced or ways to reiterate positive learning experiences in future lessons. For example, during one of my first critical friends meetings with Don, he suggested that I should have my students annotate hip hop texts similarly to the way students annotate literature. Don recognized the benefits of analyzing hip hop texts in the same way that we analyze fiction and nonfiction texts in my classroom. During the planning of my next lesson, I made sure students annotated the hip hop text and completed a thorough rhetorical analysis to reflect what they were accustomed to do with other texts. Through the advice of my critical friend, a higher-level of rigor was brought to my next hip hop lesson that increased the effectiveness of my teaching.

In order to make sure I did not overlook any instructional advice from my critical friend, I audio-recorded the meeting sessions and then transcribed the conversations. After I transcribed the conversations, I developed major themes (Creswell, 2013). This step was followed by recording my major takeaways from my critical friends meetings in my teacher reflections where I documented throughout the study. The final step included transcribing the critical friends meetings' audio and tying together the different pieces of data into clusters that capture a general concept or theme (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Three different critical friends were used with different types of backgrounds, all experienced teachers.

Included below is a description of the individuals I was able to use as critical friends in my study to provide feedback on the hip hop lessons I conducted. The teachers had different backgrounds and a varying amount of experience of using hip hop in the classroom.

Table 3.1. Critical Friends Demographic

Name	Race/Sex	Years Teaching	Level English Taught	The amount of hip hop pedagogy used?
Don	White/Male	28 years	All Levels: 9, 10, 11, 12. Academic, Honors, AP.	No. Has never used hip hop pedagogies in class, but is not against it.
Meg	White/Female	22 Years	All Levels: 9. Academic, Honors, AP	Yes, sparingly. Desires to utilize more hip hop literacies in her teaching.
Bobby	White/Male	20 Years	All Levels: 10 and 11. Academic Honors AP.	Yes, uses hip hop pedagogy occasionally.

Classroom lesson artifacts. Each lesson was planned using texts that met the requirements of the county's curriculum. Hip hop is a suitable text because it aligns with complementing the major themes of the anchor texts from the county's curriculum. For example, 2Pac's "Changes" addresses the same themes of inequality and poverty as Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed* and can be used as a text to complement the anchor text. The lesson plans included a rationale of the strategies used and an explanation of how it falls in line with the county's curricular framework as a planned lesson using hip hop pedagogy. I shared significant artifacts (See Appendix). These built a well-rounded picture of each lesson that was taught using hip hop pedagogy.

Table 3.2. The Description of Artifacts Distributed and Utilized during the Semester.

This is a description of the data collected and coded for the self-study along with the date.

Artifact	Description	Date Collected
Spiritual Song/ Hip hop Song analysis	Rhetorical/Thematic Analysis *Student Write: Essay	September 9
Narrative Writing (Hip hop song)	Personal hip hop Narrative *Student Write: Hip hop Song	October 10
8-Mile Counterclaim Activity	Question Analysis *Student Write: Short Answer Essays	December 3
Student Reflection	Juice Wrld Passing Reflection *Student Write	December 9
W.O.D Research Essay	Argumentative Research Essay *Student Write: Research Essay	December 13
American Dream Song Analysis Podcast	Scripted analysis of song for Podcast *Student Performed Podcast	December 16
American Dream Song	Performed Song about American Dream *Student Performed Song	January 15
Student Reflections	Journal Entries (6-8 sentences) *Student Write Various Topics	Semester Long

Data Analysis

Self-study occurs as an iterative process as one collects data (Samaras, 2011).

Furthermore, self-study is a flexible and recursive process that includes revisiting earlier steps of data collection, reexamining data, and comparing incoming data to data collected earlier in the research process. My data analysis process included writing reflective passages of my experiences, writing codes and memos, clustering, noting patterns and themes, and building a logical chain of evidence or audit trail (Creswell, 2013). Overall, the data analysis process for evaluating my self-study using hip hop pedagogy in the 11th grade ELA classroom included the

utilization of critical friends, an analytic coding process, explanation of validity and reliability, and ended with my positionality.

Self-study and Critical Friends

In this study, critical friends were an important part of the research design. Critical friends are “trusted colleagues” who the researcher relies on to provide “support and validation of their research to gain new perspectives in understanding and reframing of their interpretations” (Samaras, 2011, p. 25). They “mediate, provoke, and support” new understandings while supporting the teacher researcher emotionally and intellectually (Samaras, 2011, p. 25). The most supportive critical friend critiques the research study being conducted and gives open, honest feedback while being completely transparent with observations (Hendricks, 2013).

I used critical friends to provide feedback of the major themes and findings from the teaching experiences recorded in my teacher reflections. After the class lesson was conducted, I coded the data and documented recurring themes and insightful takeaways in both teacher and student based data. I presented these findings and my critical friends provided feedback and perspective to the hip hop-based lessons throughout the study. I had three different critical friends that I met with during the semester. I met with one of my critical friends, Don, three times; one critical friend, Bobby, twice; and one critical friend, Meg, once. The meeting with critical friends occurred after each of the six hip hop-based lessons in class in order to analyze the happenings and give a transparent interpretation of the data to take into consideration for the duration of the study. Future hip hop centered lessons were constructed based on the feedback given by critical friends with the intention to improve instruction. I documented the feedback from my critical friends and reflected on my experiences of meeting with them for insights, and

then applied those ideas during future lessons in my ELA classroom. This process was repeated six times throughout the study to get a well-rounded understanding of using hip hop-based instruction in ELA.

These meetings were held in one of our classrooms after our department meeting, after school. The meetings lasted twenty minutes and I provided my critical friend with the most common themes and insightful observations so they could have an understanding of the data during the meeting. The meeting ended by brainstorming and outlining the next hip hop-based lesson based on analyzing the feedback from the previous lesson.

Coding

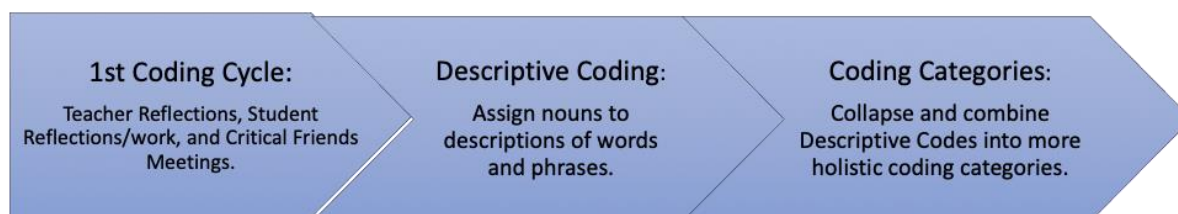
I engaged in two cycles of coding to analyze my research; this process led to the development of six major themes. The process of coding involves “aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code” (Creswell, 2013, p.184). After each stage of collecting data, I coded all journals, assignments, and transcripts so I could get a well-rounded understanding of my self-study. I began by “winnowing” (Creswell, 2013) my data which involved disregarding any information that was unimportant and could possibly lead to data overload (Miles et al., 2014). I then started coding to reflect on my work, paying attention to any repeated patterns of “statements, behaviors, and actions” across my data sets (Samaras, 2011). For the first cycle coding, I conducted a descriptive coding process and the second cycle coding included collapsing the codes into themes as described in the next sections.

First Cycle Coding Methods

The first cycle of analysis included a descriptive coding process that involved noting any information that was relevant to my research questions and theoretical framework (Miles et al., 2014). Descriptive coding is the process used when single words, usually nouns, or phrases are organized into themed topics denoted by words and short phrases. This form of coding allowed me to make note of the information relevant to my research questions and begin placing the original descriptive codes in larger coding categories (Samaras, 2011) that shared similar qualities. Coding categories are used to help sort descriptive codes into groups with similar qualities to make data analysis more manageable. For example, one of the descriptive codes during the first initial coding cycle was observing students “nod head” and also “sing along” to the hip hop song being played. I would then collapse the code of “nod head” and “sing along” into a larger category of “physical student engagement” where there were several other initial descriptive codes. These coding categories allowed me to provide an organized system of structure to analyze my data with precision.

As for using software to help organize my coding process, throughout the coding cycles, I utilized the ATLAS.Ti program where I identified codes and made note of the similarities that I discovered digitally. The program helped me label, gather, and organize the codes, categories, and finally, themes during the duration of the data analysis portion of my self-study.

Figure 3.2: First Cycle of Coding



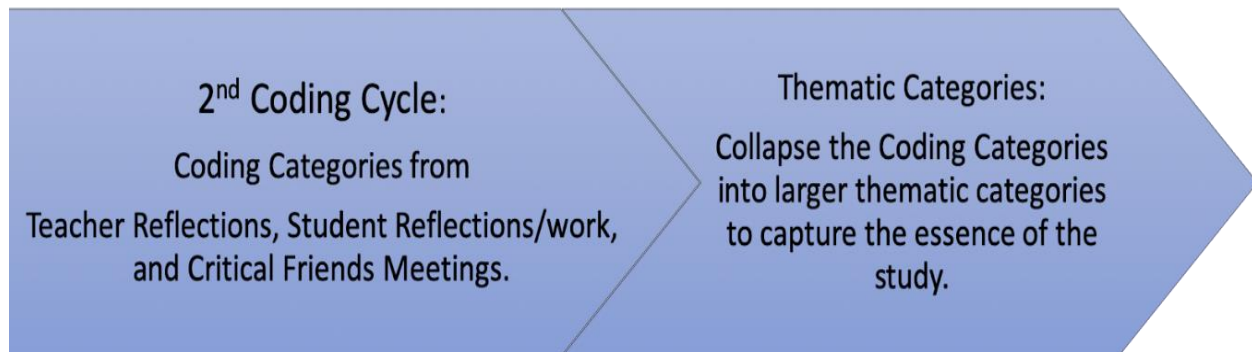
Connecting Codes to Themes

During the second cycle of coding, I reevaluated all of the descriptive codes and the holistic coding categories they were assigned under to make sure all codes were accounted for during the first initial cycle coding process. The forming of coding categories eventually would lead to the beginning of forming themes. Next, I began the process of collapsing these coding categories into larger and better-titled themes (Samaras, 2011). Themes are “broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (Samaras, 2011, p. 186). Similar to grouping codes into categories, there was overlap and redundancy in categories that could be discarded when creating themes to write up in the findings. During my critical friends meetings, I clearly identified my research questions to my colleague to help guide me through the process of collapsing my categories. Throughout the entire coding process, I shared the emerging categories with my critical friends to help me decipher what findings in my study concisely answered my initial research questions. There were times where my critical friends would validate and confirm my ideas and this was reassuring, but the most constructive observations were made by my critical friends when I overlooked or missed an enlightening occurrence from my data. For example, one of my critical friends questioned why I was not more open when sharing my hip hop-based plans with our English department. Her observation made me reflect on why I was hesitant to share and this contributed to my findings. This assisted me in identifying the major themes of my self-study.

After forming the final themes, it is important to identify 1) what is not said, 2) expose false distinctions, 3) address disruptions and contradictions or places in the study that do not make sense, and 4) focus on aspects that are unique to my study (Creswell, 2013). This will

contribute to chapter 5 of the study where I identified implications and future directions of my research.

Figure 3.3: Second Cycle of Coding



Credibility and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an important aspect of qualitative research, especially self-study research, because the researcher is at the center of the study as the instrument, collecting and analyzing the data (Samaras, 2011). One of the major determining factors that makes a self-study trustworthy is credibility. The researcher should work to build credibility in their study in order to “assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings” through extensive time spent in the field, the “detailed thick description”, and the “closeness of the researcher to participants in the study” to add to the quality and accuracy of the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 250). When the credibility of a study increases through triangulation (using multiple sources of data), the trustworthiness of a study increases. A qualitative researcher in a self-study is the focus of the study and the human element is a main aspect of the research; yet it is still important to consider trustworthiness through credibility.

Credibility is a more specific component of trustworthiness and is when readers can recognize the experience in the study (Creswell, 2013). An aspect of credibility that I used during the study included dialogical conversations with critical friends. I used my critical friends

in order to create a *prism effect*, meaning a different angle on research because he/she is removed from the extensive research process (Samaras, 2011). Specifically, my critical friends helped me identify insights about my research I would have not been able to notice alone. For instance, I would meet with my critical friends and share my experiences with the lesson and identify the major takeaways and questions that I had about my experience. It was important to share all of my findings, questions, and observations with my critical friends and engage in dialogue in order to gather a well-rounded understanding of my study and create credibility and trustworthiness.

I collected several different aspects of data, stored the data, and then transcribed all of the data. All of the student work that was collected was stored onto the laptop where it was saved under pseudonyms. The critical friends meetings were audio-recorded and later transcribed for coding. I used ATLAS.Ti to download all of my data sources onto my laptop where the information was password-protected. The data was then organized by teacher reflections, student reflections/assignments, critical friends meetings, and artifacts. Each one of these data sets were saved under a folder in the program and labeled by the type of data source and the date it was created.

Triangulation

In triangulation, “researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence...to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2013). For this study, I used triangulation, which involves gathering data from several different data sources rather than depending on just one source. Through triangulation, I was able to view my instruction and its impact from different perspectives and use multiple sources and data collection methods to confirm my findings (Merriam, 2016). In order to gather a well-rounded understanding of my ELA instruction for my study, I utilized

triangulation by collecting data from different perspectives to eventually discover major themes and insights in my study.

Positionality Statement

Because this is a self-study, it is important to define my positionality. When I first brought hip hop into my classroom early in my career, it was for listening pleasure and to gain “props” or cool points rather than for productive culturally relevant instruction. It was not until I began my graduate program here at NCSU that I became aware of the possibilities HHBE could present my students. The first aspect that I needed to openly acknowledge with my students is that I am a White, middle-class male. Since I come from a place of privilege, I have to come to terms with these privileges. This continues to be a process as I use hip hop-based instruction in my classroom and learn from enlightening dialogue with my students. Since hip hop pedagogy engages with themes of power and oppression, it is important that I openly acknowledge this with my students. Taking into account power, privilege and my identity is important as a self-study researcher.

I have to also take in consideration my biases as a White male in my early forties, enrolled in a doctoral program in teacher education and learning sciences with a focus on secondary ELA. I acknowledge that these biases can often go unnoticed, so I try to engage with my fellow ELA teachers, critical friends, to help me detect the biases I may have overlooked. I have always been a believer that everyone has the right to learn and can learn. More often than not, I have to find ways to communicate and relate to my students to build trust and let them know their education is my top priority. Literacies like hip hop engage certain students who value the culture in their out-of-school life. Creating a democratic classroom that welcomes out-of-school literacies like hip hop presents opportunities to connect with students around the texts

that impact their lives. When teachers make learning relevant, students and teachers are given an opportunity to grow.

I have spent my entire teaching career at my alma mater, the location where I plan to conduct my study. Even though the town has grown from 6,000 residents to 42,000 residents during the past thirty years, I enjoy teaching there because I feel like it still has traces of the small town that I grew up in. Located on the outskirts of the second biggest county in the state, it is a rural school that has a diverse group of students. The high school is generally well-respected in the community which has always revered teachers for putting their students first. Visitors notice the supportive environment of our school. It also attracts veteran teachers from all over the nation; these teachers have noted the quality of our students who, for the most part, are eager to learn and improve their education.

Growing up, even though we were not nearly as diverse as a population, I recall feeling the most accomplished in school when I was allowed the freedom to connect and learn from my fellow classmates in the classroom. The teachers that have influenced me the most are the ones that allowed the class members to engage with one another and learn to become empathetic with others. I found this is the best way for me to come to self-discovery and I hope to offer that to my students.

My educational philosophy is strongly influenced from my experience in high school. I value exposing my students to new ways of thinking similar to the way those teachers who taught me did. When it came to changing careers to become a teacher, I chose secondary English because of the endless opportunities to incorporate a positive impact on the lives of students like my teachers did. So, when I look back at my early and current schooling, I feel it reflects the teacher I am today. Since becoming a doctoral student, I have formed a strong foundation of my

educational philosophy and am able to articulate my beliefs. I could only hope to instill the knowledge and leadership into my current ELA students the way that my teachers and professors have instilled in me during my journey as a lifelong educator.

Summary

In this chapter, I have explained the qualitative methodology for a self-study which was designed to investigate a hip hop outsider's instruction in an ELA classroom. The ELA class selected was a convenient sample of where I have taught English for 17 years. The data collection for this study involved: student and teacher reflections, student assignments, critical friends meetings, and artifacts. The coding process included a cycle of descriptive coding and then I collapsed those codes into coding categories. I then took the coding categories and placed those into six themes. I finished the chapter explaining how the study maintained credibility and trustworthiness along with my positionality. The next chapter will discuss my findings from the self-study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings from a qualitative self-study examining my instruction of hip hop pedagogy in an 11th grade ELA classroom in a large district in a rural town in the southern United States. The purpose of this self-study was to examine my experiences integrating hip hop-based literacies throughout the teaching semester. The chapter includes findings from my teaching reflections, student reflections and assignments, critical friends' meetings, classroom lesson plans and student work. One major goal of self-study research is to find ways to improve instruction to better my teaching practice (Samaras, 2011). Over a semester's time, I collected, triangulated, and analyzed data from different resources to build on my study. Using Miles et al. (2014) method of first and second-cycle of coding, I collapsed the data into six themes to answer my research questions. My questions are as follows:

- What happens when a hip hop outsider integrates hip hop pedagogy in a public school eleventh grade ELA classroom?
 - § How can I improve the integration of hip hop pedagogy in the ELA classroom in a standardized educational setting?
 - § How does self-study help me to understand how I implement HHBE pedagogy?
- How do high school ELA students respond to hip hop pedagogy?

From the result of data analysis, four themes emerged from the first research question and sub-questions and two themes emerged from the second research question. The themes and related subthemes selected in this chapter are the result of the important findings from conducting a self-study centered on hip hop-based instruction.

