

**“POETRY OUT OF POISON:”
EXPLORING RAP MUSIC AS CRITICAL PEDAGOGY**

by

JASMINE DARES

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Abstract

How to create learning experiences that are more relevant and empowering for young people is an ongoing issue for educators, youth workers, parents, social scientists, and students. Critical pedagogical theorists have identified gaps in formal education which limit the possibilities for critical thinking and student-centredness (Ibrahim, 2004; Low, 2007, 2011; McLaren, 1997). While many of these studies have been conducted in classroom settings, this study focuses on what can be learned from youth programs that were collaboratively developed by program directors and rap artists in community organizations. Using qualitative interviews and drawing from cultural studies, this research engages the perspectives of five participants who are actively involved in the development and implementation of hip hop youth programs. The emergent themes from the interviews highlighted hip hop culture's relationship with social justice and social contradictions. These findings support the claim that critical rap pedagogies provide young people with more relevant learning experiences and with greater possibilities to draw connections between their own experiences and the wider community leading to greater opportunities for agency and empowerment.

Preface

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Jasmine Dares. The fieldwork reported in Chapters 2-6 was covered by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board Certificate number H10-00530. The title of the thesis; “Poetry out of Poison” is a quote from Havoc, one of the research participants.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This research focuses on the ways that rap music and hip hop culture are being used by social justice minded rap artists and community organizers as a strategy for teaching about history and culture and for promoting social justice. In other words, I am exploring the potential and in some cases real relationship between rap music pedagogy and the creation of greater possibilities for ethnoracially informed, progressive, social justice-based agency and learning. Theorists such as McLaren (1995) have alerted us to the tension between formal education and critical thinking and through this research I have investigated how rap artists and community organizations have used rap music to respond to this critical gap in education. According to McLaren (1995):

What isn't being talked about in today's educational debate is the desperate need within our schools for creating a media literate citizenry that can disrupt, contest, and transform media apparatuses so that they no longer have the power to infantilize the population and continue to create passive, fearful, paranoid, and apolitical social subjects. (p. 9)

As Wise Intelligent (2011), one of the members of the rap group Poor Righteous Teachers asserts, hip hop is an interpretation of the world and of reality. The cross-over rap/rock group Sublime, credits artists like KRS One for teaching them aspects of the null curriculum (what was not taught in schools): "in school they never taught 'bout hamburgers or steak, Elijah Muhammed or the welfare state. But I know. And I know because of KRS-ONE" (Sublime, 2013). Taking as a premise the idea that rap performs a pedagogical function, I conducted a study of the pedagogy of rap music through interviews with five participants. Using qualitative interviews and literature from cultural studies, I have first explored how three social justice minded, Canadian rap artists are using rap music pedagogically. They are overtly employing rap to teach their audience/listeners something, thus consciously utilizing rap as a pedagogical

strategy. Secondly, I have explored how rap pedagogy is being taken up by community organizers because what is being taught by progressive community organizers is not knowledge for knowledge's sake but knowledge that promotes agency, social justice, and representation: in short, rap pedagogy as activist strategy. The following paragraphs will explain why this research topic is important and how it expands on previous research in this field. I have provided a list of my research questions as well as a diagram that illustrates the potential relationships my research intends to explore. You will find a detailed discussion of the conceptual framework that informed my research as well as my positionality. Finally, I have included a brief description of what can be found in the upcoming chapters.

It is helpful to imagine formal education, community organizations, and rap music as existing along a sort of educational continuum that compares the differences in their educational functions. In other words, the comparison addresses the curriculum and pedagogy of schooling with the educational function of community organizations and the very informal and educational function of hip hop artists through their lyrics, workshops, and performances. At one end, the curriculum and pedagogy of formal education can be understood as more intentional, institutional and hierarchical. As Yates (2009) suggests, schooling as an institution that is controlled by policymakers and politicians, is seen as providing a vocational function with specific goals and that the politics involved in what is represented within curriculum content is less important.

