HIP HOP AND YA DON'T STOP: USING HIP HOP TO ENGAGE MARGINALIZED YOUTH IN CONTEMPORARY URBAN CLASSROOMS IN CANADA.

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Abstract

This study uses two research methodologies: retrospective life histories, and qualitative research method in the form of youth questionnaires to examine student beliefs and connections to hip hop culture as a tool for student engagement. Through open-ended questionnaires with ten Canadian urban youths in the City of Toronto, this qualitative study revealed concepts of identity, student engagement, isolation and inclusion. The purpose of the study was to provide an empowering place for youth to be understood and heard in relation to their own educational journeys, capturing both the positive and negative experiences they have encountered. As a result of the study, I, the researcher was able to locate and analyze my own passion for hip hop through the retrospective life history method. Hip hop offers an array of resources, knowledge and consciousness which students can transfer across academic disciplines. This study offers recommendations for using hip hop as pedagogy to engage marginalized youth and thus lead to less isolation and more success. In order to understand hip hop's place in schools across Canada it is important to analyze educational policies, both past and present and how these policies ultimately affect the implementation of hip hop pedagogy, which was employed in this study

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"All that I've been given, is this pain that
I've been living, They got me in the system…
Why you gotta do me like that?"

-Jadakiss ft Anthony Hamilton 'Why'

Chapter 1: Introduction

Hip hop, what is it?....Mmm pause, stop, *pull up*. First let me introduce myself. My name is Yelly and I'm from T.O...I'm a teacher where the desks align row by row. A place where hip hop has grown and will grow a place I'll talk about more. But first let me tell you what hip hop is to me. It's more than a culture, a vibe or a rhyme. It is a place to call home when you can't figure yours out. A place to challenge the "equality" we doubt. A place for all walks of life to merge, splurge and converse about the things that make us, us. When I first began my research for this paper I wrote down a few paragraphs about why I love hip hop and what hip hop means to me. Here is what I wrote word for word.

> Hip hop is **love.** It's **acceptance** and **hope.** It's **truth** and it's real. I love hip hop because of its rawness and desire to non-conformity. I love hip hop for providing a place for the voiceless to have a **voice**. I love hip hop because it isn't afraid to say what we're all thinking and dying to say. It has no filter and is like a drawing, always up for interpretation. I love that there isn't a correct answer or formula to a lyric. I love that it has evolved and is a **universal** culture respected and loved by all walks of life. I love that it creates family, hope and pain. I say pain because anything that highlights **struggles** and inequalities has experienced pain. Pain is good because it is a tool for change. If youth, people of colour, immigrants, women, homosexuals, people with disabilities and religions didn't exist, we wouldn't experience the **pain** we do and have the ability to want and create **change**. Hip hop is me, you and all of us!

I have highlighted the following words in my rhyme above for a reason; love, acceptance, hope, truth, voice, universal, struggles, pain and change. These are all words that come to mind when I describe what hip hop means to me. To say hip hop is only love covers a small portion of the culture I have grown to love and admire immensely. Hip hop is love, but it's bigger than that. It is a culture that was created from struggle and universal pain; a culture that has found hope through truth and has used this hope to bring change upon us. By culture I chose to use Yon's (2000) notion of *elusive culture* in which he describes culture as ongoing processes that are emergent and change over time in relation to context and experience. "Elusive culture opens possibilities for engaging the multiple and often competing identifications and affiliations which, are central to the ways that identity, race and culture are lived by youth" (Yon, 2000, p. 144).As Yon (2000) argues that culture changes over time, hip hop as a culture changes and how hip hop culture influences people will be examined more closely in the this thesis. As our world continues to evolve and so do our classrooms it is important our pedagogies develop and change as well.

With globalization, immigration and increased access to the World Wide Web, classrooms of today no longer look like classrooms of the eighties. As our world develops and changes so do our schools….but what does this mean for our students? "As classrooms across the country become increasingly diverse, determining how to connect in significant ways across multiple lines of difference may be the greatest challenge facing teachers today" (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002, p. 88). In order to engage students from linguistically, racially and ethnically diverse communities, teachers must adopt cultural responsive teaching strategies and pedagogy. Furthermore The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is one of the most culturally diverse communities in the world. In the largest school board in Canada, and one of the largest in North

America, The Toronto District School Board caters to students from "one of the world's most diverse cities" (Zheng, 2006, p. 5).With a variety of cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic and faith groups in this school board, it is essential that school boards like The Toronto District School Board develop policies that align with culturally-responsive teaching.

Culturally responsive teaching is an innovative approach used in many urban communities where "the underlying assumption is…that diversity is an asset that enriches the learning of all students, not a deficit to overcome" (Stairs, 2007, p. 38). In addition to valuing the diversity of our students, Stairs (2007) would argue that "teachers should be responsive to their students by incorporating elements of the students' culture" within their teaching (p. 38). Cultural pedagogy is "an approach to teaching and learning that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impact knowledge, skills and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 18). Using hip hop pedagogy as a teaching strategy is an example of embedding students' culture and interests within the classroom. Throughout this thesis, various hip hop terminologies or slang will be referenced. I have italicized these various terms and will define them in Appendix B.

My Love for Hip Hop

I think it is imperative to isolate why I chose hip hop as my area of research for this thesis and how hip hop has influenced my own life as a student, educator and community activist. My earliest memories of hip hop are without a doubt influenced by a few factors; my family, my community and the values instilled in me. Growing up white and working class in Scarborough, a suburb of Toronto, hip hop was always around me in one capacity or another. Whether hearing it coming from my older brother's walkman or on the streets, it was a part of who I was for as long as I can remember. The first factor that introduced me to hip hop was my older brothers

who were 13 and 15 years older than me. My eldest brother in particular was the greatest influence for a variety of reasons. He was a teenager in the eighties and was highly inspired by controversial and politically-aware artists such as KRS-One and Dead Prez. I recall walking into his room when I was about four years old and seeing posters of Martin Luther King Jr and Bob Marley. His conscious awareness to hip hop's power to challenge inequalities was something that I grew up to admire and aspire to connect with. Years later I can say I have become a prodigy of his connection to awareness … as I tend to gravitate more towards conscious artists.

As I was writing this paper, I thought I would have an extremely difficult time remembering the first hip hop song I ever heard. Contrary to my perception, a nostalgic moment provided insight into this experience and it was simple; the first song I can visually and mentally remember hearing and recognizing was without a doubt KRS-One's[1] *Step Into A World*. For those unfamiliar with KRS-One's demeanour and flow, he is a conscious artist who brought awareness to various social issues plagued particularly by Black communities across the United States. In particular, his poetic lyrical flow critically examined issues such as gang violence, poverty and the social inequalities marginalized communities experienced. Although I know I was exposed to various artists and songs prior to this, this was the first song that came to mind when I thought about my earliest memories of hip hop.

The other factor that influenced my love for hip hop was growing up in a diverse community in Scarborough. It was a daily routine for the neighbourhood kids to meet up and play the latest tracks they had either bought or recorded from the radio. Although I was born in the late eighties, I remember distinctively having a yellow walkman with the black earphones on which I played mixed cassettes that I recorded off the radio. I would wait for hours until a particular song came on just so I could record it onto my cassette. When I was about seven and

[1] http://www.krs-one.com/

eight my long time childhood friend Alisha and I began to develop a deep love for Salt N Pepa[2].Although I was unaware of their influence at the age of seven, later I realized being female and representing strong females in a male-dominated culture was how and why Salt N Pepa appealed to me. Being the only girl in a family of seven boys, I found a deep appreciation and connection to females that empowered young girls to strive to be included. Every day for hours we would play the song *Shoop* and *Let's Talk About Sex* over and over again and choreograph our own dances to it.

As I reflect on this memory it is clear that we did not even know what half the words meant that they were referring to. I remember buying the cd from Zellers with the money I made shovelling driveways. It is one of the many memories of hip hop I share and value because as I look back, female MC's were less significant in the hip hop world at that time and I was exposed to Salt N Pepa at a young age. It was not until I matured I realized that all the artists I was introduced to at a young age had a major impact not only on the hip hop world but on society in general for their conscious lyrics which unravelled the avoided truths about our society.

Now let's fast forward to fifth grade at an elementary school in Scarborough. I was eleven years old and had finally met my match when it came to teacher-student relationships and engagement. His name was Mr. Rezza and he was a former rapper with the sibling duo The Rezza Dons. He was a young teacher who I now can say reflects my teaching philosophy of student engagement and education. He made it a priority to incorporate hip hop in our school. As soon as he advertised for a rap club, about sixteen of us entered the classroom to get the '*411*'on this new extra-curricular activity. For the next three years, we met on a weekly basis to create rhymes, record tracks and eventually perform a hip-hopera at the old Skydome in Toronto. A hip-hopera is a performance on a stage where the script is recited through rapping. Our first track

[2] http://saltnpepa.net/

titled '*I Like it When'* incorporated the school's philosophy and values while accentuating our personal '*swag*'.

The rap club did more than inform us about how to write hooks, chorus, and the tiring process of recording. It created a sense of family that many of us deeply cherished. The rap club at school created a place for all to be accepted. Whether you were new to the hip hop scene or a devoted member for years, the veterans would help the rookies, and everyone was welcomed. This sense of family is something I truly admire about music and in particular hip hop because it provides a community where difference is accepted.

Hip Hop and Education is a Necessary Partnership

My love for education and pedagogy emerged when I was about ten years old and witnessed an inequitable education system when my brother who was labelled 'behavioural' and in need of 'special education,' was mistreated in mainstream schooling. My brother's lack of engagement and interest was the root behind the behaviour but when you are from a family of nine with an outspoken, feisty mother, stereotypes quickly emerged and the labels began. It was frustrating to see a system which 'attempts' to 'support and encourage' learning and character development, failing to do so right in front of your eyes. On the daily basis, my brother's every move was scrutinized and judged because of this fabricated label imposed on him. A label that continued to follow him from elementary to high school and further reduced his opportunities, engagement and social acceptance. As I witnessed firsthand the inequalities, oppression and discrimination my brother experienced I knew it was my duty to bring change upon this system. Being academically privileged I was destined to use this asset not only to further my knowledge but to challenge and conquer a system historically and contemporarily oppressive.

Another reason I ventured into the field of education and teaching was to challenge

traditional classrooms into being more liberal, accepting and critically conscious. This passion arose from my own negative experiences in school being a student who challenged authority. Growing up with six older brothers, I was always tough and a tomboy and outspoken. I was taught to defend myself and stand up for what I felt was right. This trait I now embrace and have grown to love, yet being what I now know as authoritative, was something I struggled with growing up. In public elementary school, girls were not supposed to "talk back and challenge educators". I always valued and took my education seriously but I wouldn't hesitate to question or challenge an educator if I felt something was unjust. Year after year, I would get suspended or lose classroom privileges because of my 'attitude' or what I now call the 'teachers aren't always right' syndrome. Fortunately, my mother would always support my decisions as a majority of the time my disagreements were justifiable and meaningful.

It was not until I was in university studying education that I realized my so-called attitude was an asset and something I would want my students to inherit. Perhaps the word attitude is an inaccurate representation of the behaviour I'm referring to, but I merely would want all my students to have the critical skills to challenge rules, ideas or concepts they feel are falsified or unjust. Now being an educator within the Toronto District School Board and working in inner-city communities such as Malvern and the Jane Strip, I have made it a priority to encourage and model the critical skills I want my students to exhibit. Historically inner-city communities were always centred at the core of the city. In this particular case, Toronto's "inner city" is actually the old suburbs of the 1980's City of Toronto. According to Teelucksingh's (2007) article "*Environmental Racialization: Linking Racialization to the Environment in Canada Today"*, historically suburban communities such as Scarborough (post-amalgamation known as The GTA)"has census demographics comparable to marginalized Canadian inner city communities"

(p. 652). It is important to define what inner-city means in order to conceptualize where the participants in this study reside.

The ways in which inner-city and scholarly words intersect will be explored in this thesis, and, although hip hop and education were always significant aspects of my life, it had never crossed my mind to merge the two prior to the development of my thesis. It was not until I had read my dear homeboy and mentor, Ramon San Vicente's thesis '*Old school, new rules: Redefining black males, hip hop culture and public schooling'* that I realized I could merge my love for hip hop with the passion I have for education. As a student in York University's Bachelor of Education program, I experienced firsthand the practice of hip hop pedagogy as facilitated by my professor Ramon San Vicente. Throughout our course together, he would utilize the core four elements of hip hop, such as the graffiti technique in which we were asked to brainstorm various ideas surrounding culturally-responsive pedagogy. As this new-found relationship emerged I was inspired and excited to provide youth with the power to voice why hip hop is important to them and why some of them are disengaged in school. I wanted this thesis to represent various voices that have and continue to be voiceless, particularly in schools where their voices are needed most.

Hip hop music has played an influential role in the formation and development of my own identity in relation to schooling in which has stemmed my current research focus. Utilizing hip hop pedagogy in inner-city classrooms can significantly improve the level of engagement for some students because it incorporates real life connections to their lives. As a result of using life histories research, this thesis will incorporate realistic accounts of how hip hop can positively influence inner-city students to be engaged in the classroom. The research question, therefore, is how can hip hop engage marginalized youth in contemporary Canadian urban classrooms?

Statement of the Problem

Why are marginalized Canadian youth not successful in school and how hip hop can intervene in this? According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2005) high school dropouts decide to leave school as"the result of a long process of disengagement and alienation that may be preceded by less severe types of withdrawal such as truancy and course failures" (p. 1). In Canada, it is currently estimated that 12 percent of students do not finish secondary school (Bushnik, Barr-Telford & Bussiere, 2004). Throughout the Ontario Ministry of Education's report, youth reported that their reasons for leaving school were school-related rather than external factors such as poverty, family structure or geographical location. With that being said, it's important to note that the school institution itself has influenced youth's decision to leave school early. One factor that youth reported to contribute to their decision to leave school early was the lack of relevant curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2005). The percentage of youth dropping out of school is even higher for students considered marginalized from mainstream societies. Gaymes-San Vicente (2006) argues that "marginalized youth drop out at higher rates than their mainstream counterparts, experience a higher frequency of suspensions, populate the lower academic streams in secondary schools and experience a more challenging schooling process" (p. 1). It is without a doubt, marginalized youth and in particular youth of color are disproportionately disenfranchised in secondary schools in Canada. They enter a system that is unfavorable to them based solely on the merit of race and class.

Within the spectrum of marginalization, Black youths, or for purposes of this study, Caribbean youths in Canada are more likely to leave school early or be unsuccessful compared to their counterparts. For years, research suggested that academic engagement was a critical issue causing Black youth to struggle in Canadian education systems (Gordon & Zinga, 2012). This is

not a recent phenomenon amongst Canadian Black youth as research has seen Caribbean-Canadian populations struggling academically since the early 1970's (Brathwaite & James, 1996). From academic streaming to marginalization within schools, Brathwaite and James (1996) argue that poor academic performance has been a result of educational systems discouraging African-Canadian students to excel. When students are pushed into a lower academic stream, it often leads to disengagement and further, low-income jobs. Black students in particular, then perceive their educational attainment and corresponding goals as unrealistic and unmotivated to achieve them. This self-fulfilling prophecy has created a detrimental paradigm in the minds of young Black students, as they have experienced this inequitable streaming process.

In addition to the Caribbean-Canadian population, other racialized groups such as Aboriginal and Portuguese-Spanish populations in Canada have had the highest dropout rates in Canada. As James (2005) states in his book *Race in Play*, educational systems fail to recognize "inequality and inequity leading to the stereotyping and marginalization of students, their alienation, and/or disengagement from the schooling process" (p. 10). In order to combat the factors that increase disengagement and decrease success, the underlying causes need to be identified and addressed. Many of these factors are influenced by systemic policies and ideologies that have been embedded within our education systems across Canada for centuries. Throughout the research, it has been well-documented that lack of relevant curriculum and connection to students' lives has been a major contribution to academic disengagement amongst youth (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005).

Rationale for study.

As illustrated in the statement of problem, marginalized youth in Canada are reporting being disengaged from the education system. In my experience being an educator in an urban

community in Toronto, Canada, many students feel disconnected and disengaged from the school system. I often hear my students say that school does not relate to their lives and that most teachers do not understand them. Some students feel that the curriculum and overall education system are not informed about their cultures and experiences, which further marginalizes them from teachers and the curriculum. Many students are unsuccessful in completing high school due to various factors such as disengagement, lack of interest, and socioeconomic status. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2005) released a report titled *Early School Leavers: Understanding the Lived Reality of Student Disengagement from Secondary School* and their evidence supports that "the highest percentage of early school leavers is in Manitoba (26.9%)" (p. 3). The report also suggests that "non-school related risk factors associated with early school leaving include macro level variables such as: low socio-economic status/social class; minority group status; male gender and certain community characteristics" (p. 14). The purpose of this thesis was to examine the role of importance of using hip hop in Canadian schools through youth voices to engage marginalized youth in the classroom. Being a woman who has always been influenced by hip hop culture, it is important to me as an educator to examine this area more closely to see how it can be integrated in classrooms to increase engagement amongst marginalized youth.

Throughout my literature review various articles and chapters have illustrated the positive impact hip hop and mainstream popular culture can have on student engagement. This literature review highlights studies conducted primarily in the United States and a small percentage in the United Kingdom and Canada. Particular attention has focused on African American youth in disenfranchised communities across North America. My research method is unique because it contains the integration of educational experiences of urban youth in the GTA, as well as an autoethnographical analysis and life histories research method that previous research methods

have not employed in the Canadian context. Capturing the positive experiences of Canadian youth's perception and encounter with the hip hop culture is pivotal for the field of education and hip hop pedagogy. Canadian youth are often overlooked within urban education research and hip hop culture because of geographical location and misinformation.

In addition to the lack of engagement many marginalized youth face, the purpose of this thesis was to create dialogue amongst youth and educators to create a sense of purpose and empowerment. According to Freire (1970) as cited in Rodriguez (2009) "dialogue is vital to understanding the world and one's place in the world" (p. 22). Freire's strong beliefs in education stem from the foundation that "creating educational conditions not for educators to liberate the oppressed, but for the oppressed to liberate themselves" (p. 22). This is a belief I foster amongst my teaching and where hip hop and education unite. Hip hop creates a sense of purpose and belonging in which many educational institutions fail to do. Previous research implies that youth have not had a space to vocalize their frustrations with their education system. My study provides a space for youth to identify if and how hip hop can positively influence them in the classroom either through the open-ended questionnaire. My thesis provides this space for youth's voice to be heard.

Research Questions

This research study aims to answer the following research questions:

1) Why do some students feel disengaged and excluded in their schools and classrooms?
2) Can hip hop be used to increase student engagement and therefore, success for marginalized students in urban Canadian classrooms?
3) How do educational policies intersect with hip hop pedagogy?

Definition of Key Terms

In order to conceptualize the study at hand, it is essential to define the various terms used throughout this thesis. Below you will find the appropriate definitions for each term.

Hip hop culture: "should be referenced as the fusion of the four elements of hip hop (MCing, DJing, graffiti, and breakdancing) and its relationship to social phenomena" (Stovall, 2006, p. 586). Although there are four distinct core elements of hip hop mentioned above that were initially defined by the hip hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa[3], there are five other elements that have emerged as hip hop culture has developed. The remaining five include a) fashion b) knowledge c) beat boxing d) language and entrepreneurialism (San Vicente, 2014).

Inner-city: "An undefined area with a wide range of economic and social problems, lying within a long established, generally large, urban area. The term may be applied to such an undefined area, usually in economic decline, lying between the commercial centre of the city (central business district) and its suburbs. That is a zone usually characterized by aged, run-down housing in multiple occupation by people with low income (especially new immigrants), people who stay for a relative short period of time, and a dwindling number of aged local people." (Clark, 1998, p. 163).

Marginalization: the "under-representation of the child's racial group in the culture" of his or her school and community in "relegation of its members to the periphery of the mainstream society (Roberts-Fiati, 1996, p. 69). Throughout this thesis the word marginalized or marginalization will be used interchangeably to represent the participants in my research study. In the context of this paper, I refer to marginalization as the inability of the non-dominant status quo to co-exist

[3]Afrika Bambaataa from the Zulu Nation "is one of the three main originators of break-beat deejaying, and is respectfully known as the "Grandfather" and "Godfather" of Hip Hop Culture as well as The Father of The Electro Funk Sound. Through his co-opting of the street gang the Black Spades into the music and culture-oriented Zulu Nation, he is responsible for spreading rap and hip-hop culture throughout the world. He has consistently made records nationally and internationally" (Retrieved from http://www.zulunation.com/afrika.html).

with the status quo in virtue of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and religion.

Urban youth: youth between the ages of sixteen and twenty living in inner-city communities within the GTA whom have attended public and/or catholic schools within the GTA.

Pedagogy: is the art of teaching or the methods used to deliver knowledge.

Hip hop pedagogy: "is grounded in an intimate knowledge of, and experience with, hip hop culture as form of resistance to inequitable and oppressive conditions. It involves teaching and utilizing the nine elements of hip hop culture as a means of inspiring young people to speak about their lived experiences and rebut dominant narratives about their lives" (San Vicente, 2014, p. 11).

Critical Pedagogy**:** is rooted in what Darder (2005) as cited by San Vicente (2006) calls a "commitment to the unwavering liberation of oppressed populations and a belief in the historical possibility of change" (p. 11). "It seeks to transform how people make sense of their place in the world by strengthening their capacity" to think critically (Wink, 2005, p. 3).

Culturally-responsive pedagogy: Is a "context of teaching and learning" which "views the inclusion of students' culture as essential in improving student academic success" (Ware, 2006, p. 429). In this paper, culturally-responsive pedagogy refers to using hip hop as a form of culturally-responsive pedagogy in which student's interests; knowledge and experiences are valued and infiltrated within the curriculum.

"Well today's topic, self-destruction. It really ain't the rap or the instances buggin. It's one or two suckahs, ignorant brothers trying to rob and steal from one another."

-KRS-ONE 'Self-Destruction'

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Throughout the literature review various themes and concepts emerged. In order to organize the various concepts and theories, it was important that I categorize relevant research together. The following literature review focuses on these areas of research: Hip hop versus Mainstream Society, Hip Hop and Literacy, Hip Hop as Critical Pedagogy, Hip Hop as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Educational Policies and Hip Hop Pedagogy and Implications of Literature Review.

Hip Hop versus Mainstream Society

Since the rise of hip-hop culture from the mid-1970s, mainstream societies of North America, particularly the United States, have failed to recognize its importance, not only for education but, for the emancipation of oppressed communities. Despite the historical negative dichotomy between hip hop and schools, "hip-hop can be used as a bridge linking the seemingly vast span between the streets and the world of academics" (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002, p. 89). Some sceptics or critics of hip hop education believe that hip hop depicts a negative message glorifying violence, objectifying of women and criminal activity. When it comes to taking sides on this issue, there is no doubt that Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) would defend hip hop by stating "hip-hop music should stand on its own merit in the academy and be worthy of subject of study in its own right rather than linking it to a perceived academic text such as Romeo and Juliet" (p. 90). According to Low (2010) hip hop will always be in constant tension with education systems because they are historically built on a Eurocentric foundation

catering to middle-class Caucasian students (which hip hop is perceived to be outside this dominant class). Kelley (1998) (as cited by Akom, 2009) states "in much of the literature, hip hop is depicted as something occurring outside of school; something that takes place on the "bloc," in the "street," in "da hood," in "da club," afterschool, after dark, and in distinctive social spaces set aside for "play" (p. 196). The overwhelming disconnection between school and community is evident in many educational institutions. Mainstream discourses fail to recognize the relevance and significance of hip hop music for inner-city students (regardless of race) who represent alternative discourses. As San Vicente (2006) stated: "hip hop has always been a part of education, however, education has refused to accept it as a player…Education has refused to invite hip hop to the table" (p. 4).

Throughout the research, scholars indicated a significant battle between mainstream discourses (institutions, governments, dominant culture) and alternative discourses (inner-city communities, minority linguistic or cultural groups). In a mainstream discourse, the majority of people support a particular ideology that is oppressive and creates a power hierarchy to those in the alternative discourse. In contrast, an alternative discourse refers to the daily experiences of families that contradict a hegemonic mainstream discourse. Such experiences include daily stresses and strains on the daily lives of inner-city families (Compton-Lilly, 2003). According to Low (2010), there has been a recent progressive movement to "legitimize knowledge and literacy practices that are either ignored or disparaged by mainstream schooling" (p. 197). Compton-Lilly (2003) would support Low's claim that "all discourses are ideological constructions bonded to particular social and political agendas, mainstream discourses in particular must be recognized as being connected with dominant power structures in our society" (p. 138). Paul (2000) states "as with any controversial literature, administrators and parents should be made integral parts of the

decision-making process from the beginning" (p. 249). If communities and parents work together for their children's education we may see a shift in power relations, institutional barriers and student achievement. In order for educational institutions and mainstream society to see the importance of hip hop music in education, there needs to be a sense of awareness or conversation around deconstructing the misrepresentations between commercial hip hop and expressions of art in underground hip hop (Petchauer, 2009). As educators, it is our duty, as Paul (2000) would agree, to familiarize ourselves within the hip hop culture and pull out pieces of art that symbolize, represent and depict positive messages, and deconstruct those messages which may be demonstrated as misogynistic, violent or misleading. The world of hip hop has a rich history, challenging journey and array of members which can effectively integrate into classroom-based literacy activities.

Hip Hop and Literacy

According to The Ontario Ministry of Education *Literacy for Learning Report* (2004) "literacy is defined in this report as the ability to use language and images in rich and varied forms to read, write, listen, speak, view, represent, and think critically about ideas. It enables us to share information, to interact with others, and to make meaning" (p. 17). It is also important to note that literacy also develops from prior knowledge, culture and individual experiences to make sense of the information being processed (Literacy for Learning Report, 2004). As indicated in the introduction, particular cultural groups have been unsuccessful in publically funded educational institutions across Canada. In addition to being from a particular cultural group, research has also been found across the United States that boys are typically less successful in school than boys. According to Smith and Wilhelm (2002), "without question, the

widest current gender gap for learning achievement recorded by standardized measures is in the area of literacy" in which boys typically perform significantly less than girls (p. 1).

Why it is that boys literacy skills are generally poorer than girls? Although many scholars attribute different reasons as to why boys perform poorer than girls on literacy tasks, one particular reason that corresponds to my research focus is the notion of purpose and interest. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) also argue that "boys like to read about hobbies, sports, and things they might do or be interested in doing" (p. 11). If research directs us to this point, why is it that boys are still underperforming girls? If we know boys' literacy skill developments are directly connected to their interests, how come our male students are unsuccessful when writing EQAO (Ontario's Education Quality and Accountability Office) testing?