Research Question #1: What happens when a hip hop outsider integrates hip hop pedagogy in a public school eleventh grade ELA classroom?

Subquestions include:

-How can I improve the integration of hip hop pedagogy in the ELA classroom in a standardized educational setting?

-How does self-study help me to understand how I implement HHBE pedagogy?

Four themes answer the first research question along with the sub-questions in my self-study. First, hip hop pedagogy presents opportunities to achieve standardized objectives. Second, I address how hip hop pedagogy can overcome ELA instructional fear while developing teacher identity. Third, I address how I build relationships with students around hip hop music to increase engagement. Finally, I will address how hip hop-based instruction changed me professionally. In the first section of my findings, I will address these themes and subthemes to answer the first research question.

Theme #1: The Power of Using Hip Hop Pedagogy to Achieve Standardized Objectives

Hip hop pedagogy was a powerful way to accomplish standardized county and state objectives, which was a significant finding in my research. One way to ensure that students learn is to empower teachers. ELA teachers should have professional autonomy for making decisions that benefit their students (Dewey, 1916, Kinloch, 2005). Through conversations with my critical friends during my study I came to the conclusion that placing restrictions on teachers and requiring a scripted curriculum results in limiting teacher autonomy. The teachers that I engaged with for my study feel these restrictions and emphasis on high test scores have ELA teachers teaching out of fear (Fecho, 2011). A way for teachers to overcome this fear is being able to bring in relatable literacies that students can engage with like hip hop texts. One reason this was significant was that I approached my teaching by integrating authentic learning, but often felt the pressure to teach based on objectives and goals set outside of my classroom. Authentic learning

entails teaching skills and subject matter that benefits students beyond the standards and end of the year test, which they can apply to everyday life (Kinloch, 2005). My findings imply ELA teachers can use hip hop pedagogy to teach authentically while simultaneously instilling students with the required skills necessary to perform well in a standardized setting (Kirkland 2007, 2008).

From this theme of how I can use hip hop pedagogy to address standards and requirements, I found that there were two subthemes: 1. Analyzing hip hop texts can reflect authentic learning while also addressing the county, state and national standards; 2. The next subtheme discusses how hip hop pedagogy can be utilized to address the state ELA writing standard of argumentative writing. In this section, I will elaborate on these points and show how the data illustrate these findings.

Utilizing Literary Analysis for Hip Hop Texts

Hip hop texts can be used for developing complex literary analysis with secondary students. For instance, a breakthrough with hip hop-based texts in my class occurred when students applied the same literary analysis techniques they used for preparing for the end-of-the-year test passages during the semester to the hip hop songs we listened to and analyzed in the classroom. Students gained a well-rounded understanding of the rhetorical purpose and themes of the hip hop songs that we studied using the same literary analysis techniques we applied for poetry and nonfiction texts. This is apparent in a conversation that I had with one of my students during our first hip-hop based unit, Devin, when he came to the realization that we can annotate a hip hop text just like the poems we analyzed earlier in the semester:

Devin: "Do you mean I can read and break down this Kudi song, just like we read those poems?"

Me: “Absolutely. Same annotation technique and everything. You can use SOAPStone method just like we did with poetry.”

Devin: “Bet.” (Teaching Reflection Notes)

In this conversation, my student, Devin realizes that a hip hop song and a poem have striking structural similarities, and he was able to articulate his awareness in our conversation (Duncan Andrade & Morrell, 2002). His insight reflects how the same literary analysis strategies can be used when analyzing hip hop texts as well as canonical texts and it was significant that this was a student-driven realization.

My own understanding of how hip hop can be used to integrate literary analysis was supported by my conversation with Devin and further interactions with my critical friends. Devin showed me how analyzing hip hop lyrics can enhance reading comprehension skills - it was clear that he was building his understanding through annotating, applying comprehension techniques, and analyzing the theme. However, it was not until I had a meeting with one of my critical friends earlier in the semester that I recognized the benefits of annotating hip hop music as a stand-alone text.

Prior to my discussion with Devin above, an observation that I made from my students after the first hip hop-based lesson was that not only did the songs have the same rhetorical appeals as the poems we had read and analyzed to help prepare for the end of the semester state exam, the songs also had similar themes. Students were used to annotating these passages and poems for figurative language and theme, and hip hop texts provided the same opportunity along with having an entertaining quality. My goal for my first hip hop-based lesson was to bring in modern day hip hop songs to compare and contrast how the sound and tone of hip hop had evolved from slave spirituals in the late 1700s. During the lesson, I played some of the slave

spirituals that had been recorded by modern-day known musicians to be analyzed by students for their rhetorical and thematic purposes. Afterwards, I played modern day hip hop songs to compare the rhetorical and thematic purposes. Some of the observations the class made included identifying how the rapper used different types of rhetoric to convey the purpose of the modern day hip hop song.

Being able to identify the rapper's purpose behind using repetition was similar to students identifying how poets used repetition in poems (Duncan Andrade & Morrell, 2002). Students were utilizing the same literary analysis techniques taught from earlier in the semester to analyze hip hop songs. Devin was not the only student to make insightful rhetorical observations during the lesson; this was evident when Amaru identified the importance of repetition in the hip hop song:

Amaru: Some of the similarities are in the style, they are both repetitions. They are repetitions because they both continue/ repeatedly explain how they feel. They always repeat similar lyrics over and over, and it probably is to make a statement about what they are trying to say. They are also similar because "freeeee" and slave spirituals had people preventing them from being free. They were also being locked up, held against their will. The raps were similar, in which, they we're relating more to a society rather than an institution. They are both showing their hurt/ pain. (Student Assignment. 9.20.19)

The speakers were repeating lines in the chorus to emphasize their struggle and this was evident to Amaru. Amaru made connections to the similarities of the style and themes of the songs, focusing on the repetition and how repetition emphasized the pain of the speakers.

Similarly, a common ELA comprehension instructional approach asks students to identify the author's purpose by analyzing symbols in a text. Amaru identified how the reference to "chains" in the hip hop song and "chains" in the spiritual song both held a significant symbolic meaning. Through a detailed analysis, Amaru identified how the "chains" both symbolized oppressive forces but were different in context; the "chains" in the spiritual songs being the

institution of enslaved people and the “chains” referenced in the hip hop song were how African Americans still face discrimination and inequality in modern day society (*Student Assignment. 9.20.19*). By using the test prep strategy of identifying figurative symbols, Amaru was able to convey the hip hop artist’s thematic message for the song. From grading Amaru’s responses, it was evident from his student work and contributions to class discussion that he could apply the same analytical strategies used for test prep passages to analyze the hip hop text.

My meetings with critical friends further supported my connection between standards and hip hop lessons. During a discussion with one of my critical friends, Don suggested: “If you have the lyrics in the form of a printed text, you could use a strategy like SOAPSTone (Speaker, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject, Tone) to analyze the song like a passage. Have students annotate like they have been doing with poetry. Why not?” (Teacher Reflection. 9/3/19). Reflecting on the conversation, this approach to engaging with the hip hop text seemed obvious, but after the conversation it occurred to me the parallel method of approaching the song was similar to the way we had approached other test prep exercises. I took Don’s advice and had my students analyze the hip hop we listened to with the SOAPSTone analysis strategy to use the same approach we did during our weekly test prep passages; it was one of many ways I was able to cover the standards and prepare students for their standardized tests but also focus on HHBE.

When reviewing the benefits and challenges of the hip hop and slave spiritual lesson, one positive aspect, that both my critical friend Don and I agreed on, is the value of hip hop literacies and how they can be interchanged with some of the canonical texts that we use on a daily basis in the ELA classroom to reveal a similar objective (Alexander-Smith, 2004; Dimitriadis, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Morrell, Duncan & Andrade, 2002). Students were analyzing the literary devices and rhetorical language to convey the purpose of the song (Morrell, Duncan & Andrade,

2002; Alexander-Smith, 2004). I have always been committed to teaching students how to build their reading comprehension skills by using different strategies of literary analysis like SOAPSTone. Students are not only building an understanding of the standardized objectives critical to improving reading comprehension skills but also sharpening an awareness of the pop culture they consume (Kirkland, 2007, 2008).

Hip Hop Addresses the ELA Objective Standards

Another important subtheme of this finding is how HHP was used to address ELA county objective standards. This was evident in the excerpts below, where the students were focusing on how the modern day hip hop song “Freeee (Ghost Town pt. 2)” had shared rhetorical appeals with the slave spirituals but had taken on a thematic meaning of its own. Monie acknowledge how the song “Freeee (Ghost Town pt. 2)” stays true to its musical roots, but how in modern day society, African-Americans struggle with a mental prison that society has a tendency to create:

Monie: After hundreds of years, music still keeps its roots. The song Free and old Black spirituals have many things in common to link them to each other. For example, both heavily use repetition to stress a main point. Both also have the meaning that somebody wants to be free from the shackles they are held down by. In Free, they are talking about being locked in a mental prison and old African American folk songs talk about being imprisoned in slave plantations. After long periods of time things stick and leave a legacy in the music that comes in the future.(Student Assignment. 9.20.19)

In this excerpt, Monie, an African-American female, compares the two forms of oppression expressed in the songs while simultaneously addressing the county ELA objective of how generational experiences impact the future culture of a group of people. She identified that both songs expressed frustration and the musician was coping through song. Both share a desperate desire to be free and Monie made that connection apparent. In this instance, I planned the lesson to address the county standards, so it was reassuring when I acknowledged Monie achieving the county objectives for the hip hop lesson.

Furthermore, Mia shared a similar experience as Monie in that she engaged with the hip hop lesson that I planned to address the county ELA standards. Mia came to the conclusion that current societal strictures that African-Americans have to face were rooted during the time of slavery in America. Mia, a Hispanic female, identifies how, even though mental chains and shackles exist, the rapper finds a way to liberate himself from the oppressive nature of society.

Mia: These conveyed a theme of freedom as well, but in this song the artist appears to be rejoicing over his freedom rather than chasing after it like the other artists. By saying that he doesn't "feel pain", the artist implies that he was once in pain and now has found a way to get rid of it or deal with it. Additionally, by saying "I feel free", he implies that he may not actually be free but he has figured out a way to enjoy certain liberties with contentment. (Student Assignment. 9.20.19)

During this conversation, Mia identifies the fact that the speaker in the song is momentarily celebrating his freedom and has overcome the oppressive ways of society. From grading her responses, I observed that Mia was making strong connections to county standards number 2 & 3: 2) How have generational experiences affected American systems? And 3) To what extent do historical experiences influence tradition and progress? Mia wrote in an assigned thematic analysis, a direct comparison of how the pain felt by the singer in the spiritual songs contrasted with how the artist in the hip hop song was able to find freedom and peace of mind.

In addition to students making thematic connections in their written assignments, I observed students making connections to the county ELA standards during the lesson's class discussion. The class discussion concluded that the experiences of African-American's past generations influence the current generation. Mia and Monie emphasized in the class discussion that the modern day oppressor still exists but takes up another form-the oppressive force. The oppressive forces mentioned in the slave spiritual in the time of slavery were the overseers on the plantation, and the oppressive force in the hip hop song, representing modern day, is systemic racism. Contributing to their point, Iggy expanded on her insightful observation from her

thematic analysis assignment: “These spirituals songs to this day influenced many of the new artists, in which modern hip hop is in some way a legacy to spirituals” (Student Assignment. 9.20.19). Even though they were created hundreds of years apart, Mia, Monie, and Iggy built on the connection of how both genres of songs had similar rhetoric and themes, and how hip hop became the successor of slave spirituals.

Teachers often shy away from using creative and innovative ways of teaching, especially when it comes to addressing standards; but based on my reflections and analyzing my students’ written assignments, students can effectively learn by making connections to the ELA standard requirements through creatively planned hip hop-based lessons. Not only does engaging with hip hop texts expose students to literary concepts highlighted on the state test, it also thoroughly addresses the 11th grade-level countywide objectives. The subject matter in the hip hop song created an engaged dialogue and had the students make connections to the essential objectives of the county. The major county objectives we were addressing for the spiritual and hip hop lesson fell under the objectives of Identity and Culture: 1) How have historical eras affected the cultures born in them? 2) How have generational experiences affected American systems? and 3) To what extent do historical experiences influence tradition and progress?

Incorporating Hip Hop Pedagogy to Address Writing Standards

Hip hop pedagogy can be used to instruct and address writing standards; for instance, lessons on counterclaims during an argumentative research unit allowed me to teach skills about how to strengthen the writer’s claim through refutation. The counterclaim can be a difficult concept for academic ELA students to grasp because it entails abstract thinking and planning before writing. During the last quarter of the semester, our ELA Professional Learning Committee (PLT) assigned an argumentative-based research essay that included several different

types of texts including songs, documentaries, speeches, articles, magazines etc. along with a properly constructed counterclaim paragraph to help enhance that argument. Each teacher had the freedom to select what the research topic was, so I decided to have my students argue whether or not to end the war on drugs in America. I have found that this topic can be engaging because of the variety of different hip hop-based literacies that can be used to conduct research. Beginning in the 80s and throughout the 90s, several hip hop songs were released openly criticizing how the war on drugs heavily targeted African-American males leading to an increased percentage of incarceration, destroying African-American communities. For example, as a class, we analyzed the song “Changes” by 2Pac which acknowledges how some African-American families never recovered from the discriminatory racist practices enforced from the war on drugs and had the students use it as a reference in their research essay. In addition, to stay consistent with incorporating hip hop pedagogy, I used a hip hop scene from the film “8-Mile” to demonstrate how to write a counterclaim paragraph.

The research essay is always a challenge. The process is so long and monotonous with so many scheduled deadlines that some students disengage before the essay is due. In order to teach it properly, many tedious lessons relating to MLA format and structure of the essay can lose the attention of the class. I have always struggled getting my students to understand the proper way to construct a counterclaim, but in recent years, I found an innovative way to instruct how to use a counterclaim by incorporating a scene in a film that represents the power of hip hop music. I explain the impact it can have in my teacher reflection:

I have found that using the scene in 8 Mile not only spices up the often drab research counterclaim unit, but it is impactful and gets students a genuine understanding of the concept. I bring the edited version of the clip because the film clip does have mature themes that I warn the class about. Since I use a lot of hip hop resources in my class, I constantly remind my students that there are aspects of the culture we will not emulate in the class (like the offensive language and references), but we can always allow the

conversation of why the culture constantly uses these offensive references. The protagonist in the film is an up and coming White rapper named B-Rabbit that is having a hard time being taken seriously because of his race in a predominately African-American Hip hop Culture. In the scene I show my students, he has a rap battle (a battle of lyrical wit against another rapper through verse over a beat) against his nemesis group and has to properly prepare and conduct research in order to win. Having a desire to win he reevaluates his own life for his own personal vulnerabilities that his opponent may expose. However, it is what B-Rabbit does that is in relation to writing a counterclaim that is the point of the lesson. B-Rabbit researches how his future opponent was not the hard-core gangster he claimed to be, but an upper-middle class raised over-protected, private school kid from the suburbs. B-Rabbit exposes the truth about his opponent elegantly in the rap-battle and is successful. (Teacher Reflection. 12.2.19)

The lesson consisted of introducing the concept of the counterclaim through a brief presentation of the objectives of the lesson, and then immediately leading into setting up the clip from the film. In preparing for the lesson, I learned from a previous critical friend meeting that rather than explicitly lecturing my students via a Powerpoint presentation it was more productive to take an experiential approach and have the students experience the hip hop music and come up with more of their own conclusions for the lesson. Furthermore, after showing the hip hop clip a couple of times, I documented how the class was extremely responsive. For instance, this dialogue occurred between myself and Marshall and reflects how an important element of a counterclaim is maintaining a confident, argumentative tone.

Marshall: *Man. The savageness of his verse was lit. So you're telling me, we can write like he raps?*

Me: *Well, yes, but remember that this is a formal essay in an academic setting, so you can write with his tone and fierceness but keep the subject matter appropriate.*

Marshall: *Of course, I wouldn't include that for school. I never thought of writing in that way before. That is somewhat lit.*

Me: *Yes. As you can tell from the clip, it is all about delivery also. That is something you can duplicate in your own writing. You have to find your voice. (Teacher Reflection Notes. 12.3.19)*

In this exchange, Marshall was coming to the realization that he could write with a confident and convincing tone like the character in the hip hop song in his argumentative essay. My exchange with Marshall made me realize that students do actually learn from different mediums. The

gleam in his eye when I told him he could be like B-Rabbit (Eminem) when he writes his counterclaim let me know he understood the impact and importance of using an argumentative tone when writing. Another aspect of the conversation that jumped out at me was Marshall grasping the fact that the offensive subject matter in the film is not appropriate for the research essay. I am always clear about what subject matter is allowed to be used in the classroom setting, but not all students have an understanding of what they can and cannot say. Most of the time it is out of ignorance and not having an understanding of how a specific term can be offensive. I look at these as learning opportunities to overcome apathy in students. Overall, my interaction with Marshall confirmed that some students get the purpose of a lesson in different mediums, in this case, hip hop.

In addition to teaching students how to write in a confident, argumentative tone, “battle rap” hip hop can be used to teach students how to write a counterclaim. The students took a liking to the lesson because of the familiarity and relatability of Eminem as a prominent hip hop artist. Pedro was another student who admired the rapping style of Eminem and who with his group members was critiquing how his “battle rap” was one of the best in hip hop. Pedro was making connections with “battle rap” and creating an argument:

Me: From the clip you just watched, how would you argue that Eminem, or B-Rabbit in the scene, is better than today’s rappers?

Pedro: He just is in the way he raps.

Me: Now we are talking about counterclaims, right? How does he use a counterclaim in his rap battle?