Driven by politicians and policy-makers and their endless critiques of teacher education, faculties of education did not want to employ people who seemed only to have something critical to say, or who wanted to raise bigger questions about what schools were doing. They wanted to leave debates about what particular constructions of curriculum

represented out of the discussion, and instead to see schooling and teaching as a technical activity with straightforward aims, and as an activity that could be improved if only it were studied more carefully (that is, in more systematic and controlled ways. (Yates, 2009, p. 18)

At the other end of the continuum, one can locate hip hop culture which, in terms of its curriculum and pedagogy is informal and in some cases, incidental. There is distance between the artist and her audience in hip hop as pedagogy, just as there is distance between the teacher and her students but the process of rap pedagogy can be considered more participatory than imposed. In the middle of the continuum, we can situate the educational work of community organizations which have been described as addressing a perceived void in the administration of institutional services that favour the technical goals of the institutions over the empowerment and agency of the individual (McLaughlin, 2000). McLaughlin (2000) found that youth who participated in community organizations were much more likely to express feelings of hopefulness and personal value than their peers who did not participate. They were also more likely than their peers to gain a greater sense of agency.

Based on the differences in the educational functions of schooling, community organizations, and rap music, it is important to learn more about how and why some of the people who work in community organizations and some of the people who produce rap music are coming together to support more empowering educational experiences. Growth in understanding about these programs and those involved with them will support greater acceptance of the importance of youth culture in the lives of youth and hopefully support greater integration of youth culture into all of their educational arenas (classrooms, community organizations, and households).

There is a strong and growing body of literature on hip hop and its social meaning (Akom, 2009; Ibrahim, 2004; Kitwana, 2005, Low, 2007, 2011; McLaren, 1997; Rose, 1991, 1994) but the area of research addressing rap pedagogy is still relatively new and there are many questions that beg to be explored. For example, in what ways are formal educational curricula being challenged by rap artists, especially in relation to their lack of relevance for youths' immediate lives (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009)? Does rap music create possibilities for agency that are different than those that are highlighted through formal education? Informed by a politics of modernity, formal education supports the progress of science and the rational division of labour (Giroux, 1992) but what are the politics that inform rap pedagogy? Is there a relationship between hip hop culture, self-improvement and social transformation? As it would be impossible for me to tackle all of these questions, this qualitative interview study focuses on exploring the relationship between rap music pedagogy and activism in terms of how it relates to the concept of educational relevance and possibilities for agency as understood by five participants; two community organizers and three rap artists. Stovall (2006) who is informed by Shor's (1980) concept of critical learning offers a notion of educational relevance that draws on hip hop culture;

As an alternative to situations that are dehumanizing and depersonalized, the infusion of hip-hop culture can provide the context for students to develop a critical lens in approaching subject matter and its relevance to their daily lives. Hip-hop culture, as relevant to the lives of many high school students, can provide a bridge to ideas and tasks that promote critical understanding. (Stovall, 2006, p. 589)

Educational relevance can be understood as a concept that embraces the idea that a student's experiences in the classroom should not be separate from their experiences in the world. Their

interests, their families and their histories for example, should both impact and be reflected in the classroom just as what they learn in the classroom should impact and be reflected in their lives outside of the school. Based on the notion that hip hop culture offers a way to make educational experiences more relevant for young people (Ibrahim, 2004, 2010; Stovall, 2006) the following research questions have guided my exploration of rap music as critical pedagogy.