According to the Chief Executive Officer of EQAO Marguerite Jackson (2010) there is a sense of urgency to attend to boys academic underachievement in the area of literacy as evidence for 15 years has indicated "boys lag behind girls in literacy" (p. 1). When Smith and Wilhelm (2002) conducted their study with 24 male students, it was evident throughout the study that "boys wanted to do reading that fed (their) pre-existing interests" and that having a choice to read what interested them was something *Jeff*, one of the participants found really important to his success (p. 108). This notion of interest is described by Smith and Wilhelm (2002) as "interests were brought to school, not developed in school" (p. 108). This particular concept intrigues me because as educators, we are historically taught to use the curriculum to foster learning, rather than using the student's learning/interests to create a continuum of learning.

Hip hop as critical literacy. Throughout the literature review conducted for this thesis various scholars have analyzed the importance of using hip hop to develop and construct literacy skills amongst children and youth. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) have become one of two

most pivotal scholars in the field of hip hop and literacy. In their article *Promoting Academic Literacy with Urban Youth through Engaging Hip-Hop Culture*, Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) argue that hip hop lyrics are literary texts which "can be used to scaffold literary terms and concepts" to foster literacy development (p. 89). Not only can hip hop lyrics contain positive messages for marginalized students, hip hop texts are "rich in imagery and metaphor which can teach irony, tone, diction and point of view" (Morrell& Duncan-Andrade, 2002, p. 89). In Morrell and Duncan-Andrade's (2002) study they developed a unit to integrate "hip-hop music into a "traditional" English poetry unit" (p. 90). As a result of their experimental unit they observed the students created brilliant interpretations and were able to make distinctive connections between rap texts and canonical poems. In addition, Morrell and Duncan-Andrade noticed an increase in student engagement with poetry, meaningful literacy connections and use of critical dialogue. According to Stovall (2006) hip hop has served as a "transformative element in the development of critical teaching and thinking" (p. 585). It can also be argued that literacy can be developed through hip hop because it "connects individuals and communities, and is an essential tool for personal growth and active participation in a democratic society" (Literacy for Learning Report, 2004, p. 17).

Throughout the research, scholars confidently mention that hip hop pedagogy creates an awareness of critical thinking skills that students otherwise may not have developed. Stairs (2007) analyzed pre-service teachers who integrated hip hop to teach poetry and a unit on the Harlem Renaissance. Stairs' work supports the claim that culturally responsive pedagogy motivates and engages high school inner-city students in ways other pedagogical approaches cannot. Furthermore, Stairs (2007) reiterates "urban students will develop their language arts skills…by drawing from the rich variety of experiences and intelligences students bring with

them to class" (p. 42). Yosso (2005) arguably defines these experiences and intelligences our students bring to our classrooms as 'community cultural wealth'. Yosso coined this term to illustrate the positive aspects or wealth marginalized communities or communities of colour have and are typically not perceived as valuable because they counter the status quo. Examples of community cultural wealth include linguistic capital, which is the ability to speak a variety of languages other than the dominant language. Navigational capital is the ability to navigate unfavourable systemic institutions and access resources and information for oneself or community. Another capital Yosso (2005) identifies is familial capital that does not necessarily include the typical immediate family, rather, any positive relationships with community members, neighbours, agencies or individuals who are not blood related. Similar to Yosso's notion of cultural capital, it can be argued that hip hop culture and those who identify as being members of the community have an extensive skill set in which they can bring to the classrooms to enhance not only their own learning but the learning of educators as well.

Various skills acquired through hip hop are transferrable to academics. Essential literacy skills such as critical thinking skills, inferencing/analyzing lyrics and higher order thinking can be developed through hip hop (Literacy for Learning Report, 2004).Many researchers such as Scherpf (2001) argue that hip hop lyrics foster critical consciousness and provide the foundations for examining dominant ideologies and discourses. Hanley (2007) argues that hip hop as an artistic form of expression allows for the development of "imagination, creativity, cultural knowledge, expressiveness, and skills in observation, sensory awareness, problem solving, hypothesizing, risk taking, decision making, focus/concentration and patterning" all of which are exemplar skills needed to be successful in formal education (p. 41). It is without doubt that throughout my own journey and relationship with hip hop I have become more expressive and

creative with words. As a member of my school's rap club I vividly recall this space created not just a physical location to create and spit rhymes; rather, it was a forum for analysis, recognition and the development of critical thinking skills. Prior to my teacher organizing a hip-hopera, we would often be given a theme each week and given time to brainstorm rhymes and ideas about this theme. In addition to using literacy skills to actually write and recite these rhymes, analyzing what the theme meant to us as individuals is where the critical thinking skills were engaged. Low (2011) argues that youth who relate to hip hop can develop critical language-awareness skills by "arming them with sociolinguistic tools for studying the language practices of their communities" (p. 17). Evidence suggests a positive correlation between hip hop and academic skills which can ultimately translate into success in school.

Hip Hop as Critical Pedagogy

Historically, hip hop was a culture that challenged the dominant status quo and provided a space for marginalized youth to question and confront social inequalities. Using hip hop within our classrooms provides more than just a context and framework for learning; it empowers students to achieve autonomy and self-awareness. According to Petchauer (2009), hip hop culture is an artistic expression of practice created by Black and Latino cultural groups in post-industrial America during the 1970's and 1980's. Although hip hop emerged from a culture of oppression San Vicente (2014) argues that hip hop as "a living culture will surely continue to evolve, enriched by new elements introduced by a new generation of practitioners" (p. 8). Hip hop education as a tool of critical pedagogy fosters and develops critical consciousness amongst students. Hip hop is more than a catchy rhythm and rhyme. If delivered and analyzed effectively, hip hop is and can be used through the lens of critical pedagogy. According to Wink (2005) "critical pedagogy challenges our long-held assumptions and leads us to ask new questions, and

the questions we ask will determine the answers we get" (p. 165). What better way to challenge assumptions then within the culture of hip hop? Our students coming from various generations, experiences and backgrounds will have their own set of assumptions about hip hop. As Wink argues, critical pedagogy challenges assumptions of not only educators and students, but society and communities in general. Hip hop is a forum in which critical pedagogy can be used to develop student's critical thinking skills and how they challenge the world around them.

Throughout the research there was an overwhelming amount of support around using hip hop as a tool for challenging and examining social inequalities, oppression and racism. Embedded within these claims are examples used within different case studies to examine critically issues of social justice. Morrell (2002) had his participants engage with hip hop to teach a media literacy unit. The students created their own poems, which presented critical social commentaries that challenged social injustices within their communities. However, according to Rodriguez (2009) "historically marginalized youth are afforded few opportunities in school to engage in such dialogue" (p. 21) that Morrell (2002) would argue is essential for the development of critical thinking skills. Hip hop has served an essential purpose for racialized and marginalized youth typically of Latina/o and African-American cultural groups to voice their opinions and form an identity within homogenous societies. Hip hop has allowed disenfranchised youth to "communicate their existence to the world" (Rodriguez, 2009, p. 21). Hip hop is more than a rhythm and rhyme; it began as a cultural movement in response to the immoral "foundations of centuries-old U.S. racial caste system" (Newman, 2005, p. 402). The entire hip hop culture is embedded within a culture of resistance to historical, political and social inequalities which can be utilized to expand on curriculum expectations.

In the early nineties black-on-black crime was becoming an American pandemic and the

hip hop community united more than ever to address this injustice. It was the Stop the Violence Movement developed by various MC's in New York City during the late 1980's and songs like '*Self-Destruction*'[4] that brought the Black community together on the fight against violence as a result of racial oppression. "Self-destruction, ya headin for self-destruction" plays in my head every time I hear of gun violence amongst our youth in Toronto. Stapleton (1998) states that "hip-hop gave youth the option of fighting with words, art, dance or the ability to produce good beats" as oppose to fighting with their fists and weapons (p. 219). Hip hop provides youth a space to create their own identity within cities, communities and societies which have and continue to ostracize youth of particular backgrounds.

Hip Hop as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

As several theorists have illustrated across literature regarding education and success, this pedagogical approach of using culturally relevant content is still something many educators struggle to use."We do not do critical pedagogy; we live it…it is a way of life" (Wink, 2005 p.120). According to Jorgenson in Ware (2006), data indicates that "teachers of color represent 9% of K-12 public school teachers, whereas students of colour represent 40%" in the United States (p. 430). With statistics like these it is inevitable that students will have teachers who do not represent the same ethno-cultural group as them. What does this mean for American students of colour? Ware (2006) suggests that there are "culturally specific teaching styles" that have shown to support academic achievement for African American students (p. 428). These teaching styles she suggests refer to cultural responsive teaching which is an "approach…suited to urban schools where educating linguistically, culturally, and racially diverse students is a reality that some teachers find challenging and ill-prepared to address" (Stairs, 2007, p. 38).

[4] See Appendix C: Hip Hop Lyrics

Teachers feeling inadequately prepared to relate to their students are very much evident in Canadian urban schools particularly in large metropolitan cities such as Toronto and Montreal. Higgins (2014) as cited in San Vicente (2014) *Rhymes to Re-Education* witnessed this racial and cultural disconnect in Toronto schools in which he states "I had one black teacher throughout my whole elementary and high school life in a city that is arguably the most multicultural on the planet" (p. 2). He further argues that "there is one thing that all educators, whether working in conventional school settings or non-traditional learning spaces, can do, and that is to create educational tools that…increase engagement among diverse student bodies" (San Vicente, 2014, p. 3). As particular groups of students—Caribbean, Aboriginals, Portuguese and Spanish-Canadians continue to be disengaged and unsuccessful in traditional schools in Canada, more needs to be done to change this.

Up north flow. As I briefly mentioned earlier, a vast majority of research on hip hop and schooling comes from an American context. Although there have been some pivotal scholars in Canada, the presence of Canadian literature and hip hop has a long way to go. Some of the key motivational scholars who have shaped my interest in popular culture through a Canadian context would be Ramon San Vicente, Rinaldo Walcott and Gamal Abdel-Shehid. Walcott and San Vicente focus some of their work on the identity of Black and/or Caribbean black youth and their representation in education systems. San Vicente (2006) defines hip hop as a culture, community and identity not solely represented by rhymes, graffiti and beats. This holistic definition encompasses the entire existence of hip hop culture and is one I use as a foundation of my research.

Aside from education, some Canadian scholars also investigate the national identity of being black in Canada and how blackness is perceived and interpreted both by Blacks themselves

and society as a whole. According to Walcott (2001) Canada's lack of "native popular culture" and space within a global popular culture community has allowed for popular culture in Canada to be a contradictory space (p. 124). This notion of contradictory space is quite interesting to me in my field of study because it highlights the need for a Canadian hip hop culture which has failed to create a global identity. For decades, Canadian artists have created and demonstrated their raw talent and proved their reputation in an American industry which has historically failed to recognize us. It hasn't been until the recent commercial rise of Drake, K'naan, Classified and Kardinal Offishall that has put Canada-specifically Toronto and the East Coast on the hip hop map.

Although commercialization in itself is a whole other research topic, Canadian hip hop has had a variety of raw and innovative artists that represent a different identity that the global stage fails to see. As noted in Ramon San Vicente's (2006) thesis "hip hop as both music and culture in Canada has been an important part of the lives of Black youth since it crossed the border" and came up north "in the late 1970s" (p. 44). As Black youth continue to dominant the hip hop circuit, the rise of indigenous artists and hip hop has created a different perspective of hip hop that I argue coincides more with the original intent of hip hop founded in New York City.

Hip hop within Aboriginal communities has and continues to develop locally and globally around world. In Canada, Aboriginal hip hop has created a new face for hope and empowerment as many Aboriginal artists immersed in the hip hop world have a shared existence—and that is to shed light on the conditions Aboriginal communities face today. Artists such as Que Roc[5], Eekwol[6] and A Tribe Called Red describe the harsh and inequitable conditions

Aboriginal communities across Canada experience from post-colonial power. Through his witty and critical lyrics, Toronto-based MC Que-Rock simultaneously mimics the traditional sense of hip hop as New Yorker's developed in the seventies. Que-Roc quotes in his song *Ghost Dance* (2012) "for all the ladies in the shelters, where nobody helps ya, except the cards they dealt ya." These lyrics provide evidence that the hip hop culture in Canada is expanding beyond Black youth. Aboriginal youth have connected with the social consciousness hip hop culture embodies, as a tool for exercising their opinions and challenging the status quo.

Indigenous knowledge. A member of my family was married to a man of Aboriginal heritage, and through this connection I have developed a devoted passion for questioning the countless inequalities suffered by those who occupied this land before us. When I became a teacher, I was even more intrigued and passionate about aboriginal students and how our country has continued to fail educating Aboriginal students. Despite many Ontario teachers' assumptions "there are over 50,000 Aboriginal students who attend public elementary and secondary schools in Ontario" (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008, p. 3). And although these figures reflect a large population of Aboriginal students it is without a doubt their values, heritage and way of learning is not incorporated in most publically-funded schools. As a steady increase of Aboriginal students in Ontario schools and a steady decline in Aboriginal teachers, Cherubini and Hodson (2008) are accurate in their statement that education systems are "ill prepared to provide a learning environment that is conducive to Aboriginal student needs" (p. 4). According to Statistics Canada (2003) (as cited in Cherubini & Hodson, 2008, p. 4), Aboriginal youth (those between 15 and 24 years of age) reported "boredom as the most prominent reason for quitting school" and feel disconnected from their schools. As our education systems continue to lack the

[6]Beat Nation website provides information about hip hop culture in Aboriginal communities across Canada. www.beatnation.org

cultural competencies to engage and educate Aboriginal students, how can we even imagine a system that incorporates the new urban Aboriginal and its connection to hip hop?

With such a vast variety of cultural representations within the Canadian hip hop scene why has it taken years for this Canadian identity to be recognized globally? Is it because some of our artists are too "conscious" and not commercialized enough? Is it because we are perceived to be "new" at this whole culture they call "hip hop"? This Canadian identity is the exact reason why additional research from a Canadian context is needed to situate hip hop pedagogy within our schools. In order to understand how hip hop pedagogy will infiltrate in Canadian schools it's imperative to examine educational policies that ultimately affect what is delivered and welcomed in Canadian classrooms.

Educational Policies and Hip Hop Pedagogy

For centuries, educational policies have been a key stakeholder in curriculum development, academic expectations and teacher development across Canada. As our demographics change, one would assume the policies would reflect this change. Despite obvious expectations, many of the policies developed and executed in Canadian schools fail to reflect the needs and strengths our students possess. For example, with the changing student population in Canada, the increase of students whose home language is not English, one would assume policies would be put in place to foster and embrace the positive aspects of bilingualism. Educational policies, hip hop pedagogy and this thesis all interrelate because many of the youth participants in this study live in inner-city communities across Toronto. Levin et al. (2007) argue that educational policies negatively impact inner-city communities more so than others. They believe that urban education in particular has been "deeply rooted in larger and long-lasting social inequalities built around class, ethnicity, language and gender" (p. 2). These are all factors the

participants in this study and I have faced within education. Goldberg (2006) emphasizes the importance of looking at policies as they intersect with one another and build upon previous historical, social and political ideas. In the subsequent chapters, how educational policies intersect with hip hop pedagogy will be explored more in-depth.

Implications of the Literature Review

With any literature review, there always seems to be a gap or over-generalization in one particular area. In the literature review I conducted, some of the implications of my research included a lack of current Canadian context in which hip hop has been used in classrooms. Predominantly the research found is American-based and from urban cities such as New York City and Los Angeles. For many marginalized youth in Canadian schools, secondary schools are failing to engage and thus therefore create success for their students. Research consistently demonstrates that specific cultural groups such as Aboriginal, Portuguese and Caribbean-Black youth have been unsuccessful in Canadian public schools, in terms of graduating high school and/or dropping out. In The Toronto District School Board's Special Education Report (2010) "self-identified Black students with an overall proportion of 14% were over-represented amongst students with behavioural exceptionalities (36%)" (p. 42). Despite evidence to show the disparities between race and special education, concrete research and awareness has been for the most part hidden from mainstream knowledge. Further research is needed in this area to combat the inequitable labelling on particular cultural groups.

We as educators need to accept and validate students' lived experiences and knowledge (what Teelucksingh describes as community cultural wealth) as curriculum resources within our classrooms. Often time's hip hop is not "brought" into schools because of teacher and administrators fear of the unknown and perceived lack of connectivity to the curriculum. If

educators were to delve into this unknown territory known as hip hop they would immediately see the connection between hip hop and curriculum as well as learning and engagement. In order to incorporate hip hop in Canadian classrooms, educators themselves will need to make changes to their own teaching practices. Further research, particularly within a Canadian context will be needed in order to assess how and who is using hip hop pedagogy in classrooms. The purpose of my research is to find ways to help particular groups of students be successful through using hip hop as a pedagogical tool.

"A woman strives for a better life but who the hell cares because she"s living on welfare? The government can't come up with a decent housing plan so she's in no-mans-land"

-Queen Latifah 'The Evil That Men Do'

Chapter 3: Methodology

This thesis used a combination of three research approaches, including retrospective life-history research, qualitative research in the form of open-ended questionnaires from youth in communities across the GTA, and educational policy analysis to answer the research questions. The research questions are: *Why do some students feel disengaged and excluded in their schools and classroom? Can hip hop be used to increase student engagement and therefore, success for marginalized students in urban Canadian classrooms? How do educational policies intersect with hip hop pedagogy?* Using three research approaches has enabled me to answer specific research questions related to the methodology. Each of the research methods will be briefly described below.

In order to answer the question of *why do some students feel disengaged and excluded within their schools and classrooms,* it was important to have the youth's voice infiltrate through the research by conducting and analyzing qualitative data in the form of a questionnaire. The second research question I began my thesis with *asks the question, can hip hop be used to increase student engagement and therefore, success for marginalized students in urban Canadian classrooms?* In order to answer this question it was essential to use a combination of the qualitative data from the youth participants along with my own autoethnography as both the participants and I (the researcher) had been engaged by hip hop culture. The final research method, policy analysis, serves an essential purpose in my thesis because it provides insight into the intersections of discourse that educational policies create. These intersections of discourse

directly implicate pedagogies such as hip hop pedagogy, and whether it is welcomed in classrooms across Canada.

Participants

I distributed 10 questionnaires to youth between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one. All the youth were members of a youth empowerment program I created and facilitated at a high school in Toronto. Six of the participants were males and four were females. All the youth participants lived within the GTA. Eight of the ten lived in the West end of Toronto while the other two were from Scarborough. All ten of the participants represented various ethnic groups they self-identified with including African, Somalian, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, White, Guyanese, Jamaican, Afghani and Portuguese. They were given the questionnaires after school hours at the same time so they could be completed the day of distribution.

Although I knew all of the youth in the capacity of the group, they were selected on first-come-first bases as there were limited incentives for participating in the study. The incentive given was a free movie pass to each participant. I strategically provided an incentive to the youth because I know many youth would be reluctant to complete a questionnaire that required them to write. The questionnaires were distributed one evening after school at the same time. The first ten youth to participate received the incentive. All participants resided within the City of Toronto and had interest in the hip hop culture and had resided in a marginalized community characterized by inner-city factors. Teelucksingh (2007) would define marginalized communities as intentionally created communities where strategic obstacles are in place to reduce opportunities for these populations to be successful in mainstream society. In this study marginalized communities are those in which have been negatively represented within society and are not limited to but can include The Jane and Finch Corridor, St. Jamestown, Regent Park,

Kingston Road-Galloway, Mornell Court, Palmer Court, Chester Le, Dorset Park, Eglinton East-Kennedy Park, Westminister-Branson, Crescent Town, Scarborough Village, Malvern, Flemingdon Park and Lawrence Heights (Poverty by Postal Code, 2006). Although many of the participants come from one of the city's designated "priority neighbourhoods" some of them do not. In the City of Toronto, specific neighbourhoods are designated as *priority neighbourhoods*[7] or *neighbourhood improvement area*[8]*s* when they are facing economic and social distress. The City of Toronto decided to invest resources and funding into these neighbourhoods in response to The United Way of Greater Toronto Report on *Poverty by Postal Code* (2004). The report identified various neighbourhoods in the City of Toronto that were in need of investment opportunities, community resources, crime prevention and community engagement. It is important to highlight these communities within this study because research indicates that students from marginalized communities are less likely to succeed in school.

Open-ended questionnaire. In addition to demographic information collected at the beginning of the questionnaire I distributed an open-ended questionnaire to each participant. For some of the respondents, they would write one or two word answers for each question, so I asked them clarifying questions in which I wrote down to use for my analysis. These were informal questions that helped them elaborate their answers. Although these clarifying questions were not initially part of the research, I improvised as I was faced with limited data from some participants. The following questions were on the questionnaire:

- How well would you say, you do in school?
- How do you like school?
- Do you feel the school you attend is inclusive of your identity?

[7] http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=e0bc186e20ee0410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD
[8] http://www.unitedwaytoronto.com/document.doc?id=59

- Do you feel included within your school?
- How engaged are you in school?
- Do you find the material/curriculum used in your school relevant to your everyday life?
- Do you find the curriculum relates to your interests?
- Would you say you listen to hip hop music?
- Do you consider yourself an active member of the hip hop community? Ie: go to shows, consider yourself an artist, attend hip hop events, participate in discussions
- How often do you listen to hip hop throughout the day?
- Who would you say are your favourite top 5 MC's/Artists/Rappers?
- How does hip hop positively influence you?
- Would you like to see hip hop incorporate within your schooling?
- If so, how would it look?

Retrospective Life History

Life histories research is defined as "a reconstruction of past events from the present feelings and interpretations of the individual concerned" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 166). Using life histories as a research method provides a space for the participants to reconstruct past experiences and value how these experiences have shaped our interpretations. The mode of life histories research I included was my personal autoethnography. An autoethnography "uses the self as a starting or vantage point from which to explore broader sociocultural elements, issues, or constructs" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 13). The first component of data was personal journal entries I comprised from the beginning of this process (approximately 1 year) in which I recollected various memories I had as a child and adolescent which related to hip hop and/or school experiences.

Within this research study I used my autoethnography as a starting point of my discussion on how hip hop culture can be an asset if used in the classroom to increase engagement. I recorded my personal experiences and memories in relation to my teaching and relationship with hip hop in a journal, which I later used for my analysis. According to Cole and Knowles (2001) "an autoethnography places the self within a sociocultural context" and differs from an autobiography in which the purpose is to self-represent to create self-understanding (p. 13). I think it is important to highlight the significance of hip hop culture within my own schooling journey as a basis for my discussion. Incorporating an autoethnography into my research also provided a mutual understanding because both the researcher (myself) and the researched have a common relationship to hip hop culture. When I initially set out to answer the research questions I started writing in a journal the earliest and most pronounced memories I had about and with hip hop. I used these memories as a catalyst for my autoethnography. According to Measor and Sikes (1992) "life history method involves developing relationships and trust, doing so enables us to penetrate several layers of access" and this relationship can be more authentic and genuine when there's a shared understanding as demonstrated within my own autoethnography of hip hop and schooling (p. 213).

The autoethnographer as researcher is a form of research where the "researcher is deeply self-identified as a member" of the population in which it has sought out to explore and study" (Anderson, 2006, p. 374). Vone'che (2001) (as cited in Hamdan, 2012, p. 226) autoethnographies "accounts as a text that a person interprets from their own past in a retrospective way where "its form and content largely depend upon the author's current preferences and opinions and part of its function is to preserve and remain faithful to the writer's personality." Although the participants and I had similar interests difference still existed. I

differed from the participants in what Anderson (2006) describes as *ethnographic researcher difference. Ethnographic researcher difference* simply means that there is a connection between the researcher and the participants but there still lies a difference in terms of power since the researcher is the one interpreting the data collected. I am a hip hop enthusiast but I am also a member of the scholarly community at York University, which ultimately means I can relate to my participants in one aspect and then be completely disconnected to them in another.

Hamdan (2012) focused her research on using autoethnography as a qualitative research method that she argues is essential to educational research. Similar to my own educational journey, I strongly believe that incorporating my own knowledge, experience and passion for hip hop has helped to de-construct the researcher-participant hierarchy which exists within research. Having similar interests, connections and beliefs as the participants in my study allowed for conversations and relationships that I argue may have not been formed had I not had a personal connection to hip hop. Hamdan (2012) believes that "autoethnography research can make significant contributions within "educational research, particularly within research based on immigrants' experiences" (p. 586). Similar to Hamdan's beliefs, many of my participants were either first or second generation immigrants and I believe using autoethnography as a research methodology helped diffuse the stigma and power inequalities that traditionally exist between the researcher and the researched.

To me autoethnographies as a research methodology has created a paradigm shift attempting to separate the oppressed from the oppressor. In my eyes, traditional ethnographical research implicitly co-constructed the notion of the oppressor versus the oppressed. When researchers who had no connection to particular topics or groups of people, their assumptions, beliefs and concepts are (with or without) consciousness implied in the research process, thus

further perpetuating the oppressed versus oppressor phenomena. In her book *Becoming an Ally*, Bishop (2002), discusses where oppression comes from and how we all at some point in our lives oppress and fall victim to oppression. She illustrates this concept of the oppressor versus oppressed in which she states that most people are not one without the other and within our identity we are both the oppressors and the oppressed at different times. In autoethnography, the researcher (typically the oppressed) shares power with the oppressed (typically the participants) by having similarities (interests, experiences, demographics). Although I argue autoethnography is a shift in traditional research, it still exhibits a power hierarchy that I believe can never solely be removed when others are being used for research purposes. However; in my research I believe I attempted to deconstruct this power hierarchy by utilizing the participant's voice as a method of educational change.

Qualitative Research Method

The second research methodology I chose was qualitative research in the form of open-ended questionnaires. Qualitative research attempts to "embrace the complexity of social interactions as expressed in daily life and with the meanings the participants themselves attribute to these interactions" (Kirby et al., 2006, p. 12). As Kirby et al. concur, qualitative research methods recognizes how participants interact with themselves, their environment and their experiences and "relies on verbal and visual communication to answer questions" (Lichtman, 2012, p. 4). Using this method of research enables the researcher to collect information about the participants through their own articulations. Kirby et al. (2006) would argue that qualitative research is unique as it "can capture the way that people interpret and communicate their experiences" (p. 121). Lichtman (2012) describes qualitative research as "the systemic investigation of social phenomena and human behaviour and interaction" (p. 4). Lichtman's

definition is interesting because it refers to a systemic investigation and how social phenomena's or what Kirby et al (2006) would describe as social inequalities are a result of systemic structures, policies and beliefs. Lichtman (2012) also argues that qualitative research methodology is "multidimensional and fluid" and "relies heavily on the voices of humans" (p. 6). Distributing open-ended questionnaires allowed the participants to interpret their own experiences with education and how hip hop has positively influenced their lives. Open-ended questionnaires is something Lichtman (2012) describes as a must-do for qualitative research as it "opens new doors to learn what others think and feel" and does not confine the answers you will receive (p. 205). By completing the open-ended questionnaire, the data reflected their individual voices.