Pedro: He knows that the guy he is going against is a fraud and he exposes him and he talks about his friend Cheddar accidentally shooting himself.

Me: True. Why does he do this?

Pedro: To leave him speechless with nothing to say. He already said it, so there is nothing for him to say. He knows his opponent.

Me: True. He did his research. Just like you are going to do research for your argumentative essay on the war on drugs. You will do the same. Because he is the G.O.A.T (Greatest of All Time) and you can do that too.

The group chuckles and Pedro smirks. (Teacher Reflection Notes. 12.3.19)

Here, Pedro came to the realization that he could use a “battle rap” approach to his argumentative essay. It was easier for him to process the hip hop clip and understand that a similar tone could be used in his writing to argue his counterclaim. During the class period, I assisted students by helping them outline their counterclaim. Watching the *8 Mile* clip motivated students to use an argumentative tone while refuting their opposing claim. For example, Pedro would eventually turn in his research essay on the war on drugs with a counterclaim that addresses the opposition's claim that marijuana is a gateway drug (Student Assignment.12.10.19). When I followed up in a one-on-one writing conference as to why he felt the opposition would claim this, Pedro said that this was the most common argument he came across when he was conducting research on the topic, and he knew that would be the opposition’s most prized point. Pedro utilized a similar technique in his essay when he wrote his counterclaim. Hip hop culture is relatable to students because they engage with it daily by choice (Hill, 2009; Petchauer, 2009). When students observed that they could use the same counterclaim strategy in their essay as Eminem used in *8 Mile*, it was a relatable approach to writing that they could resonate with because of their familiarity with hip hop culture. When the research essays were turned in, most of the class had an understanding of the function of the counterclaim, but the key was how I found innovative ways to work it in the curriculum to address the state writing standard with hip hop.

Theme #2: Teaching Scared: Using Hip Hop Despite Instructional Pressures

By using the hip hop music that I closely identify with to guide my teaching, I found my voice as a teacher. Teacher identity, in the case of my study, my own identity, was important to develop through hip hop-based instruction. By using the hip hop music that I closely identify with to guide my teaching, I found my voice as a teacher. When reflecting on my first spiritual

songs and hip hop lesson with my critical friend, he observed how I seemed to be too concerned with justifying the use of hip hop music through lecture rather than allowing the class to experience the music (Critical Friends Meeting #1). I was fortunate enough to explore my hesitancy and concern with my critical friend who provided honest feedback to improve my teaching (Samaras, 2011). The hesitancy and concern I had bringing in hip hop pedagogy created an anxiety in me because I did not want my lesson to be perceived as ineffective. This anxiety I had became twofold because I clearly wanted the students to understand why they were listening to hip hop during class, and I wanted to be able to justify teaching hip hop songs to my administration and teaching colleagues (Teacher Reflection. 9.25.19). Hall (2017) stated that ELA teachers who utilized hip hop-based instruction did not have to worry about justifying its use because it has proven to be effective, but I still showed hesitancy in my instruction. For this theme, I explored why I was so hesitant in teaching a hip hop-based lesson.

When addressing my hesitancy after the lesson, my colleague Don confirmed that I spent too long dispensing knowledge rather than being the facilitator (Dewey 1916; Freire, 2000; Glassman, 2001). Being a veteran teacher who did not use hip hop music on a regular basis but used other versions of out-of-school literacies, my critical friend Don did know the challenges of bringing out-of-school literacies into the classroom and sympathized with me being overly cautious. Don addressed these challenges he had during his own instruction when he would make thematic connections to literature with film. In our critical friend conversation he stated, “One challenge I had of bringing in outside texts, like film, is having students understand the objective of watching the film and not that it is just a free day, or movie day. There are relevant thematic connections between the literature we read and films we watch; students need to make this connection” (Critical Friend Meeting #1). Don brought up the point that even though the lesson

is valid and the conclusions my students formulated were advanced, I still felt the stigma of bringing out-of-school literacies into the ELA classroom, especially hip hop. It is almost as if it is a form of literacy that is not scholarly because of the criticisms associated with its content: violence, misogyny, drug abuse (Critical Friends Meeting #1). This comment paralleled my thinking leading up to this study in my teacher reflection:

For some reason or another, I am concerned, and have always been, that an administrator may come into my class while I am playing a hip hop song that may have mature themes and just completely freeze up. This is ridiculous since I have utilized hip hop music of some sort for my entire teaching career and have experienced several breakthrough moments. I have a concern that my administrators may not understand how purposeful this instruction is and that is disconcerting. It is disconcerting because I should have more faith in my instruction, but I know that when August comes around, we will evaluate test score data from the year before in front of the entire school. And the way they do it is so indiscreet! There have been years that I have not done so well and all I can think of is an administrator saying, "I bet if you cut back on bringing that rap music into your class, you could be more successful." This haunts me in every way possible. (Teacher Reflection. 9.25. 2019)

I am still concerned how an outside administrator may perceive hip hop literacies because the genre addresses mature topics. Don suggested to get over my anxiety, I should invite my department head administrator to observe a hip hop lesson, so I could openly communicate how it is a beneficial pedagogy. Don focused on how the hip hop-based lessons that bring out-of-school literacies into the class discussion are relatable because students are familiar with the form of pop culture (Critical Friend Meeting 9.25.19).

Don emphasized in my critical friends meeting that the hip hop songs about enslaved people can bring a level of tension to the lesson (Fecho, 2011) meaning students could feel emotions of guilt and resentment. Being a veteran teacher, Don knew highly emotional topics like enslaved people can provoke intense class discussions. In the particular lesson, I was uneasy about how the spiritual songs and hip hop songs address the topic of enslaved people (Teacher Reflection. 9.25.19). My instructional fear had to do with the wide range of emotions that can be

triggered involving a discussion centered around such a painful chapter in America's past specifically related to enslaved people. Even in my early teacher reflection, I noted my discomfort with the unit because of my past experiences with the emotional topic of enslaved people:

My nervousness and anxiety comes from a past of teaching hip hop literacies in the classroom. I have found that the topic of enslaved people has always been an emotional experience for the classroom. Since I model a classroom that encourages dialogue and discussion, these debates can lead to hitting up a wide range of emotions for certain students who are invested in the subject matter. The discussions we have in class can become intense and heated. In the past, I have had students get so emotionally involved in the lesson and discussion, feeling extreme frustration or pride, they have to leave the classroom to gather their composure. What I have observed in the years past is that students respond in a variety of different ways when discussing the topic in class. It can be hard for certain African-American students when other members of the class lack understanding or are apathetic toward the history of oppression. My experiences have made me realize that even though it is a highly emotional learning environment, it can be a beneficial learning experience. But there have been times that I have lost control of the class and had a hard time trying to settle everyone down, so the class could have a civil discussion. (Teacher Reflection. 9.15. 2019).

In my reflection, I realized that the lesson did not go the way I envisioned because I was teaching in fear on two fronts, the first being the uncertainty of the classroom dialogue from the emotional subject matter of enslaved people and the second being perceived by the administration as not following the curriculum by using out-of-school texts. The lack of confidence I had in hip hop pedagogy limited the effectiveness of the lesson.

In my critical friend meeting, I expressed my anxiety going into the lesson and he informed me he could sense my conflicted emotions. Don provided me with feedback in this regard:

Don: It seems that you bombarded the class with so many resources and instructions that you gave little time for the class to engage with the different texts. I would suggest that you give students the chance to work together in smaller groups (rather than rows), so they could interact with one another. (Critical Friends Meeting. 9.25.19).

Don suggested that I should provide students with the freedom to come to conclusions independently and explore the cultural and historical significance of the songs. He stated that I had over planned for the lesson and prevented my students from learning organically.

My exchange with Don helped me realize that I had actually approached the hip hop lesson in the most anti-hip hop way. Hip hop is a music of the people, and I had not allowed the people to experience the songs on their own. My structured approach and lecture format was not a reflection of Dewey's (1916) democratic classroom and certainly was not one of Fecho's (2011) dialogical classroom because I had resorted to what Freire labeled the *banking model* of education (2000) by trying to provide my students what to think instead of encouraging them to think on their own. I had fallen victim to what my theoretical framework illuminated as anti-education because I was not giving them the opportunity to construct meaning in their own ways. Don continued with his critique in reference to the post lesson activity that the class had completed and the fact that a majority of the class just regurgitated information that was given to them in my presentation. Don continued with his advice, "Students have to be pushed to discover and find connections on their own. The reason they did not go beyond surface level is that the lesson seemed too structured" (Critical Friends Meeting. 9.25.19).

By engaging in reflection and through support with my critical friends, I realized it was time to implement ideas around democratic spaces (Dewey, 1964) and authentic dialogues (Fecho, 2011), so students could learn from one another. As I reflected on the first lesson, I came to several learning experiences moving forward:

Reflecting back on it, I was teaching scared because I did not want to lose the control of the class. I left little room for the class to collaborate on their own; I actually unconsciously discouraged engagement. This is when I thought back to some of my colleagues in my ELA department, current and past, and realized why they may fear to bring hip hop pedagogy into the class. Being a hip hop outsider is a challenge when you bring the out-of-school literacies into the classroom to openly discuss. You cannot

control what students may say, and how students react to what may be said. One of the most beneficial learning experiences a student can have is when they may unintentionally make a racist comment based on a cultural stereotype. This is a great opportunity to pull a student aside and educate him/her on why stereotypes are not reality, but a harmful representation.

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My critical friend session resulted in me realizing that I had failed to utilize the hip hop pedagogy to its full extent. The reason why I kept getting repetitive responses on the assignment is because the class was not encouraged to make both personal and critical connections. A select few students made some higher-level connections, but I learned that in order for hip hop pedagogy to work for all in the classroom, I had to believe in hip hop pedagogy and allow it to take its course. I realized that I did not trust the process. (Reflective Journal. 9.30. 2019)

Even after many years of teaching, I still have this concern that I may be perceived as not doing the most possible for my students. One of the main reasons for my fear is the fact that, due to standards and high-stakes assessment that are imposed in our professional decision-making, teachers have little freedom to explore out-of-school literacies. My fear of the administrator coming in the class and thinking I was “jamming out” and not conducting an enlightening lesson paralyzed my teaching, preventing me from being the teacher I could be. I did not have enough faith in the hip hop pedagogy to allow students to learn naturally. Instead of giving students the opportunity to listen and engage with the text and carry on a dialogue afterwards, I structured the lesson in the form of a lecture, presenting too many limitations to allow students to learn naturally. This is mainly because I did not want to lose control of the discussion on the hop hop-based lesson that centered around slave spirituals because it can be highly emotional.

Hill (2009) noted an advantage of HHBE is the ability to bring highly emotional and controversial topics and present them in an entertaining manner that can be discussed critically in an educational setting. Oftentimes, I had to help guide these controversial conversations into being productive which I learned can be a challenge for a cultural outsider bringing hip hop into the classroom. Hall (2017) addressed the challenges of a majority White, middle-class secondary

teaching workforce bringing hip hop pedagogy into the classroom. The lack of familiarity of the music and giving up being the all-knowing “expert” in the classroom can lead to the same insecurities I felt during my lesson. My fear led me to over control my instruction. A teacher lecturing too much makes students less engaged. This resulted in the class not drawing the conclusions I was seeking in using hip hop pedagogy. A major component of hip hop-based education is giving students agency about their learning. My instruction was not achieving the democratic approach I was striving for.

Using self-study methodology while instructing hip hop pedagogy gives me an insightful awareness of my identity as a teacher. The music allows me to learn from my students and think critically about what I value as their teacher. I like to bring in socially conscious hip hop songs because the themes they contain create an interesting discussion and raise important issues. I completed the cycle of self-study, of teaching, meeting with critical friends, reflecting on data, and planning a new and improved lesson (Samaras, 2011), and was able to improve a hip hop-based lesson later in the semester where I acted like a facilitator more than an authoritarian. The hip hop-based lesson allowed me to engage in dialogue with my students and reflect on my own identity as their teacher.

Hip hop artists use narratives to articulate their experiences with oppression and discrimination in an artistic form that appeals to students (Hill, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2017). Crooke & Almedia (2017) highlight how students gain a critical consciousness when they become aware and take action against the oppressive elements in one’s life, which is a major theme in hip hop. During the American Dream unit we listened to a few hip hop songs about how unattainable this dream can be for African-Americans. After listening to “Institutionalized” by Kendrick Lamar, Freddie, an avid hip hop listener, reflected in his journal “I have heard that

song a few times before but never really paid attention to the lyrics. It is about the struggle about being trapped. It's crazy deep" (Student Reflection. 12.15.19). Freddie was not the only student who picked up on Kendrick Lamar's theme of being trapped in the lifestyle and mindset of his poverty-stricken neighborhood. As we discussed the systematic oppression that African-Americans face on a day-to day-basis, students productively discussed concepts of equality and equity. For instance, Freddie continued to reflect on his older sibling having a harder time finding a job in the workforce because his family was poor growing up. Freddie termed the lack of education and opportunities made his brother "Institutionalized" (Student Reflection. 12.15.19). Freddie was bringing up the lack of equity his brother faced growing up and that was a powerful thematic connection that he made when analyzing Kendrick Lamar's lyrics. I would later write in my teacher's reflection, "Freddie reminded me that we are all not on an even playing field and how big a part equity plays in social dynamics. These hip hop songs generate incredible discussions on the lack of equality, but I also need to start bringing the topic of equity as a focus" (Teacher Reflection.12.15.19). I learned from Freddie the impact the lack of equity can have on an African-American male who has been "Institutionalized" and not been given necessary tools to survive.

More importantly, my interaction with Freddie allowed me to explore my own identity as a teacher. I concluded in one of my teacher journals that I had been "unaware of the varying number of advantages I had because my identity" (Teacher Reflection.12.15.19) and my engagement with my students was enlightening. His reflection not only made me want to learn more about his upbringing and his culture but also reevaluate my position as a privileged White, male (Mooney, 2016). I was fostering my own critical consciousness by learning from my

students' experiences in the real world, and it made me reevaluate my own position and identity (Crooke & Almeida, 2017).

An aspect of CRP is to not only share one's own identity in the classroom but provide opportunities to learn from others (Ladson-Billings, 2017). Learning about my students' cultures helps build on what Wells (2019) refers to as my own "knowledge of self." Students regularly articulate ideas that I would never think of because of their unique cultural identity. An example of this occurred while teaching another hip hop song with thematic elements addressing the adversity of the American Dream when we listened to 2pac's "Brenda's Got a Baby." Lauryn, a Hispanic female, shared with the class that she got emotional listening to the song because it was about a young, teenage girl who had to abort her child because she was financially unstable and had no family to support her. Lauryn would write in her reflection, "By not having her family caring, she has to do whatever to stay above water. It shows the hardship that Brenda was going through, the trauma she was put through just to make it through" (Student Reflection. 12.15.19). Lauryn expressed her empathy for Brenda in the song because she understood that it is a challenge to support a child on your own without any family support. Another student debated that in no situation should Brenda have taken such drastic measures, but Lauryn made the point that not everyone has access to a supportive family and the luxuries that come with the American Dream (Teacher Reflection. 12.17.20). I learned a lot about Lauryn that day because she opened up about how the song affected her and made her emotional and how she was empathetic. She brought up the point that one feels sorry for Brenda but that is not enough; we, as a society, have to be willing to help Brenda. This point resonated with me. Her justification behind her beliefs made me see the character in the song, Brenda, from Lauryn's perspective. She was making

advanced connections to the major themes of the song and caused me to reconsider how I felt about Brenda's situation (Teacher Reflection 12.17.20).

As a facilitator of the class, I was learning along with my students and questioning my beliefs and identity as a teacher (Dewey, 1916; Fecho, 2011). The teacher reflections had me reevaluate the impact my identity had on the individual relationships that I had with my students. Furthermore, the reflections had me question my preexisting beliefs about my identity in relation to my students. Hip hop music can stimulate conversations that allow me to continue to learn from my students and grow (Hill, 2009).

Theme #3: Building Student and Teacher Relationships with Hip Hop Pedagogy

As I found in my own data, students and teachers can build relationships around a passion for hip hop music (Dimitriadis, 2001; Crooke & Almeida, 2017; Hill, 2009; Petchauer, 2009). Utilizing hip hop pedagogy impacted my ability to form meaningful relationships with my students. This theme shows how the impact of using hip hop-based learning can create strong connections not only between students, but between students and teachers. When a teacher brings hip hop pedagogy into the classroom, it can be a relatable resource for a high-risk student who has trouble performing well in school (Hill, 2009; Petchauer, 2009). Hip hop-based education provides students with a way to become engaged with literacies inside of the classroom and learn valuable skills; this engagement can lead to stronger relationships (Hill, 2009; Petchauer, 2009).

An ELA teacher can use hip hop pedagogy to develop a connection with a student who is indifferent to the ELA curriculum or school in general. Reflecting on my 17 years teaching, I have had the opportunity to use a common interest in hip hop to engage students that normally were so disengaged from the standardized curriculum, they were in danger of failing the course.

When I reflect back on the semester, I recall a relationship I built with a student through our common interest in hip hop music. Billie was a student that had a passion for different types of performance arts like theater and music but struggled in the academic setting. At the time Billie had a 30% average and would turn in about a third of his daily assignments. My English class was not Billie's lowest grade at the time, as Billie was only passing his elective course. Billie had not yet turned in a writing assignment, and I was working with him to get caught up as we continued to prep for the writing portion on the ACT. All of my attempts to get Billie engaged, and this included placing him in a group that I felt would motivate and include him, failed. When Billie did come to class, he remained quiet and kept to himself. Usually, he would have the look of exhaustion on his face as he put his head down and went to sleep and mentally checked out even before he had the chance to attempt the class starter. I would occasionally check on him to make sure everything was okay and was regularly in communication with his academic support team. When I did approach his desk, I asked if he was "good"; he would just subtly nod and have an expression on his faces as if there were no reason for me to check up on him. Billie clearly wanted to fly under the radar and did not want to be a nuisance in any way, but Billie's disengagement was one of my biggest challenges early in the semester. Billie had fallen behind in the semester from absences which led to missing assignments and had a low, failing average and I was determined to get him back on track. When dealing with students like Billie in the past, I would attempt to find a common interest to build a relationship. One pivotal turning point in my ability to connect with Billie centered around a conversation I had with him before class:

Billie: "Mr. Richards, have you heard the new Freddie Gibbs?"