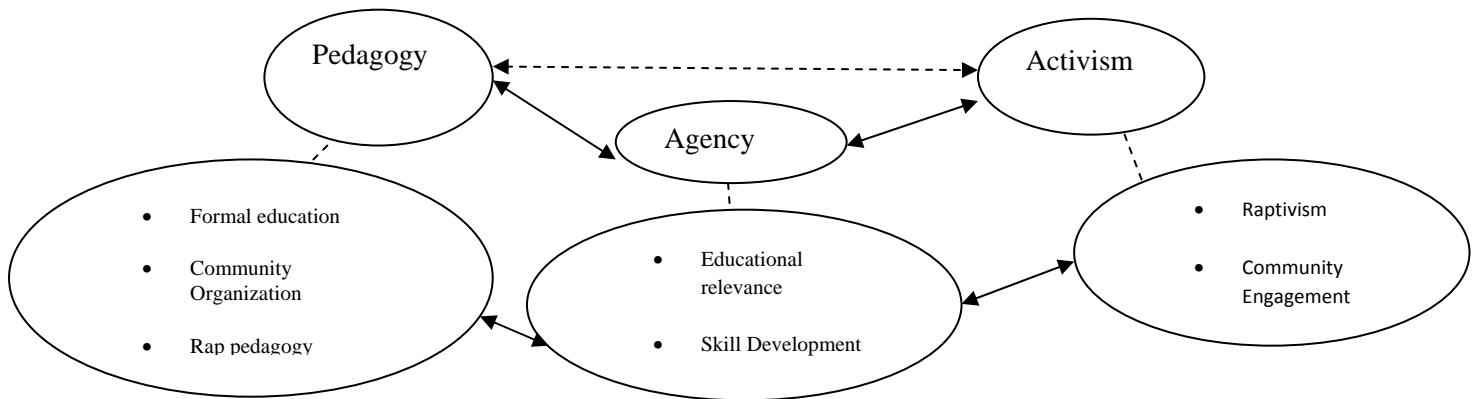
1.1 Research Questions

Through more specific questions that address the participants' own experiences with formal education, community organizations, and rap music, I aimed to gain a greater understanding of this relationship as it relates to the relevance of education in the lives of youth. According to critical scholars such as Giroux and Kincheloe (2010), the relationship between pedagogy and activism is mediated by the degrees of possibility for agency (freireproject.org, 2010) but with the participation of people who are actively engaged in this process we stand to learn a lot more about how this relationship functions and why it is important. Based on the limited body of research in this area, my research explores the following questions:

1. How is rap pedagogy being defined by the participants?
2. How do community organizers and rap artists interpret the relationship between pedagogy and activism?
3. How and why is rap pedagogy being used in community organizations?

Figure 1: Diagram of Potential Relationships

The purpose of this diagram is to visually highlight how the main concepts in this research project work together and/or impact each other.



The primary research question explores the relationship between pedagogy and activism. The concept of pedagogy in this project is examined from the perspectives of three different educational settings; formal education, community organizations, and rap music. In particular, these settings are explored in terms of how they understand the relationship between education and agency for young people. Each of these lenses understand agency on different levels ranging from labour production, to skill development, to creative awareness and social engagement. The concept of educational relevance which encompasses all of these levels would fluctuate depending on where the focus lies. The question then becomes how these different interpretations of agency promote or engender a desire to engage in activism.

1.2 Conceptual Framework and Positionality

My research is grounded within Social Constructionism, a tradition which highlights the historically and culturally constructed nature of social and individual experiences and understandings. According to Gergen (1985), knowledge arises out of the interactions people have with each other and the ways they negotiate different forms of language, be they verbal or

gestural. Social Constructionism was born of the incompatibility to reconcile two of the traditional, Western streams of thought. On one hand, the exogenic perspective represented by Locke, Mills, and Hume assumes that knowledge is reflective of the real or concrete world, and on the other hand, Kant and Nietzsche described the endogenic perspective which suggests that knowledge is an internal process that arises from the human abilities to categorize information (Gergen, 1985). Social constructionism understands human ontology as being both outside of the head and away from the assumption of a concrete reality. Human ontology is the consequence of “the processes and structure of human interaction” (Gergen, 1985, p. 271).

The concept of positionality suggests that a researcher is positioned within her research as a person who embodies class, race, gender, age and many other defining structures along with a system of values, experiences and history. These embodiments affect the ways that the researcher interprets, understands, and responds to the research and the participants (Plowman, 1995). Moser (2008) goes even further to argue that positionality is not only about the role that these defining structures have in the research process, it is also about the role of social skills and emotional responses, what she describes as ‘personality.’ The importance of positioning oneself in the research arose out of the paradigmatic shift that began to question the reality of objectivity in research. Arising out of post-Marxist, post-colonial, and feminist claims that the production of knowledge is contextual and “marked by its origins” (Rose, 1997, p. 307), those at the forefront of this shift such as Rabinow (1977), and feminist geographers (Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1991; Rose, 1997) insisted that neutrality is a façade since researchers are entrenched within positions of power that shape the research at every circumstance (Moser, 2008). The researcher decides what to research and how it should be interpreted therefore, it can never be truly objective. An integral component to the process of positioning oneself in the research is the call for reflexivity

wherein the researcher engages in analyses that are self-critical and self-conscious (McDowell, 1992; Katz, 1992; Radcliffe, 1994; Moss, 1995). Reflexivity includes inward analyses of the researcher's identity and outward analyses of the researcher's connection to both the research and the world (Rose, 1997).