Policy Analysis

Once I analyzed the data from the questionnaires and my own autoethnography I found myself questioning how educational policies in Canada would implicate hip hop pedagogy in schools and therefore answer my research question: *How do educational policies intersect with hip hop pedagogy?* In order to answer this question of sustainability and implementation I conducted a thorough educational policy analysis using Taylor's (2004) concept of critical discourse analysis. This included analyzing four past and present educational policies in Canada such as *The Growing Success*, *The Safe Schools Act*, Africentric Schooling and *The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT).* Critical discourse analysis examines how policies in a textual context imply and embed specific discourses that reflect various stakeholders—politics, school boards and researchers. Levin et al. (2004) encourage policy analyst to "situate educational policy in its broad social context, understanding it as being shaped both by dominant ideas that travel internationally and by political battles that tend to be local" (p. 2).

As I reflected on my autoethnography I soon realized how my experiences had shaped my own love for hip hop as well as my positionality as a researcher. Anderson (2006) highlights a significant point in which autoethnographers more so than ethnographers "use their experience among and knowledge of others to expand their knowledge of self" (p. 383). I agree with this statement as my own understanding and love for hip hop was challenged and revised as I learned from the youth participants and my own autoethnography.

Data Collection

Kirby et al. (2006) define data as "lived experiences and information gathered through the research that reflects those experiences" (p. 222). In this thesis, the data collected was from the open-ended questionnaires with youth participants and my personal autoethnography. Participants had to hand-write their responses to the answers in the questionnaires and on occasion they would ask me for clarification what particular words meant. As I read through their responses I had to ask four of the participants for clarification of what they wrote as their legibility and answers were difficult to read. When I asked the participants for clarification I recorded their answers anecdotally. Participants were informed about the process and provided with the research questions prior to participating in the study. Each participant was read and given the informed consent form and primed about the purpose of the study and how the information given will be used. Kirby et al. (2006) defines informed consent as "receiving the consent of the research participants after having informed them carefully and truthfully about the research" (p. 54). In addition to informing your participants about the motivations and purpose of the study, it is also important to inform them of their involvement and what they need to do or not do within the research process. Once the questionnaires were distributed the participants were given as much time as they needed to complete it.

When I initially set out to collect my data I wanted to interview urban youth in the GTA to capture their voice holistically by recording their answers using a tape recorder. I initially set out to conduct *unstructured interviews* with urban marginalized youth to a) communicate their experience with hip hop and b) to gain insight into how hip hop culture can be infused within the education system to increase academic engagement. *Unstructured interviews* occur when "the general questions and direction for data gathering are understood ahead of time, but the actual format and wording of questions and probes are developed as the interview progresses" (Kirby et al., 2006, p. 134). I initially chose this format for my study because I did not want the youth to feel uncomfortable with a formalized interview that could also alter the data (could limit what responses are given because of the formal structure of the interview).When you use unstructured interviews it allows for the participants and the researcher to improvise during the interaction, rather than conform to a particular script. However, I soon realized this wasn't the best avenue to gather data because it is perceived to be invasive and something many youth are apprehensive to participate in due to the learned code of silence many of them have learned from their communities. Many of the youth interviewed live in low-income communities across Toronto such as Malvern and Jane and Wilson (see map of Toronto's priority neighbourhoods Appendix E). It's been ingrained in them that, if asked questions, answers are not given. In this particular scenario, the youth wanted to participate in the study but they just did not feel comfortable communicating their thoughts and opinions if they were being recorded. It was their way of maintaining power and control over their representation.

Although the youth participants were interested in being heard about the thought of incorporating hip hop in schools, the fact that they had to be recorded raised some concerns. Being that this research study was and will always be participant-focused and guided I decided to

turn the interview questions into a less intrusive questionnaire which would still require their input and voice, but would create a greater sense of anonymity. At this particular instance I was reminded of Kirby et al. (2006) concept of '*researcher positionality'* in which I had to question my position within the research and adjust it accordingly to accommodate the request and needs of the participants as well as my ethical duty to be inclusive and collaborative. For those brief few minutes I was questioning my position as not only a researcher but as an advocate for youth's voice.

I strongly believed the informal interviews would have been extremely useful for my research, but I respected the respondents' culture, thus altering the data collection method. Throughout this experience I found myself a bit unsure of my own knowledge as a researcher and as a hip hop enthusiast. How did I not know youth would be reluctant to being recorded? How did it not cross my mind that the culture of silence may present itself? Although I was conflicted with this experience I believe it was beneficial for my journey as a researcher because I was negotiating my own identity as an urban woman as well as being a graduate researcher from an institution. This experience was something I felt really helped me to understand the unequal power dynamics that exist between the researcher and participant(s) as well as the sense of discomfort that can have a positive effect on the research. By discomfort, I am referring to what could occur between the researcher and the participants and recognizing this discomfort can provide a great deal of insight into the research process. It was not until this experience that I realized that being a researcher implicates your everyday experience and forces a new-found lens that is both exciting yet conflicting.

When I initially received the completed questionnaires from participants, I noticed many of them did not provide enough in-depth answers so I found it really important to ask further

questions to the participants to get a deeper understanding of their responses. Considering the students were youths and many bilingual, asking clarifying questions opened up a broader discussion, which created more rich data to analyze. When I asked individual participants for further information regarding their answer I kept anecdotal notes of their answers corresponding to their name so I could refer to it when analyzing the data.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data involved the comparison of both the students' responses on the questionnaires (alongside the anecdotal notes) and my own journals from my autoethnography. Once the data was collected from the questionnaires, I began to read through my personal journal entries and identify which memories connected to particular questions from the questionnaire. Many of the journal entries I reflected on corresponded to the participant's answers. In order to identify emerging themes from the data, I grouped similar answers together using a coding process. I wrote each answer from each participant on a cue card and highlighted particular words or phrases that connected to the themes such as engagement, identity, inclusion and relatedness. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative research data should be analyzed using a metaphor such as a jigsaw puzzle. This method of analysis allows the researcher to take their data and group it into categories "whose properties make conceptual sense" (p. 348). In order to assemble and complete the jigsaw puzzle, I categorized various answers and then identified the themes that were present. Answers with little substance or relationships to the themes were not dismissed, rather set aside for further exploration.

As Miles and Huberman (1994) would argue, qualitative analysis requires the researcher to become "immersed in their data" (p. 349) by asking questions that unravelled further insights and exploration. Some questions I began to ask myself were: What are these answers telling or

not telling me? How are my memories connecting with the participant's answers? Is there something I'm missing here? Is there a narrative missing from the data that implicitly implies another concept or narrative? With qualitative data "there are no superficial or rigid prescriptions for making sense of it all" and one must investigate the data with an open mind (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 349). Throughout the analysis I was mindful of Miles and Huberman (1994) concept of having an open mind to qualitative data and what the text says there can open up discussions around discourse. The explicit themes I gathered from the data included a) lack of school and curriculum engagement, b) school identity exclusion and c) hip hop is culturally-relevant.

In order to analyze the data from the textual analysis of the various educational policies, I used Taylor's (2004) concept of critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA emphasizes that various discourses (often conflicting) are embedded within policies that reflect various stakeholders such as policy makers, administrators, teachers and parents. To answer the third research question: how do educational policies intersect with hip hop pedagogy I first had to analyze the four policies (Growing Success, Safe Schools Act, Africentric Schooling and The OSSLT). Once I deconstructed the discourse within each policy, I identified areas that would directly relate and thus impact hip hop pedagogy. I used Goldberg's (2006) concept of discursive policy web to visually depict the intersections between each of the policies mentioned above along with its intersections with practice (that being hip hop pedagogy in classrooms).

The Importance of Collaboration between Researcher and Participants

The specific collaborative research approach I used was participatory research which is defined by Kirby et al. (2006) as research which "work(s) with rather than for the researched, breaking down the distinction between researchers and the researched" and "(is) grounded in the

context of the community and contribute something of value to the community in which the research is conducted" (Kirby et al., 2006, p. 32). In addition to moving towards an equilibrium of power, "in order for the knowledge to be understood, taken seriously, and used" it is imperative to incorporate those individuals at the forefront of the research (Kirby et al., 2006, p. 30). Paralleling my own experiences with those of contemporary youth created a great deal of space for comparison and dialogues about how hip hop has influenced each participant in a different way depending on era and the direction hip hop is in. Incorporating my own personal life narratives in relation to my love for hip hop created collaboration between myself (the researcher) and the participants. According to Kirby et al. (2006) "collaboration is a broad concept; it involves working in an inclusive way, bringing perspectives forward, and possibly enhancing interdisciplinary" (p. 34). Using that as a foundation for my research, I selected collaborative research methodology to channel my research in accordance to my social justice approach to learning and knowledge. A social justice approach to learning is demonstrated when "engaging with research allows people, whatever their role, to engage in producing knowledge" (Kirby et al., 2006, p. 30). Kirby et al. (2006) would suggest that informing my research with personal accounts will create "another layer of data" through "researcher subjectivity" (p. 16). According to Kirby (2006), "we must be aware of our subjectivity and be capable of identifying its impact while continuously interrogating it" (p. 19). Layering occurs throughout the research process when the researcher continuously accounts for themselves within the research (Kirby et al., 2006). Although my own accounts created an additional layer to the participant's data, I needed to be aware of my position and subjectivity within the research at various stages.

Collaborative research is important for my research because it provided a space for both the researcher and the participants through a mutual exchange of knowledge and information.

Using this approach helped create a powerful dichotomy between a historically inequitable relationship between academia and communities. Being a community member and once the researched, I value the significance of maintaining an equitable relationship between the two as much as possible. According to Kirby et al. (2006) implementing a collaborative research approach allows for a paradigm shift in traditional research settings. "If knowledge represents power, and we are committed to developing knowledge that generates social change and actions that improve life for people, it makes sense to involve those people" in the research process and narrative (Kirby et al., 2006, p. 30). Using a combination of life histories and participatory research methods within my research creates a mutual space of respect, cohesion and voice to those too often silenced in academic research.

Throughout this research study it was very important to me that I understood the importance of ethics and carrying out ethically-sound research with my participants. I have completed the TCPS Tutorial Certificate at York University to ensure I understand all responsibilities of conducting research with human participants. According to Cohen et al. (2000), "the motivations of the researcher need to be made explicit to the intended subject" (p. 166). When discussing the purpose of this study to the participants I ensured that they understood the motives of the research in relation to my personal interests with hip hop. Revealing the significance of the study to the participants is important ethically because it allows the participants to understand the motivations and connects them with the researcher. According to Kirby et al. (2006) argues that "ethical procedures are generally understood as protections for participants, but they are also protections for researchers and others involved in research" (p. 88). I ensured my study was completed ethically by using an ethical checklist and submitting a TD1 form to the Graduate Studies Department. My study was ethical because I had the participants

complete an informed consent form and informed them of all the risks and benefits associated with the study.

The combination of three distinct research methods explored the significance of hip hop culture as a significant element of student's identity, understanding and motivation to learn. The data has been analyzed to provide information to support the research questions*: Why do some students feel disengaged and excluded in their schools and classrooms? Can hip hop be used to increase student engagement and therefore, success for marginalized students in urban Canadian classrooms? How do educational policies intersect with hip hop pedagogy?* In the next chapter, I have analyzed my autoethnography and how it has shaped my love and understanding for hip hop as both a pedagogy and way of life.

"Ghost dance, for the ladies in the shelters where nobody helps ya, except the cards they dealt ya"

-Que Rock 'Ghost Dance'

Chapter 4: Findings Part One

In this chapter I will use data from my autoethnography relating to hip hop and how it has shaped the research I have conducted and answer the question of can hip hop be used to increase student engagement and therefore, success for marginalized students in urban Canadian classrooms*?* In addition, I will also discuss my experience as a hip hop curriculum developer and how this evolved. To analyze the autoethnography, I deconstructed the narrative into themes that emerged. In the analysis section of this chapter, I will be looking at the constructs of family and identity and how my autoethnography has achieved a pedagogy of possibility.

Where this journey began and where it is today, is certainly a positive transition into a new world of education for urban youth in Canada. My journey as a researcher began at York University where I knew I wanted to articulate my own life histories in relation to hip hop and how it has been a positive ally throughout my life. My journey currently has paved a way into an era where hip hop pedagogy is welcomed, discussed and embraced. In this chapter I will explore the concept of autoethnography in practice and how this research method has influenced this thesis. In this thesis, my autoethnographical accounts begin in childhood and proceed into adulthood.

Rhyme-ing to Re-Educate

In 2013-2014, I had the privilege of co-constructing the first Canadian hip hop curriculum designed by youth, teachers and community members from across Canada. The

curriculum guide, *Rhymes to Re-Education*[9]*;* encompasses all four core elements of hip hop (MCing, DJing, Graffiti, Breaking). From a collaborative approach or '*cypher*' various artists, educators and "*hip hop heads*" came together to develop lessons, background on hip hop pedagogy and community resources all aligned with the Ontario curriculum expectations. The project was funded by *Education Attainment West, The Toronto District School Board's Equity and Inclusive Schools Department and the Ontario Ministry of Education's Toronto Area Regional Office.* In February 2014, the book was published and launched at a local public library in the west end of Toronto in one of Toronto's most 'notorious' neighbourhoods Jane and Finch. With overwhelming acknowledgment, excitement and expectation, *Rhymes to Re-Education* is becoming beyond successful and has caught the attention of scholars, educators, community workers and youth across the city of Toronto and province of Ontario.

How it all began... The initial stages of this project came about from a dear friend, brother and colleague of mine Ramon San Vicente, who for years has been advocating for hip hop pedagogy in schools. I first met Ramon at York University when he was a teacher within the pre-service education program. He was my Practicum Seminar Leader and we immediately gravitated towards one another as we had a shared love for hip hop and inner city education. Long before Ramon wrote his thesis in 2006, Ramon was utilizing hip hop as pedagogy within classrooms across the Toronto District School Board when he was an elementary school teacher. Now, an Instructional Leader for Equitable and Inclusive Schools, Student, Parent and Community within the Equitable Schools department of the TDSB, he has used his positionality to provide a space, a much needed space, for hip hop in classrooms. He along with the development team had attempted on several occasions to approach the Toronto District School

[9]Rhymes to Re-Education is a published hip hop curriculum. Visit www.rhymestoreeducation.com for more information

Board in order to pilot the hip hop project idea. After years of rejection, the Toronto District School Board finally agreed to allow a team of employees to pilot this idea of hip hop as pedagogy. Once he received approval from his superiors, Ramon began canvassing the city for educators, artists, community workers, youth and scholars who had an invested interest for hip hop. Being that Ramon is a rapper and former artist in a hip hop group called UBAD[10], he had a lot of personal ties to the hip hop community in Toronto. The list is extensive, however; some members of the hip hop curriculum project include but aren't limited to TDSB teachers, youth artists, b boys and girls, hip hop scholars, graffiti artists, music producers, community activists and agencies such as Manifesto[11], Lost Lyrics[12] Success Beyond Limits[13].

When I first received the phone call from Ramon to be a part of this liberating project I was both honoured and thrilled. My visions to develop a hip hop curriculum were coming to light and it was taking a completely different approach that I was eager to participate in. Prior to this experience I had not thoroughly thought through how a hip hop curriculum would be developed and who would be part of the process. I admit my biases had put me in a mindset that it would be developed by educators since they would ultimately be the ones delivering the material. Contrary to my beliefs, I was completely wrong for thinking this. How can a book be written about hip hop without artists, youth and hip hop enthusiasts? Who better to create a curriculum on hip hop then those who have lived and breathed hip hop? I was eager to reunite with old faces and meet new faces, while sharing the same love for hip hop. Without a moment

[10] https://www.hiphopweb.tv/video=8468

[11] Manifesto is a non-profit arts-based community organization devoted to uniting, inspiring and empowering diverse young people through arts and culture. Courtesy of themanifesto.ca

[12] Lost Lyrics is also an arts-based community agency who strives to provide innovative learning spaces for young people disengaged with the education system. Lost Lyrics believes our "whole mission in life is to help us find the power we lack, to create the world we want"(http://ckc.tcf.ca/org/lost-lyrics).

[13] Success Beyond Limits (SBL) is a "A collaborative, youth-led, community based movement that provides youth with holistic supports to complete their education and experience success in their lives" (Courtesy of http://www.successbl.com/).

of hesitation I responded to Ramon 'OF COURSE I want to be a part of this'. Before I could process what he proposed, he further asked if I wanted to be part of the writing team and develop a lesson or two which would be published in the document. Of course I agreed.

Within a few weeks I found myself at the first *cypher* (community meeting) on March 4th, 2013 with other hip hop enthusiasts, in my opinion, at one of the most united communities in Toronto, 'Jungle', or otherwise known as Lawrence Heights. Located at Allen Road and Lawrence Avenue West, Jungle has had a rather stigmatized reputation many public housing complexes have received across the city. People often refer to Social Housing as Public Housing and in Toronto it is operated under Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC). TCHC is the "largest social housing provider in Canada and the second largest in North America" providing 2200 buildings, townhouses and houses for low-moderate income households (http://www.torontohousing.ca/about). Many of the residents occupying these spaces include seniors, families, single households, refugees, new immigrants and people with disabilities. Jungle or Lawrence Heights contains several TCHC properties including low-rise apartments and townhouses. The demographics in Jungle change over time but currently there is a large Somalian, Caribbean-Canadian and Roman population occupying the community. Despite its misrepresented persona, it is home to many hip hop lovers and youth who have used hip hop as a space of sovereignty.

The *cypher* represented more than just a strategy to engage familiar and unfamiliar faces, it was a way to welcome hip hop into the space holistically. I remember entering the space and seeing colleagues I hadn't seen in a few years as well as meeting individuals I had heard of but had not met before. On this particular day I ran into a colleague I had met years ago and collaborate with when I worked at Black Creek Community Health Centre in the Jane and Finch

Corridor. His name was Abshir Hassan. He had a welcoming and gentle smile that would light up a room when he entered. We had lost touch after I left the Jane and Finch community but like hip hop always does, it continues to foster friendships and community. I recall *hailin* up Abshir and asking him what he was up to. He replied that he was now an occasional teacher with the TDSB. I felt a great deal excitement for him, not only as a friend, but knowing how difficult it was to get a job with the board. Our conversation went back and forth and he asked if I still drove Sasha Fierce, my 1995 Oldsmobile Achieva. I laughed hysterically and replied "no no, I retired Sasha Fierce." Abshir had entered Lawrence Heights Community Centre that day with hopes that he could bring voice to his community and to the students he taught. Now, a year later, I can firmly say he did. He brought his experience, knowledge and passion for education to the table that day and *Rhymes to Re-Education* will forever remind us of his legacy for a more equitable and critically aware education system. May you rest in peace my brother.

Throughout this chapter the word *cypher* will be used frequently as it was an important strategy to build and maintain collaboration amongst members of the hip hop curriculum project. According to San Vicente (2014), a *cypher* in hip hop communities "is a gathering, typically in a circular formation, where ideas are shared verbally, most commonly through freestyling, with participants building on each other's ideas" (p. 225). In this context, our *cypher* didn't consist of *freestyling* rhymes, but it did follow a circular formation and allowed for all members to contribute and build upon each other's ideas and feedback. At the first *cypher* for this project I couldn't help but feel a sense of nostalgia for when I was part of a rap club in elementary school and we used this notion of a *cypher* as a starting point of discussion for our raps. The first task at Lawrence Heights Community Centre first *cypher* was to state our name, reason for being there and our favourite hip hop song either in the past or presently. I found myself stumped with this

question of favourite song because I had so many, so I thought about the recent songs I was been *bumpin*. The first one that came to mind was A Tribe Called Red's song *Sisters* from their first album Nation 2 Nation[14]. At the time this question was asked I was (and still am) really interested in Canadian aboriginal hip hop and how it's revolutionized hip hop in today's sense of the word. A Tribe Called Red's style of hip hop reminds me of Afrika Bambaataa's[15] electric dance instrumentals. As I listened to my brothers and sisters in the *cypher* respond to the same question of favourite song, I began to see the shift between the old school and the new school. The older cats were *hailin* up KRS-One[16], Afrika Bambaataa, Mary J Blige[17] and Funk Master Flex[18] while the younger cats were attempting to go old school by *hailin* up Nas[19], Biggie[20] and Tupac[21]. As I looked around the room it was a beautiful space represented by beautiful people who were from different races, classes, ethnicities, genders, experiences, places, occupations and ages. Despite the beauty of difference, the commonality is what brought us together; and that was hip hop.

As the first *cypher* progressed, we transitioned away from introductions and our reasons for being here towards a more critical and research-based information session. Ramon alongside Karen Murray (Program Coordinator for Beginning Teachers within the TDSB Equity and Inclusive Schools Department) went through an in-depth discussion around key concepts: Hip

[14]A Tribe Called Red is a Canadian Aboriginal hip hop group. http://atribecalledred.com/.
[15]AfrikaBambaataa is a DJ from the 1970's who has been noted as one of the grandfather's of hip hop in New York City. www.zulunation.com/afrika.html
[16] KRS-One is one of my ultimate favourite MC's who's rhymes were always very conscious and socially-aware. Visit http://www.krs-one.com/
[17] Mary J Blige was a very influential female hip hop artist during the nineties. Visit http://www.maryjblige.com/
[18] Funk Master Flex is notably one of the fundamental influences of hip hop. Visit http://www.funkmasterflex.com/
[19]Nasir Jones aka Nas is a rapper who came out of Queens New York in the 1990's. Visit http://www.nasirjones.com/
[20] Christopher Wallace AKA Notorious BIG/Biggie Smalls Visit www.rollingstone.com%2Fmusic%2Fartists%2Fnotorious-b-i-g%2Fbiography&ei=J3PtU7K8FtP-yQTLnYLoBg&usg=AFQjCNHWxomwv4hWDzMObD_A-H1_IOZrBQ&sig2=4Y_HRE0dBqNIqZVnevcHVw&bvm=bv.73231344,d.aWw
[21] Tupac Shakur another infamous rapper from the West Coast Visit http://2pac.com/

Hop Based-Education, Hip Hop Pedagogy, Critical Pedagogy and Problem/Project Based Learning (See Appendix F). Many in the *cypher* (myself included) had never heard of these terms let alone practiced them. Although many of us were educators (school-based or community-based) we hadn't explicitly understood what we do is described by the terms identified above.

As each *cypher* progressed, the number of participants grew as the excitement of this project was making its way around the streets of Toronto. Throughout the *cyphers*, led by Ramon himself, a collaborative approach was always fostered. Whether it was whole-group discussions/activities or smaller group interactions, the idea of unity and family was very much valued and alive. Family was not just a word thrown around to describe us as a group; it was practiced and embraced by all members. Collaboration is essential in any family, particularly in our hip hop curriculum family, because all members had immense knowledge, resources and experience to share with one another. Within our project, the curriculum resource would not be a product today had we not taken a collaborative approach. Members had experience both within classroom settings and out-of-school settings that created a unique resource never achieved before. The resource was created based on youth's voices and what they would want to see in their very classrooms. Artists who lived and breathed hip hop were valued and respected and their input was an integral part of the process.

It was now April 8th, 2013 and the hip hop family was re-uniting for the second of three *cyphers* at Lawrence Heights Community Centre. Those who were interested in developing a lesson for the resource were asked to bring a draft of their lesson to discuss with the family. Individuals were broken up into three groups according to classroom grades (1-4, 6-8 and high school) for which the lesson was intended. Being a high school teacher I initially wrote my

lesson to target high school students, particularly connecting to the grade 9 Ontario dance curriculum[22]. I had chosen to write my initial lesson for high school students by taking bits and pieces of my own lessons to compile one. As soon as I was asked to write a lesson for this curriculum resource I knew I wanted to incorporate two things 1) it would be interactive and connect to one of the four elements of hip hop and 2) it would stem from the song *Self-Destruction*[23]by the Stop the Violence Movement[24] because I had taught lessons in my own classroom using this song, and students responded to it. I knew Self-Destruction would be the song of choice for me because the lyrics unravel so many layers of social inequalities that both reinforce and deconstruct stereotypes.

Like many of my other *cypher* family members, we had all worked with adolescents either in school or community-based settings and immediately gravitated towards the senior age group. Due to the overwhelming interest and response to write lessons for the senior grades, Ramon found himself in a predicament in which he had to have writers who could write for both primary and junior grades as well. Most of the members in the room had found themselves perplexed as to how to teach hip hop to kindergarten students and were reluctant to offer their assistance and expertise in lesson writing for this age group. Although I was more comfortable writing lessons for high school students I offered to revamp my lesson in accordance to intermediate (grade 6-8) curriculum expectations. As we moved around the room and briefly described our lesson, many of us were really struggling with how hip hop could be incorporated in the primary years especially when most students are still developing their literacy skills such as decoding, making and writing words. As the *cypher* concluded, I left Lawrence Heights with

[22]The Ontario Arts Curriculum Grades 9-10
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/arts910curr2010.pdf
[23]*Self-Destruction* video http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxyYP_bS_6s
[24]http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stop_the_Violence_Movement

various questions in my mind. How can we use hip hop in kindergarten classes when students may not even know what hip hop is? Would the power and critical-ness of hip hop be transferable in primary classrooms? Would students really appreciate the use of hip hop at such an early age? As I was consciously aware of the questions running through my mind, I began to question my own pedagogy. I'm a teacher; how can I not see how this would work in primary classes?

When I entered the conference room at Lawrence Heights Community Centre on May 6th 2013, I knew my lesson in and out and was sure it would be a hit. Contrary to my intuition, I was faced with constructive criticism, feedback and a new-found appreciation for collectively. We again divided into smaller groups to teach our lesson interactively to other members of the family. It is important to note that not all members of the smaller groups were lesson writers. Many were members of the project were either youths, educators, community members or hip hop enthusiasts who did not write a lesson. They were part of the group to give feedback, clarify concepts or simply provide insight into creative avenues to take the lesson to the next level. The goal of this *cypher* was to learn about each other's lessons and give feedback for improvements. Upon completion of the *cypher*, writers would go back to the drawing board, review their feedback and make the necessary changes they felt would improve the lesson.

When it was my time to deliver my lesson (See Appendix F), I was both eager and nervous for a few reasons. I was eager because I had a devoted passion for the song *Self-Destruction* (see Appendix C for lyrics) and knew it had been successful in my classes. I was nervous because I was in a group with Motion[25] whom is a well-established hip hop artist from T.O., author, screen writer, spoken word artist, educator and community activist. I had met Motion a few years before the *cypher* and although I knew her outside this context, I was

[25] Motionlive.com

impressed and privileged to be working with her on this project. Her prestige within hip hop and community engagement was something I valued and respected about her. Besides Motion, there were two other TDSB educators in the group who were also passionate about hip hop pedagogy but had chosen not to develop a lesson.