Me: "No, I haven't. I heard he was recording in the studio. Is it good?"

Billie: "It is. He is going to release an album later this month. If it is anything like the single, it is going to be really good."

Me: "That's awesome. I love "Pinata" (Freddie Gibbs's last album). That was my favorite album a couple of summers ago. That summer fire!" (Teacher Reflection Notes, 10.7.19)

On a typical day, I am often stressed at the beginning of second period, the period I have Billie, because there are behavioral class management issues that require my attention even before the ringing of the bell as the students enter class. This is why it was important for me to make an effort in any given opportunity to communicate with Billie when he shows any type of interest that I can connect with him. In this instance, he reached out to me and brought up our mutual interest in hip hop. He was excited about a recent release from an artist we both admired; I had expressed an interest in this hip hop artist to him earlier in the semester, so I took this opportunity to connect with him.

One hip hop-based assignment in particular helped Billie become engaged with the class and begin to increase his average—the hip hop personal narrative. The assignment involved writing a narrative in the form of a hip hop song about a significant time in their life that defined them. We had listened to a few hip hop songs in narrative form from Slick Rick, Kendrick Lamar and J. Cole to study how to properly tell a story. The assignment the class was working on involved defining the rhetorical appeals these artists' use to tell their personal narratives. When I noticed that Billie was showing some sort of interest, I immediately went to him to see how he was doing and later recorded the interaction in my teacher reflection:

Billie opened up today and I had my first in depth conversation with him. The group members were talking about the hip hop group Brockhampton whom I had heard of, but was not familiar with. I learned from Billie that they had a heavy R&B and jazz influence on their music and that if I liked J.Cole and Kendrick Lamar (artists that I would regularly bring into the classroom) I would like Brockhampton... Wanting desperately to connect with Billie, when the class let out, I pulled up my Spotify account and listened to a few songs so I could engage with Billie the next school day. I

listened to the songs and made mental notes of some observations that I heard in the music. The next day we had an in-depth conversation about Brockhampton and different hip hop artists that we shared a common appreciation for. (Teacher Reflection, 10.7.2019).

My relationship with Billie improved after connecting with Billie about the common hip hop artists we enjoyed. I credited Billie's turn around to my efforts of using hip hop to bond with Billie; this led to his engagement with the hip hop-based assignments. Specifically, I transitioned from our discussion about these artists and the type of rhetoric they used in their lyrics to the possibilities for what Billie could use in the hip hop narrative assignment. Billie ended up writing a song about the experiences of working on a set of a play as a theatre technician:

*Wood and nails, building props all around,
Surrounding the stage with a fictional town
It is often the unseen that allows a play to be,
That is my preference, if it was up to me. (Student Assignment, 10.15.2019)*

When I first read Billie's song, I was taken aback by the complex nature of the metaphor he used to articulate his relationship with the world as a theater technician. It had been a struggle to get Billie engaged in class and now he was excelling by engaging with hip hop education. Billie took a genuine interest in creating a hip hop song to express his relationship with the world through his passion for technical theater. Fortunately, this assignment of a narrative rap sparked an increase in Billie's participation in class. Billie often struggled to get major writing assignments in on time but stayed engaged enough during the semester and scored one of the highest grades on his digital portfolio. Three of the major assignments in the digital portfolio included hip hop-based assignments that he completed successfully. Dimitriadis (2001) noted that when students take a genuine interest in engaging with hip hop-based assignments, it becomes a valuable component of the curriculum. Billie's interest in the hip hop-based lesson ended up being the

breakthrough that I needed with a student who desperately needed to find some kind of connection with the curriculum, as I noted:

Billie is one of my successes during my teaching career. When it comes down to it, teaching comes down to relationships. Of course, you have a classroom of nearly 40 at times, but it is how you engage with each student personally. As for Billie, building that trust throughout the semester allowed growth for both teacher and student. So many times in my teaching career, hip hop music, that wonderful often perceived “out-of-school” literacies, gave me an “in” to creating a relationship that I once thought was a futile cause. Billie realized I was interested in him and his success, and when Billie realized this, Billie bought in. These opportunities don’t take place if I do not allow this hip hop culture in my classroom. (Teacher Reflection. 10.29.19)

As I met with one of my critical friends to share this moment of success, we wholeheartedly agreed that one-on-one relationships can result in student engagement. During that critical friend meeting, Bobby told me, “The most rewarding part of our profession are times like these (referring to my experience with Billie) when you make the possible out of what was once an impossible situation” (Critical Friends Meet. 11.5.19). Integrating the hip hop culture in my ELA classroom results in students realizing that I value what interests them. Ladson-Billings (2017) emphasized how all students have their own generated culture that begins with their interests. Hip hop has always been a common interest I have shared with students from all different cultures and backgrounds.

In order to develop strong relationships with students, a teacher needs to show genuine interest in what matters in a student’s life. Therefore, staying attuned to the music my students listen to can often spark interactions that lead to relationships benefiting both students and teachers. The out-of-school literacies that interest students have been a way that I can constantly connect with students and begin to understand who they are (Ladson-Billings, 2017). Since hip hop is a passion of mine, if a disengaged student shows any interest in the genre, I can lead in with a conversation about what they are currently listening to. I cannot even begin to express the

value of openly sharing my passion for hip hop music. A powerful bond can occur when the teacher learns from our students when having the opportunity to open up and be human.

Theme #4: Change Over Time: How Hip Hop Pedagogy Changed Me Professionally

Implementing hip hop pedagogy allowed me to not only gain a better understanding of my students and their cultures, but I have acquired a well-rounded understanding of my own identity in relation to those various cultures. Throughout the semester, the democratic and dialogical qualities of hip hop pedagogy provides insights into my instruction; reflecting on these insights improves me as a professional educator. Fecho (2017, 2016) defined dialogical teaching as everyone contributing democratically in the classroom setting through conversation, resulting in both teacher and students learning about the different cultures and identities involved. Bakhtin (1986) noted that one gets a well-rounded understanding of their own identity when dialoguing with individuals from other cultures. My students get me to question my own beliefs both personally and professionally allowing me to grow as an educator and human being.

In one particular hip hop lesson during the semester the class examined the dynamics of the American family. Specifically, we had a classroom discussion of how systemic oppression can impact the family structure. In the song “All I Got is You” by Ghostface Killah, the narrator describes how a broken family structure has left his grandmother to raise 15 children in a three bedroom apartment.

*“Sadly, Daddy left me at the age of six
I didn’t know nuttin’ but mommy neatly packed his shit
She cried and grandma held the family down
I guess mommy wasn’t strong enough, she just went down
Check it, fifteen of us in a three bedroom apartment
Roaches everywhere, cousins and aunts was there
Four in the bed, two at the foot, two at the head
I didn’t like to sleep with Jon-Jon he peed the bed”
-Ghostface Killah “All I Got is You”*

More often than not, when a family lives in poverty, they do not have the luxuries that a middle-class or upper-class family has. Ghostface emphasizes that the power of his family's love and support in often desperate and destitute times contributed to the man he is today. During class, we listened and annotated the song, and I gave the class a chance to discuss the song in groups and then we shared those observations with the entire class. Queen, an African-American female, offered an incredible insight that demonstrates the power of using culturally relevant pedagogies like hip hop in the classroom:

Today in class, Queen made an insightful connection of how the song "All that I Got is You" is similar to her own day-to-day life. Queen said, "I can relate to the song (Ghostface Killah) because sometimes you have to depend on family to get through the day. This is just like me having to take care of all my siblings to help my folks." This would explain how Queen very rarely turns in any homework assignments and despite being a good athlete (from her demonstrated abilities in P.E) and a quality student (from her classroom abilities), could not participate in any after-school sport or club activities. Queen had to watch her siblings after-school, so her parents could work late. This prevented her from participating in any extracurricular activities and explained why she did not complete her homework assignments on a regular basis. As a white-male coming from a position of privilege, I had labeled Queen as not being engaged with all of her studies and not wanting to participate in after-school activities when in reality, she had no choice. Queen understood her position being the older sibling and having to do her part by helping her parents provide for the family. This is just one of the times that the class dialogue centering around a hip hop song made me come to a valuable realization about my students I never would have concluded. (Teacher Reflection: 12.18.2019)

Hip hop pedagogy includes a dialogical element that regularly gets me out of my comfort zone and makes me question my own belief system. When I am critical of my preexisting beliefs it puts me in what Fecho (2017, 2016) referred to as a wobble state. I learned that the assumptions I had about my students were wrong. At first, I felt ashamed for making assumptions about them, but I quickly realized this was an opportunity to use reflective practices to get to know and also learn from my students. In the case of Queen, I was incorrect in thinking that she was unmotivated and did not want to complete all of her homework or participate in extracurricular activities. Her home situation and culture prevented her from having any type of

free-time like a privileged student may have. Ghostface Killah's song articulated how a family that was impacted by systemic oppression and lived in destitution, honorably united together to support each other for the sake of the family's benefit. After discovering this through the hip hop-based assignment, I admired Queen even more, identifying her as a selfless, strong-willed teenager who sacrificed her own needs for those of her younger siblings. Learning this about Queen's academic challenges through dialogical discussions put me in a state of wobble (Fecho, 2016) where I began to question my own ELA instruction and how I could better accommodate someone in Queen's position. In my teacher reflection, I acknowledge how the school system does not meet the needs for a student like Queen because of its macro-structure. Obviously, with the way my instruction was currently set up, it was not accommodating to Queen's academic needs. After hearing Queen's story, I recognized why it is important to give my students a voice in my classroom. As a result, it was time to reevaluate our instructional approach with my PLT members.

Conducting my self-study resulted in realizations that improved my instruction in many ways and also enhanced my professional relationships with my colleagues. When I shared this experience with my critical friend Bobby, we discussed the relevance of some of the homework we assign in our academic English classes. Since homework counts for a percentage of their final grade, we had a discussion of a student like Queen who demonstrates an ability to read and write well and earns high grades on her assessments but does not turn in the majority of her homework. More often than not, students like Queen want to complete their homework but have other more important obligations. This conversation with Bobby was productive because we decided that we should dedicate class-time for students like Queen to make-up any missing

homework assignments, so it does not impact her grade. We also recalculated the percentages of the final grade, so it does not impact a student like Queen in a negative manner.

Utilizing hip hop pedagogy in my self-study meant that I had breakthrough professional moments “by dialoguing with others and/or oneself around an issue that has created a sense of uncertainty, individuals enter into an open-ended and flexible process that has no predetermined destination or outcome” (Fecho, 2017). In the case with Queen, I accepted that I was wrong about my predetermined beliefs about her not being motivated or willing to apply herself more in the school setting. My privilege kept me from realizing that Queen was the byproduct of a hip hop culture that Ghostface Killah was articulating in his song. It was true that her family was poor and had trouble making ends meet, but she was helping to keep her family afloat which I found admirable. This resulted in meeting with my English PLT and finding ways to help students like Queen succeed in school. Hip hop pedagogy leads to these breakthrough realizations that allow me to not only understand my students better but find ways to help my students succeed in the school environment. By being open to challenge my own beliefs and find ways to improve my profession, hip hop pedagogy contributes to my growth as a teacher and a human being.

Hip hop pedagogy and self-study based research has improved my professional knowledge the most because it gives me an insight on my own personal beliefs in relation to the groups of diverse students I engage with daily. The best way I can serve my students is improving as an educator, and I achieve this by utilizing culturally relevant pedagogy and including literacies that represent my students (Hill, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2017). For me, hip hop pedagogy functioned as a method of CRP by providing students encouragement to find their voice and express themselves in a dialogical setting (Fecho, 2017, 2016). I grew as an educator when I take the

time to listen to my students and learn from their experiences in relation to the hip hop literacies we engage with regularly (Dewey, 1964; Fecho, 2017).

Being both classroom teacher and researcher, self-study (Samaras, 2011) gives me the chance to conduct lessons and then reflect on my practice. When reflecting on my practice, hip hop pedagogy presents insightful revelations about my teaching practice because it is built on an approach that values a student's culture and identity formation (Hall, 2009; Kelly, 2013; Wells, 2019). Regularly reflecting on my instruction and using critical friends to improve my craft puts me in a constant cycle of improving my profession (Samaras, 2011). Hip hop pedagogy transcends the ELA classroom because students begin to understand how to read the world, helping them prepare for life beyond school (Crooke & Almeida; Hall, 2009; Wells, 2019). As an ELA teacher that recognizes that my success solely rests on the success of my students, hip hop pedagogy has provided me the best instructional approach to empower my students, so they can be successful in reading the world and positioning themselves to excel as productive citizens.

Research Question #2: How do high school ELA students respond to hip hop pedagogy?

In this section, I will describe the two themes that answer my second research question. First, the data show that students are open to engaging in hip hop-based dialogue in a democratic space. Second, hip hop-based learning can develop student identity as each fosters his or her critical consciousness, constructs a knowledge of self, builds confidence, and contributes to a classroom community.

Theme #5: Creating a Hip Hop-Based Dialogue in a Democratic Space

A democratic classroom that welcomes hip hop-based dialogue offers students a safe space to make connections between the subject matter and their personal lives. At times during

the semester, I altered my lessons in response to students, which is how I defined creating a democratic space. In this example, I share a time when I organically created a safe, productive and democratic learning environment. The lesson involved the focus on an out-of-school literacies that most of my students were familiar with and reflected a point where I valued the livelihood of my students over the administrative expectations. The date was Monday, December 9, 2019, the day after Juice Wrld, a classroom favorite hip hop artist, overdosed on recreational drugs and died. I knew that many of the students would take his death hard, but I was particularly worried about one student, Jared, because he was constantly listening to Juice Wrld, sketching his logo, and singing his songs. Mondays were usually dedicated to preparing for the end-of-the-year test, but I wanted to address this trauma because I knew it would be important for my students, especially Jared. I first wanted to see if doing that would be all right with the class or if their emotions were running too high and it was “too soon”. The following excerpt is what I recorded in my teacher reflection journal:

My most productive lesson of the year was after Juice Wrld had passed away. There were a lot of students in the class who were fans, some idolized him. His name would often be brought up in class. Just a couple weeks before when I was teaching the research lesson, I made a reference to his hit song “Lucid Dreams” and how it contained a musical sample of the legendary artist Sting and how hip hop artists sample credible songs to validate their own music just like my students would have to validate their research paper by quoting reliable sources to improve its quality. The point resonated with the class. It was an “Aha” moment. We even listened to the Sting song, I often do that song to teach the research essay. (Teacher Reflection. 12.9.19)

I noted in my journal that the class walked in just like any other normal Monday, but the students whom I knew were fans were somewhat subdued. One student just asked me, “You heard?” and we both just shook our heads in disbelief. When I asked the class if they would like to journal and dialogue about our loss, most of the class nodded in approval, including Jared. My plan was to do a music journal where we would listen to the artist as they answered the prompt, “What is

something that meant a lot to you that you lost?" I figured this would open up the possibilities for students to write about Juice Wrld if they wanted to. This more abstract prompt also allowed students who were not familiar with his music to reflect on a similar sentiment. Since I was playing Juice Wrld's music in the background, this set the tone to write about him if they wanted:

The class was really focused today and honed in on the journal and discussion surrounding Juice Wrld. I could tell Jared, an avid fan of his music, was still coming to grips with his tragic death. He shared in his journal his deep sadness and he regretted never have seen him perform live and he was planning to go to a festival Juice Wrld was scheduled for. Another rapper, whom we lost to similar circumstances, Mac Miller, was brought up which contributed to a productive discussion. I was proud of Jared and the few that he shared his grief with the class....I am so glad that my classroom provided that safe space to open up how my students feel. Students were not necessarily all talking about Juice Wrld either, some students were bringing up family members and even pets -don't judge!- they lost. It couldn't have been a healthier discussion.(Teacher Reflection. 12.9.19).

In my reflection, I noted how students were honest in their dialogue about the loss of a hip hop artist whom they admired. Students also opened up about other loved ones they had lost, and this made the class period therapeutic. Despite the fact that I had a lesson planned for that day focusing on test preparation, I went off the scheduled lesson to meet the needs of my students. When teachers create a therapeutic classroom environment, a community begins to form where students are encouraged to openly express and authentically share who they are (Crooke & Almeida, 2017).

A democratic classroom values students and their needs above all (Dewey, 1916) and hip hop pedagogy was invaluable in finding ways for students to explore personal and emotional feelings on such complex topics as death. Dewey (1964) thought education should be relevant and beneficial to students' lives and this spontaneous Monday exercise was an opportunity to have students learn a lesson greater than a county standard. The playing of Juice Wrld's music,

the journal prompt, and aura of the classroom gave the class an opportunity to explore their own feelings about the event. For students like Jared, the impromptu lesson allowed students to use the dialogical classroom to engage with the texts of their lives (Fecho, 2011). Students also took the opportunity to discuss the loss of what they valued in life. I always feel that these days in class are valuable because they allow students to share who they are as people, and this keeps a high morale throughout the semester. Of course, as teachers we have standards and objectives to cover but to have students bring what they value in their culture into the classroom makes a difference and promotes student and teacher growth. The journal and discussion afterwards was such an insightful learning experience for my students and for me. It was pivotal to take a moment and disregard the curricular expectations and just be human beings.

Hip Hop-Based Dialogue and Hip Hop Controversies in a Democratic Space

*Life can bring much pain
There are many ways to deal with this pain (right)
Choose wisely (right)
(J.Cole. Once an Addict. Interlude)*

Hip hop pedagogy includes controversial but relevant topics that directly relate to students' lives. I took the opportunity after Juice Wrld's death to create a learning opportunity so students could discuss the drug culture ever present in hip hop music. Realizing that Juice Wrld's passing did arouse some controversy because of his problems with drug abuse, I planned a discussion addressing substance-use disorder and how it is often notoriously glorified in hip hop. As I mentioned in my literature review, the mature content that comes with hip hop pedagogy creates learning opportunities in the classroom. In this case, my students and I built on our discussion with America's war on drugs by showing how hip hop has falsely glorified the consumption of opioids as a means to cope with life and be "real."

I incorporated discussions on difficult topics in the classroom that centered around controversial hip hop themes but were also relevant to students' lives. For instance, in one class discussion, first the class discussed why rappers glorify in their songs different types of drugs like Percocet and "lean"(a recreational drug cocktail). Lamar, an African-American student, elaborated on this in his reflection: "Rappers these days like to party, and they rap about them because it is what is cool. You have Future making an album about Drank and Lean" (Student Reflection. 12. 12. 19). Students like Lamar chimed in that the drug use was sensationalized because it sells records. Personally, I was interested in the way students responded because I know that these drugs that rappers glorify are accessible to my students.

Our conversation ended up being productive and relevant to their lives. Pedro pointed out in the discussion that glorifying these drugs seemed ridiculous when they ended up killing you, like Mac Miller, Juice Wrld etc. When we discussed the hypocrisy in the songs, it was evident that there was some tension (Fecho, 2011) among those students who argued that the content was not meant to be taken literally. Aalyiah, an African-American female, argued that these rappers are grown and that they can rap about what they want, and people do not have to do what rappers say (Teacher Reflection. 12.12.19). Other students backed up what Aaliyah argued, making the point that one cannot deny the freedom of the artists to rap about a glorified relationship with drugs. By this time in the semester, I was aware of my role as a facilitator of the discussion and only chimed in when I felt there was a need to keep the conversation going (Dewey, 1916; Fecho, 2004; Glassman, 2001). I began allowing my students to learn from each other based on discussions on hip hop music:

Our dialogue centering around the controversial themes in hip hop are productive. Today the class pointed out how J.Cole is right in criticizing glorified drug use and how it can be destructive to families. On the other hand, the class argued for the right of these artists to rap about what has made them popular and that is what goes

along with the hip hop party culture. Students even openly shared their negative perceptions of drug abuse in their own communities. A student shared a story about a local high school sports star in the neighborhood who never could overcome his addiction. One common ground that everyone agreed on stemming from our previous discussions on the impact of the war on drugs was the fact that drug use is serious issue that should be at the forefront of our discussions. (Teacher Reflection. 12.12.19)

In this case, some students were arguing that hip hop songs that glorify negative stereotypes like drug abuse can be harmful to the people in these communities; on the other hand, certain students were arguing that these harsh realities that hip hop artists rap about should be expressed through song because it is a case where art imitates life and educates its listeners. Overall, hip hop lessons can lead to productive discussions exploring different perspectives on controversial topics and creates an environment where students are allowed to engage in healthy debates while listening to varying perspectives.

Using hip hop in the classroom was a conduit for addressing realities that students may face in their personal lives and in their own communities. As a matter of fact, I have overheard conversations that implied opioids like “percs” were present and accessible in their social circle (Teacher Reflection. 12.12.19). Students opening up about their own perceptions of the drug use they witness in their home life was an organic discussion students could learn from. These hip hop songs are not just for entertainment but serve as a symbolic representation of cultural reality (KRS-ONE, 2009). This was an example of what a productive discussion can transform into when hip hop-based teaching is present. Students respect the opinions of people who disagree with them but can still find a common ground. In conclusion, hip hop-based discussion creates an environment where students can critically think about topics that are relevant to their lives.

Theme #6: Hip Hop Pedagogy for Identity Development

When teachers incorporate hip hop pedagogy, it presents several opportunities to build on both student and teacher identity. One way of building on identities is through critical consciousness, or the idea of being aware of how oppressive societal forces impact one's life. Throughout the semester, students' engagement with hip hop pedagogy fostered growth in their sense of self through critical consciousness (Hill, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2017). Critical consciousness aids in building "knowledge of self" (Wells, 2019) and instilling student confidence.

Hip Hop Pedagogy Fosters a Critical Consciousness

I found when students engaged with hip hop songs, it challenged them to think critically about topics that mattered in their life. During our American Dream song podcast, an African-American male student, Lamar, demonstrated elements of developing a critical consciousness through hip hop pedagogy. Lamar often gravitated toward songs that spoke to a specific belief or idea he was interested in. When engaging with the song, students learned how to look at a cultural issue with a new light based on the themes used by the hip hop artist. One North Carolina born-rapper, J.Cole, has gained some momentum in pop culture. I praised this artist throughout the semester and suggested that my students listen to him. J.Cole reminds me of the lyrically conscious hip hop artists from the 90s who created an awareness of the injustices being imposed on African-American communities. Lamar always expressed an affinity for J.Cole's music and decided to focus his podcast on the J.Cole song *Neighbors* to highlight how African-Americans are not given fair treatment in a society that assumes the worst about a successful young African-American male achieving his dreams:

Lamar: *This song portrays the difficulties many blacks have to deal with in our society, and how they are often starting out life with far less privileges and opportunities than*

others. J. Cole talks about our society being racist, and about being a “black in a white man territory” where “cops bust in with the army guns, no evidence of the harm we done”. Our law enforcement and society are often mistreating blacks against their will, placing them at an unfair disadvantage in society. J. Cole expresses that he’s “moving back to the south side” after experiencing racism in an area with whites. This shows how blacks are sometimes forced to choose between a supportive community and attempting to pursue the American dream by looking for opportunities outside of their home communities. This is clearly not equal opportunity, and so this shows how the American dream is harder for many to achieve and pursue simply because of factors they can’t control. The idea of the American dream is different for just about everyone. But from my perspective, the American dream is being able to choose, having a grand variety and struggling with the paradox of choice rather than struggling with being confined in a terrible situation with no way out. (Student Assignment. 12.15.19)

As Lamar was completing his commentary on the J.Cole song for the podcast, I noted how he was demonstrating critical consciousness by questioning whether everyone had an equal opportunity to live out their American Dream. Based on J.Cole’s allegory, Lamar came to the conclusion that the American Dream is the ability to have a choice in any given situation to better one’s life. Lamar found himself questioning the legitimacy of the American Dream because obstacles constantly come into play if you are a minority in America. He noted that one does not have the freedom to live in any neighborhood one desires because of skin color. Unfortunately, not everyone has the opportunity like J.Cole had because of his status of being a popular recording hip hop artist, and Lamar acknowledges in his podcast that his reality in America does not allow him to freely roam wherever he wants to go because he is not always welcome.

Lamar’s observations from the song illustrate how hip hop music makes him think critically of his own position in the world (Freire, 2000; Hill, 2009; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Petchauer, 2009; Stovall, 2006). The fact that unforeseen obstacles confront African-Americans while they are striving to achieve their American Dream is clearly expressed in the song. The lyrics influenced the students’ podcast scripts that they performed for the project.

Centering ELA activities around hip hop gave students an opportunity to creatively explore and articulate their beliefs. Lamar illustrated this- he made most observant points of the year during his American Dream podcast based on his critical analysis of a J.Cole song through a creative podcast medium. This was one instance of several where I saw that when students are allowed to work with the songs from the artists they admire, the message is closer to the heart (Hill, 2009).

In another instance of students connecting personally to the curriculum, Aaliyah, I had built a connection with her early in the semester by sharing my favorite hip hop artists early in school. During the podcast project, Aaliyah demonstrated a high level of critical thinking. Aaliyah, an African-American female who struggled to write academically, was a strong reader and exhibited deep comprehension. She took an interest in the feminist writing of Zora Neale Hurston and was fully engaged when we learned about Sojourner Truth in class. She became fascinated in how these historical icons openly questioned and took action against the oppressive systemic forces during their lifetime, defining what it meant to form a critical consciousness. Early in the semester, I had the opportunity to introduce her to a female hip hop artist, Rapsody, from South Hill, North Carolina, who was a vocal women's rights advocate. I fell in love with Rapsody's most recent album and was ecstatic to share that interest with her because I felt it was fitting for the junior ELA classroom. She ended up liking one specific song titled "OooWee" that Rapsody released with the artist Anderson .Paak. Aaliyah decided to create her podcast on the song. When Aaliyah wrote her podcast script, she addressed how Rapsody does not let her success of achieving the American Dream get in her way of staying grounded:

***Aaliyah:** When Rapsody say "Don't forget all your family and where you came from/ Money change, the spirit shouldn't change none," she is saying that you can't forget where you from. It was a dream that she had young and kept it to return and live at North Carolina..... In Gatsby, money changes people. In the song, she does not change with money and wants to please the old people of her town. (Student Assignment. 12.15.19)*

Working with Aaliyah and her writing was often a challenge because she had trouble organizing her thoughtful ideas. She was able to make comparisons to *The Great Gatsby* in her podcast script, it exemplified the power that hip hop literacies can play in the classroom and also demonstrated critical thinking. Aaliyah developed this awareness of how capitalist tendencies like money and materialism can distance people from what matters most, family. We often discussed in class the negative impact materialism has on people, and hip hop artists are often at fault in praising monetary value too much. The main point Aaliyah highlighted from Rapsody's verse is that she was not about to let money change her "realness."

The hip hop podcast assignment had students connecting the main themes from hip hop songs to the main themes in the literature we read during the semester. Aaliyah identified how money often can have a negative influence on someone's character and affect one's judgment of what is important. This was a common discussion we had about such characters in *The Great Gatsby* as Daisy Buchanan and her hunger for materialism. The fact that she understood the message from Rapsody and was able to compare this mindset to how the rich lived in the Fitzgerald novel was an insightful point. I thought it was her best work of the semester, and she had a sense of pride when presenting the podcast to the class. Aaliyah would go on to write in her script, "I would never let that money change who I am. When I get money now, I always share, and I rarely get it (laughs)...You can't forget who was there in the beginning" (*Student Assignment. 12.15.19*). Aaliyah was not only able to point out a negative impact of the capitalist system, she also was able to compare two different texts and apply them to her own life. By stating she would never let Daisy's materialistic tendencies in *The Great Gatsby* happen to her and would live by Rapsody's words of wisdom of valuing family, she explored a new reality in relation to her life and the dangers of capitalism, fostering her critical consciousness.

During the semester, I witnessed complex responses from students as they developed and shared a critical approach to understanding that all races, sexes, and classes have an equal opportunity in America. Petchauer (2009) claims that hip hop pedagogy had its most significant impact on education when it took the form of culturally relevant pedagogy to bring awareness to marginalized groups and their oppressors. Developing a critical consciousness can be a transcending learning experience for students by educating them on new ways to view their world (Crooke & Almeida, 2017; Stovall, 2006). My hip hop lessons provided opportunities to foster a critical consciousness in students by making them apply critical thinking skills to examine their current situations and understand their personal reality in the world (Freire, 2000; Hill, 2009; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Petchauer, 2009; Stovall, 2006). When students face adversity from systemic oppression, it is important that they can explore solutions to these adversities to enhance their lives.

Hip Hop Pedagogy Creates a “Knowledge of Self”

This is an excerpt from a student assignment about the American Dream:

*The American dream of equal opportunity
is nothing but a pipedream
Nothing but false advertising
which, what else do we expect from America?*

*We do it all the time,
Sure, it looks pretty,
but what’s the real catch?
(Student Assignment. Zelda. 1.15.20)*

During the semester, students presented, discussed, and performed hip hop literacies to build on their knowledge of and reflect on their own ideas of self while creating a wide cultural understanding in the classroom. Zelda, a white female, wrote the spoken word rap above. She was always reserved and would occasionally become engaged if it were a topic that she was interested in. For her American Dream project, she performed a rap live in spoken word form

about a topic she was passionate about which was, in her words, the falsehood of the American Dream. Her rap was titled *American Pipe Dream* and she performed it for the class. Performance is important because it gives students a chance to artistically present their understanding of the world through an entertaining medium for an audience. When teachers give students a creative art space (Green, 2001) in the ELA classroom, it forms a “metaphysical coming together of bodies, ideas, artwork, voice and experiences” (Mooney, 2016, p.30). Performing their own hip hop songs in front of the class gives students a platform to champion their voice and instill confidence (Hill, 2009; Mooney, 2016; Seidel, 2011).

Even though Zelda was reserved most days in class, she openly expressed how hip hop literacies is a powerful and creative way to explore one’s personal identity. The performance aspect of hip hop allowed Zelda to creatively express her voice that she passionately embraced. When I asked Zelda about the advantages of performing hip hop-based songs and allowing elements of hip hop culture in the ELA classroom, she reflected that it presents unique, thought-provoking perspectives in a creative way and replied:

If you allow hip hop in the classroom, it gives the student another platform, to reiterate their ideas in a creative and also a scholarly fashion. It is able to reach other students, because when a student performs it, their audience of students gets to absorb another point of view, they are able to learn more about a certain subject, and they are able to improve on themselves. And consider hip hop as a medium. And it gives someone an opportunity to be creative in a formal setting. (Teacher Reflection. 1.15.20)

Students like Zelda need to have another way to explore and articulate their ideas and a CRP-inspired medium like hip hop pedagogy provides that opportunity. The knowledge of self requires a “deep command of hip hop histories and traditions that convey largely unspoken but intuitive understandings of collectivity, history, and inherent cosmopolitanism, meaning that every individual is and should be connected to one another based on shared history, culture, and identity” (Wells, 2019, pg. 2).

The idea of self, in relation to the knowledge of self, is collective in scope where each student learns about herself or himself through experiences with students and teachers in the class, transforming the classroom into a community (Rosenblatt, 1994). Ladson-Billings (2017) defined a students' culture as every aspect of human endeavor including their thoughts, perceptions, feelings and attitudes. Zelda used the rap to explore her idea about what the American Dream represented and how it lacked equality:

*Are you:
Cisgender
Straight
White
Christian
Wealthy
and Male?*

*Can you move your arms and wiggle your toes
And is everything alright in that head?*

*If so, congratulations!
You're the demographic America was built for.
You won't have to worry about
getting paid less than your coworkers for the same job
Or not even getting a job because your name is too ethnic or feminine
You won't have to worry about losing your job if they find out about your husband,
or if you sexually harass Cindy from Planning.
You're a true American!
(Student Assignment. 1.15.20)*

As Zelda performed her rap, she was working out her frustrations that she had with the concept of the American Dream. She was acknowledging that the American Dream was more accessible for the privileged American that checked all of the boxes of being a part of the majority. During her performance of the rap, she incorporated performative elements to express her point. Her inflection would rise when she wanted to emphasize a major point. She controlled her cadence, so the class clearly received the message that she was conveying. The performance was so powerful that it nearly brought her to tears during delivery.

One positive aspect of the assignment is that students were allowed to openly express what they value and use the class as an audience. The performance aspect of hip hop pedagogy functions as a method for students to publish their work through performing and then receive feedback from the audience through a critical dialogue (Fecho 2017; Hill, 2009). Engaging with their peers is a productive way to polish their beliefs; performance can be a critical stage for self-discovery. After, I asked the class to fill out an exit ticket after class and one of her classmates wrote, “I really don’t remember her talking up very much because I didn’t know her voice. It was surprising. I didn’t agree with everything she was saying but she was good” (Student Assignment. 1.15.20). Performers get immediate reactions and reinforcement from the audience members, allowing students to process how their performed beliefs resonate with their peers. Students were free to agree or disagree with the content of the song and this created constructive dialogue, benefiting both the performer and the audience.

Zelda’s performance not only gave her a better understanding of her own beliefs but gave the class something to ponder. A student’s culture is constantly forming through interactions with students from different cultures in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2017). I recorded in my reflection journal, “Zelda was shivering with passion during her delivery and had the class’ attention. The discussion that took place after her performance was one of the top learning moments” (Teacher Reflection. 1.15.20). A knowledge of self builds on the idea of forming a sense of identity through openly engaging with classmates to build a community. When I had the chance to ask Zelda about the overall meaning of her performed rap she said:

The American Pipe Dream is about the false ideologies that surround us that make us believe we can do anything in America. And the true realities of it, the disadvantages we face, the idea, Yes, we have these opportunities, but all of these obstacles make these opportunities near inaccessible without true luck. (Reflection Journal. 1.15.20)

For a student who did not participate in class discussions on a regular basis, Zelda demonstrated deep engagement as she openly explored and expressed her own beliefs in performance form in front of her peers. Zelda was using hip hop and rap as a medium to express who she was and what she valued as a concerned citizen. She used her platform to question the dominant culture in relation to the American Dream. One of the elements of hip hop-based learning and the knowledge of self is how students can learn from each other through these forms of self-expression. In this case, students were carrying on a dialogue regarding a shared American culture.

Researchers have identified how students should be able to use their voices to speak out against the dominant cultures (Fecho, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2017). One student openly refuted Zelda's claim that privilege existed. I recorded the dialogue in my journal:

David claimed that privilege did not exist and that it is not right to label someone who has had to work for everything that they have earned as benefiting from privilege. Nathan refuted David by bringing up equity and that not everyone starts from an even playing field. We had brought up the concept of inequity earlier in the semester and had had similar conversations about the subject. I kept my role limited and just added some general questions to keep the discussion afloat. The class jumped into an in-depth discussion on the matter where they all settled the discussion to "agree to disagree" (Teacher Reflection. 1.15.20)

In this instance, Zelda's performance resonated with the class and fostered a thoughtful discussion about privilege. Hip hop-based performance can lead to constructive discussions about the topics that matter in students' lives.