Although I was nervous, I was ready to go. I began my lesson by introducing the song *Self-Destruction* and pulling up the video on YouTube. To be quite frank, Motion was the only member in the audience who was familiar with the track. I gave a brief history of how the song was developed in relation to an increase in black-on-black violence in America during the 1980's. I felt it was important to give background information about the song to help my audience comprehend the power the lyrics of the song had during this time. The objective of the original lesson was to have students listen to the lyrics of the song and deconstruct what stereotypes are portrayed in the song. Some of the verses in the song reiterated how Black youth are perceived in society at that time (1980's) and rappers themselves needed to transform their identities by changing the way they interact with each other in order to demystify the perception of being Black in America. As I delivered my lesson I was stopped on a few occasions as members of the group asked for clarity and gave feedback. Of all the feedback that was given I found this to be the most powerful and informative. *Motion,* thought the lyrics were too powerful for elementary students particularly grade 6 students. I told her the original lesson was for high school students and she agreed that it would fit best within the senior grades. We both called Ramon over for his guidance and he assured us that this could be adapted to meet the expectations of intermediate students (grades 6-8). Since we both trusted Ramon's expertise and guidance we attempted to adapt the lesson accordingly. In addition to being 'inappropriate for elementary students' Motion also suggested that using this song with young kids may reinforce

the stereotypes as oppose to breaking them down but she did value and respect how powerful the song could be. Although I appreciated her feedback, I had used a modified version of this lesson before with this age group and knew that it could be a tool to developing critical thinking skills.

When I left Lawrence Heights again on May 6th I knew I had work to do to fine-tune my lesson, but I also knew that my lesson was very conscious and represented what hip hop means to me. On May 12thsome of the core group of writers (15 in total) met at P.E.A.C.H. (Promoting Education and Community Health[26]) community hub in the Jane and Finch corridor to apply our lesson into the designated lesson plan template created by Ramon and the publishing team. As I worked through my lesson by bouncing ideas off others I decided to confirm that my lesson titled *Breaking It Down* (See Appendix G) would explore the concepts of stereotyping, identity and representation through the element of dance. After students explore the concept of stereotypes and deconstruct the lyrics as a class, students would divide into smaller groups to create and perform a dance. Students would interpret the lyrics from *Self-Destruction* and communicate their interpretations through dance. The concept of point of view is also incorporated in the lesson in which the audience watching the dance performances must fill out a graphic organizer describing what point of view the dance is being told from. As I reflect on creating this lesson I am reminded of the research question: can hip hop be used to increase student engagement and therefore, success for marginalized youth in Canadian schools? The answer is yes. Findings from the lesson illustrate that engagement increases by using hip hop as a pedagogical tool as hip hop is a culture that so many of our youth identify with.

Upon completing the lesson, it was sent to Ramon for editing and eventually sent to various school and community-based educators for piloting. Members of our hip hop curriculum *cypher* family recommended various educators whom they thought would be interested in

[26]http://ckc.tcf.ca/org/peach-%E2%80%93-promoting-education-and-community-health

piloting the lessons. Again, with overwhelming response, almost a hundred educators responded to this call and were eager to pilot the lessons within their classrooms (either in schools or community settings). Thus, in May-June 2013, educators across the GTA, in various school boards and community settings were piloting lessons from the first Canadian hip hop curriculum resource. I remember leaving P.E.A.C.H that Sunday afternoon and thinking, "Wow, this is actually happening!"

Towards the end of June, all educators had piloted the lessons and provided written feedback based on tangible and practical experiences from the lesson. Each educator had been provided with the lesson along with a feedback form to complete upon completion of the lesson. The feedback was then given to the lesson writer to work with. When I received feedback about my lesson I was very pleased with it. For the most part, the students thoroughly enjoyed the lesson and the educator (a high school teacher at Thistletown Collegiate[27]) found it to be very engaging for her students. Some of the strengths noted by the teacher included,

The students really responded to the discussion on stereotypes, that discussion could have taken an entire class. They had so much to share because they face stereotypes every day. It made it personal. In fact, I think an entire lesson and creative assignment can be made just around that topic (I already started to plan it as I listened to my students' responses). The students really liked the song and the lyrics. They pulled out a lot of great lines from it and made great interpretations. They responded well to it.

I was very pleased to hear that the students themselves liked the song and lyrics and found them to be powerful enough to interpret them into their assignment. When the same teacher was asked if she would use the lesson again in the future with a group of students she responded,

[27]Thistletown Collegiate Institute in located in the west quadrant of Toronto http://schools.tdsb.on.ca/thistletownci/

Yes, I would, but I would modify it. I would take the components I like about it (song, idea of stereotype) and work a creative assignment through that. My students explore the elements of dance so much that it is already ingrained in their work. I would rather have the focus be on something else, something more specific.

As evident from the feedback above, the lesson was appreciated by both students and the educator and was pretty much ready to be published with minor revisions.

As summer 2013 progressed, the editing and publishing team worked with Ramon and his staff to finalize the document. Once school resumed in September 2013, a final *cypher* was held to update all the members on the progress of the book and planning for a book launch. On September 16th the final *cypher* was held once again at Lawrence Heights Community Centre. Most of the original members of the *cypher* attended and were eager to find out the direction the book was heading. Due to editing and receiving all chapters by a particular date, the book launch was targeted for early 2014. Within these months, the publisher had been working on a draft and was ready for preview from project members only for final approvals.

On January 31st2014 myself, the TDSB Beginning Teachers Department[28] and a few members of the writing team attended a brainstorming meeting at a TDSB office. The goal of the meeting was to review the book draft and brainstorm ways in which a three-day professional development workshop would transpire within the TDSB. Ramon and his boss Karen Murray had designed and advocated for a hip hop pedagogy workshop for teachers across the TDSB. Upon approval, they were eager to gain insight into what youth, educators and community members from the original *cyphers* would like to see at the workshops. The workshop titled *Hip Hop for Critical Pedagogy* would run for two and a half days, (two full days followed by a half

[28] http://schools.tdsb.on.ca/asit/standards/btstart/

day) from March to May 2014. Unfortunately like many workshops within school boards, there was a limit of how many teachers could attend. With overwhelming hype and success, the workshop registration lasted only a few days. Despite record-number teachers wanting to participate in the session, only 35 spots were available.

During this meeting on January 31st, the three-session workshops were designed interactively and fostered a hip hop framework incorporating all elements of hip hop. The first workshop would introduce the theoretical and conceptualization of hip hop as pedagogy along with an introduction to the project and resource. In addition to introductions, participants would be given a hip hop journal to freestyle their ideas throughout the sessions. The second workshop would involve hands-on interactive activities such as *beat production*, *graffiti* and *breaking*. The afternoon of the second session required teachers to visit a classroom with the TDSB which models hip hop pedagogy. The final session held on May 12th 2014, involved a panel discussion with hip hop enthusiasts like myself to discuss our connection to hip hop and communities. I was fortunate enough to be a part of the community panel to describe how I have used hip hop within my classrooms and community programs in the St. Jamestown[29] community.

One of the ideas that was discussed and implemented within the sessions was where the sessions would be held. Collectively we as a hip hop project family thought it would be perfect to hold the sessions at our *cypher* location—Lawrence Heights Community Centre. Therefore, several teachers participating in the sessions would get a sense of community and how we as a project came about. As the panelists discussed our connections to hip hop throughout the community panel I was impressed but not surprised with the level of engagement, appreciation and professionalism that these educators had for hip hop. I say I am not surprised because this PD (professional development) workshop was not mandatory and, therefore, the teachers at the

[29] http://www.torontoneighbourhoods.net/neighbourhoods/downtown/st-james-town

session wanted to be there. If this had been a mandatory workshop, I think that there would have been a lot of resistance and disengagement from educators. Highlighting the importance of this observation I am reminded of the research question I set out to answer and that is: can hip hop pedagogy be used to increase student engagement and therefore, success for marginalized youth in Canadian classrooms? It is evident from the teachers' experiences piloting the lessons and those involved in the PD session, that engagement increased in their classrooms when hip hop was used as a pedagogical tool.

Can I get an encore? Do you want more? Just over a year of dedication, hard work and passion, the hip hop curriculum was finally ready to be launched to the world. On April 22nd, 2014 the reality of our hip hop *cypher* family's dreams had come true. The *Rhymes to Re-Education: A Hip Hop Curriculum Resource Guide for Educators with Social Justice Activities* was published by A Different Booklist[30]. A Different Booklist is a bookstore located in the heart of downtown Toronto which offers alternative resources to traditional books. This publisher was strategically selected to publish this resource because of a close connection to Ramon's step-mother Itah Sadu and father Miguel San Vicente co-owners of A Different Booklist. Itah an award winning children's author, community activist and educator has written books such as *Christopher Changes His Name* or *Name Calling* highlighting themes of racism, social justice and inclusion. A Different Booklist is definitely a 'different booklist' as it carries a variety of multi-ethnic and diverse genres of books written by authors from all around the world. Many of the books published and sold at this store reflect themes of prejudice, racism, diversity, acceptance, social inequalities, arts and bilingualism.

The first day the book was released was at an organized book launch at Yorkwoods

[30] http://www.adifferentbooklist.com/

Library[31] located in one of Toronto's Priority Neighbourhoods—Jane and Finch. As I anticipated this day I was thrilled to bring three very important females with me. My first child and daughter Marley, my queen (mother), and one of my former students, Ahlam, with whom I have developed a close friendship. Eager to touch the book finally and reunite with my hip hop family, I was amazed by the turn out and support. I say amazed not that I was surprised, rather, proud that not just this book, but hip hop had brought us altogether. Hip hop had not only brought together a city; it had also reunited people who had been redirected by life's busyness. As Ramon was introducing a young spoken word artist from Westview Centennial Secondary School[32], I was approached by a man whom I had never seen before. He was a tall, skinny Black male, well-dressed with a Kangol hat on. If you are a hip hop head, you will know that Kangol hats were a signature accent in many hip hop videos during the nineties. As this man approached me he excitedly asks me "Are you a Koehler?" If this was a question asked in high school I would hesitate to answer, but now I am an adult and a proud one for certain. "Ya I'm a Koehler, who are you?" The man immediately begins to illuminate and he was almost jumping with joy. "I'm Shabazz, I know your brothers and I grew up with ya'll back in the day." Just before I was born, my parents and my six siblings lived in a two-bedroom apartment in North York. This man, Shabazz was referring to this neighbourhood. Before I could respond, his eyes begin to wander to the left where my mother was standing. "Cathy, is that you Cathy? Oh my god, Cathy Koehler is that you!" My mom immediately knew who he was and said "Donavan, it's been forever. How are you?" I was now squinting my eyes and thinking Donavan..mom he just said his name was Shabazz. Turns out, a hip hop artist himself and a great friend of Ramon and my older brothers, he had moved around the United States pursuing his career and had changed his

[31] http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/detail.jsp?Nr=p_cat_branch_name:York%20Woods
[32] Westview Centennial Secondary School is located in the west quadrant of Toronto http://schools.tdsb.on.ca/westview/

name to Shabazz in response to his new-found faith within the Muslim Brotherhood. As the conversation ended, it reminded me how personal and unified the hip hop world is and that my immense appreciation for and connection to hip hop culture in the city had reunited an old face for my family. *Rhymes to Re-Education* had provided a space for many kinds of families to form, and communities to unite.

Meeting and working with other individuals passionate about hip hop had given me a new sense of meaning in relation to hip hop in schools. For as long as I have been using hip hop in my classrooms, I have always struggled to articulate and defend why I do what I do. I always found myself defending this culture I love without being consciously aware of what I was doing. Writing this curriculum document, I never had to justify or defend why, what or how hip hop can be used in schools. Everyone in the project shared a mutually understanding. We all shared this mutual love that unified us across cultural, religious, political and racial differences. Hip hop has the ability to relate to people from completely different walks of life with conflicting or similar experiences, ideologies and narratives. In the following pages, I will deconstruct and analyze my journey as a hip hop curriculum writer and how *Rhymes to Re-Education* has shaped me as a researcher and the research process. In the next few pages the results from my analysis will examine how identity, family and pedagogy was embedded in my autoethnography.

***F to the A to the M, I, L, Y come on everybody and touch the sky*.** Throughout my narrative the notion of family was quite evident. For me the word family represents various feelings, beliefs, ideas and experiences and this notion changes depending on the context in which it is situated. Throughout our development and implementation process as fostered through the *cypher*, the members of the hip hop curriculum team had become a family. Family to me extends beyond biology and the traditional nuclear family. Griffith's (1992) describes family

as the "normatively ordered nuclear family organization" where the father works and the mother stays home to foster the educational development of the children (p. 418). She argues that this notion of family is problematic within educational policy because many of our families do not reflect this normative concept. Griffith (1992) argues that education systems assume that families represent this definition and thus depend on mothers particularly to foster academic development. For purposes of this thesis, the concept of family, opposes the normative nuclear family, rather is defined as a group of individuals representing a variety of backgrounds bound together by a common thread—the love for hip hop. The family we holistically created from the *cyphers* was built on passion, mutual respect, understanding and acceptance. Members of this family had a wealth of knowledge, experience and cultural capital which Yosso (2005) would argue is essential to communities of colour and in this sense—our community. Considering this resource was developed by and for communities, it was essential that the hip hop community was part of this process. Yosso (2005) accurately portrays the importance of recognizing and valuing communities of colour and the wealth of knowledge and resources they have. I chose to use Yosso's concept of community cultural wealth to represent how our family was created because it accurately depicts how communities are rich with resources we as educators often fail to recognize.

I admit that as I analyzed this notion of family as community, I was reminded of my ignorance at the beginning of this narrative where I assumed a hip hop curriculum resource would be developed by educators. I had failed to recognize the wealth of knowledge and experiences the community—meaning the hip hop community (artists, community-based educators, youth) had and how essential these resources would be for hip hop pedagogy. It is important as a researcher to recognize and question your position within the research as both an

insider and outsider. Griffith (1998) would argue "that researchers are rarely Insiders or Outsiders. Rather, research is constructed in a relationship with many others" (p. 362) in relation to the data (youth questionnaires, autoethnography) more so than being an insider or outsider. Hamdan (2012) on the other hand describes personal narratives captured through autoethnographies as privileged knowledge in which she argues is a "significant form of knowledge because it provides an insider account and analysis of weaved power structures that an outsider cannot dismantle" (p. 587). Although Hamdan (2012) supports the dichotomy between the insider and the outsider she recognizes that personal narratives serves as an insider account which outsider's cannot deconstruct. I question whether the insider-outsider phenomenon would have been more prevalent had I researched a particular group of people or an idea in which I personally could not connect with. Did my interest and knowledge of hip hop bridge the traditional gap between the insider and outsider researcher or is it still there?

San Vicente (2006) highlights the obviousness of power and voice in which he states many scholars particularly of hip hop pedagogy have not lived the realities of hip hop culture but write about it. He acknowledges that "most hip hop intellectuals are not well versed in academic, written expression. Thus, most written accounts of hip hop are produced by those who dwell outside of the culture, encouraging me to now feature my own experiences and voice in an effort to *keep it real"* (San Vicente, 2006, p. 34). It is absolutely accurate that those most entrenched in hip hop culture typically have little opportunity to be heard in academia. Although I am not a hip hop artist, I have a deep understanding of the culture and appreciate both my existence within and outside the culture. It is with this similar understanding that has led me to write this paper and thus give youth—hip hop consumers a voice in the curriculum development process.

Who am I? Revealing one's identity. Another concept that I found was communicated

throughout my narrative accounts was the notion of identity. Identity as Yon (2000) would argue is fluid and changes in response to contextual demands and influences. Although I believe I have a solid understanding of who I am as an individual I was faced with the question of who I was as a researcher? I began to realize that I was not just the researcher; rather, I was the researched. I say I was researched because the personal experiences I recorded served as tangible data for this thesis. My personal reflections as illustrated in the narratives throughout this paper were embedded with concepts and notions I had not considered as data. Data to me was what my participants had given me from their questionnaires. Fortunately, as I reflected on this process I appreciated and valued the data I had provided. I was now not only the researcher, but the researched. What does it mean to be both the researcher and the researched? At first I did not know the answer to this but as I analyzed 'my personal data' I began to unravel the concepts of identity. Being a researcher is a privilege and offers a particular lens in which to view the data. This lens also holds a sense of power, we as researchers must acknowledge. Despite my efforts to equalize the researcher-participant relationship, I still obtain power because I am the one analyzing the data I receive from the participants and thus I have the power to interpret that information. Being the researched offered a conflicting lens—I did not withhold the same power as the researcher—rather I had lost this power.

My identity throughout the hip hop curriculum process had also experienced a transformation in relation to my research—as individuals I met and the process I engaged in had transformed my identity. Prior to this project, I had never referred to myself as a hip hop educator. I had used hip hop as a pedagogical tool within my teaching career but I had never labeled what I did. Surrounding myself with self-identified hip hop educators I found a new appreciation for what I do and believed it was something to embrace and represent. I now call

myself a hip hop educator. As we interact with others our identity responds and develops. In Gaymes-San Vicente (2006), she refers to identity as limitation in which identities that are imposed upon us often limit who and what we are. Gaymes-San Vicente (2006) (as cited in Yon, 2000, p. 59) states "the very act of naming one's identity is also a moment of recognizing the limits to the name." As I embark on this notion of identity as limitation, I am reminded again how our identities are challenged throughout our journeys. By identifying as a hip hop educator, am I limiting my scope as an educator? Am I isolating who I am as a holistic person? When people hear me say I am a hip hop educator are they truly understanding what this means? Gaymes-San Vicente (2006) herself recalls "at times, when I was asked to self-identify, my answer would vary based on the context of the question" (p. 6). As Yon (2000) and others argue, our identities do change in response to contexts. Referring back to my personal narrative, I mentioned how I felt the need to justify myself when using hip hop in classrooms. Now, as hip hop as pedagogy is welcomed in my school board, I am now openly proud and vocal about using hip hop as pedagogy. This illustrates how our identities are contextualized. Had hip hop been welcomed a few years ago when I first began teaching, I may have approached my colleagues differently.

Another concept of identity that emerged throughout the autoethnography was the question of race and how constructs of race, class, gender and ability intersect with one another. According to Simpson (2009) intersectionality is recognizing how constructs and inequalities are not separate identities; rather intersect with one another meaning one inequality cannot be understood without the other. Simpson's (2009) work around policies reflecting intersectionality suggests that when we are designing programs, services and curriculum for specific populations "it can be difficult not to fall into the trap of making general assumptions about those populations

without taking into account differences within communities" (p. 19). I had to be consciously aware, as Simpson (2009) suggests in how I deliver hip hop pedagogy and within particular contexts, my biases could filter through and result in assumptions about particular populations of students being engaged with hip hop. With any pedagogy, one must put the student at the centre of the learning process and develop tools of instruction that will engage them and enable them to be successful, meaning hip hop as pedagogy may not always be the way depending on your students.

Analyzing my autoethnography I was aware of what Simpson (2009) describes as being aware of one's privilege and how we can 'simultaneously' be privileged and excluded at the same time. To be aware of my privileges is recognizing my Whiteness, my association with a higher learning institution and being middle-class. All the constructs of race, class and ability manifested themselves within my privilege. Cassidy and Jackson (2005) describe the detrimental effects of intersectionality in which "the idea is that a person's experiences with a multitude of factors, such as race, gender, ability, age and socio-economic location, can interact or intersect in ways that can either advantage or disadvantage the person's well-being and development" (p. 438). As I continue to question my Whiteness in relation of being a hip hop educator, I am aware of the privileges and the exclusions I feel simultaneously.

Pedagogy of possibility. As I analyzed my story, I was reminded of my own pedagogy and how pedagogy is developed and fostered. Questioning our pedagogy is what Simon (1992) argues many educators fail to do when attempting to challenge their students. Further, it is especially important in our profession to "recognize how much of our own histories and assumptions shape our ability to make sense of the world" and ultimately our pedagogy (Simon, 1992, p. 132). To recognize how my own experiences, assumptions and knowledge have

influenced my pedagogy, I began to ask these questions; how did my pedagogy come about? Why do I teach the way I do and why do I teach what I do? In Simon's book *Teaching Against the Grain* (1992), he introduces us to the concept of pedagogy of possibility. What is pedagogy of possibility? According to Simon (1992) pedagogy of possibility questions "which knowledge and modes of knowing and learning would be most worth in enabling the enhancement of human freedom as the understanding and the transformation of necessity" (p. 22). We as educators are confined to a set of curriculum and policies that dictate what we deliver and what we do not. I would argue that hip hop as pedagogy is a knowledge and way of learning that does not meet the status quo's *modes of knowing.* Simon (1992) would argue that educators enter a space (classroom) from a "point of practice" within themes or curriculum expectations that are "specified by institutional arrangements" (p. 57). Where does hip hop fit within our institutional policies? Typically, it doesn't! Using Simon's notion of possibility I would argue that hip hop as pedagogy is a mode or possibility that can open limitless learning opportunities for youth.

Throughout my life, I have faced many obstacles and witnessed others close to me face obstacles that has shaped my pedagogy. Being and witnessing disenfranchisement, disengagement and isolation within an education system has influenced how I perceive and deliver knowledge. I have always been conscious to embed Yosso's (2006) notion of community cultural wealth within my pedagogy in which I attempt to incorporate my student's knowledge, experiences and resources within the classroom and school. An example of how this is done is by getting my students to lead discussions, introduce new ideas and build community within the walls of the classroom. To achieve a pedagogy of possibility Simon (1992) argues that there is no prescription or explicit practice that one can mimic. Rather, he suggests "approaching such a task strategically, locally a contextually" as every classroom is completely different. I value this

approach to pedagogy because I firmly believe that we should situate our pedagogy in response to our student's needs, interests and knowledge. Rooting our pedagogy with particular ideologies (for example, socially aware, politically conscious) is perfectly acceptable but how we deliver this practice within particular content (curriculum) would adapt to the needs of our students. As Simon (1992) would say our education systems fail to recognize how they reproduce sexism and racism, so it is within the power of educators to be consciously aware of how education systems reproduce knowledge's of inequality.

To illustrate how education systems reproduce inequalities, is to use the example of how the idea of *Rhymes to Re-Education* was rejected for years before it became reality. Considering Ramon and I both are educators in one of the most diverse education systems in North America, one would assume the idea of hip hop as pedagogy would be something explored years ago. When Ramon first proposed the idea of developing a curriculum document with various stakeholders (educators, community members, youth, hip hop artists etc), upper management failed to appreciate its importance. Years later, with a huge fan base and evidential success, the book Rhymes to Re-Education was finally published.

As the excitement of *Rhymes to Re-Education* continued to grow, the question of how this will look in practice must be questioned through policies. Although I know firsthand the exceptional relevance this book offers the Ontario curriculum expectations, the question still remains who and how will it be used? Will this book eventually become a course or Ontario Ministry of Education document? One may never know, but it's important to consider how educational policies in Ontario—and Canada as a whole ultimately impact *Rhymes to Re-Education* and hip hop as critical pedagogy. Educational policies directly influence what material is delivered in classrooms across our country, despite lived proof that hip hop pedagogy is a

critical tool that meets and exceeds provincial curriculum expectations. In the next chapter, the findings from the open-ended questionnaire will be explored and the various themes that emerged from the data.

"I can't do nothing', girl without somebody buggin'
I used to think it was me, but now I see it wasn't
They told me to change, they called me names, and so I popped one
Opinion's are like assholes and everybody's got one"

-Salt N Pepa 'None of Your Business'

Chapter 5: Findings Part Two

Introduction

In this chapter, findings from the open-ended questionnaires will be shared and discussed in relation to the question: *Can hip hop be used to increase student engagement and therefore, success for marginalized students in urban Canadian classrooms?* In addition, supportive data of the themes that emerged from my autoethnography journal will be included. The themes that emerged from my research data: a) lack of school and curriculum engagement, b) school identity exclusion, and c) hip hop is culturally-relevant. Each of these themes will be discussed below.

Lack of School and Curriculum Engagement

The first theme that emerged from analyzing the open-ended questionnaires was lack of school and curriculum engagement. Although many of the responses directly related to curriculum disengagement, there was also a narrative around school as an environment was disengaging. School engagement can positively or negatively affect whether a student is successful or not. One of the questions in the questionnaire asked participants "*how engaged are you in school*?" When participants were asked this question, seven of the ten responded 'no', 'not very much' or 'very little'. The other three participants responded 'I don't know' or 'a little bit'. When asked informally what that meant one youth identified as A.P.* said he was "bored all the time and the teachers don't teach us things that are interesting" (A.P., personal communication, July 12, 2013). Similarly, another participant identified as M.L. wrote that she hates school "cause the classes are boring and we learn stuff that I'll never use in my life"

(personal communication, July 12, 2013). An interesting response from L.M. states that he's not engaged very much in school "because we learn about Shakespeare and math that is really hard to understand and the teachers don't make it easy for us" (L.M., personal communication July 12, 2013). I found this to be rather interesting so I asked L.M. to elaborate about what he meant by the teachers don't make it easy for him and he responded,

You know how Shakespeare is written in old English? When you ask the teacher what certain things mean they won't explain it to you and tell you to keep reading and find it out for yourself. Nobody talks that way now, how am I supposed to know what it means?

The information provided by participant L.M. illustrates how disengaged some students are from the curriculum as they do not recognize and relate to what is being delivered. How can we expect adolescents to be successful in school when the curriculum being delivered has no relevance to their everyday lives?

As I read through the questionnaires and anecdotal notes I recorded during my research, I was reminded of my own experience in school and how disengaged I was at times; both by the content and educators pedagogy. I recall being in grade 12 university English at Blessed Mother Teresa secondary school in Malvern and being introduced to Macbeth. As much as I'm an educator in my current life, Shakespeare was the furthest thing I was interested in during adolescence. Learning old English and attempting to appreciate an era I had no knowledge or interest of, was challenging. I remember going home and telling my mom "We shouldn't have to read this. We're in the 2000's now." I just couldn't comprehend why or how this was relevant to my life and how this would assist me in university. It turns out, years later, it did not. I myself have taught grade 11 and 12 English and have avoided Shakespearean plays as much as possible because my students, like I was, are not interested in such.

This lack of engagement I experienced as a student was something I didn't recognize until I was removed from that environment and learning about content that was relevant and interesting to me. Hip hop for me was an escape from this boredom. Any chance I got to bump a track, I would take. Now, years later, I find the privilege and joy of being able to incorporate my love for hip hop and my love for education together in one space. Similar to the participant's responses, my love for hip hop directly corresponded to my lack of engagement in school. I would rather be listening to music then actively engage with the material being presented. As an adolescent I was not consciously aware of why I was disengaged, but as an educator I now realize my disengagement in school was because I was bored and not stimulated by the curriculum. I always had a socially-conscious mind and social issues would immediately grab my attention. Thus, discussions around social issues were never an option in classrooms I occupied. Had these issues been raised and dissected in my classes, I perhaps would have been interested in participating in classroom discussions.

At the beginning of the questionnaire students were asked *do you find the material/curriculum used in your school relevant to your everyday life?* All ten students responded no in one form or another. One of the participants R.A.* responded "not all of it" (personal communication, July 13, 2013). When he was asked to clarify what he meant by that he stated,

Most of the work we do in class don't help me outside of here. The math will help me a bit but nothing else...I feel like the stuff we learn is so boring and I'd rather look at my phone or talk to my friend then listen and learn.