Looking back on the lesson, everyone in the class created a project that critiqued American culture and the idea behind the American Dream. Reflecting in my journal, I highlighted that one of our most powerful discussions of the year was not based on a classical novel or a popular selection from the literary canon, but from a student's rap that was performed in front of the class. As Zelda highlighted before, hip hop gives students another way to explore

their own ideas on a topic and articulate them in a creative way. But the learning does not stop there, for these performances can create a dialogue where students begin to learn from one another in relation to a concept like the American Dream. Students discover their own voices by interacting with others through hip hop-based performance, acknowledging their own knowledge of self (Wells, 2019).

Hip Hop Pedagogy Instills Confidence to Inspire

The power of hip hop music can inspire students to engage deeply and respond in complex ways in the classroom. Using hip hop in the ELA classroom provided students with opportunities to gain confidence and inspire each other. For instance, Zelda was not only successful with inspiring others in the class; she performed at a level of confidence that I had not seen all semester. As a matter of fact, her mother ended up emailing me to praise how the performance and interaction with the class gave Zelda a much-needed boost of self-esteem during a “tough stretch in her life” (Teacher Email. 1.20.19). Zelda is an example of how one of the most powerful aspects of using hip hop pedagogy is the way it instills confidence in students.

Zelda was not the only student that gained confidence through her hip hop performance. Another shy and reserved African-American male student, Amaru, got in front of class and delivered a powerful verse that exemplified critical thinking. Amaru aggressively took advantage of the opportunity to perform in front of the class:

When Amaru delivered his rap about the American Dream, I didn't even recognize the character he morphed into during the performance. Amaru was often shy and reserved but something was different this morning. He was all 100% sure about himself, completely confident. I knew he was going to perform first, and I was curious how he was going to prepare, and he told me he was listening to the instrumental he was rapping over to rehearse for his performance... I could see his awakening as he passionately delivered his speech. (Teacher Reflection. 1.15.20)

Amaru was demonstrating how hip hop pedagogy is some students' most expressive language. I had not seen him so focused on a task during the semester and could tell he took a special interest in his performance. His song was so expressive and reactionary, I asked him afterwards what hip hop meant to him:

***Amaru:** Hip hop is cultural. Cultural music. It mostly comes from Blacks and is cultural. I have listened to hip hop ever since I was young and growing up in it gave me confidence as a person.*

***Me:** What do you mean it gives you confidence as a person?*

***Amaru:** Tupac and Biggie. Those are the big time artists. I saw them perform for the first time and thought "Wow! This is what WE really can do!" That was inspiring!*

***Me:** So you watch and listen to these artists and they make you feel you can achieve your goals and dreams?*

***Amaru:** Yeah. They came from nowhere. Both did not have a whole bunch of money growing up. And that is the same situation I was in. So I was what they did with the little they had so....(Teacher Reflection Notes. 1.15.20)*

Amaru associated hip hop as being a representation of Black culture that instilled confidence in him growing up. He used hip hop to connect to his cultural identity and used it as a form of motivation. This is especially important based on the fact that he can relate to these artists like 2Pac who also had little money growing up. Hip hop artists can be inspiring when they rap about overcoming poverty and adversity to become successful. Hip hop pedagogy, being a form of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), can be inspiring to students because they are exposed to songs of artists facing and overcoming adversity. Ladson-Billings (2017) claimed CRP allows students to see themselves and their culture in the classroom to encourage engagement. In addition, Amaru demonstrated engagement with hip hop by questioning some of the power structures in society (Hill, 2009; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Amaru humbled me with his response because he was inspired by the socially conscious artists I grew up listening to.

When he spoke, he had a level of excitement in his voice, and I could sense he was truly inspired by these hip hop artists.

During his performance, Amaru focused on how failing to achieve your American Dream is not always the end. His message emphasized how one can find even a better life from the result of the failed pursuit: “But some of us here won’t make it/Don’t give up and think your life is over/Because the journey to achieve your dream/ Might just be a place where you don’t want to leave” (Student Assignment. 1.15.20). Not only did Amaru perform an attention-grabbing song, he also gave the class a message to ponder when analyzing the possibilities of the American Dream. He mentioned that where he is from, not everyone is given the chance to achieve the American Dream, hence “Dream”, but there are other opportunities in life. Amaru was tying his experiences to the hip hop music we listened to during the semester and making personal connections. He would later reflect on the major theme of his song:

So it is more about the journey rather than failing or succeeding. You see there are many stories out there, like a person will try to get to somewhere. But on the journey, they end up somewhere completely different, and they actually prefer where they are rather than the American dream they thought they wanted. (Teacher Reflection. 1.15.20)

When Amaru elaborated on the meaning of his song, the themes reflect what he has witnessed in his own life. The confidence that Amaru gained from listening and performing his hip hop song inspired the class and also me as his teacher. The performance aspect of hip hop once again proved to benefit students to find their personal voice and instill confidence in their abilities (Hill, 2009).

In the time of standardized teaching and assessments, hip hop performance has proven to be one of the most beneficial activities I have used in my ELA class. To think that Amaru has battled adversity and formed such a clear perception of his world is mesmerizing. It is especially moving to witness him making a positive impact on his peers, helping them see that there is hope

for everyone, despite what background they have. Monie had nothing but praise for Amaru's song: "I knew when he was working on it that it was going to be good. I worked with him in groups and he always looked at things from a different angle. Uplifting angle" (Teacher Reflection Notes. 1.15.20). Hip hop gave an opportunity for Amaru to express his understanding of the American Dream, so his classmates could get a fresh perspective of its possibilities. In comparison, the literature that we read throughout the semester cannot measure up to how insightful and inspirational Amaru's performance was.

Individual Hip Hop Identities Create a Collaborative Hip Hop Community

When students performed their individual hip hop projects during the school year, the class was accepting and supportive, creating what resembled a mini-hip hop community. This was most evident during our last class period of the semester; Earl opened up to the class about his selfless vision of the American Dream. What was unique about Earl's performance is that his song was an instrumental-based hip hop song. For his presentation, he plugged in his aux cord to the classroom speakers and played an instrumental that he created with a hip hop-based producing program. I described my experience listening to his song in my journal:

Earl outdid himself with an instrumental hip hop song that definitely caught the attention of the class. The song had several layers of tempo as the song would speed up with heavy bass kicks and then slow down like a smooth jazz rift. One student said he would love to put rap over his song. No one had ever created a song like this. It was so innovative and genius. (Teacher Reflection. 1.15.20)

Earl demonstrated how hip hop is a spoken language to most students. When it came to other assignments, Earl was a good English student and constantly engaged in the class but listening to his music made me admire the fact he was even better at other talents, like music production. Since Earl did not write song lyrics, he completed a journal reflection and shared his ideas with the class:

When I was younger, around 7, I was homeless and lived in a car, my dad had no job, my mom worked for minimum wage in the Bronx, yet somehow we miraculously escaped that lifestyle, mostly due to my father completing college and obtaining a government job in Florida which just so happened to be in Broward County, same place Kodak is from. While I didn't experience poverty anymore in Florida, I experienced far worse from the death of my first love in front of my eyes, to dealings of illicit substances, battery and assault charges and just overall dangerous activities for a 13 year old boy, yet from there I could only rise up to pursue my dream. I want to help people around me, no matter what it takes, nor whether they're good people or bad people, I want to help everyone around me and that's the dream I will chase forever and I always will no matter what hardships I face because that is My American Dream and no one will shake me because my will is made of steel. (Student Assignment. 1.15.20)

Earl had never revealed to the class the adversity he had faced before he made this song. The fact that he felt comfortable enough to share his experiences with the class reflected the way the classroom had become a safe and supportive community. He had been through adversities but still had the heart to share his American Dream of helping the world become a better place. I like to think that hip hop can bring out the most beautiful aspects in our students when they have the opportunity to articulate who they are through song. At this point, I came to the realization that no matter how much I thought I knew my students; I really did not know what they had experienced and how tough they could be. Earl was sharing what it meant to live in poverty and how that experience shaped him to be a better person. This was a moment where my students inspired me to be a better teacher and person: "I am in class listening to this amazingly produced song and then Earl drops this gem on us that, despite his misfortunes, he is here to help others to the best of his ability. Incredible." (Teacher Reflection. 1.15.20).

Earl was not the only student to open up to the class and share a sentimental piece. Throughout my study, I found creating hip hop music often gave the students in my class that did not thrive in the more traditional skill and drill forms of ELA instruction, a voice. Possibly the most moving piece came from Conway, a student that had struggled during the semester staying engaged with school and had just recently come off suspension from making a poor decision on

campus. Conway found an outlet of the recent frustrations he was feeling by writing and performing a rap song. On this particular day, about halfway through the class period, the principal of the school walked into my classroom because of some of the commotion that was coming from the room. I captured the moment in my reflection:

During the performance of our songs, it was one of the most productive class periods we could possibly have had. Of course, the principal came walking in, I'm assuming to check to see what, the commotion was. This is when I explained the assignment and how it was the interpretation of the American Dream. I have to say I was nervous because the last day of class had always been that one last opportunity for teachers to squeeze in that last review day for the end of the year test...but guess what?!?!? Not today. This is when I desperately asked for the next volunteer knowing the principal was going to observe for a little bit longer and students may feel intimidated to perform. Only a few seconds went by after I asked and that is when Conway raised his hand. I was incredibly relieved. To give some backstory, Conway was going through a bad patch of getting in trouble so the principal was a little too familiar with him if you get my drift. (Teacher Reflection. 1.15.20)

Conway had always been vocal in class and a solid contributor, but never would get personal and open up with anyone. He was always commenting and giving his opinion on the subject matter but would never open up about his home life. This is why it was so refreshing to hear him perform his song “The Bottom” about his experience of growing up in a poverty-stricken African-American neighborhood and a tough home life:

*The Bottom
 The American dream for me is too play pro baseball
 See I started from the bottom had to work my hardest
 Everything I had to do had to be the smartest
 So I was on a mission
 Had to make better decision
 Had to make my pops proud, grinding hard
 Just to see a smile
 It was tough, it was rough
 Nobody would understand exactly how I feel
 So I'm on a mission
 To perfect my ability
 To make it legitimately
 Workin' hard to make it where I want to be
 This is me (Student Assignment. 1.15.20)*

The class was taken aback about how honest Conway was with his song. It made the experience that much more powerful. I later recorded in my reflection:

Having Conway deliver such a meaningful performance in the presence of the administrator made his song even more powerful. It was an opportunity for the principal (who is an African-American female) to see us as human beings, genuinely learning from each other. In one of my most memorable moments as a teacher, afterwards, for the first time ever, the principal insightfully addressed the class and shared her own experiences of her hometown that also had a section referred to as "The Bottom". She described "The Bottom" similar to how Conway did as being an impoverished African-American community where it was a challenge to move up socioeconomically. Conway's vision of getting out by playing baseball and working hard. The performance was so powerful, the principal later pulled me aside and said Conway's performance made her get chills, it was so moving. She followed up by saying she was glad she stopped by my room because "sometimes you forget where some of these children are from and what they have to overcome." (Teacher Reflection. 1/18/20).

Hip hop can be a form of expression and a language that is universal for all audiences. Not only was the class intrigued by Conway's brutal honesty and performance, the principal was complimentary of his genuineness as a student. This encounter gave her a chance to see this student in a different light and build a new understanding of him, which demonstrates the power of hip hop-based learning. This type of pedagogy is not always the easiest to teach, but it can create the most authentic experiences between a teacher and student.

One of my ultimate goals as a teacher is to build an environment where students feel it is safe to learn. From there, I like to have each of us learn from one another and create a community throughout the semester. Some classes are easier than others, and sometimes I feel like I come up short. This class showed growth and started to build a strong connection by the end of the semester. This is usually the time it takes to feel that way about a class, but I always know how comfortable students are by the end of the semester and one sign is for students to be willing to perform their songs.

As an encore to several hip hop-based performances, the final group to perform that day had a closing message that personally resonated with me. Monica performed a song with her group and the major theme of her song is that despite all of the evil forces trying to bring African-Americans down, whether it is racism, law-enforcement, violence etc., the only way we will sustain and achieve our dreams is to support one another. Her main point was that we can only work together as a community, which she defined as everyone in the class at that moment, and how important it was to work with and to support each other (Student Assignment. 1.15.20). As I reflected in my journal, I recognized that there were times during the final hip hop performances in front of the class that we acted as an ELA mini-community (Rosenblatt, 1994) through the support we had for another. To close out the semester, Zelda, Conway, Monica, and Earl all shared personal experiences through hip hop that left the class thinking that although we face adversity, we still can celebrate who we are and where we are headed. It was these individual hip hop-based performances that students bonded and collaborated over that led to a close knit classroom that resembled a hip hop community.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the findings of this qualitative study and answered the research questions about what happens when a hip hop outsider integrates hip hop pedagogy in a public school eleventh grade ELA classroom and how high school ELA students respond to hip hop pedagogy. I concluded that hip hop pedagogy is a form of authentic teaching that can teach standards-based skills and address county and state objectives. Hip hop-based education can also assist in identity development by building a critical consciousness, building a knowledge of self, instilling confidence in students, and creating a community. Even though a hip hop outsider may face challenges utilizing hip hop pedagogy, it can be successful in building relationships with

students and fellow teachers who are looking to bring hip hop instruction into ELA. Students used hip hop-based dialogue to evaluate important themes and controversies in hip hop culture. Additionally, hip hop pedagogy can be used as an instructional method to overcome fear that some students experience in school and to celebrate the identities and cultures of the students in class. In the final chapter, I discuss these findings in relation to existing research and implications for practice and future research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this self-study was to explore what happens when a hip hop outsider integrates hip hop pedagogy into a public school 11th grade ELA classroom. My interest in the research topic originated when I was in elementary school and started listening to 80s hip hop. This passion remained with me, and when I became an ELA teacher 17 years ago I integrated hip hop pedagogies to teach my students. It was not until I entered the NC State graduate program that I began to engage with the research involving hip hop pedagogy in the ELA classroom. The research of Hill (2009) and Morrell & Duncan-Andrade's (2002) that took place in the secondary ELA classroom inspired me to reflect on my own practice and improve my approach to utilizing hip hop music in instruction. After being exposed to Dewey's vision of a democratic classroom, I made a connection between this approach and my own teaching using hip hop pedagogy. I took a particular interest in how hip hop pedagogy could be implemented in a rural school by a hip hop outsider like myself.

This study is composed of five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the focus and significance of the study. Chapter 2 includes a literature review that focuses on democratic, dialogical, culturally relevant pedagogy and hip hop-based instruction. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of a self-study. The six major themes are highlighted in chapter 4 that answer the research questions for the study. In this chapter, I summarize and synthesize the findings of the research study, position the findings within previous research, and discuss the implications of this research for my professional and academic pursuits of hip hop pedagogy in ELA.

Summary of Methodology

The study took place in a large school district in a rural county in the southern United States. Self-study design (Samaras, 2011) was the methodology used to investigate how I

integrated hip hop pedagogy into an 11th grade ELA classroom. Self-study methodology provided a framework where I could investigate my hip hop-based instruction, reflect on the process, and improve my craft. Throughout the study, I used qualitative methods to gather data that included student and teacher reflections and notes, student work, critical friends' transcripts, and lesson plans. I applied descriptive coding methods (Miles et al., 2014), and then collapsed the codes into category codes (Samaras, 2011) resulting in six major themes to address the research questions that guided the study:

- What happens when a hip hop outsider integrates hip hop pedagogy into a public school eleventh grade ELA classroom?
 - § How can I improve the integration of hip hop pedagogy into the ELA classroom in a standardized educational setting?
 - § How does self-study help me to understand how I implement HHBE pedagogy?
- How do high school ELA students respond to hip hop pedagogy?

Discussion of Findings

My findings reflect six themes; four themes relate to the research question of how I implemented hip hop pedagogy in my classroom using self-study. Furthermore, I addressed how I used that knowledge to improve the integration of my hip hop-based instruction. The next research question has two themes that addresses how students respond to hip hop pedagogy through engaging in hip hop-based dialogue in a democratic space. In the first section of my findings, I will address these themes and subthemes to answer the first research question and subquestions.

Theme #1: The Power of Using Hip Hop Pedagogy to Achieve Standardized Objectives

Findings from my study demonstrate that when hip hop-based teaching takes place in the ELA classroom, students can make strong connections to the ELA standards (Kirkland, 2007, 2008). ELA teachers should be encouraged to find creative means to engage their students.

Despite the pressures that teachers feel from administration to teach the standard curriculum, hip hop pedagogy integrates essential ELA skills. Overall, I observed from my research methods and discussions with my critical friends that it is possible to address the standards that often stifle creative teaching. ELA teachers can utilize critical relevant pedagogies like hip hop to provide a creative outlet for students while simultaneously addressing the ELA standards.

Theme #2: Teaching Scared: Using Hip Hop Despite Instructional Pressures

The reflective element of self-study research allowed me to develop insights into my teaching that improved my overall instruction. Specifically, the process of researching and reflecting on my instruction and discovering how to incorporate HHP. During the semester, I was able to initiate a democratic classroom which are spaces where teachers facilitate learning to encourage students to be creative, explorative learners who utilize experiences from their family, community, and culture to gain academic knowledge and understanding (Dewey, 1916; Kinloch, 2005). I used hip hop pedagogy to make cultural connections to students through hip hop themed lessons that were academically beneficial. By establishing a democratic classroom, I was able to organically discover my teacher's voice through instructing my students to fully engage with the hip hop music and make connections that students in the class benefited from. It was not until my students were learning democratically with hip hop pedagogy that I felt I had begun to find my teaching identity and voice. Self-study research methods provided that keen insight on my ELA instruction through a comprehensive reflective process that included collaborating with trusted colleagues.

Theme #3: Building Relationships around Hip Hop-Based Learning in ELA

Oftentimes, teachers have to be persistent when it comes to finding common interests with their academically disengaged students. I concluded that hip hop pedagogy is not the

solution for reaching disengaged students, but it can be a catalyst for forming relationships. My professional reflection indicates that it was significant to find literacies of which the teacher has a strong knowledge-base, build on student interests, and use both of these aspects to build relationships in the classroom. This research suggests how the impact of using hip hop-based learning can create strong connections between students and teachers leading to student engagement.

Theme #4: Change Over Time: How Hip Hop Pedagogy Changed Me Professionally

Reflecting on my hip hop pedagogy has been beneficial; I have a better understanding of my own personal and professional identity in relation to the groups of students I educate. This was particularly important to me since students had different backgrounds and experiences than me. In this way, I engaged in a democratic approach to learn with and from them. Establishing a democratic classroom (Dewey, 1964) where students can engage in dialogical learning (Fecho, 2017) gives students the chance to begin to find their voice by engaging with hip hop pedagogy.

In addition, creating a space for culturally relevant instruction involved much reflection through the process of self-study as I was teaching. Culturally relevant instruction included teaching students to develop positive cultural identities and critique social inequalities while helping them to achieve academically (Ladson-Billings, 1995). As a teacher researcher, the process of self-study provided insights to the shortcomings in my instruction that needed immediate attention.

Theme #5: Creating a Hip Hop-Based Dialogue in a Democratic Space

As an ELA teacher, I can use hip hop pedagogy to create responsive lessons that build on students' experiences. My findings reflect how hip hop pedagogy is invaluable in finding ways to have students explore personal and emotional reactions to complex topics like death that are

relevant to their personal lives through an open class dialogue. As I addressed in a previous theme, when I am given the autonomy to incorporate hip hop pedagogy, I can create lessons that address my students' emotional and academic needs. As a result, students benefited from the student centered discussion because they were allowed to share their personal experiences and beliefs on the topic in a safe teaching space resulting in the most fruitful discussion of the semester. When teachers are given the professional freedom to creatively plan lessons around students' experiences, it gives students an opportunity to learn life lessons that are greater than any academic standard.

Theme #6: Hip Hop Pedagogy for Identity Development

Throughout the semester, students' engagement with hip hop pedagogy built on their sense of self by fostering their critical consciousness (Hill, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2017). For example, the identity development in students contributed to what Wells (2019) refers to as building a "knowledge of self". Students analyzed and wrote hip hop songs forming an understanding of their own identities in relation to the real world (Freire, 2000). One aspect of hip hop education that students excelled in during the semester was through performance. Hip hop performance instilled student confidence and bonded students as they formed a hip hop community. In addition, students also used performance-based hip hop songs to instill a "knowledge of self" (Wells, 2019) as they shared their own identities through rap verse, highlighting how hip hop performance can also increase self-worth (KRS-ONE, 2009). Overall, the dialogue that centered around hip hop themes from students of different cultures and backgrounds can create empathetic relationships forming a caring community of learners.

Discussion

The findings from this study support existing research that hip hop education is one way to establish a democratic ELA classroom (Dewey, 1916, 1964; Fecho, 2011, Hill, 2009, Kinloch, 2005). During my study, the setting of the democratic classroom created a space where authentic learning took place as I made several documented connections with my students. Democratic classrooms are spaces where teachers direct learning to encourage students to be creative, explorative learners who utilize experiences from their family, community, and culture to gain academic knowledge and understanding (Dewey, 1916; Kinloch, 2005). When ideas are exchanged openly in the classroom and cultural knowledge is shared between students and teachers, democratic engagement can be utilized to enhance personal and academic identities (Dewey, 1916; Kinloch, 2005).

Self-study as a research method allowed me to grow as a professional. The findings in my study reflect how I was given the opportunity to freely explore my identity while engaging with hip hop pedagogy with my students. Self-study methodology highlighted the importance of establishing a democratic classroom so my students could learn with hip hop pedagogy. As a teacher, my students would regularly challenge my preconceived notions and beliefs through hip hop inspired discussions. Democratic learning with hip hop pedagogy allowed me to get to know and learn from my students in a genuine setting, which broadened my perception of the possibilities my students could achieve in and outside of the classroom. Not only did I learn from my students engaging with hip hop pedagogy, students learned from each other. When a democratic classroom is established, students are allowed to express their own identities and be authentic in the classroom setting. The hip hop-based projects that addressed complex themes proved students were aware of how these texts represented realities in their personal lives. A

democratic classroom is one in which everyone learns from each other and grows together (Dewey, 1916).

I taught democratically in the ELA classroom instead of being restricted to a scripted standardized curriculum (Dewey, 1916; Fecho, 2011). During my professional teaching career and throughout my study, I was affected by standards and professional pressures and expectations; however, my methods helped me understand how these worked together and also how I could improve my teaching. With the stresses and pressures of standardization and high stakes testing, it is crucial that teachers find ways to navigate standardization. In my study, I navigated standardization with hip hop education. I realize that not all ELA teachers have an interest in instructing with hip hop pedagogy, but they can creatively incorporate other forms of CRP to help their students learn. In the following sections, I address my major themes in relation to existing research.

Connecting Findings to Previous Research

The findings from this study are supported by the researched literature of utilizing hip hop pedagogy in a secondary ELA classroom. The themes from my analysis are highlighted in the existing research of democratic teaching, dialogic teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, and hip hop pedagogy in secondary education. In the following sections, I discuss the findings from the present study in relation to key, related research.

Democratic Classroom

Dewey's conceptualization of democratic classrooms are spaces where teachers encourage learning to encourage students to be creative, explorative learners who utilize experiences from their family, community, and culture to gain academic knowledge and understanding (Dewey, 1916; Kinloch, 2005). One end goal is to have students graduate as

productive citizens who push back against the suppressive forces that create inequalities in society (Dewey, 1916). In a democratic classroom, the teacher is a facilitator of knowledge rather than the lone source of information (Dewey 1916 ; Fecho, 2011; Glassman, 2011; Kinloch, 2005). Teachers and students exchange instructional roles to promote an engaging environment (Fecho, 2004; Dewey, 1916). The insights my students made during the hip hop lessons enlightened both my students and me as their teacher. Students would articulate their beliefs and interpretations of hip hop songs based on personal and cultural experiences in the form of hip hop music that was informative to the class. When students act as facilitators of knowledge, they take ownership of their learning (Glassman, 2001; Kinloch, 2005). In a democratic classroom, students feel like contributors to the learning environment because their voice is valued and heard.

For a democratic classroom to work, teachers have to be given professional autonomy to instruct with culturally relevant pedagogy like hip hop, so they can creatively plan lessons that meet students' academic needs. The democratic classroom is not a classroom that strictly follows the standardized curriculum (Fecho, 2011; Glassman, 2001) but centers learning around students, so they can grow academically. Despite not intentionally following state and national standards, I have found that a democratic classroom can still address state and national standards organically. Establishing a democratic classroom became valuable to me because I have constantly felt the pressure to meet and address the standards since I began teaching nearly two decades ago. There were times during my career that I taught in fear because of the expectations that were placed on me from the administration to teach the standardized curriculum. In order to overcome my fear, I discovered ways my students could benefit academically by creatively implementing hip hop pedagogy (Hill, 2009; Petchauer, 2009). In my study, I observed that students learn when they

are exposed to texts that reflect their personal lives and interests (Dimitriadis, 2001; Gay, 2000; Hill, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2017). For example, in my findings, students found a common interest in hip hop literacies and felt comfortable enough to engage with the lessons in a democratic setting that valued out-of-school literacies (Stovall, 2006).

A key benefit for a teacher that implements democratic instruction is to have the entire class learn from the diverse cultures represented in the classroom (Gay, 2000; Hill, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2017). The findings suggest that aspects of a community-based classroom were established by the end of the semester and that it evolved from democratic instruction (Dewey, 1916; Kinloch, 2016). The community-based classroom was exemplified by students collectively learning about topics that are relevant to their lives that they can apply to their communities post graduation. My approach to having students engaging democratically has students taking responsibility for gathering the knowledge that they see as relevant to their own realities (Glassman, 2001). Teachers who use culturally relevant pedagogy prompt students to explore their own cultures while learning from other students' cultures.

Dialogical Classroom

A key component of democratic learning is valuing a dialogical classroom that encourages an open dialogue from students and teachers (Fecho, 2011). The dialogical classroom shares similarities with the democratic classroom but puts an emphasis solely on the conversational engagement among students and teachers. A democratic classroom has a goal of forming a community of learning and dialogical-based learning is a method of instruction to achieve this goal. A dialogical ELA classroom is one where literacy is used to engage teachers and students in an ongoing conversation focusing on the texts of their lives. In a dialogical classroom, teachers believe that “students bring understandings, perceptions, meanings and

interpretations with them to the classroom” (Fecho, 2011, p.13) and through dialogue, students make meaning through themselves. The hip hop lessons I conducted provided my students a space to have conversations centering around the texts that are relevant to their lives (Dewey, 1916; Fecho, 2011; Kelly, 2013; Stovall, 2006). Both teacher and students learn from one another in a dialogical classroom where culturally relevant texts are valued (Fecho, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2017). In my study, when students openly connect with hip hop music, they share who they are as people, while simultaneously learning from others.

Fecho (2011) highlighted one important goal that drives a dialogical classroom is the “pursuit of truth”, defined as the process of seeking answers to questions through an engaging discussion. The “pursuit of truth” allows students and teachers to bring in their own experiences and observations to answer challenging questions collaboratively. When a teacher makes the “pursuit of truth” a priority in the classroom, both teachers and students work together to co-construct knowledge to essential questions. Some of the complex themes in hip hop music can require a collaborative classroom effort to explore and question. An important aspect of dialogical classrooms is working together to form and seek answers to thought-provoking questions. For example, this was apparent in my classroom's pursuit of closely examining the American Dream as students collaborated together to challenge its current accessibility. After listening to one student’s podcast, the class debated over her claim that not everyone can achieve the American Dream because of the lack of equity. Students used evidence from their hip hop songs and research that they conducted to contribute to the productive discussion. An ELA classroom can work together to look for answers and make meaning out of some of the questions that materialize during a hip hop-based discussion. Collaboratively asking thought-provoking

questions with my class challenging the American Dream created a bond with my students that was fueled by a hip hop-based, dialogically driven lesson.

I learned that analyzing hip hop songs can lead to controversial questions that may lead to times of discomfort during class discussion. From a teacher's perspective, asking difficult questions may lead to a state of wobble (Fecho, 2016) where one's pre-established beliefs are challenged. For example, in my study, there were times when a student would ask a question that made me reconsider my position as a White male teacher in a diverse classroom of students. This led me to question my position of power at the time which was uncomfortable but a learning experience that I valued in the end. In my teacher reflection journals, I noted how I needed to take my position of power in consideration when I brought culturally relevant texts in my classroom and make sure every student had the chance to be heard. By experiencing a state of wobble, I concluded that despite the fact that addressing my power and privilege was challenging; it was critical in my growth as a teacher.

Overall, when I implemented hip hop pedagogy during my study, students openly expressed opinions on the thematic significance of modern day hip hop songs. Dialogical interactions like this, with students having opportunities to learn from each other, also led to me learning about myself (Bakhtin, 1986; Fecho et al., 2016). I learned that it is important to value what my students' value and take the time to create a dialogue to help my students emotionally heal. For example, observing my students openly work through the loss of one of their beloved hip hop artists with a conversation gave me new perspectives on how to perceive death. Through this experience of allowing my students to converse, I learned valuable lessons from my students that made me a better educator and human being.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy is based in the belief that students learn better when knowledge and academic skills are situated in their lives from their perspectives and cultural experiences (Gay, 2000). Ladson-Billings (1995) defines CRP as having both a socially democratic and cultural element that can empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically. In my findings, students fostered their critical consciousness during hip hop-based lessons by analyzing hip hop songs that claimed not all cultures have an equal opportunity and lacked equity when it came to achieving goals in America (Crooke & Almeida, 2017, Freire, 2000, Hill, 2009, Stovall, 2006). The hip hop-based lesson focused on themes and asked essential questions that had students reflecting on their own experiences and making connections through writing, discussion, and even performance. In these instances, students also become more motivated and build their confidence from bringing in non-canonical texts because it represents what students value in their lives (Gay, 2000, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2017).

A teacher that values CRP encourages students to share their experiences and accepts everyone as an equal contributor to the classroom dynamic. Welcoming the sharing of student experiences in the classroom can be empowering for students. The democratic classroom setting created a space where students could openly express the challenges they face as a culture. Students that identified the challenges that their culture faced through hip hop-based assignments in class, were regularly greeted with empathy from their classmates. Supporting each other when sharing hip hop songs built a strong and supportive classroom community.

Hip Hop Pedagogy

Hip hop pedagogy provides an approach to teaching and learning where students and teachers can express an open appreciation of music and make connections to hip hop-based texts

that students may not make with traditional and canonical texts. Hip hop pedagogy presents an opportunity for out-of-school literacies to be valued as primary texts (Dimitriadis, 2001; Hill, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2017; Morrell, Duncan & Andrade, 2002; Stovall, 2006). In addition, hip hop texts have proven to contain similar themes that more traditional texts have contained and been studied in the ELA classroom, proving that the themes in music, especially hip hop music, are universal and relatable to students of all types of backgrounds. Through its worldwide success and presence in academia, hip hop is a genre that transcends race and other barriers making it a treasured medium teachers of all subjects can utilize.

My findings reflect how hip hop-based learning can establish a sense of community where everyone contributes and learns from one another. An important factor in a community being built is a connection being formed between students and the teacher. Throughout my study, I built relationships with my students by taking a similar interest in hip hop music where a connection may have not been initially made (Dimitriadis, 2001; Hill, 2009). These relationships can translate into a higher level of engagement in hip hop-based lessons.

Hip hop pedagogy presents opportunities to bring together members of the class and create a supportive community that can possibly help them accomplish their dreams and aspirations beyond the classroom (Gay, 2000; Hill, 2009; Kelly 2013; Kinloch, 2005). When students engage with hip hop-based themes through group work, students begin to learn from each other through collaboration. These lessons build an understanding and communication among students that creates a healthy and safe learning environment. It is important that students make connections in class that relate to their personal lives (Glassman, 2001). When students leave the classroom, they can reflect on the conversations that we had and apply the concept of building a classroom community in the actual community where they live outside of school.

Implications for Practice

ELA teaching instruction has been heavily impacted by standardization and high-stakes testing. English education remains one of the highest tested subjects in secondary public schools (Gilbert, 2014). The constant pressures and stresses placed on ELA teachers by administration to meet these testing expectations have limited the development of teachers' professional choices and voice. By limiting teacher autonomy, student learning has been hindered and this has led to the lack of creative and culturally relevant learning that appeals to a student's identity and interests. In my case and many other cases throughout the state, ELA teachers catch the brunt of preparing students for a high-stakes test through a standardized curriculum and catch blame when the test scores fall short of the district's expectations.

Before writing my dissertation, I had found that my passion for teaching and inspiring my students was in direct conflict with state and local ELA requirements that were imposed by my administration. These responsibilities became overwhelming and exhausting for my fellow ELA teachers, and I was in desperate need to find a way to fight back. As far as improving my professional field of ELA from my study, I have concluded that ELA teachers can use aspects of self-study methodology to improve their instruction and can use artistic approaches and culturally relevant-based instruction to enhance student learning. ELA teachers can utilize self-study methodology to creatively implement critical relevant pedagogies in their classrooms to teach students about topics that concern their lives.

The Positive Impact of Self-study Research

Self-study highlights the importance of a close examination of one's own teaching practice through written reflection. Samaras (2011) highlighted the importance of constantly reflecting on your teaching practice and identifying challenges one may face when trying to

improve professionally. During my study, I set specific goals I wanted to accomplish and clearly identified the obstacles that appeared in my way. Afterward, I would then meet with a critical friend and ask for instructional advice to address my instructional dilemma. My findings highlight the importance of professional support among teachers. One way this could be achieved revolves around providing more time for teachers to meet, reflect, research, and engage in critical friend groups. Critical friends can be a support system for these teachers willing to bring hip hop in their classrooms.

The intense structure of the workday allows little time for teachers to be reflective and learn from their teaching experiences throughout the work week. Teachers need time to collaborate with each other to build a support system for morale and instructional assistance. It is a challenge to be reflective because one has to be willing to engage in criticizing their craft and highlight their own weaknesses, but it is productive and necessary in order to grow as a teacher. It is important to highlight it was the collaboration with critical friends that helped me reflect on my practices and improve my instruction throughout the time of this study. Wanting to improve my instruction, the critical friends meeting was the aspect of the study that made me a better teacher by offering insights into my instruction that I also utilized in my research study. Teachers could use a similar self-study approach when bringing hip hop pedagogy into their classroom, so they feel like they are not alone.

ELA teachers meet as a Professional Learning Team throughout the county, but there is little instruction on how to truly benefit one another and improve a teacher's craft. Using self-study methods can help ELA teachers thoroughly support one another and improve instruction to help students learn. As demonstrated in my study, I felt that I improved as a teacher because I had supportive ELA teachers to help me reflect on and improve my instruction. Since hip hop

pedagogy may not be for all ELA teachers, they can still implement a different type of culturally relevant pedagogy they are comfortable with to build connections with their students. Despite the type of CRP teachers choose, self-study methodology can assist ELA teachers wanting to get the most out of their selected pedagogy. Building a supportive Professional Learning Team can encourage teachers to utilize new pedagogies. Likewise, I contribute the successes that I had to their assistance as critical friends. One insight I took away from my study was how learning to utilize critical friends can improve the entire teaching profession, not just in ELA.