R.A.'s response reminded me of a time in high school in history class where I was listening to my cd walkman and not listening to the teacher. I remember looking around the room and most

of my peers were doing three things; listening to music like I was, drawing on their desks or binders or writing notes back and forth to each other. I myself would tune out the teacher by listening to various hip hop artists on my cd walkman. My cd walkman served two purposes for me most days, a device to play my music and a distraction from the boredom and irrelevant material I was being forced to learn. Another participant T.J.* wrote,

School don't teach me how to live. It don't teach me how to survive outside. It doesn't tell me how to be successful, how to make money. All it teaches me is to come to school, learn and do your work.

If our student's do not see the purpose in the content they are learning, how do you expect them to be successful in school? It was overwhelmingly evident that the participants felt the content they are forced to absorb and transfer is irrelevant to their everyday lives. What I sense from T.J.'s response is that he doesn't see a place within the classroom to ask questions or to challenge the information he was receiving. If our student's are not learning critical thinking skills they will never be successful in the world beyond school.

I personally can relate to this theme in which I struggled immensely in high school math, specifically grade 10. Aside from it being intellectually challenging for me, I would immediately shut down because I couldn't comprehend how the slope of a hill could relate to my life. I would look at the different formulas and immediately become defensive and ignorant to learning the material. Now as an educator, it is also evident with my own students when they enter my Grade 12 English classroom assuming it was going to be this boring Shakespearean-English class and just want to 'get the credit' juxtapose to learning lifelong skills. This learned way of thinking has developed throughout their educational journey, in which they perceived English class to be a boring place that does not relate to their lives outside of school. Being a student disengaged in

school, I ensure to use relevant and critically-conscious content to engage my students, thus, counteracting some of their initial perceptions.

School Identity Exclusion

Another prominent theme that emerged throughout my research was this notion of identity exclusion within schools in terms of student's perceptions of how they are perceived and understood. Abdel-Shehid and Kalman-Lamb (2011) define identity as "the way in which a person defines him/herself" (p. 138). In this context, identity is being referred to how the participants self-identify in relation to their environment; that being their school or the overall education system. According to Rodriguez (2009) in the article *Dialoguing, Cultural Capital, and Student Engagement: Toward a Hip Hop Pedagogy,* she states that historically, marginalized youth similar to the ones I interviewed, are often not given the opportunity to engage in dialogue about their identities in relation to schooling. This research study provided a space for youth to discuss their dissatisfaction with the education system in relation to their identity.

One of the questions in the questionnaire asked participants *do you feel the school you attend is inclusive of your identity?* Three of the participants asked me what I meant by identity so I explained to them it's how they identify themselves in relation to their gender, religion, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class and age. It was interesting some of the responses I received for this question. One student A.P. wrote, **"**No in my school you have to be an athlete or really smart for the teachers and students to like you. I kinda keep to myself at school and I'm not into sports so I don't feel so comfortable being at school." A.P.'s response on identity made me conclude that there still exists this notion of perception and cliques within schools that can either create a sense of belonging or a sense of isolation. As I read A.P.'s response I was reminded of when I engaged in an interracial relationship in high school with a Caribbean-Canadian boy. Although

this occurred in the millennium era, there was still a silent narrative that circulated within my community and school about interracial relations. Initially, I struggled with my identity and felt that it was always being questioned. Being a White woman with a Black boyfriend, I felt I had to defend myself in two ways. One, I had my identity questioned by other White people, particularly males and two; I was being questioned by Black women as to how this dynamic worked. Despite growing up in a diverse community in Scarborough, a small stigma towards White women engaging in relationships with Black men still existed within schools and outside. Another participant, L.M responded to the same question about identity in which he states, There's lots of Black people in my school so we can relate to each other but I think sometimes the teachers are scared of us because we're loud and always listening to rap with lots of swearing in it.

L.M.'s response elicited ideas of identity that can be problematic for some individuals like L.M. His response provides evidence that he feels included within his own community of friends but not within the community or culture of the school. It is obvious L.M. has experienced firsthand, the inequities hip hop culture experiences such as stereotyping. According to L.M.'s experience he believes the teachers in his school believe all Black people are loud. This is a strong stereotype that needs to be addressed because we all know people are unique and individuals so to categorize all Black people as loud is an overgeneralization.

As I read L.M.'s response I was reminded of the stereotypes I fell victim to being the only girl in a family of six boys. My brothers (all older than me) were what most people would call challenging, destructive and rebellious. Most of my brother were in and out of trouble for part of their childhood and adolescence. From joyriding to robbing trucks full of chips, they did it all. My oldest and youngest brother in particular did not make the best choices as youths which

lead them to being arrested on a few occasions. Being from the same family and having the same surname; Koehler, I was constantly reminded of this relationship. When I was in eighth grade my teacher approached me after school and asked me if I smoked cigarettes. I defiantly responded no! I had friends and family members who smoked, but I had never tried it nor was interested in it. She responded to my hostile tone by saying she could smell smoke on me that led to her assuming I smoked. I responded, "my parents smoke, of course I smell like smoke." Although this wasn't the first time I fell victim to being labelled and stereotyped, I knew it was because I was the Koehler sister, the teacher thought this could be true. Had this teacher got to know me on a personal level, she would know being an athlete, smoking was the furthest from my interests.

Another episode of stereotype I experienced was all throughout high school where my brothers had attended prior to me. Four of the six brothers had been expelled from the same high school I attended, so of course I entered grade 9 with a huge sticker on my forehead that said 'Watch out, she's a Koehler.' I remember being consciously aware of my name and that it served two contradictory purposes. I felt proud and honoured to be a Koehler when it came to the student body, because I was virtually untouchable. I had six older brothers who had and would defend me as soon as I said so. On the other hand, I found myself reluctant to identify as a Koehler because of the poor reputation my brothers had created. When teachers (and I mean various teachers) asked if I was so and so's brother, I would hesitate for a moment as if I was contemplating whether to tell the truth or not. If I said I was a Koehler, would I be penalized for it and have to exceed your expectations? Or would you see me for who I was and that was a student-athlete who took pride in her academics? I found so often, like the participants in this study, defending myself from the narrow-minded ideas so many teachers had of me, simply because of my name. Although I shared similarities with the participants, I did not face the same

inequities related to race, culture and faith many of the participants did.

As part of my qualitative research method I wanted to find out how students felt within their schools and if they felt a sense of inclusion. When participants were asked *do you feel included within your school,* all but one of the participants responded no, not at all or not really. One participant T.J. wrote,

Not really cause being Black were always getting in trouble for being rude or talking loud or listening to music or on our phone. I go on my phone cause the stuff I'm learning is so boring. I would fall asleep if I didn't have my phone to listen to my music.

Similar to L.M.'s experience, T.J. also developed this sense of self in which he connected being Black to being rude and loud. Being just an adolescent, it's so disheartening how students develop distorted representations of self and culture based on other people's perceptions and ignorance's. This just goes to show you that in 2014, Black students like T.J. are still disenfranchised, stereotyped and marginalized within their classrooms. In addition to not feeling included, T.J. also found solace in escaping the boredom of class by listening to music. He describes his classes as boring and uses his phone as a distraction tool. Had T.J. not had access to music, would he channel his boredom in other ways? Perhaps, or perhaps not. T.J.'s response provides evidence that music, particularly hip hop is a source of pleasure, engagement and inclusion so many students use to cope with the boredom and the irrelevativeness of classrooms.

If hip hop was invited into the classrooms like it should be engagement would increase because it is an interest so many students like T.J. identify with. Another participant P.A. responded to the question of do you feel included in your school with a very intuitive and provoking response. She writes,

I love school because I get to see my friends every day. Do I feel included? Nooooo!!! Being of Middle Eastern background, I find that topics of interest to me are not discussed. I think teachers are afraid to talk about these issues because it may offend someone or they don't know much about it. If I were a teacher I would talk about Palestine and why the Middle East is the way it is.

Although I felt the response did not quite correspond to the question I found her answer to be one of the most compelling and critical answers of all data I collected. She did not find a connection to her school not just for reasons of being Middle Eastern, but because she did not feel important topics to her were relevant to the teacher or subject. I was very impressed P.A. provided insight into this because it showed me that students are aware of what is and isn't included within their classrooms and for obvious reasons. This in-depth critical lens is one I argue could have been developed and fostered through P.A.'s love for hip hop, where she responds to the question of *how does hip hop influence you*? P.A. states,

Hip hop to me is passion. Passion for the world, for mankind. Being Muslim, my parents didn't understand why I loved hip hop. They thought it had too much curse words and sex. I fell in love with hip hop because I could connect to it being a Muslim woman. The lyrics always made me think and question how the world works. I can't explain why but I just love it.

P.A.'s response raises questions as to who decides what we should learn and how? Why are particular histories discussed while others are repressed? This notion of exploring the unfamiliar or unconventional happens too often in classrooms because teachers are afraid or uncomfortable with discussions of inequalities. In addition to being afraid, some school boards and administrators are against this critical pedagogy our students, like P.A. so desperately want to discover.

Hip Hop's Cultural Relevance

Throughout the data the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy emerged. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), "anthropologists have examined ways that teaching can better match the home and community cultures of students of color who have previously not had academic success in schools" (p. 466). Most of the participants in my study were students of colour who have identified throughout their answers, that hip hop relates to their everyday lives. One participant; L.M. describes hip hop as,

Hip hop is about life. Everyone I know listens to hip hop because it talks about real situations we can understand. I would love to see hip hop in my class because I would want to go to school every day.

Many students aside from the participants in this study would appreciate the incorporation of hip hop across Canadian classrooms for reasons similar to L.M.'s. As various scholars have concluded, hip hop is the largest consumed music genre in the world and accounts for a large percentage of popular culture youth engage with. Hip hop is culturally relevant to Canadian urban youths just as much as it is to youths all around the world.

I recall teaching night school grade 12 English in Scarborough (see Appendix E for Map) and having a majority of Caucasian students. Although I was aware of my classroom demographics I still continued to teach the course similar to how I have taught it before, and that was through a critical and socially-aware framework. Typically I teach in what the City of Toronto identifies as "priority neighbourhoods", where many of students view the world through a similar lens, which is critical and consciously-aware. I purposely decided to stick to similar content even though I was in a more affluent neighbourhood with students who weren't so aware or engaged with such topics of poverty, race, class and identity. Not to my surprise I was faced with the challenge and backlash I assumed I would receive. We read a book called *The Bite of*

the Mango, a memoir of a young girl named Mariatu Kamara who was a victim of the Sierra Leone civil war. She overcame obstacles and her resilience brought her to Canada where she obtained education and became a political activist for child war crimes across the globe.

When this book was first introduced, one of my students, a Caucasian male, said "Miss, why are we reading this book? This has nothing to do with my life." My initial thoughts were to challenge this student firmly, but I stepped out of my own critical lens and thought to myself, it is because of responses like that, why this book and the content you teach, is so desperately needed in classrooms. This student had not been taught through a critical pedagogy or given non-traditional material like the ones I had. He was victim to the atrocities the traditional education system had imposed on him. How could I fault him for feeling this way towards a book and issue he was so foreign to? I could not, so instead of responding how I initially wanted to, I calmly validated his point and said "That's an excellent question but I'm going to ask you to keep that question until you have read the book." A few weeks later, after dissecting the book and covering topics of civil war, female empowerment, resilience, western influences, colonialism and strength, he appreciated the book and told me he did not realize how lucky he was until he read this book. It was for experiences like that, why I continue to incorporate hip hop and critically-provoking topics within my pedagogy, because regardless of one's socio-economic status and demographic, hip hop provides an avenue to explore such issues many students would never discuss.

Throughout all the questionnaires it was obvious that the respondents had a love for hip hop and for a variety of reasons. Interestingly, one respondent stated that hip hop positively influences him by keeping him out of trouble. When asked to elaborate his answer he states "hip hop has a way of relaxing me. I just zone out when I'm listening to it, keeping me from getting

cheesed" (R.K., personal communication, July 12, 2013). For those unfamiliar with the word '*cheesed*', this form of slang represents anger or the act of being angry. Another respondent stated hip hop "makes me want to get money by working hard for what I want to achieve" (M.A., personal communication, July 12, 2013). It was evident from M.A.'s response that he associated hip hop with work ethic and in order to obtain money, he must work hard. This translation he had received from hip hop implied a positive message. M.A.'s connection to the theme hip hop is culturally relevant, answers the research question; *how can hip hop be used to engage marginalized youth.* It can be used as a tool to empower young people to have a strong work ethic. Hip hop's cultural relevance was found throughout the findings as many of the participants identified with the hip hop culture in many aspects of their lives. The data from the findings suggests that hip hop can connect with youth on a variety of levels and using hip hop as a culturally-relevant tool can relate to students' everyday lives.

When another respondent T.J. was asked why he likes hip hop he wrote,

Hip hop helps me focus when I'm studying. I put my headphones on and just go through my notes. If I don't have my music I get distracted easily and will go on my phone and play games or text people.

When asked how it influences him T.J. elaborated and said,

It shows me that Black people can be successful and that hip hop has come a long way because now we have BET and other channels that play only hip hop. Before it was only Black people who rapped but now we have Eminem and French Montana.

This was the only answer from the data that highlighted the demographic change hip hop has experienced. Historically, hip hop was "one of the purest expressions of urban African-American and Latino/a youth culture" (Edmin, 2010, p. 2). As we now can see, hip hop has transpired into

a cultural phenomena representing various ethnic groups including Caucasians, First Nations, Middle Eastern and Asian. George (1999) would argue that hip hop culture is the dominant voice of urban youth because it was historically created by youth. This voice has thus immersed itself across various cultural boundaries creating a new genre of hip hop many of participants of this study affiliate with.

It is also important to highlight the sense of appreciation and pride T.J. has for Black Entertainment Television (BET) as he can see himself represented in the mainstream circuit. Stapleton (1998) argues that "since (hip hop's) inception, one of the areas found to be most problematic for the expression of African-American culture has been television" (p. 222). Stapleton (1998) also recognises that many youth, particularly Black youths "look to the media to find representations of their own lives" (p. 222). Although I argue that Black males are typically misrepresented in the media having channels like BET, provides a space for Black youth in particular to feel included, valued and represented. On the other hand, some would argue that BET fosters and reconstructs stereotypes about Black people. Either way, it is evident from the data that youth like T.J. feel represented and included by having access to television stations such as BET which reflect their culture and race.

All of the participants in this study responded that they wanted to see hip hop incorporated within their schooling in one form or another. One participant stated that "if I could listen to hip hop in class and discuss the lyrics I'd be in class everyday" (S.M., personal communication, July 12, 2013). If it was that simple to keep kids in class, why don't all teachers bump some tracks in their classrooms? Another respondent B.K. states that "we should watch music videos and discuss what's happening in the videos" (B.K., personal communication, July 12, 2013). This is exactly the kind of data I wanted to collect. Specific ways youth would like to

be taught. Hip hop videos often times offer a lot of controversy worth discussing and analyzing. B.K.'s response indicates that students themselves find real value in what hip hop has to offer as an educational tool. When participants were asked *would you like to see hip hop incorporate within your schooling and if so, how would it look* all respondents answered yes. The most compelling response I received from this question was from P.A. in which she states,

Hip hop can be used in so many ways in the classroom. We could listen to songs, read lyrics, talk about the lyrics, and make our own lyrics. We could use hip hop in dance, drama or English class. If teachers would ask us what we wanted to learn I bet most of the kids at this school would say hip hop.

P.A.'s response provides concrete evidence that hip hop is a widespread interest to youth. It breaks down the power hierarchy between educator and student when an interest and popular culture is brought into the classroom. The curriculum document I was fortunate enough to contribute to, *Rhymes to Re-education* looks at hip hop as a teaching tool (pedagogy) rather than content-based. That basically means that aside from the immense amount of knowledge and concepts which can be dissected from hip hop culture, using the elements of hip hop as the medium of teaching is another way hip hop can be used in schools. Having students create graffiti for a science lesson or setting up your classroom as if you're all part of a *cypher* are specific ways hip hop as pedagogy can be facilitated. The immense ways hip hop can be used within classrooms is a completely separate thesis in itself, however; in order for hip hop pedagogy to be effective, school boards, administrators and educators need to be on the same page. Using your students as the focal point of content, is the first step in the right direction to empowering and engaging your students.

Summary. Technology, globalization and social media have all been factors contributing to the changes hip hop culture has taken. Firsthand accounts from youths themselves, data from the questionnaires has helped answer the research question; how can hip hop be used to engage marginalized youth in contemporary Canadian urban classrooms? The respondents provided a great deal of evidence to support the claim that they are disengaged in school, feel disconnected to the school environment and curriculum thus resulting in the questioning of one's identity. In order to combat disengagement, social isolation and academic success, hip hop pedagogy is an important factor in this fight.

"Some of the smartest dummies
Can't read the language of Egyptian mummies
An' a fly go a moon
And can't find food for the starving tummies
Pay no mind to the youths
Cause it's not like the future depends on it"

-Damian Marley ft Nas 'Patience'

Chapter 6: How Educational Policies Intersect with Hip Hop Pedagogy

What is policy?

As I reflected on the participants' data and my autoethnography, I found myself questioning how policy can affect the way in which teaching practices are encouraged or discouraged in publically-funded classrooms in Canada. This chapter will focus on how educational policies intersect with hip hop pedagogy that developed from the findings of the questionnaire and the autoethnography. The results suggest a need to address systemic and political agendas, which the current analysis intends to explore further. Policy analysis has been a focal point of discussion for education advocacy groups across Canada for years. It is imperative to this thesis to point out that "from the beginning in Canada, education is a provincial and territorial responsibility and does not fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government" (Lessard & Brassard, 2005, p. 5). In order to contextualize educational policies in Canada, one must be aware of the political, historical and social influences of the time. To understand what policy means in relation to this work, I am going to use Ball's (1993) definition in which he states that "policy is text and policy is discourse" (p. 10). Ball (1993) refers to policy as text in which policies are "encoded in complex ways (via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations) and decoded in complex ways" (p. 11).

This basically means that policies are written texts that are developed, interpreted and reinterpreted by various individuals representing various agendas and "are the product of compromises at various stages" of systems (p. 12). Ball (1993) describes policy as discourse in which policy makers concentrate "too much on what those who inhabit policy think about and misses to attend to what they do not think about" (p. 14). Rather than focusing on what's missing or what haven't we thought of, policies reiterate what we already know and discuss—in relation the educational discourse. Ball (1993) provides further insight into policy as discourse in which he argues we as educators "take up the positions constructed for us within policies" and thus "we are spoken by policies" (p. 14).

As I reflected on Ball's quote "we are spoken by policies" I was reminded of my experience as an educator and forced to put comments on provincial report cards that didn't reflect the students I was teaching (p. 14). My administrator had advised me that I must put three comments per student and must follow the following formula; one positive comment, one comment about challenges and one comment about how to improve. I remember questioning this formula and arguing that I may have more than three comments for my student, or I may know little about this student as they didn't attend often. I was confronted with another institutional barrier when I was told it must contain three comments. Why was this number three? Who decided that there must only be three comments per student? I began to wonder if this limit was developed by my administrator or was it a global exercise practiced by all TDSB teachers? According to Levin (2010) he suggests educational policy development has"been motivated more by untested assumptions or beliefs, or by issues currently in the public mind, than by evidence of value or potential impact" (p. 739). This suggests that what is on the agenda for educational policies typically reflect what recent high-controversy topics have emerged in the

public eye.

Ultimately, when governments enforce educational policies within schools, educators, students and the educational system as a whole are affected. In his book *Teaching Against the Grain*, Simon (1992) echoes this claim in which he states our decisions and actions as educators have always had a "moral and political dimension" and these dimensions often times contradict our personal pedagogical philosophies (p. 15). In this chapter, various provincial and school-board specific policies will be analyzed and will demonstrate how educational policies ultimately affect hip hop pedagogy.

Policy Analysis Framework

In order to analyze policies within this paper I am going to build on Ball's (1993) notion of policy as discourse by using Sandra Taylor's (2004) concept of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and how this illustrates the power dynamics between discourse and text (policy). In her paper *Researching Educational Policy and Change in 'new times': Using Critical Discourse Analysis*, Taylor (2004) illustrates how the use of critical discourse analysis (CDA) is essential to educational policy development. She firmly believes that CDA critically analyzes policy because it creates and facilitates an "investigation of the relationship of language to other social processes" and thus identifies what power relations lie within that policy. She further argues that "critical discourse analysis, then, aims to explore the relationships between discursive practices, events, and texts; and wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes" (p. 435). Texts within policies co-construct representations of the world and influence the social relationships and identities of individuals. Taylor (2004) argues that relations of power are ideologically shaped by such practices (p. 435) and the notion of 'politics of discourse' as illustrated by Yeatman (1990) is evident in current educational policy development. Taylor argues that

"policies are seen as the outcomes of struggles" (p. 436) between conflicting ideologies. Taylor's concept of CDA is adapted from Fairclough's (2001) work around CDA in which he argues the purpose of analysis is "to show how the semiotic, including linguistic, properties of a text connect with what is going on socially in the interaction" (Taylor, 2004, p. 437). As Taylor (2004) and Fairclough (2001) illustrate, policies as text reflect what is occurring in societies and thus educational policies attempt to persuade and influence the reader to adopt these practices. To analyze particular educational policies across Canada I will be extracting text from these policies to highlight and deconstruct the discourse behind the text.

What's the 411? In hip hop culture the term *411* refers to what is the business or news for that time period. When I say, what's the *411*? I'm asking what's going on in a particular situation. In this context, the *411*refers to the current educational policies in Canada that directly affect curriculum and pedagogy in Canadian schools.Educational policies have been developed and implemented in Canada since the beginning of publically funded schools. In the next few pages, I will be identifying various educational policies in Canada and how they ultimately affect hip hop pedagogy.The following policies will be examined throughout this chapter; a) *Growing Success*, b) Africentric Schooling, c) *The Safe Schools Act* and d) the *Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test.*

Growing Success

In 2010, the Ontario Ministry of Education released a highly anticipated document titled *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools*. I can attest from personal experience that educators and administrators continue to reference and value this document as a useful assessment tool to enhance pedagogy. The first edition of *Growing Success* highlighted the importance of assessment, evaluation and reporting for grades 1-12, while the

full-day kindergarten was later implemented in the third edition. Throughout the document, emphasis on various roles within education are highlighted and identified including the role of teachers, students, parents and administrators. The document which is one hundred and sixty pages in length provides a variety of information regarding achievement standard charts, how to evaluate, assess and then report marks, how to provide modifications and accommodations for special education needs, English language learners and definitions of key terms. This policy highlights the importance of assessment and evaluation in order for students to achieve and succeed in school.

Coincidentally in 2010, an international education forum was held in Toronto with educators, policy developers, scholars and government officials titled *The Building Blocks for Education Summit*. Two influential speakers of the summit, Michael Fullan and Sir Michael Barber, highlighted specific strategies and policies that "generate effective education improvement" (2010, p. 5). These strategies addressed four key themes a) standards and targets, b) assessment and use of data, c) capacity building, and d) the development of the teaching profession, leadership development and sustainability. The Premier of Ontario at the time Dalton McGuinty (part of the Liberal political party), welcomed over 600 delegates from over eight countries to discuss ways to improve education in Ontario and globally (Fullan & Barber, 2010, p. 1). Some of the keynote speakers were from countries including Australia, The United States, Singapore, Finland and Germany. Many of the ideas addressed in the summit correspond to the *Growing Success* document as it relates to student achievement and assessment. Some of these similarities include the need for data-driven assessment strategies and the importance of educators (the teaching profession) to be confident with the policies they must enforce. In their report from the *Building Blocks for Education Summit* held in Toronto, Fullan and Barber (2010)

discuss the various strategies, concepts and policies needed to address internationally accredited education. To understand how educational policy intersects with hip hop pedagogy, the Growing Success policy provides insight that what is welcomed in the classroom is based on what those in power (not educators or students) feel is worthy of knowledge. As Simon (1992) describes pedagogy of possibility as questioning what modes of knowing and learning are valued. If the Growing Success is an attempt to compete with international standards, hip hop would not serve as a pedagogical tool the international community would embrace. As I familiarized myself with the Growing Success policy I was reminded of the research question I initially set out to answer and that is: how do educational policies intersect with hip hop pedagogy? How the *Building Blocks for Education Summit* and Growing Success intersect as educational policies will be explored in the analysis section.

Africentric Schooling

On January 29th, 2008 the Toronto District School Board approved the development of the first Africentric school in Canada. Africentric schools within Canada have and will continue to be a contentious debate amongst educators, parents, scholars and communities. In Chen's (2010) unpublished thesis, he explores the concept of segregation in relation to the debate about Canada's first Africentric school in Toronto. He questions how segregation is perceived by those outside the discipline. The Africentric school idea in the 2000's came about in response to statistics showing Black students are disengaged in school and thus dropping out. The streets began buzzing as statistics finally showed that Black students are unsuccessful in Canada's largest publically-funded school board. As this contentious issue gained media popularity, debates across the country emerged for and against Africentric schooling. Dei (1996) would argue that the notion of an Africentric way of learning emerged long before the Toronto District

School Board decided to make this a reality—particularly in Nova Scotia after the Cole Harbour racial conflicts in 1980[33] which led to provincial legislatures introducing anti-racist education policies.

Prior to a Canadian perspective, Black-focused colleges and universities have been developed and functioning in The United States since the ninetieth century. Jackson (2012) confirms that "since 1865, black colleges have been vibrant and vital members of the college community" viewing education from an Afrocentric framework (p. 56). From a Canadian perspective, Dei's (1996) work around Africentric schools focuses on the need for a more "inclusive curriculum" that values "non-hegemonic ways of knowing" not just for Black/African-Canadian students (p. 170). Dei (1996) advocates for Africentric education which encompasses both curriculum and pedagogy but admits it "will be a difficult task in Canadian schools" (p. 170). When Dei (1996) and his team of graduate researchers conducted a study of Black students in Toronto schools the data reflected three primary concerns the participants had. They expressed concern around; "differential treatment according to race, the absence of Black teachers, and the absence of Black and African-Canadian history in the classroom" (p. 172). Throughout Dei's study, the narratives generated from the participants were one in which "Black culture in school texts and academic discourse" was completed invisible in Canadian schools (p. 175). Although the participants of the study emphasized the need for a more inclusive curriculum, one in which they see themselves in, they began to move beyond "questions of culture to questions of power" (p. 175). Dei (1996) refers to power as 'who has power' in schools—and how this inequitable distribution of power is further represented in the Canadian curriculum. Dei, a self-identified African-Canadian, believes in a " 'multi-centric' education that can create

[33]In the early 1980's, Black students in Cole Harbour began uniting together to tackle the issue of unequal educational opportunities. Courtesy of http://blackhistorycanada.ca/timeline.php?id=1900

spaces in the classroom for all participants" and that a Afrocentricity focused-education should not "exclude other centric knowledge's" but contribute to pluralistic ways of knowing (1996, p. 177).