Professional Development with Self-study and Hip hop Pedagogy

I encourage professional development that guides teachers in how to effectively utilize self-study methods to improve critical relevant teaching. I would like for them to be exposed to the self-study methodology that I have benefited from since I began to conduct this study. Samaras (2011) suggested that the thoroughly reflective nature of self-study offers insights to teachers that can improve their instruction. In addition, a professional development session to support teachers in implementing self-study research practices would include how to be reflective on one's teaching practice using critical friends. Overall, I could see all teachers benefiting from learning how to work with their departments and PLTs to implement self-study methodology in their instruction.

More specifically for ELA teachers, I would like to present a professional development opportunity focusing on hip hop pedagogy. I hope that we can create supportive professional environments where teachers are encouraged to apply hip hop-based strategies so their students can receive the benefits from the pedagogy. Teachers should have the autonomy to make their own decisions and bring in their strengths and interests, as well build on the strengths and interests of students. Similarly to the way that a classroom is enhanced through dialogical

engagement between a teacher and students, the same can be associated among teachers using dialogical engagement with critical friends to strengthen ELA instruction. Teachers can use reflection and critical friends' feedback, to help plan mini-hip hop-based lessons until the teacher is comfortable with utilizing hip hop pedagogy on a larger scale. Using the techniques and instructional steps of Samaras's (2011) self-study benefits a hip hop outsider that wants to expand the types of culturally relevant literacies used in the ELA classroom.

It would be beneficial to share my experiences from my study in mini professional development sessions (45 minutes to an hour) that we carry out monthly during the semester. My encounters with my critical friends reflect that teachers are interested in the hip hop lessons I conduct in my classroom and would be willing to implement some of the strategies I have shared during my study. To address the question of where to start when bringing hip hop pedagogy in class, I would suggest hip hop outsiders begin with a song or songs that are relevant to the curriculum objectives, similarly to the way I demonstrated in my self-study (See Table 3.3). In addition, I would give my teaching colleagues a list with the songs that I have used in my past hip hop-based lessons that complement the themes of canonical texts teachers are required to read. From my past experience of attending professional development sessions, I have found giving teachers specified lessons and resources reduces the anxiety of utilizing a new teaching approach. Similarly to my own study, I would instruct teachers on how to use some of the self-study practices like keeping an active teacher journal to reflect on their challenges and successes with hip hop-based instruction. Next, I would advise that when ELA teachers record their experiences through a direct reflection from the lesson, they have documentation to share with their fellow teaching colleague or critical friend that can be used to provide constructive feedback.

My Future as a Teacher-Researcher

Samaras (2011) claimed there is often a disconnect between researchers and practitioners in education. Having the opportunity to research my practice is an important way to bridge the divide. I'm in a unique position as a researcher as I plan to continue to teach on the secondary English level. I can carry on an open dialogue across both ELA practitioners and researchers to keep both professions informed of the priorities and interests of the other. Acting as a bridge will benefit my teaching practice and offer insights to the practitioners and researchers I work with. When it comes to secondary ELA, I plan to stay current with the research by continuing my part as a teacher-researcher where I can present my department with different approaches utilizing hip hop pedagogy along with other culturally relevant pedagogy. Since the concern is not whether hip hop pedagogy works but how does one implement hip hop pedagogy in the classroom (Hall, 2017), I could use my experiences from this study as a way to create an open dialogue with ELA teachers that are willing to bring hip hop pedagogy in the classroom. Hip hop outsiders will face the same challenges that I faced in my self-study, and I can offer the expertise from my documented experiences to help guide ELA teachers in their classroom. I can act as my colleagues own critical friend (Samaras, 2011) and be the support system they need to become a hip hop outsider that is comfortable utilizing hip hop pedagogy in the classroom. I have had the opportunity to coach some of my fellow teaching colleagues in my English PLT through hip hop-based lessons with success and wanted to expand its use in my department by offering more rigorous hip hop-based projects and extending my assistance to all ELA grade level teachers in my department.

Moving Forward: Hip Hop music and the Community

Moving forward, I would like to see more research involving hip hop outsiders and their experiences with bringing hip hop pedagogy into their classroom. Research needs to be conducted on how teachers who have limited experience with hip hop music can implement hip hop pedagogy in their classrooms. More research can also be used for applying these literacies in rural school settings since hip hop has evolved to become more influential in urban settings. I see myself taking a leadership role within the classroom while also continuing an active line of research. Journals like the *English Journal* constantly are looking for innovative ways to implement different types of literacies to help students make connections to their own lives (Freire, 2000, Ladson-Billings, 2017). I would like to continue conducting research on the secondary ELA level by investigating the experience of expanding my student's audience to the local community.

Through my years teaching, I have built relationships with local and regional hip hop acts that remain involved in the local community. I envision conducting a study where these hip hop artists visit my classroom and instruct my ELA students on how to create, produce, and perform a hip hop song. During each semester, our drama department hosts an open mic school-wide performance where members of the community can come and observe students perform different artistic forms of expression. I would like the local hip hop artist to work alongside my students, so they can perform in front of the school and community. This sort of collaboration would follow Dewey's (1964) major objective of creating democratic learning. Based on my student's past hip hop music they created, I feel that they can open up the dialogue (Fecho, 2017) of their identity and experiences in the world with the community. Building an interconnected dialogue and connection with the community opens up communication and welcomes community

members outside of the school to get an understanding of the concerns and values of high school students. Hip hop performances can foster community building through the creation of dialogues and listening opportunities for the community, allowing students to develop critical stances and authentic voices (Wells, 2019). Conducting this study would allow me to investigate how students can expand hip hop-based conversations from the ELA classroom to the community in order to build a common bond with fellow community members.

Concluding Thoughts

This study has offered insights into the instruction of a hip hop outsider teaching in an ELA 11th grade classroom. Even though I have many examples of where the hip hop-based instruction was successful, challenges did present themselves. Reflecting on my study, I have gained a stronger understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of my ELA teaching instruction based on self-study methodology. The utilization of critical friends enhanced my study by improving my instruction and my insights into the research. Having trusted colleagues I could use as a sounding board and to offer critiques benefited the self-study research process. In addition, I have been able to apply the concepts from my research in my classroom to help my students grow. Both teachers and researchers can gain insights from my experiences of implementing hip hop pedagogy. Additionally, the present study contributes to the growing body of research of teachers using hip hop-based instruction in the classroom.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Dear Ronald Richards:

Date: May 29, 2019

IRB Protocol 17956 has been assigned Exempt status

Title: Using Self-study Teacher Research to Reveal a Secondary ELA Teacher's Role Implementing Hip Hop Pedagogy in the Classroom.

PI: Wiseman, Angela Michelle

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101. Exempt d.1). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review. This approval does not expire, but any changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
2. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
3. If any unanticipated problems or adverse events occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website: <http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs/compliance/irb/submission-guidance/>.
4. Any unapproved departure from your approved IRB protocol results in non-compliance. Please find information regarding non-compliance here: http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs-docs/irb/non-compliance_faq_sheet.pdf.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

Jennie Ofstein
NC State IRB Office
919.515.8754 (email is best)

Gospel/Songs

* Required

1. What are the different names for the African-American Spirituals? *

2. When would slaves sing the spirituals? *

3. Read the Frederick Douglass quote about spiritual songs, directly quote how the songs made him feel. Why did they make him feel this way? How did the slaves feel? How did the masters feel? Why? *

4. Why were the spirituals important for slaves? *

Narrative Song/Rap

Directions: Reflect back on the narratives we have listened to and read in class. Create your own narrative rhyme about something that defines you.

It does not have to rhyme but it needs to reflect you in some way.

20+ Lines

Counter Claim Activity: 8-mile

* Required

1. Name *

2. Reflect back on the film scene and rap battle of B-Rabbit (Eminem) from 8-mile, how does he use a counterclaim to win his battle? *

- 3.

4. Does this Eminem, 8-mile scene from the rap battle help you understand the concept of counterclaims? How can this rap battle and hip-hop help you understand the concept of writing the counterclaim? *

5. The Research Essay is asking whether the United States should continue, reform, or end the War on Drugs. What side will you argue? Write a sample thesis. *

6. Considering your research essay and thesis (argument) on continuing, reforming, or ending the War on Drugs, what is the oppositions strongest argument? *

Research Paper Specifications

Topic: Many college courses require you to submit a major research project. You will demonstrate your understanding of the research process by submitting a research paper written in MLA on a topic of your choice. You will follow proper MLA style including a “Works Cited” page that documents all of the sources you have used. You will need to find 6 sources and at least 3 of those sources need to be print. The sources you may use include scholarly papers and essays, legitimate websites (.org, .edu etc.), surveys, interviews, polls, documentary films, published interviews and informational pieces (video and Youtube). You will also need to synthesize the sources to fully argue your claim. The topic must be argumentative and controversial in some form. Meaning both or several sides of the issue may be argued.

Style: MLA Format. Use Purdue Owl EDU as a reference. All papers must be typed in 12 point Times New Roman font, double spaced in black ink. Margins must be set at **one inch**: top, both sides, and bottom. It is important to use Purdue Owl EDU as a reference.

Length: 3 pages (Academic). 4 pages (Honors) 6 Pages (AP) complete pages. ****The title page and “Works Cited” page does not count. ****

Body pages do not include Works Cited or outline pages in these totals. Deductions will be taken for partial pages. Example: 3 ½ pages of text would not meet the requirement.

Title Page: A title page must be included that centers the title of the essay on the page followed by your name, my name, English class, and date.

Outline must be at front of paper. You must include the title of your essay along with the thesis statement. There is no reason to outline your introduction and conclusion. Only outline the body paragraphs. Center the title one inch from the top of the page. Double-space throughout the outline. The content of the outline must be organized and follow the paper.

Heading should be in the upper left-hand corner of the first page with the following information double-spaced. DO NOT INCLUDE THE HEADING ON THE TOP OF ANY PAGE BUT THE FIRST PAGE YOU BEGIN RESEARCH.

- Student name
- Teacher name
- Course and block (English III-4)
- Date (day month year)

Paper Title: The title of the paper must follow these guidelines:

- First page centered
- Double-space after the last line of the heading
- Use initial caps only
- No underlining, quotation marks, or bold print.

Page Numbers: The pages must be numbered in the top right hand corner, ½ from on page 1. Your last name and the page # appear in this corner.

- Ex. (Davis 2)
- Continue number through Works Cited page.

War On Drugs: Hip Hop Edition

* Required

1. Name: *

2. Look at your notes and lyrics about the songs we listened to in class. How do the artists (Killer Mike and Tupac) criticize the War on Drugs? Quote two quotes from the songs to make your point. *

3. Does listening to hip hop songs increase your interest in learning about the War on Drugs? Do you prefer analyzing and listening to songs or reading articles? Why or why not? Explain your answer in a few sentences. *

American Dream Music Podcast

You are to create a podcast with your group that focuses on the American Dream and music that is inspired by the idea.

American artists have been inspired by the American Dream from its creation whether it is art, literature, films etc. You will chose a song with themes related to the American Dream. This may not be deliberate; some songs have these themes that are subtle. This may include what the transcendentalists were addressing or the major themes of artists addressing the American Dream. Make sure the song you choose is appropriate for school.

You are to find a song that has elements of the theme of the concept of the American Dream and analyze its position on the topic. You will use the online program Soundtrap to create a school account to record your podcast. All group members must participate verbally.

These are the steps you will take.

Physically sign up with Richards. Include song and artist. Sign up for a Soundtrap or Youtube (Vlog) account.

First you must write this out in script form. Include the speaker and what exactly will be said by each member. Turn in script under this assignment.

- 1) Introduce yourself and the name of your podcast. Act like it is an ongoing podcast and this is just another episode. (:20 Seconds)
- 2) Create an ad that supports your podcast. This can be fictitious or real but the commercial has to be your creation. (:10 seconds or so)
- 3) Introduce the podcast topic and what the episode will focus on. (:20 Seconds)
- 4) Give a general definition of the American Dream and give your own critique of that dream. (:45-:60 Seconds)
- 5) Introduce your musical artist by giving a description of their life/musical career. (:45 Seconds)
- 6) Begin introducing the song you have chosen and some of the hard hitting themes to expect from the song related to the American Dream. (:45 Seconds)
- 7) You will play a sample of the song. (:30 seconds or so) You can play this on your phone or a mini speaker etc.
- 8) Break down an aspect of the language the artist uses. This will include a lyrics analysis. Think about a rhetorical analysis in class. Break down metaphors, syntax, symbols etc. Tie this into the overall purpose of the essay. (:45 Seconds)
- 9) Analyze how the song is a critique on the American Dream. (1-2 minutes)
- 10) Sign off. "Until next time" and end podcast. (:15 Seconds)

8-10 minutes in length.

The American Dream Project

Individual or Group based. No more than 4 per group.

Assignment: Create a song, spoken word, or voice over video. If you perform or play the song/poem in front of the class you will get EXTRA CREDIT! You may also perform the assignment live.

Plan to discuss and present your project.

You must answer the questions:

A) Define the American Dream?

B) What is your American Dream? Is it just about comfort or peace of mind? Is it about monetary value for you? Material goods? You may give your own commentary.

You need a hard copy of your lyrics. You can turn them in on Google classroom or write them out.

Or you can use a program that you can send me the link to your song. You may go acapella or sample an instrumental beat.

Follow this format for your song. You can break it up in verses.

- 1) Define the current state of the American Dream
- 2) What is your vision of the American Dream?

Groups have performed an allegory that breaks down the experience of a person living in America.

Use this program: You can use your student log-in.

<https://www.soundtrap.com/>

Example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzcxOl4b7IA&disable_polymer=true

Example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_ZmM7zPLyI

Listening Journal:

Below are some of the categories that are important to include in a listening journal. Address the following aspects from listening to the song.

Lyrics: The words of the artist. Straight Lyricism.

1. What is the tone of the artist? Make note of the inflection. Use your tone words to capture the sound.
2. What phrases or lyrics stand out to you on a first (or second) listen?
3. Make note of the chorus or hook of the song. Is there any repetition or other forms of figurative language? Is the hook catchy? Omitted?
4. Can you get a feel of the overall message of the lyrics based on a first or second listen? Summarize the overall themes from the song.

Timbre/Tone Color: Refers to the “what” or “who” in music making

1. What kind of instruments do you hear?
2. What types of voices are there, if any?
3. What other sounds are in the music?
4. What type of group or ensemble or orchestra is playing?
5. What is the melody like (main tune), is there harmony? (unless there is only one part there is some kind of harmony)?

Dynamics: The intensity of the volume

1. What is the Dynamics/intensity of the volume /Dynamics (softness/loudness)?
2. Does the intensity ever change? (pianissimo, piano, mezzo piano, mezzo forte, forte, fortissimo)
3. Does it change often or infrequently? Does dynamics become softer or louder, or change back and forth? Crescendo / Decrescendo

Meter: How many beats per measure. For this category students may have to come up with a creative movement activity (clap, pat foot, dance) to feel the beat.

1. How is the beat divided throughout the piece?
2. Is it a duple or compound? (Divided by 2's or 4's or 3's, 6's, 9's etc.)
3. Does it stay the same for the entire piece?

Tempo: The pace of the music

1. How fast is the music moving? Does it change during the piece? (speed up or slow down?)
2. Students can say fast/ slow etc. , but eventually using music terms like Allegro (fast) Moderato (medium) Andante (walking pace) Largo (very slow), Vivace (very fast) would be expected.

Style: Students should be as specific as possible

1. What category does this piece best fit into? What genre ? (It may fit more than one.)

Time Period: This category is for advanced students.

1. When do you think it was composed?
2. What in the music makes you think this? (for more advanced students)

Intertextuality: Have the students make personal connections with the music.

1. What does the music make you feel?
2. What does the music remind you of?

Date	Action	Collection
9/3	Teacher Reflection #1	
9/3	Meeting with critical friend to plan activities	
9/15	Teacher Reflection #2 (Pre Spiritual Reflection)	
9/20	Student Assignment Reflection. Comparing Hip Hop and slave spirituals. Journal reflection included	Google Doc
9/20	Teacher Reflection #3 Spiritual/ Hip Hop Lesson	
9/25	Critical Friends meeting with Don	Recorded in Teacher Journal
9/25	Teacher Post Reflection #4 Spiritual/HH Lesson	
10/6	Teacher Pre Reflection; Narrative	
10/7	Student Assignment: Narrative	Collected by hand/ online
10/7	Teacher Journal #5. Narrative	
10/9	Critical Friends meet #2. Bobby	Recorded in Teacher Journal
10/9	Teacher Journal #7. Post Narrative	
12/2	Teacher Reflection #8 Pre. 8 Mile Counter Claim	
12/3	Student Assignment: 8-Mile Activity/ Journal	
12/3	Teacher Reflection #9 . 8-Mile Reflection	
12/4	Critical Friends Meeting #3. Meg	Recorded in Teacher Journal
12/6	Teacher Reflection #10: Post 8-mile Reflection	
12/9	Teacher Reflection #11. Juice Wrld Passing	
12/9	Student Reflection on Juice Wrld	
12/10	Teacher Reflection: #12 War on Drugs Activity	
12/12	Teacher Reflection #13 & #14. War On Drugs/Juice Wrld	
12/116	Student Assignment: AD Podcast. Reflection	

12/16	Teacher Reflection #15. American Dream Podcast	
12/18	Critical Friends #4. Bobby American Dream Podcast	
12/18	Teacher Reflection #16. Post American Dream Podcast	Recorded in Teacher Journal
1/13	Teacher Reflection #17. Pre American Dream Song	
1/15	Student American Dream Song Performance	
1/15	Teacher Reflection #18. American Dream Song Reflection	
1/15	Critical Friends meeting #5 and #6. American Dream Song	
1/15- 20	Teacher Reflections #19-22	Recorded in Teacher Journal