Finally in September 2009, the first Africentric Alternative School housed out of Sheppard Public School in the west quadrant of Toronto opened. During the first month of operating, the school served 90 students from grades 1-6. Since 2009, it has expanded its program to include full-day kindergarten to grade 8 and as of 2013, the number of students attending was 193[34]. A few years later, the Africentric Secondary Program emerged at two high schools across opposite ends of the city of Toronto. The program tailored to grade 9 and 10 students was offered at Winston Churchill Collegiate Institute[35] in 2012 and Downsview Secondary School[36] in 2013. Many people began to question why the board was opening a second Africentric Secondary program within The Toronto District School Board as "just six students enrolled in the program at Winston Churchill Collegiate last year" (Brown, 2013). According to a spokesperson from the TDSB Shari Schwartz-Maltz, the low enrolment at Winston Churchill was because the program was advertised too late and not many people knew about it until it was open.

As the Africentric schooling conversation continued to manifest into policy, I began to question how it intersects with hip hop pedagogy. To understand how educational policy intersects with hip hop pedagogy, the Africentric schooling as policy provides insight that modes of knowing and learning as described by Simon (1992) are valued based on the status quo. Hip hop as a mode of learning is one that would be isolated (just like Africentric schools) as systemically it is misconceived and undervalued. The question of race and constructs of race

[34]http://schoolweb.tdsb.on.ca/africentricschool/AboutOurSchool.aspx
[35]http://lifeatchurchill.com/LeonardBraithwaite.html
[36]http://schoolweb.tdsb.on.ca/downsview/Home.aspx

merge between Africentric schooling and hip hop pedagogy as both ways of learning and the knowledge's embedded within those ways of learning, are distant from the dominant discourse in education.

The Safe Schools Act of Ontario

The *Safe Schools Act* of Ontario or Bill 81 was introduced in June 2000 by the Conservative government whom was in power at the time. According to Anderson and Jaafar (2006), Bill 81 took over for the *Violence-Free Schools Policy* introduced by the New Democratic Party in 1994. Although the Violence-Free Schools Policy was developed in response to highly publicized violence in schools across the province, it was "intended to assure students, teachers and the public that all school boards had explicit policies in place to prevent and respond to violence" (Anderson & Jaafar, 2006, p. 7). According to Goldberg (2006) policies "cannot simply be imposed from other jurisdictions, but that they enter into previously existing contexts that influence how they are taken up locally" (p. 97). *The Safe Schools Act* built on these premises by creating a provincial Code of Conduct that outlined specific and transparent consequences for misbehaviour. The text below taken directly from the Safe Schools policy itself outlines what behaviours are unacceptable and will result in mandatory suspension. It states,

Mandatory suspension of a pupil

306. (1) It is mandatory that a pupil be suspended from his or her school and from engaging in all school-related activities if the pupil commits any of the following infractions while he or she is at school or is engaged in a school-related activity:

1. Uttering a threat to inflict serious bodily harm on another person.

2. Possessing alcohol or illegal drugs.

3. Being under the influence of alcohol.

4. Swearing at a teacher or at another person in a position of authority.

5. Committing an act of vandalism that causes extensive damage to school property at the pupil's school or to property located on the premises of the pupil's school.

6. Engaging in another activity that, under a policy of the board, is one for which a suspension is mandatory.

Duration of mandatory suspension

> (2) The minimum duration of a mandatory suspension is one school day and the maximum duration is 20 school days. The minimum and maximum duration may be varied by regulation, and different standards may be established for different circumstances or different classes of persons.

As you can see from the excerpt above, particular behaviours result in mandatory suspensions. Further in the act, it describes the various roles of teachers, principals, police and parents and how they should respond to behaviours and suspensions. Although the act recommends individual school boards build policies around the ones outlined in Bill 81, the guiding principles and offences are standard. In the analysis section, I will disclose how the *Safe Schools Act* of Ontario has negatively impacted students across school boards.

To understand how educational policy intersects with hip hop pedagogy, the *Safe Schools Act* of Ontario provides information that particular groups of students are labelled as a result of this policy. Hip hop as a culture has been labelled and stigmatized in relation to violence, misogyny and profanity. Although those elements manifest themselves in hip hop there are several essential skills transferable to academics which counteract the negative elements. When labels, such as ones imposed on students within the *Safe Schools Act,* are evident, students and cultures are inequitably represented. Hip hop as pedagogy is a tool of instruction which many in favour of the *Safe Schools Act* would argue influences inappropriate behaviours.

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT)

The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test was implemented in 2003 in response to public demands to create "consistent standards and expectations" that would enable all Ontario

students to receive a high quality and transparent education (Anderson & Jaafar, 2006, p. 26). Designed and created by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) its purpose is to assess student's reading and writing skills "based on the expectations for reading and writing that are outlined in the Ontario curriculum policy documents for all subject areas up to the end of Grade 9" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 2). The OSSLT was just another component of the Secondary School Reform, Anderson and Jaafar (2006) describe aimed to re-stream education in Ontario secondary schools once the fifth year of high school was reduced to 4 years. As the Ontario education system compressed five years into a mere four, students and educators were left to put the puzzle back together.

The OSSLT was derived from this notion that to be literate, one must pass the test and receive a mark of 75% or above. Students are given two opportunities to write the test and if after two attempts are unsuccessful they can take a full-credit grade 12 course titled The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC) (Ontario English Curriculum, 2003) in replace of successfully passing the OSSLT. It is important to note that in order to graduate from an Ontario High School students must either pass the OSSLT or successfully pass the OSSLT course. The OSSLT is administered on two separate days in October "consisting of a separate 2.5 hour reading and a 2.5 hour writing component, both of which must be successfully completed for credit to be obtained" (Cheng et al., 2007, p. 187). Students who feel they are not ready to write the OSSLT in grade 10 can wait until grade 11 or 12 to write it but it would reduce the number of chances they have to write it or complete the OSSLC course.

To understand how educational policy intersects with hip hop pedagogy, the OSSLT provides insight into what is of value in Ontario schools is number-driven data reflected in standardized testing. Hip hop pedagogy does not produce tangible statistics which could be used

to assess provincially how ‘successful’ or ‘unsuccessful’ a student is, and therefore would not be welcomed in schools.

Using Critical Discourse Analysis to Analyze Educational Policies in Canada

In order to analyze the documents and policies mentioned above, it is imperative to use Taylor (2004) concept of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and how discourse within policies delivers particular messages related to politics and social agendas. Throughout all the policies I analyzed, conflicting discourses emerged in response to context and the intended audiences**.** In order to accurately dissect and analyze educational policies, it is important to be aware of the historical, political and social influences of that time period. More so than not, policies build upon previous policies which many people fail to recognize. As an educator for social change, I was determined to identify how educational policies influence pedagogy, curriculum and ultimately hip hop in schools.

As I analyzed *The Growing Success* policy, the discourse within it had generated a narrative surrounding what is success, and how success is measured. Using Goldberg’s notion of discursive policy webs, I identified the intersecting discourses that interact with a “complex network of power” (2006, p. 78). Power is embedded within any educational policy and in the *Growing Success* policy, the power lays within administrators and educators to determine what is success and how success is achieved. In The *Growing Success* policy the fundamental principles outline that, “Successful implementation of policy depends on the professional judgment of educators at all levels, as well as on educators’ ability to work together and to build trust and confidence among parents and students” (p. 2). As evident from the excerpt above, implementing policy successfully means that educators must buy into the policy and establish trust and confidence with parents around the effects of this policy. Using Taylor’s concept of critical

discourse analysis, the discourse of this excerpt echoes that educators are expected to use their 'professional judgment' and implement the policy regardless of their beliefs and confidence towards the policy. Speaking from personal experiences, often times we as educators don't have the power to use our professional judgment and decide whether we will implement a policy or not. The power lies within administration and we as front-line educators are forced to adhere to these policies and implement them—regardless of personal opinions. Throughout the Growing Success document conflicting discourses emerged between who has power and how power is distributed.

The *Growing Success* policy like most educational policies in Canada, are typically written by retired educators or 'experts' in the field of education who fail to relate and understand the current cultural demographics our students reflect. As evident from the youth respondents in my study, they felt a disconnection between their cultural competencies and their educators understanding of their cultures. Throughout the questionnaires, the respondents stated how their educators did not understand them and they didn't feel included within their classrooms or overall school environment. Although the *Growing Success* policy claims to adhere to the "principles of supporting all students," I suggest that policies such as this one need to "respond to the needs of a variety of students" (p. 7) – a common pedagogic notion called "differentiated instruction" and assessment. *Differentiated instruction/assessment* involves adapting and modifying pedagogical strategies and ways of assessing student's work. It puts the student at the centre of the learning cycle and utilizes their strengths as the focal point of learning. The *Growing Success* policy fails to incorporate notions of differentiated instruction and this is echoed on page two where it says, "The policy outlined in this document is designed to move us closer to fairness, transparency, and equity, as well as consistent practice" (p. 2). If

practice must be consistent and transparent as outlined in this policy, then differentiated assessment cannot be achieved, simply because differentiated assessment varies in accordance to student's strengths, interests and needs. The conflicting dichotomy that exists within this policy document illustrates Goldberg's concept of "processes of resistance and contestation" in which the discourse provides evidence that there is an underlying resistance of what and how success can be measured. Educators resist formalized principles of assessment which are black and white, yet policy makers want concrete data in order to assess and evaluate whether students are successful or not.

Throughout the *Growing Success* document another explicit message suggests that "the primary purpose of assessment and evaluation is to improve student learning." (p. 38). In my experience as an educator, to improve student learning is to have students themselves recognize what improvements need to be made in order to further develop critically thinking skills. *Growing Success* also describes ways in which teachers should reach and report grades for students. The document specifically states that equitable grading principles should be discussed and led by principals, and teachers must adhere to these practices. This statement supports the claim that grading practices are school-specific and reflect the leadership agendas and experience.In addition to grading principles, educators are encouraged that "the evaluation of learning skills and work habits, apart from any that may be included as part of a curriculum expectation in a subject or course, should not be considered in the determination of a student's grades" (Growing Success, 2010, p. 10). As part of the Ontario Report Card, learning skills and work habits include responsibility, organization, independent work, collaboration, initiative and self-regulation (Growing Success, 2010, p. 12). Teachers are encouraged to observe and provide feedback on these skills but not include them within any evaluation.

Although I would argue these are essential skills that all students will need to transfer into any aspect of their life, it is without reservation why these skills are not valued enough to be included in evaluations. For one, the skills are not data-driven or produce figures in which can be assessed. For two, in our society, assessment and evaluation are the only frameworks used to determine if a student is 'successful or not'. Perry (2009) would argue that education should be democratic in nature and be influenced by diversity, equality, participation, choice and cohesion. He describes democratic education as "that in which empowers individuals to free themselves of oppressive circumstances" (Perry, 2009, p. 427). Building on Perry's definition of democratic education, it is evident that the Ontario education system has failed to achieve this as policies such as the Growing Success policy have been oppressive for students across the province.

At the beginning of the Growing Success policy, it discusses how the Ontario education system has been effective in increasing student success in Ontario. Below is an excerpt from this policy,

> We have defined high expectations and standards for graduation, while introducing a range of options that allow students to learn in ways that suit them best and enable them to earn their diplomas. We are proud that our students regularly place among the world's best on international standardized tests. (p.1)

As you can see from the text above, the discourse implied within this policy is one that fails to accurately reflect the current conditions of our education system. The policy emphasizes how the Ontario education system (systemically) has students whom "regularly place among the world's best on international standardized tests" (Growing Success, 2010, p. 1). Contrary to this policy's over exaggeration of its international success, students in Ontario have had significant difficulties in standardized tests provincially, especially in mathematics and science. According to McDonald (2013) from the National Post, professors across Canada are frustrated with the lack of analytical skills students have in math and profess an immediate change in how math is

delivered—one that returns to the fundamentals (basics) of math. In addition to the National Post, CBC released an article in 2013 that illustrates the poor achievement of math in elementary and secondary schools in Ontario while similarly"Canada is no longer among the top ten performers and now sits in 13th spot" (Tremonti, 2013). Alphonso and Morrow (2013) emphasize the need for new solutions to Ontario students failing in math as "standardized test results that revealed students are losing ground in the subject for the fifth year in a row" (p. 1). If you subtract five years from 2013, it is evident that since 2008, there has been a significant decline in achievement on standardized tests in Ontario, yet the *Growing Success* policy fails to acknowledge that. So despite data from the Ontario Education Quality and Accountability Office, the *Growing Success* policy attempts to provide discourse that inaccurately reflects the education system of Ontario. As Goldberg (2006) would attest, "discourses do not simply assign meaning to texts in isolation, but weave them together to form contexts" (p. 81).

Throughout the *Growing Success* policy, the narrative represents one of potency in which the Ontario Ministry of Education attempts to construct a system that would appear to be successful in international forums. Cheng et al. (2007) believe that as the student populations in Canada change, there has been a creation of the accountability framework that results in "increased use of standards-based curricula and assessments to address the fears of declining standards" (p. 185). The *Growing Success* policy is a direct example of what Cheng et al. (2007) describe as the accountability framework and the egotistic need to address declining standards while living up to the expectations of the international community. In this case, the ministry has created a facade in order to compete and appeal to international standards.

An Africentric or multi-centric education system? As I reflected on the Africentric Schooling concept, I began to question how policies such as the Africentric School in Toronto,

has impacted the solutions or lack of, to combating low graduation rates and disengagement among Black Canadian students as that was the spring board for discussions around Africentric programming. One concern that was highlighted as I was analyzing this policy was who benefits from such programming—students, parents, community members or the school board? I advocate that any policies that directly affect students should benefit them in practice. Good policy analysis involves what Taylor (2004) describes as a "detailed investigation of the relationship of language to other social processes, and of how language *works* within power relations" (p. 436). In order to analyze the Africentric school policy, I had to recognize how social processes influenced the concept since its inception. Social processes reflect how particular societies develop and change overtime. The most prevalent social process that directly relates to the discourse in the debate around Africentric schooling is the emphasis of educational accountability to the public.

I am not here to argue whether the solution to low dropout rates and disengagement amongst Black youth was to develop Africentric schools, however; I am here to illustrate how educational policies can serve as 'band-aid solutions' as a result of social processes such as accountability. One proposed strategy that the Toronto District School Board offered (aside from a segregated school location) to combat Black student disengagement was to develop "a three year pilot program to integrate the histories, cultures, experiences and contributions of people of African descent and other racialized groups into the curriculum, teaching methodologies and social environment in three existing schools" (Chen, 2010, p. 2). I certainly cannot see how a three year "pilot project" only at "three schools" would combat a systemic inequality that has existed within our education system since its initial existence. As I familiarized myself with these proposed 'solutions' I began to refer to my research question: how do educational policies

intersect with hip hop pedagogy?

According to Manning (2008) as cited in Chen (2010) a conclusive literature review performed by board researchers found no conclusive evidence as to what was the best strategy or framework for narrowing the achievement gap between Black and White students. If researchers could not provide evidence that one particular strategy was more effective than the other, how did the Africentric school idea come about? Social pressures directly affect educational policies as governments are held accountable for ensuring children are given the most promising education. As the public and world became aware of one of Canada's flaws—the inability to engage Black students in their so-called internationally-acclaimed education system, politicians had to find a 'solution' in order to diffuse these flaws as quick as possible. Levin (2010) argues that educational policy development is a response to public or societal norms and often times does not provide adequate solutions for the problem directly.

I firmly believe that isolated Africentric programs across the city of Toronto do an injustice to the rich content Africentric way of learning and knowing provides. Isolating programs in particular communities further isolates Black students in Toronto schools as Black students come from all over Toronto not just in Scarborough or in the west end of the city. Dei (1996) argues that Africentric schooling goes beyond a curriculum about Africentric ways of learning and knowing, rather the focus should be on inclusivity rather than centric-focused programming. Dei (1996) describes inclusivity as it relates to equity and "the qualitative value of justice. It also means ensuring *representation*: a multiplicity of perspectives in academic discourse, knowledge, and texts" (p. 176). To be inclusive means that policies reflect the demographic diversity of its students and students feel represented not just within curriculum content, but within the general school environment as well. As Dei (1996) also highlights in his

work, he believes Black or African-Canadian students fail to identify with Africa and being African as a result of misrepresentation of African peoples in Canadian education. So before we infuse Africentric ideologies within schools, the concept of what should be included in these ways of knowing and learning should be addressed.

Who is really safe as a result of the Safe Schools Act? Within schools, there is a general sense of safety that we all (students, educators, staff administration, parents, community members) hope to achieve and maintain. Who decides whose safety is most important? As I thoroughly dissected the *Safe Schools Act* it was apparent that the discourse within the text emphasized the importance of 'staff feeling safe' and not was mentioned as to how studentsshould feel. Under the Purposes section of the *Safe Schools Act*, the policy states the following are the purposes of the code of conduct: "To ensure that all members of the school community, especially people in positions of authority, are treated with respect and dignity."Without reservation I was immediately drawn to the text 'especially people in positions of authority' and began to question what this means conceptually and in context. How can a provincial legislation contain such oppressive language? Who decides that people in positions of authority deserve to be treated with respect in dignity, and not students? Being an educator who strives to create and foster a sense of community within my classroom, I could not imagine using discourse such as the text above. Aside from using such language, I could not see myself believing that this is tolerated and expected. The discourse surrounding the *Safe Schools Act* illustrates what Perry (2009) describes democratic education should aim to achieve and that is education should lead "to the liberation of oppressed classes and transformation of oppressive social structures (p. 426). The *Safe Schools Act* established in 2000, further illustrates how oppressive education systems really are. Policies such as the *Safe Schools Act* fail to put the

student at the centre of policy development and consequently they themselves are the directly impacted.

To highlight how discourse and policy affects our students it is important to analyse and dissect policies in practice. I'm going to explore how the Safe Schools Act developed in 2001 has negately impacted students across Ontario, and in particular youth. Daniel and Bondy (2008) argue "that the *Safe Schools Act* (2001) in Ontario set within a *discourse of zero tolerance*…has had a detrimental impact" on students (p. 2). The *Safe Schools Act* was a policy and legislature passed in Ontario which attempted to combat problematic behaviours in schools. The zero tolerance discourse surrounded schools with this idea that any form of misbehaving could be subject to suspension and/or expulsion. Although the affects of the Safe Schools Act (SSA) on students is truly immeasurable, particular scholars like Daniel and Bondy (2008) have developed articles to highlight some of the affects. According to Skiba and Peterson (1999) (as cited in Daniel & Bondy, 2008, p. 4) "the primary function of zero tolerance is the assertion of authority" and "these measures had negative effects on the emotional health of students, their graduation rates and their life chances." Although the SSA was highly supported in its initial years, over the last ten years "these policies have come under intense criticism for their blanket approach to addressing behaviour problems, their disproportionate adverse impact on students from disadvantaged groups and their questionable effect on the overall safety and security of our students" (Daniel & Bondy, 2008, p. 2). It is also imperative to note that the zero tolerance policy had an even larger affect on minority students and students with exceptionalities.

One of the most controversial topics that arose from the *Safe Schools Act* was the implementation of mandatory suspension or expulsion and police involvement. The Human Rights Commission conducted a policy analysis of the SSA in 2003 and their results indicated

that there was a large increase in suspensions amongst students with special needs (Daniel & Bondy, 2008). Students with special needs are more susceptible to violent outburst due to their disabilities, and should not be punished because of this. Suspending or expelling a student with complex social, emotional, behavioural or physical challenges do not solve the external problem. Another commonality that students expelled from schools (as a result of the SSA) was they all had poor academic performances at their schools. Attempting to isolate the many mitigating factors that can create poor academic performance is nearly impossible, but suspensions and expulsions certainly is not the answer. In Daniel and Bondy's (2008) study, sixteen administrators and school personnel were interviewed about their experience with implementing the SSA. The findings illustrated that all participants in the study concurred that schools needed additional resources to support students in need and suspensions and expulsions alone were not the solution" (p. 10). As Daniel and Bondy (2008) discovered, there are several layers within schools that influence and affect how behaviour and challenges are addressed.

The discriminatory challenges of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test. As the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test enters its eleventh year of execution, sceptics around the province question how effective the test is and how it fails to address the diverse learning styles amongst particular groups of students. Being an educator who has administered the test before, I can attest that the content within the test is outdated and contains phrases and material that does not reflect the demographics of our students thus putting them at a disadvantage. As our demographics continue to change the OSSLT remains the same. According to Cheng et al. (2007), in one year alone between 2001-2002, the number of students identified as English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Literacy Development (ELD) students increased by twenty-three percent. Cheng et al. (2007) conclude that results from the OSSLT show "that English as a

Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD) students have comparatively low success and high deferral rates" (p. 185). Considering students who are identified as ESL or the current term English Language Learners are required to write the test, it's fair to say they are a step behind before they even write the test. When statistics show a drastic increase in the number of ESL and ELD learners in Ontario, you would assume that the Ontario government would re-construct the test in order to support ESL/ELD student success.

Since the OSSLT continues to be a functioning part of the secondary school requirements, the validity of the *Growing Success* policy and the *hype* around Africentric schools should be questioned. According to the *Growing Success* policy, in order to be successful students must pass the OSSLT test or complete the course, as a graduation requirement. The OSSLT also relates to Africentricity as many of the students writing the test or completing the course are Black students yet the content within the tests or course fail to incorporate any fundamentals of an Africentric program.

Using Taylor's concept of critical discourse analysis it was evident throughout the OSSLT policy the discourse around *teaching to the test*. When I say *teaching to the test* I am referring to the practice of educators teaching concepts, writing styles and focuses in grade 9 and 10 courses in order for the students to successfully pass the OSSLT. Every school aims to outperform themselves year after year and administrators will invest resources and finances in order to achieve this. When schools are doing significantly poor on the OSSLT, mock tests will be administered, after-school programs will be developed and additional professional development workshops will be mandatory for English teachers. Specifically, teachers who teach students in grade 9 and 10 are encouraged to familiarize themselves with what the OSSLT assesses and use the OSSLT preparation book to prepare students to 'ace the test'. In 2003, the

Ontario Ministry of Education released a document titled *Preparing Students for the OSSLT: Best Practices from Ontario School Boards*. The document outlines specific details about preparing students for the test and in the introduction part of the document it says,

> Although the development of literacy skills is an integral component of the curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 12 and must be continuous over a student's school career, many students may benefit from specific strategies that are designed to prepare them for the test itself. (p. 2)

As you can see from the excerpt above, the document emphasizes that literacy skills should be developed from kindergarten until grade twelve, yet also recommends teachers to use specific strategies in their classrooms can help prepare students for the test itself. Like many sceptics would argue, teaching to the test fails to provide essential life-long literacy skills (Cheng et al., 2007). The preparation guideline also includes specific strategies school boards across Ontario have implemented to help increase their success rate at their school. The Wellington Catholic District School Board's Literacy for Life program for example "provides highly individualized support to Grade 10 students who are at risk of not being successful on the OSSLT" (Preparing Students for the OSSLT, 2003, p. 16). If school boards are modeling that students should learn material or ways of reading and writing in order to pass a test, we are delivering a message to students that knowledge is only valuable if you are being assessed on it. The discourse surrounding the OSSLT is one that says passing equals success. The more students that pass the OSSLT, the better perception the school has as being academic. If the passing rate decreases over time school boards, schools and administrators are held accountable. According to Cheng et al. (2007) "schools must document their annual yearly progress and those with less than satisfactory performance may face a variety of sanctions" (p. 187). By teaching to the test, students fail to receive quality education that aims to develop their critical thinking skills.

Another flaw that the OSSLT policy has is the discourse that has been generated by students. Speaking from direct experience, students have learned how to outsmart the system. For example, students know that if they fail the test after two attempts they are eligible to enroll in the course that is equivalent to the OSSLT. Therefore, students discursively do not see the purpose of passing the test nor preparing for it as they can simply enroll in the course. The other glitch within the policy is that in order to pass the OSSLT, students must get 300 which is equivalent to the provincial standard level 3 which is 75%. The EQAO scorers use "a standard psychometric process, the student's raw score is converted into a score on a scale from 200 to 400 points. A scale score of 300 is required to be successful on the OSSLT," yet students only require a 50% to pass the course (EQAO, 2008). I can confidently say that some students would rather enrol in the course and get a 50 then write the test in five gruelling hours and aim to get 75%. As with any policies, conflicting discourses exists that are interpreted differently by educators, students, parents and school boards.

How hip hop pedagogy is affected by educational policies?

Like many scholars have and will continue to argue, hip hop has never had occupied a positive space within education. It has never really been truly understood or welcomed. As education in Canada was founded on Eurocentric ideologies that fail to represent the dominant discourse amongst youth and students across Canada, the concept of hip hop in classrooms was far from these roots. Levin (2010) recognizes both sides of the public education coin in which he states public education is an achievement in itself but there are systemic inequalities which disadvantage students based on family backgrounds and skin colour, etc. The Ontario curriculum, like most curriculum documents across North America is outdated and illegitimate to the realities our students experience. So there was no surprise that when Ramon approached The

Toronto District School Board with this hip hop curriculum idea, it was immediately shot down. Like many institutions, policies are just one of the many challenges educators like Ramon and I face on a daily basis.

Perry (2009) establishes a conceptual analysis of educational policy in democratic societies based on concepts of equality, diversity, participation, choice and cohesion. Although we as a society hope to achieve education as a democratic system, Perry (2009) argues that there is a "contradictory and competing tension embedded" within the relationship between education and democracy (p. 423). In an ideal democratic education system, hip hop as pedagogy would be a useful tool with immense resources which foster the development of democratic individuals. In the next few pages I will explore how educational policy directly affects hip hop as pedagogy in Canadian urban schools.

Being a member of the hip hop curriculum project, I felt a sense of emancipation once it was complete. I had witnessed firsthand the dialectic process of resistance and resilience that hip hop so often is faced with. The institution of school is what represented resistance and how it resisted welcoming hip hop into the walls of education. Resilience was represented by all members of the hip hop curriculum team, and how our unified existence failed to allow resistance to define what we would achieve. Our resilience as a community, a hip hop community; has been defined by producing and publishing *Rhymes to Re-Education*. Although the publication of *Rhymes to Re-Education* is a step in the right direction, policies ultimately govern how education is perceived and delivered in Canada. Anderson and Jaafar (2006) would argue that policies have had an even more detrimental effect on students and educators once school board amalgamation occurred in 1997. They strongly believe that "the intentions of these policies are to promote consistency across the province" where educators are held accountable

within the "framework of standards" (p. 44). As contemporary policies have a greater impact on student's success, it is now time to question how do policies affect hip hop pedagogy?

The answer is quite complex. Hip hop is an out-of-school literacy many policy makers have little or no understanding of. Policy makers are concerned with numbers and data that can be revealed through standardized tests and tangible assessments. Hip hop is more than a medium for assessment. It can be used as a pedagogical tool in which the fundamentals of hip hop as a culture can be modeled and integrated within a classroom. It can't however, spit out numbers in order to satisfy policy makers. When people who write curriculum continue to represent the dominant cultural group (White males from high socioeconomic statuses) hip hop as a critical thinking tool will not be infused in provincially-funded classrooms. Although Yosso (2005) argues "hip-hop maintains amazing potential to be a revolutionary art form and transformative cultural expression that can inspire and inform social movement" (p. 84) those in power who construct policies fail to see this.

In order to understand how policies intersect with my thesis around using hip hop to engage marginalized youth in contemporary urban classrooms, I have used Goldberg's visual concept of discursive policy webs to illustrate this. I created my own visual web to illustrate how the various policies I examined intersect and influence one another and the implications of these policies on hip hop pedagogy (refer to the end of the chapter for the visual web). Using a discursive policy web is imperative when discussing how multiple policies intersect and influence one another. Although hip hop pedagogy has not reached the policy stage YET, I am confident it will one day and thus will be influenced by earlier policies. For purposes of this paper, I have created a discursive web to visually-illustrate how the *Safe Schools Act*, *Growing Success*, Africentric Schooling and *The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test* has directly

impacted hip hop in the space of education.

As Goldberg (2006) highlights, a discursive web serves as a metaphor to illustrate how policies are intertwined and influence one another. It is import to emphasize why I put the word student at the centre of the discursive web. I did this strategically to illustrate how important students are within education and they should be put at the centre of policy development, as oppose to the policies I have analyzed above. The *Growing Success* policy came about in response to international pressure to formulate specific strategies that can be applied within school boards across the globe. Hip hop is a universal culture which is embraced and welcomed by youth around the world, yet has struggled to find its place within schools. Hip hop pedagogy is an out-of-school literacy that can be used as a differentiated teaching strategy to engage students, otherwise disengaged. Although conceptually, the *Growing Success* policy attempts to meet the individual needs of students, its sole purpose is to provide consistent and transparent assessment and evaluation strategies for educators. Hip hop as both a teaching and assessment strategy would fail to adhere to the standards outlined in the Growing Success document because it serves as a differentiated teaching tool.

The Safe Schools Act implemented in Ontario schools in 2000, directly impacts how students are identified and directly threatens how hip hop would be perceived in schools. As scholars such as Anderson and Jaafar (2006) confirm, the SSA discriminates against students of colour, students with special needs and students labelled as behavioural. Those groups mentioned above have created a compassionate relationship with hip hop which as a culture has been stigmatized for its use of profanity, violence and sexual exploitation. Despite evidence contradicting this claim, "hip hop culture also serves as a space where youth struggle with what it means to be raced, classed, and gendered individuals in a capitalistic, race-based society"

(Porfilio & Viola, 2012, p. 285). Hip hop culture encompasses all the characteristics Perry (2009) believes leads to a democratic education system. Those characteristics include equality, diversity, participation, choice and cohesion. Hip hop discusses and challenges notions of equality and diversity while fostering a sense of cohesion amongst those from similar experiences. No matter where you come from in the world, hip hop will resonate with you at some point in your life and emancipate you from a situation you are in.

The final policy which directly correlates to hip hop pedagogy is the *Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test* which became a mandatory component to graduate in Ontario as of 2003. In Griffith (1992) she analyzes educational policy in relation to what's formally known as the Toronto Board of Education (now TDSB). In the 1970's Griffith argues that the Toronto Board of Education developed a policy that "pumped extra resources into schools whose students were considered to be at risk of school failure" (p. 416). Prior to the implementation of this policy, funding and resources were allocated based on enrolment. Griffith (1992) highlights the policies such as the one above were directly "linked school failure to differences in students' family background" (p. 416). Although Griffith's work is somewhat outdated,additional resources and finances are invested in schools who fail to meet the provincial standards for EQAO testing. When particular schools fail to improve their OSSLT passing rate, additional strategies are employed to increase their success. How does the OSSLT relate to hip hop pedagogy? The answer is quite simple. It does not. Hip hop as pedagogy doesn't produce tangible statistics which most school boards are interested in thus not having a place within publically-funded education. When additional resources are added to a school, it is given as an incentive to achieve something? Additional resources come with a cost. Schools who receive these resources must report back to funders and provide evidence that innovative strategies were employed, and

success has increased (Cheng et al., 2007).

Concluding ideas. In order for policies to reflect the student demographics, municipally-created curriculum is needed or a change of key stakeholders who design and enforce policies. As Dei (1996) argues "it is insufficient, for example, to include a few sessions dealing with minority themes in a course syllabus and label that action as 'inclusive schooling'" (p. 177). In order to achieve inclusivity in relation to curriculum, educators must whole-heartedly encompass all elements of hip hop as pedagogy, rather than isolating the content to one or two particular lessons. Hip hop in schools has and will continue to be directly relate to the current educational policies of that time. Policies need to reflect the diverse student populations our schools demonstrate.

The creation of Canada's first Africentric Schools and the *Safe School Act* illustrate again how policies are designed and implemented with a particular agenda—typically not in accordance to the needs, beliefs and ideas of those directly affected by it—the students themselves. Levin (2010) supports the statement that "education policy has been unsuccessful in improving student outcomes or in reducing the inequities in those outcomes while also having negative effects on educator's morale" (p. 739). As illustrated by Levin (2010), policy makers fail to recognize the irreversible effects policies have on the students and educators themselves.Being an educator in one of North America's largest publically-funded education systems (The Toronto District School Board), I have been and continue to be isolated and regulated by policies.

When I first taught grade 12 College English I was forced to conform to two systems, the larger provincial system and the individual school system, which basically outlined what expectations I must teach. I was left helpless and powerless in a big system as a little fish. I was a

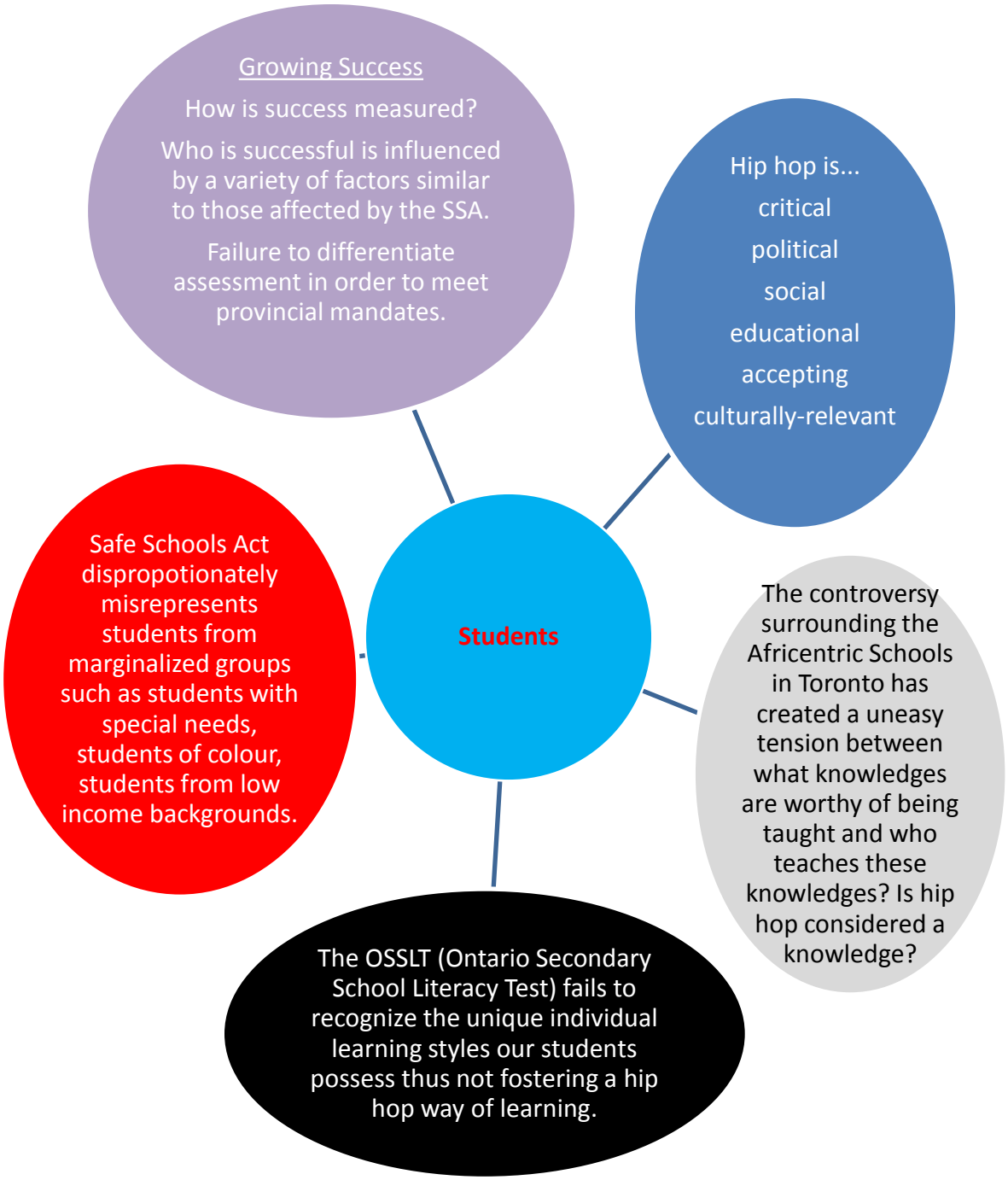
new educator, who desperately wanted to teach, regardless of how this was achieved. It wasn't until I gained confidence, seniority and a positive reputation, that I adjusted the prerequisites to teaching relevant curriculum students can engage with. Simon (1992) would suggest that my experience highlights this notion that "one's pedagogy is to be justified and sanctioned" (p. 15). Ball (1993) further argues that "the more ideologically abstract any policy is, the more distant in conception from practice" (p. 13). Policy makers fail to recognize how policies implicate the practice of teaching in everyday settings and how these practices negatively impact students.

Like most policies, they fail to address the real challenges facing our youth and teachers today. Ball (1993) accurately depicts educational policies in which he says they "pose problems to their subjects… problems that must be solved in context" (p. 12). In order to implement an efficient and solution-based policy, it must be executed in various contexts to see how adaptable it really is. Taylor (2004) also discusses the importance of contexts when creating educational policies and how contexts shape and re-shape the development and implementation of policies. Throughout educational policy and practice, Griffith (1992) argues that "linking family background to school performace is a feature of the discourse" in education that has inadverseably affected student's educational experiences (p. 418). Discourse and policy are interrelated concepts that present themselves in negative ways within edcucation. Contextualizing policies is one step in the right direction, by putting the students and their communities at the centre of the equation is where policy development should begin.

As we reflect on educational policies in Canada, it's imporant to consider how these policies implicate students themselves. The policy analysis above answered the question of how do educational policies intersect with hip hop pedagogy. Educational policies such as *Growing Success*, Africentric Schooling, *The Safe Schools Act* and the *OSSLT* are governed by conflicting

ideologies and discourses that ultimately shape how classrooms are organized and what curriculum is delivered.As disengagement, poor academic results and drop out rates continue to increase, the need for futher educational policy analysis is even more imperative.

Figure 1: Discursive Policy Web



"If you examine what they tellin us then you will understand
What they plantin in the seeds of the next generation
Feeding our children miseducation"

-Dead Prez 'Propaganda'

Chapter 7: Discussion

Introduction

The following broader ideas or categories developed from a synthesis of important issues that were raised in relation to each of my research questions. These are: the fear of the unknown, valuing out-of-school literacies, the irreversible effects of being labelled "at-risk", and moving towards a culturally-relevant education system based on the results of my findings and research in the field of education and critical pedagogy.

Fear of the unknown. Many educators particularly in large urban communities come from different cultural, racial and socio-economic statuses then their students. As Dei (2008) argues "changes in schools have not kept pace with changes in demographics—the racial, ethnic mix of students" (p. 347). Many scholars would argue that educators are simply not adequately prepared to educate students from diverse backgrounds. Although this can be true, I argue that educational policies has conquered teacher's independence and power to deliver curriculum relevant to their students. When policies such as *The Growing Success* and *The Safe Schools Act* are implemented, educators are faced with immense pressures to conform to such policies. Seidel (2011) would argue that administrators and teachers believe hip hop culture "promotes violence, misogyny, homophobia, hypercapitalist consumption and…bad grammar" (p. 117). Although these elements can be present in some facets of hip hop culture, why not use these concepts to create critical thinkers. No one is preaching that hip hop should or needs to be viewed only from

one perspective. Teachers can take a concept such as misogyny and counteract it with other artists who challenge this such as Eve or Salt N Pepa. The power hip hop holds should be a catalyst for exploration—leading to critical awareness. Rather than avoiding this culture completely, challenging it is one way of inviting it into the classroom and allowing students to deconstruct and challenge what they hear, see and experience. Whether it's preconceived notions, lack of awareness or plain ignorance, this fear of the unknown needs to be discussed openly.

As the community demographics change so should our classrooms, but many educators do not know where to begin or have a lack of knowledge of their students' culture. My answer to this dilemma is simple. Use your students' community cultural wealth to learn about them. Yosso (2005) describes students' knowledge, experiences and resources as community cultural wealth which can be incorporated in the classroom to bridge the gap between communities and schools. If educators are unfamiliar with hip hop culture, they can simply ask their students or bring in community members as agents of knowledge. Seidel (2011) simultaneously argues Yosso's point in which he claims that in order for education to be innovative, "educators must encourage, extend, and learn from students' ingenuity and resourcefulness" (p. 145). Hip hop is a revolving culture that will change as we progress, but it definitely will not be going anywhere. Educators need to embrace this culture and situate their classrooms within this culture. As Neegan (2005) would say without change "the colonial education system of the past continues to function" (p. 8).

Valuing out-of-school literacies. As evident from the participant's responses, students are more likely to succeed in the institution of school when their out-of-school literacies are incorporated into the classroom. Out-of-school literacies are traditionally non-academic and are

people's experiences, culture, interests and everyday literacies they interact with. Hip hop is an out-of-school literacy which should be embedded within the classroom in order to increase student engagement. According to Schultz and Hull (2008) "curriculum and content continue to be delivered in predictable ways and school knowledge and literacy practices tend to be valued over those used in everyday life...Out-of-school practices are used in service of school knowledge, to engage students in learning rather than to transform teaching and learning" (p. 651). Hip hop in my opinion is an out-of-school literacy that so many students similar to the participants, idolize, represent and reproduce. By valuing the importance of out-of-school literacies such as hip hop, students would be the voice of the curriculum which in turn would empower them to be successful in school. Schultz and Hull (2001) believe there is no better time to examine the dichotomy "between the privileged and the disenfranchised" by investigating the relationship between out-of-school literacies such as hip hop and success within classrooms. Rather than dismissing the value of out-of-school literacies as secondary to academic literacies, we as educators need to appreciate and incorporate these literacies in classrooms across Canada.

The irreversible effects of being labelled "at-risk". Aside from being marginalized in the greater society, marginalization also exists within the walls of the institution of school and their classrooms due to educational policies. Marginalization within schools occurs as a result of implemented policies such as the *Growing Success policy, The Safe Schools Act*, Africentric Schooling and the *Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test.* Throughout my experience as a secondary school teacher; many students are marginalized due to uncontrollable factors including race, ethnicity, social class and academic abilities—without the complex effects of policies. As a result of this marginalization students are typically labelled as "at-risk" when they don't meet the social or academic expectations defined by the school climate. This notion of at-

risk has and will always be problematic for me because it holds an inequitable power hierarchy in which the student is perceived as less than or in need of help. According to Gaymes-San Vicente (2006) "within the school setting, at-risk students can be automatically placed at a disadvantage because they are viewed, treated and marginalized according to a label which is presumed to denote their academic disability" (p. 48). Echoing Gaymes-San Vicente's beliefs, some participants in my study have become marginalized due to labelling, which I argue is directly related to the *Safe Schools Act* and other educational policies.

Policies as Taylor (2004) and Goldberg (2006) argue intersect with social and political ideologies which manifest themselves in education. When policies are implemented, educators and students are forced to conform to a set of expectations and ideas, without the opportunity to challenge or question its motives. This sense of assimilation is what Ware (2006) warns can negatively impact students. According to Ware (2006) when students fail to assimilate and "culture switch to the dominant culture" they are at a greater risk of being unsuccessful and thus failing in school (p. 429). Throughout my research, most of the participants responded that they didn't feel included within their school or within the curriculum. That alone is substantial enough evidence to conclude that what students are learning fails to represent their identities', and these learning outcomes are driven by policies.

Marginalized youth whether youth of colour or from low-income communities, have and will continue to be marginalized and disenfranchised in various education systems across Canada because of lack of awareness and acceptance that culturally-relevant curriculum is a valuable tool for success. If we know the formula for success, why in 2014 has it been so difficult for both educators and school boards to integrate this formula? The answer is simple. Educators like myself have been educated and educate in education systems, which were historically developed

through a Eurocentric ideology we all know does not represent the learning styles, cultures or students we educate today. Despite the changing demographics of our student populations, various education systems across Canada fail to recognize the change and develop necessary policies and curriculum that is necessary for our students to succeed.

Throughout the participants' responses, it was evident that many of them felt disconnected to the culture of their schools. Was this because of their race, culture, faith or simply their social status in society? Various responses implied that this historical and contemporary 'school versus hip hop' dichotomy is still evident. One respondent identified as J.H. stated that "school just doesn't get me" (personal communication, July 12, 2013). According to Rodriguez (2009) "many youth from the hip hop generation speak and carry themselves with a certain style and swagger that can be misinterpreted as confrontational or combative" (p. 31). One of the participants J.H. wrote,

> I don't think my teachers like me because I'm rude and give attitude. I do this because they never answer my questions or let me listen to my music. If they would let me listen to my phone, I wouldn't bother them.

Did J.H. feel like his school didn't "get him" because of his *swagger* or did the school fail to accept J.H. as a holistic person comprised of various layers, aside from just his *swagger*? Although we cannot be certain, one can assume that J.H.'s persona or self-identification as being rude, was something that masked his true identity and potential. Educators need to unravel the many layers our students have because their swagger is comprised of many facets including upbringing, history, experiences, values, beliefs and culture. If students continue to be labelled and misrepresented in schools, how can we expect policies to represent our students?

Throughout my research it was evident that this sense of inclusion failed to exist within many of the respondent's schools. Of the ten participants, nine of them did not feel included.

Although some argue inclusion and belonging are two separate entities, for purposes of these findings I would argue they are simultaneously present. Hooks (2009) embarks on her own journey of belonging in which she believes that outsiders have a "stereotypical way of seeing that world" (p. 14). Belonging is a constant battle all people face whether it be within themselves, their families, their communities or the world in general. This notion of belonging is even more evident in schools where youth struggle to fit in. Throw in differences in race, culture, faith, gender, class and sexual orientation, and a whole new notion of belonging comes into play. This notion of belonging was evident in my findings because many of the respondents stated they did not feel the school or curriculum was inclusive to their identity or culture. Dei (2008) looked at schools as not one separate entity but rather community, race and schools foster education. He states "education must cultivate a sense of identity within culture and community, while working with ancestral cultural knowledge retentions" (2008, p. 346). Dei perfectly describes this delicate relationship that should exist between students' culture and historical knowledge, in which we use contemporary pedagogies to teach and challenge historical ideas. If this philosophy was adopted by policy makers, we would have an education system which honors students' existence beyond the identity of being just "students". Hip hop can be a tool to navigate differences and create a place of belonging for students otherwise perceived to be outsiders.

Moving towards a culturally-relevant education system. In Canada's largest school board, The Toronto District School Board, "twenty-seven percent (27%) of TDSB students were born outside of Canada in more than 175 different countries" (TDSB, 2010, p. 23). All of the participants in my study were students within this school board, so it is safe to say that similar to many urban centres in Canada, the student populations are ethnically diverse. As illustrated in

my literature review, particular cultural groups such as Caribbean Canadians and Aboriginals are disproportionally disengaged and disenfranchised in Canadian schools. Neegan (2005) suggests these groups have many similarities but "one important commonality is their shared history of oppression through the education system" (p. 4). She further argues that most Aboriginal children attend provincially run schools across Canada, yet the curriculum being delivered lacks content Aboriginal youth can relate to. The participants in the study represented a variety of cultural groups but a majority self-identified as Black and were of African or Caribbean decent. As mentioned earlier in this paper, Black students in Canada (particularly Caribbean-Black students) have a high dropout rate and are disengaged in schools. San Vicente (2006) would argue that a cultural divide between Black students and public education is a pivotal factor in the lack of school success for Black students.

According to Mattern (1997), as cited by Stapleton (1998), hip hop is referred to as *protest music* in which objects to the injustices and oppressions many individuals and groups of people experience as a result of race, class, gender and socio-political positions. Hip hop can be used as a tool of resistance and to give power and ammunition to those traditionally powerless. As one of the participants in the study pointed out, "hip hop is a way to express myself when no one wants to listen" (S.K., personal communication July 12, 2013). In addition to challenging the injustices many youth face, I echo Stapleton (1998) that hip hop serves as a voice for youth, regardless of race, faith and culture.

Moving forward. The lack of professional development, poor pre-service teacher education programs and inequitable educational policies has led to ineffective teaching practices that fail to incorporate culturally relevant and critical pedagogy such as hip hop. One participant in particular summarizes these findings where she quotes,

Hip-hop is who we are. We listen to it and live it every day. Without it I wouldn't get up every morning and take the bus to school. I wouldn't be able to fall asleep at night. Hip-hop should be used in our classes because that's what we all love and care about. Until the teachers start understanding us we're not going to change our thoughts about school.

As illustrated in the above quote, hip hop is more than a song, a lyric or a culture. It is a way of life, a way of perceiving and making sense of the world. If our youth are using hip hop as a lens for looking at the world, it is essential this lens is honoured and welcomed within the learning environment.

The literature review conducted indicates that success is limited when students cannot relate to the curriculum in which they are expected to absorb. When irrelevant curriculum is delivered, students are less engaged with the content and less likely to be successful. Throughout my research, the concept of engagement was discussed and analyzed significantly. This has been evident across all interdisciplinaries, that if students are engaged, they will succeed academically. Seidel (2011) would agree that many teachers fear using hip hop in the classroom because the level of engagement would increase, not because of their own pedagogy, but because of the content hip hop offers. He further argues that hip hop is incredibly successful in engaging "the very students these same educators are unable or, in some cases, unwilling—to teach" (p. 117). It is without a doubt hip hop is needed in contemporary urban Canadian classrooms to increase student engagement and as an example of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy for marginalized youth. In order to engage students from particular backgrounds incorporating their personal interests, cultures and values is essential for success. If research and evidence suggests that using hip hop to engage students can increase their success, why is it that so many educators, administrators and education systems fail to incorporate this in their frameworks?

By conducting this research, I was able to achieve more than just a topic to write about or a thesis to complete. I was able to achieve my initial goal, which was to empower youth to be productive participants in their own learning and answer my research questions. Although, I only scraped the surface of this notion of voice and power, the youth were able to be heard and their ideas brought back to a foreign institution of scholarly ideologies. "Once considered black noise" Stapleton (1998) argues that hip hop has become a political voice for an entire youth culture, regardless of race. To take the concepts and opinions of these youth and put them in writing in an academic setting is something I cherish deeply, because, without their words, we as educators can never move forward and challenge the unjust ways of this system we call education. Call it critical pedagogy or simply, taking the time to hear your students out, this research study as Wink (2005) would say "gives voice to the voiceless; gives power to the powerless" (p. 165). Although "change is often difficult, and critical pedagogy is all about change from coercive to collaborative; from transmission to transformative; from inert to catalytic; from passive to active", change can only begin with us, educators, taking the time to hear our students beyond the books and curriculum expectations (Wink, 2005, p. 165).

As I analyzed the data I received I was grateful because it served an important purpose to my research agenda. I set out to investigate a problem I see so often within Canadian urban schools; disengagement and lack of success. The data I received created a voice for youth who are often voiceless in large institutions. The information they gave me has created this piece of writing which I know will eventually make its way into the very classrooms they occupy. I do not like to look at this as I gave them voice, rather they themselves have channeled their own voice through a different avenue, one that I hope serves a great purpose. Edmin (2010) echoes this ideology in which he states hip hop has evolved "into the main avenue of voice for urban

marginalized youth across the globe" (p. 1). Often hip hop is the only voice many youth like the participants in this study have or use to communicate their feelings, ideas and knowledge.

Limitations and Recommendations for Research and Practice

With any research study, challenges and implications arise that can affect the data collection and analysis. In this particular study, a few implications were observed and deconstructed. Primarily, the goal of the research was to locate students' voices and assimilate their voice in this paper to provide more insight into the desperate need for educational policy reform in schools across Canada. Although I believe I did attain this objective, there were limitations in the data I received. When youth are asked to respond to questions on paper, there are undocumented thought processes that cannot be detected. With that being said, the youth would answer the questions directly with minimal discussion and emphasis. I believe if the methodology of informal interviews had been used, the depth of analysis and would have been immensely greater, and therefore, this is recommended for future research.

Another implication was the limited number of participants. It is possible that the results may vary with a larger sample, however, given the nature of this area being under-researched, and the difficulty of engaging adolescents in extra writing tasks, particularly about schooling, this study provides some insight in that area. It is recommended that future research include a larger student sample in order to further clarify the findings of this study. The further limitation to my research was in regards to the policy analysis. I argue all educational policies directly or indirectly impact hip hop pedagogy, however, within the scopes of this thesis I was only able to analyze a few. Further research on other educational policies not included here on how they impact hip hop pedagogy is needed.

In addition to the recommendations mentioned above, there is a dire need for the

reconstruction of teaching practices and school policies to ensure marginalized students are successful in Canadian urban classrooms. School boards across Canada need to re-evaluate the curriculum being delivered and look for ways to incorporate student's community cultural wealth and out-of-school literacies within the curriculum, even beyond hip hop integration, to ensure all students success. Aside from policies, pre-service education programs need to inform up-and-coming teachers of the complex educational disparities which exist in our schools. When pre-service teachers are aware of the statistical drop-out rates and disengagement, they may choose to adopt a more consciously-aware approach as a framework for their pedagogy. In addition to pre-service education programs, teachers working in marginalized communities across Canada should be trained on culturally-relevant pedagogy and taught how to incorporate students' interests, values and cultures within the classroom to increase engagement. As Stairs (2007) argues, many educators are not prepared to educate urban students who reflect completely opposite demographics linguistically, racially and culturally. Whether educators are or aren't from the same cultural background of their students, they need to possess the necessary skills, resources and knowledge to educate their students regardless.

Another recommendation for practice is implementing mandatory professional development amongst educators across Canada that are facilitated and delivered by educators currently using hip hop in their classrooms. With any pedagogical tool, concerns may arise from parents and communities about the rationale for using a particular mode of instruction. It is important as educators we discuss our rationale with our administrators, students and parents. As the findings indicate, using hip hop as pedagogy within classrooms can increase engagement and is culturally-relevant to most students.

Conclusion

The findings from the questionnaires, my autoethnography, and the educational policy analysis suggest that hip hop is a pedagogical tool that is needed to engage marginalized youth in Canadian urban classrooms. Students provided a great deal of insight into their own personal experiences and the very classrooms that have failed to include them. Inviting hip hop into the curriculum can create an avenue for students to succeed and be included. The intentions of this thesis was to provide a space for youth voice to surface and use their voice to illicit change within the diverse education system in Canada, in particular, urban centres where students are traditionally marginalized. I believe the data collected from the questionnaires has provided a great deal of insight into the need for hip hop in classrooms as a mitigating factor to enhance engagement and success amongst marginalized youth. Further, the combination of three research methods contribute to our understanding of the educational concerns facing our youth.

With any form of resistance and social change, there is still a long way to go to get school boards, policy developers and educators on the same page about hip hop as a tool for engagement. Although I initially set out to answer the questions: *why do some students feel disengaged and excluded in their schools and classrooms, can hip hop be used to increase student engagement and therefore, success for marginalized students in urban Canadian classrooms and how do educational policies intersect with hip hop pedagogy*, further questions have emerged that may pave a new path for me in the future. The questions I now find myself asking are the following: What specifically about hip hop culture is so engaging for youth? What does a hip hop school look like? If hip hop was the pedagogical tool of choice for educators, would we see drastic changes in the attitudes and culture of our students? I intend on extending these questions further as I continue using my research as a forum for youth's voices to be heard.

From a personal perspective, writing this paper is another example of how I have challenged the many systems that continue to isolate and reject hip hop as pedagogy. Although our education system has and will continue to have flaws, recognizing and then deconstructing these flaws is the first step towards a pedagogy of possibility. As I reflected on my journey writing this thesis it is fair to say that my pedagogy simultaneously attempts to achieve Simon's (1992) notion of pedagogy of possibility. To me pedagogy of possibility is about social change, challenge and resilience. In order to achieve social change, one must challenge resistance and then overcome that resistance through resiliency. As evident in my journey, I have been challenged by a failing education system, administrators and colleagues who didn't believe or appreciate what hip hop can do within classrooms. The ability to persevere and continue to challenge these assumptions was illustrated through the entire hip hop curriculum project team's ability to publish the book *Rhymes to Re-Education*.

Although I hope to achieve a pedagogy of possibility, it is inevitable that questions will continue to arise on how and what pedagogy of possibility will look like as our changing world continues to change. Simon (1992) further argues that "educational practice is a power relation that participates in both enabling and constraining what is understood as knowledge and truth" (p. 56). So as I embark on a continuous battlefield I am reminded of who this battle is for, and that is the youth. They are the future of our society and world and we must put their interests, needs and possibilities on the forefront. I conclude this paper with a quote from one of my favourite rapper's, Nas aka Nasir Jones. I chose this quote because it summarizes the importance of youth being at the forefront of education and the future. Without them, our future is hopeless.

> *Be, be, boys and girls listen up, you can*
> *be anything in the world in god we trust.*
> *An architect, doctor maybe an actress but*
> *nothing comes easy it takes much practice* -Nas "I Know I Can

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Appendix A

Key Informant Questionnaire

Name:_____
Age:_____
Gender: _____
Place of Birth:_____
Geographical Location of Residence:_____
Languages Spoken:_____
Ethnic Identification:_____
Grade:_____
School:_____
Current Courses Taken:_____

1) How well would you say, you do in school?
2) How do you like school?
3) Do you feel the school you attend is inclusive of your identity?
4) Do you feel included within your school?
5) How engaged are you in school?
6) Do you find the material/curriculum used in your school relevant to your everyday life?
7) Do you find the curriculum relates to your interests?
8) Would you say you listen to hip hop music?
9) Do you consider yourself an active member of the hip hop community? Ie: go to shows, consider yourself an artist, attend hip hop events, participate in discussions
10) How often do you listen to hip hop throughout the day?
11) Who would you say are your favourite top 5 MC's/Artists/Rappers?
12) How does hip hop positively influence you?
13) Would you like to see hip hop incorporate within your schooling? If so how?

Appendix B

Hip Hop Vocabulary

411: What is the business or news for that specific time period.

Breaking: Also known as breakdancing, it is "an energetic and acrobatic style of dancing originally created in the late 1970s- as an alternative to gang violence" (San Vicente, 2014, p. 226).

Cheesed: The feeling of being angry or highly frustrated.

Cypher: "Is a gathering, typically in a circular formation, where ideas are shared verbally, most commonly through freestyling, with participants building on each other's ideas" (San Vicente, 2014, p. 225).

Freestyling: "The sharing of spontaneous thoughts and ideas through a medium such as rapping, djing, dancing or drawing" (San Vicente, 2014, p. 226).

Graffiti: "A style of art and communication that involves writing or drawing as a means of self-expression" sometimes in public spaces (San Vicente, 2014, p. 226).

Hailin: To call someone out or acknowledge them. For example, "I'm hailin up my dad for always being there for me".

Swag/Swagger: A person's sense of self, style and overall persona.

Appendix C

Self-Destruction Lyrics

Hook]
Self destruction, you're headed for self destruction

[KRS-One]
Well, today's topic, self destruction
It really ain't the rap audience that's bugging
It's one or two suckers, ignorant brothers
Trying to rob and steal from one another
You get caught in the mid
So to crush the stereotype here's what we did
We got ourselves together
So that you could unite and fight for what's right
Not negative cause the way we live is positive
We don't kill our relatives

[MC Delite]
Pop pop pop
One is shot who's to blame?
Headlines, front page, and rap's the name
MC Delight here to state the bottom line
That black-on-black crime was way before our time

[Kool Moe Dee]
Took a brother's life with a knife as his wife
Cried cause he died a trifling death
When he left his very last breath
Was "I slept so watch your step"
Back in the sixties our brothers and sisters were hanged
How could you gang-bang?
I never ever ran from the Ku Klux Klan
And I shouldn't have to run from a black man
Cause that's

[Hook]

[MC Lyte]
Funky fresh dressed to impress, ready to party
Money in your pocket, dying to move your body
To get inside you paid the whole ten dollars
Scotch taped with a razor blade taped to your collar
Leave the guns and the crack and the knives alone

MC Lyte's on the microphone
Bum rushing and crushing, snatching and taxing
I cram to understand why brother's don't be maxing
There's only one disco, they'll close one more
You ain't guarding the door
So what you got a gun for?
Do you rob the rich and give to the poor?
Yo Daddy-O, school em some more

[Daddy-O, Wise]
Straight from the mouth of Wise and Daddy-o
Do a crime end up in jail and gotta go
Cause you could do crime and get paid today
And tomorrow you're behind bars in the worst way
Far from your family, cause you're locked away
Now tell me, do you really think crime pays?
Scheming on taking what your brother has?
You little suckers..you'retalkin' all that jazz

[D-Nice]
It's time to stand together in a unity
Cause if not then we're soon to be
Self-destroyed, unemployed
The rap race will be lost without a trace
Or a clue but what to do
Is stop the violence and kick the science
Down the road that we call eternity
Where knowledge is formed and you'll learn to be
Self-sufficient, independent
To teach to each is what rap intended
But society wants to invade
So do not walk this path they laid
It's

[Hook]

[Ms. Melodie]
I'm Ms. Melodie and I'm a born again rebel
The violence in rap must cease and settle
If we want to develop and grow to another level
We can't be guinea pigs for the devil
The enemy knows, they're no fools
Because everyone knows that hip-hop rules
So we gotta get a grip and grab what's wrong
The opposition is weak and rap is strong

[Doug E. Fresh]
This is all about, no doubt, to stop violence
But first let's have a moment of silence
Fresh beatboxes... swing
Things been stated re-educated, evaluated
Thoughts of the past have faded
The only thing left is the memories of our belated
And I hate it, when
Someone dies and gets all hurt up
For a silly gold chain by a chump; word up
It doesn't make you a big man, and
To want to go out and dis your brother man, and
You don't know that's part of the plan
Why? Cause rap music is in full demand
Understand

[Hook]

[Just-Ice]
My name is Just-Ice -- a man not a prankster
I was known as the gangster
But believe me that is no fun
The time is now to unite everyone
You don't have to be soft to be for peace
Robbing and killing and murdering is the least
You don't have to be chained by the beast
But party people it's time I release!

[Heavy D]
Aiyyo here's the situation: idiodicy
Nonsense, violence, not a good policy
Therefore we must ignore, fighting and fussing
Heavy's at the door so there'll be no bum-rushing
Let's get together or we'll be falling apart
I heard a brother shot another, it broke my heart
I don't understand the difficulty, people
Love your brother, treat him as an equal
They call us animals -- mmm mmm, I don't agree with them
I'll prove them wrong, but right is what your proving them
Take heed before I lead to what I'm saying
Or we'll all be on our knees, praying

[Fruitkwan]
Yo Heavy D, deep in the heart of the matter
The self-destruction is served on a platter
Making a day not failing to anticipate

They got greedy so they fell for the bait
That makes them a victim, picked then plucked
New jack in jail, but to the vets they're a duck
There's no one to rob, cause in jail you're a number
They never took the time to wonder about

[Hook]

[Chuck D, FlavorFlav]
Yes we urge to merge we live for the love
Of our people the hope that they get along
(Yeah, so we did a song)
Getting the point to our brothers and sisters
Who don't know the time (boyyyee, so we wrote a rhyme)
It's dead in your head, you know, I'll drive to build
And collect ourselves with intellect, come on
To revolve to evolve to self-respect
Cause we got to keep ourselves in check
Or else it's

[Hook]

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

Date: July 2013.
Study Name: Using Hip-hop to Engage Youth in Canadian Urban Classrooms.
Researcher: My name is Danielle Koehler and I am a graduate student at York University working towards a Masters of Education.
Purpose of the Research: I am working towards completing my Masters of Education at York University and am interested in looking at how hip hop music can be used in Canadian urban classrooms to increase student engagement. I am therefore asking if you would agree to participate in this research study by answering some questions.
What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: You will be asked to answer some questions in a short interview which should take about 45 minutes to complete.
Risks and Discomforts: I do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.
Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: A benefit you may experience by participating in this study is providing information which may be used to improve the quality of education in Ontario schools, through advocacy for hip hop pedagogy.
Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of your relationship with York University, or me, either now, or in the future.
Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed.
Confidentiality: All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Your name will not be attached to the interview questionnaire and I will ensure that your participation remains confidential anonymous. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only research staff will have access to this information. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.
Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Danielle Koehler by e-mail at Danielle_koehler@edu.yorku.ca or (416) 906-4434. You may also contact my supervisor, Joy Mannette by email jmannette@edu.yorku.ca.
This research has been reviewed by the Graduate Program in Education Human Participants Review Committee, and approved for compliance on research ethics within the context of the York Senate Policy on research ethics. If you have any questions about this process or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the committee at 416-736-5018.
Legal Rights and Signatures:
I_____, consent to participate in conducted by Danielle Koehler. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate in Using Hip-hop to Engage Youth in Canadian Urban Classrooms. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

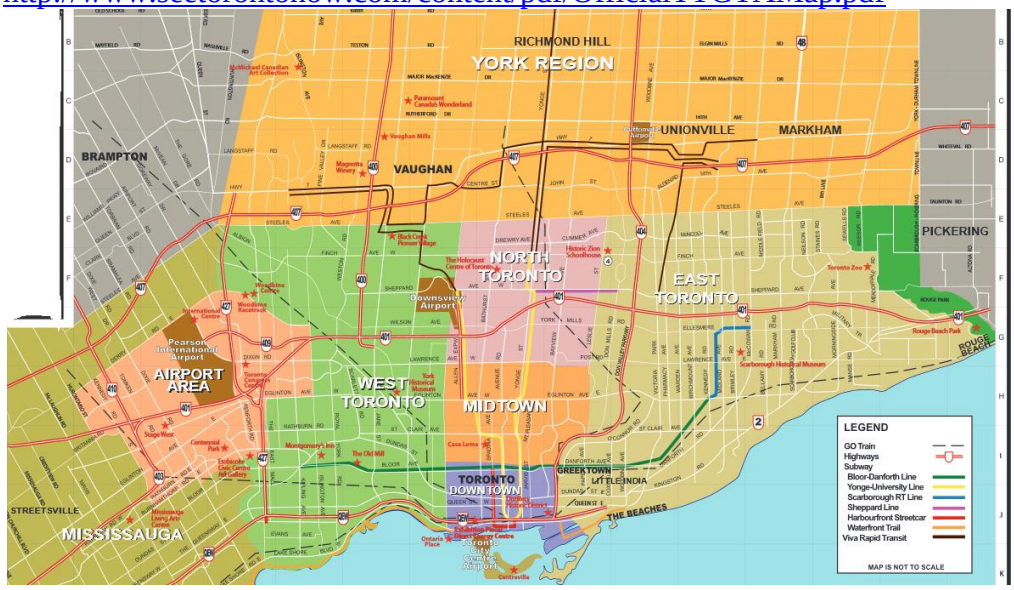
Signature _____ Date _____
Participant
Signature _____ Date _____
Principal Investigator
Signature _____ Date _____
Participant's Parent and/or Guardian

Signature _____ Date _____
Principal Investigator

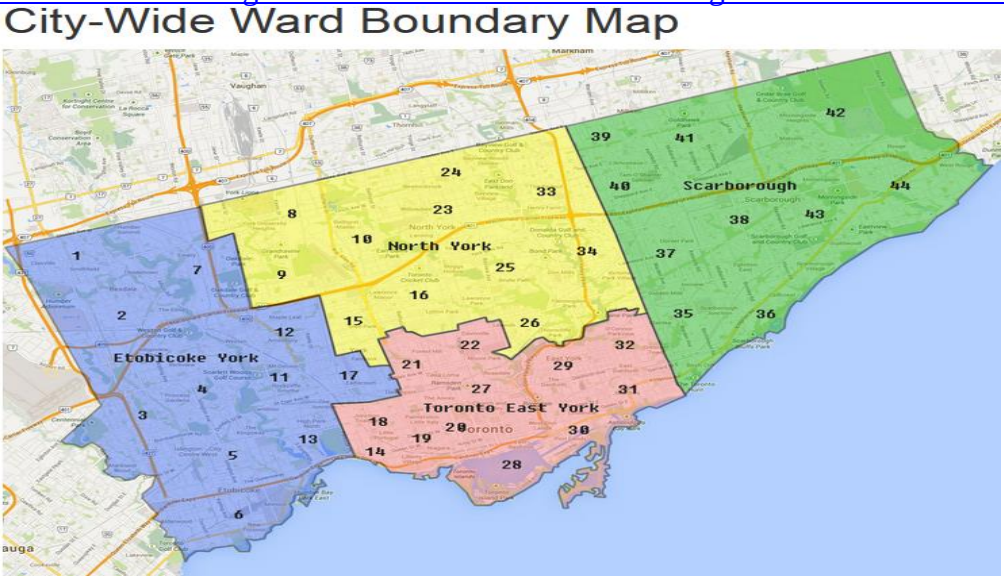
Appendix E

Map of Toronto and Greater Toronto Area

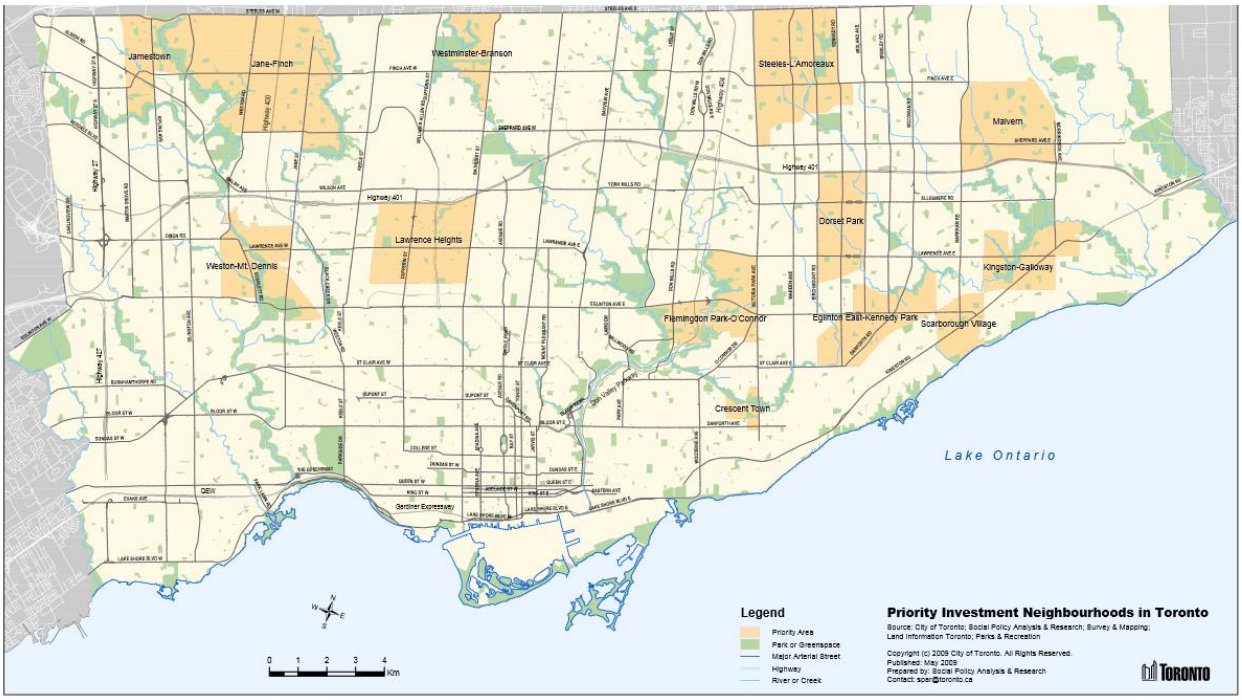
Map of Greater Toronto Area (GTA) courtesy of
http://www.seetorontonow.com/content/pdf/OfficialTTGTAMap.pdf



Map of Toronto Boundaries courtesy of
http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=2ca5045b4f870410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD&vgnextchannel=75461ba53b450410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD



Appendix E Continued:
Map of Priority Investment Neighbourhoods


Jamestown
Jane-Finch
Westminster-Branson
Steeles-L'Amoreaux
Malvern
Highway 401
Dorset Park
Lawrence Heights
Weston-Mt.Dennis
Kingston-Galloway
Flemingdon Park-O'Connor
Eglinton East-Kennedy Park
Scarborough Village
Crescent Town
Lake Ontario
Gardiner Expressway
QEW
0 1 2 3 4 Km
Legend
Priority Area
Park or Greenspace
Major Arterial Street
Highway
River or Creek
Priority Investment Neighbourhoods in Toronto
Source: City of Toronto; Social Policy Analysis & Research; Survey & Mapping; Land Information Toronto; Parks & Recreation
Copyright (c) 2009 City of Toronto. All Rights Reserved.
Published: May 2009
Prepared by: Social Policy Analysis & Research
Contact: spar@toronto.ca
TORONTO

Appendix F

Break it Down Lesson Plan
By: Danielle Koehler

Big Idea: Media and the arts can be used for social activism.

Topic(s): Identity; Stereotyping; Media Representation.

Enduring Understandings:

- Our communities are much more than the stereotypes that exist about them.
- The media should not define "who I am".

Guiding Questions:

- How does the media depict various groups and individuals?
- What is a stereotype?
- How does/can the artistic elements of Hip Hop, particularly dance, act as a form of resistance and create a space to mediate conflicts?

Introduction to Topic

Media literacy can be an important curriculum and can be a vehicle to connect with the lives of young people and engage in critical dialogue. Not only is it important for children and youth to be aware of the ways in which media often creates and reinforces stereotypes and misrepresents certain communities (particularly racialized and other marginalized communities), it is just as important for them to understand the important role that media and the arts can play in advocating for social change. This lesson begins to explore the media and arts as a tool for social activism.

Lesson Summary

This lesson explores the concepts of stereotyping, identity and representation using the song *Self-Destruction* by The Stop the Violence Movement. Students will examine the song, connect it to themes of power and representation, and then interpret the message using the five elements of dance.
Minds On: Students explore their own knowledge and understanding of media representation in relation to stereotypes.
Action: Students interpret a verse from the song *Self-Destruction* and discuss, in groups of 5, how the lyrics can be communicated through dance.
Consolidation: Students reflect on their learning and create a 1-minute dance incorporating the five elements of dance (body, space, time, energy and relationship).

Planning Notes	Materials
• Make necessary photocopies of *Appendices 10A to 10D* • Create groups of 4-5 • Introduce vocabulary to students (e.g. unity, stereotype, media) • Post new vocabulary on the class word wall	• Chart paper • Markers • Tape • Audio/visual equipment • Internet access • *Self-Destruction* song lyrics*(Go to rhymestoreeducation.com)* • Elements of Dance graphic

organizer*(Go to rhymestoreeducation.com)*
- Point of View worksheet*(Go to rhymestoreeducation.com)*
- Rubric *(Go to rhymestoreeducation.com)*
- Newspapers
- Magazines

Note: All songs and videos are available on YouTube and can be accessed through *The Hip Hop Curriculum YouTube Channel – Lesson Resources*.

Prior Knowledge

- Students should have explored the 5 elements of dance both physically and theoretically as part of their dance curriculum
- Students should be familiar with graphic organizers and how to use them

Minds On: What is misrepresentation? 40 minutes

Description: Students explore the concept of representation in the media through the use of various headlines and quotes from their local newspapers.

Teaching and Learning Strategies:

1. Divide students into groups of 4 or 5.
2. Ask students what they think the word "stereotype" means.
3. Provide examples for students.
4. ***Graffiti***: Ask the students to explore the concept of "stereotypes" by writing or drawing their understanding of a stereotype/misrepresentation on their group's graffiti map. Graffiti is a Hip Hop teaching and learning strategy that facilitates students brainstorming around a concept and sharing their thinking.
5. Each group shares their masterpiece by presenting their graffiti map to the whole group and explaining what and why they drew or wrote what they did.
6. Post the final products around the room.

Speaking points:

- We all have different understandings of what our communities mean to us.
- There are several ideas and interpretations outsiders have of our "community" that are often not accurate, based on misinformation, and used to judge us or our communities.

Action 1: Challenging Stereotypes and Uniting 3 x 50 minutes

Background Information:The song used in this lesson is titled *Self-Destruction*and it was created in 1989 in New York City by the *Stop the Violence Movement*, a collaboration of multiple MC's including KRS-One, MC Lyte, Doug E Fresh, Just Ice, Chuck D, FlavorFlav, Heavy D, Fruitkwan, Ms.Melodie, Kool Moe Dee, MC Delite, D-Nice, Daddy-O and Wise. These MCs came together to bring awareness to gun violence plaguing urban, particularly black communities in the United States. KRS-One pioneered this movement in response to losing his

original partner DJ Scott La Rock to violence. This song and its message are relevant, as gun violence, particularly in urban cities, continues to be an issue to be dealt with.
Description: Students listen to the song *Self-Destruction*analyze the lyrics and respond through dance.
Teaching and Learning Strategies:

1. Handout the lyrics to *Self-Destruction* and play the song twice for the students (students might need a second listen to properly digest the song and follow along with the lyrics). *(10 minutes)*
2. In a large group ask the students to shout out what came to mind as they watched the video and listened to the song. Continue to discuss the song with the students using the following guiding questions:*(10 minutes)*
    - How does this song positively or negatively represent particular communities?
    - What kind of violence/conflicts exists in your community?
3. Enlarge the following verse on the board, overhead or chart paper. Read through the verse 3-4 times, having different students read the excerpt each time. Another option is to use choral reading to recite the verse (i.e. everybody says the words at the same time). *(5 minutes)*

    So to crush the stereotype here's what we did
    We got ourselves together
    So that you could unite and fight for what's right
    Not negative cause the way we live is positive
    We don't kill our relatives
4. In groups, have students reflect on the meaning of the verse and respond to the following questions on chart paper:*(20 minutes)*
    a. What does unity mean?
    b. What are some examples of how your community unites?
    c. Give some examples of how the media often depicts your community?
    d. What do you think is meant by the words "fight for what's right"?
    e. How would you define "positive living"?
5. Re-introduce the 5 elements of dance (as outlined in the grade 3 dance curriculum - body, space, time, relationship and energy). *(Note: If students require support around developing and performing dance moves, Hip Hop Dance instructional videos appropriate for all age groups are available on YouTube and can be accessed through "The Hip Hop Curriculum YouTube Channel – Instructional Videos").(10 minutes plus)*
6. Divide the students into groups of 4-5 to create a one-minute dance expression communicating their interpretations of the song *Self-Destruction* by The Stop the Violence Movement.
7. Review the rubric with students and check for understanding.*(10 minutes)*
8. Give each group time to brainstorm ideas and a graphic organizer to complete to support them when including the five elements of dance within their created dance piece (see *Appendix 10B*). *(40 minutes)*
9. Provide time for students to practice their dances. *(20 minutes)*

Modifications for Junior Students:

- With students, discuss their thoughts about violence.

- Describe communities as places people interact with each other.
- Scribe for students.
- Have students use a computer to complete graphic organizer.
- Create a dance together as a class.
- Have students create a dance as a group.

Speaking points:

- How can you use your entire body (facial expressions, movement and location) to communicate meaning about the verse highlighted in step 3 of the lesson?
- What are you trying to communicate?

Action 2: Performance and Analysis 50 minutes

Description: Students present their dance to the entire class.
Teaching and Learning Strategies:

1. Have the students perform their group dances for the whole class.*(30 minutes)*
2. Instruct the students who are watching to make observations about the dance (particularly as it relates to the 5 elements of dance) and communicate these ideas and thoughts to the group afterwards.
3. Ask the students watching the presentation to decide whose point of view the dance is told from (to see if their observations match the intention of the group who's performing).
4. Ask the performing group to reflect on the message and meaning of their performance, as well as their own strengths and areas for growth. The students will create a reflection paper (or journal entry) to summarize their thoughts.*(20 minutes)*

Consolidation: Point of View Extension 45 minutes

Description: Students summarize their learning and interpretations of the song and dance. Then students describe whose point of view is expressed as they observe each other's dances.
Teaching and Learning Strategies:

1. Students will be familiar with the concept of point of view.
2. Students will use the graphic organizer to describe the point of view their dance was told from (e.g. a victim, the perpetrator, their community, society as whole etc.).

Discussion Questions:

- Do current hip hop artists express concern about violence?
- Does hip hop music encourage and condone violence?
- Are most hip hop music videos violent?
- Do other musical genre's express concern for violence in our communities?

Extensions:

- Students can write a rhyme, spoken word or poem to communicate the main themes around the song and dance

Assessment and Evaluation

- Point of View Assignment
- Group Dance Presentations
- Anecdotal notes
- Culminating Task (teachers refer to grade 3 arts based rubric in Appendix D)

Accommodations

- Provide scaffolding support for culminating task
- Allow students to draw their interpretations of the dance for their point of view assignment
- Word walls for younger students