My research interests are inspired and informed by my own history with music and education. It was 1993 and I had made friends with some kids who moved to my neighbourhood from Detroit. They were skateboarders and they listened to rap groups like 'A Tribe Called Quest' and 'De La Soul.' They had cassette tapes which we would listen to all day long and while in the beginning I think I was more intrigued by the music and the melodies, the more I listened, the more I became familiar with the lyrics and really began listening to the stories. Around this time rap music was just starting to be played on the radio and in our area there was a one hour long hip hop show that played on a college radio station on Monday nights at midnight. We would all stay up to hear the latest songs and then we would talk about them the next day at school. As a white teenager growing up on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, population ten thousand and mostly white, the reader might be interested in why my friends and I loved hip hop music because it would seem that the experiences that mostly Black and Latino rap artists talked about in terms of racial discrimination, poverty, political invisibility, violence and injustice were distinctly different from our experiences on the island. When I consider this question, I think about my childhood experiences. My parents were always considered hippy-ish and it was important to them that we question authority figures and institutions. My sisters and I were encouraged to critically engage with the world around us and to not believe everything we heard or saw and especially not to believe that the government had our best interests at heart. The demographics on the island were racially homogeneous but when it came to economics, there

were stark divisions between the less well-off kids and the rich kids. While we were by no means poor, we did feel less advantaged and many of us hippy kids were bullied. At this time in my life, I know that when I began to listen to rap music, I found a common political inclination in terms of an aversion to the social structures and institutions that create oppressive experiences for people. While I cannot begin to claim that I understood what it felt like to be racially discriminated against or surrounded by violence, I felt a common connection to the goals of the music in terms of wanting to be heard and wanting to create awareness for social justice issues.

When I was 16, I went to France for a year-long exchange program and once again, my love for hip hop music provided a way to connect with other people who embraced the same ideas about anti-racism and economic and social injustices. This idea of common political goals and understanding often arises within my research and will be developed in more detail in the analysis chapter where I discuss mediation and authenticity. These are the politics at the core of hip hop culture and music which account for some of the reasons it has been adopted throughout the world by so many different types of people for both pleasure and activism.

I completed my undergraduate degree in Sociology and found myself becoming increasingly interested in the tensions between formal education and youth culture and the role that music played within both social arenas. I was accepted into an Educational Studies program for graduate school and received a grant from the Social Sciences Research Humanities Committee for a proposal that sought to research the role of music in formal education settings. Throughout my courses and other types of experiences in the graduate program, I realized that I wanted to approach my research from a qualitative standpoint because I was really interested in learning more about the personal experiences of those working with youth through rap music. My interest in this area is informed by my own personal experiences with rap music as a tool for

learning but also by my belief that formal education does not always provide a positive or rewarding learning experience for all students. Popular culture and music in particular, is also an integral part of young people's socialization and exploration of identity. A qualitative approach offers a way to support and bring awareness to the particular experiences of the artists and organizers who work together and educate youth outside of the classroom.

In summary, this research explores the ways that rap music and hip hop culture are being used in community organizations to respond to students in ways that promote social justice and critical engagement. By way of qualitative interviews with five participants including three rap artists and two community organizers, I have sought to understand their use of rap pedagogy as a way to create educational experiences that are more empowering and relevant. By drawing on the work of critical pedagogy scholars, my research expands the field of hip hop music and culture as critical pedagogy and addresses its relationship with activism. The research that follows is understood within the framework of social constructionism where experiences are defined through both social structures and social interactions. The following paragraphs briefly describe what will be addressed in the coming chapters.

Chapter two reviews the literature on hip hop music and culture as it has been explored through different lenses and perspectives. I begin with the literature on hip hop as culture and musical genre. Secondly, I take a look at the literature that addresses the relationship between education and hip hop with a particular emphasis on the research that discusses rap pedagogy as a form of student-centred pedagogy. The final section in the literature review discusses the work that has been concerned with hip hop and activism. I will describe the specific concept of "raptivism" which combines hip hop music with social change. Furthermore, in this section authors explain hip hop culture and music as a means to open up conversations about race,

gender, sexuality and violence. There is also a body of literature that outlines the ways that hip hop culture and music are being used to validate other forms of knowledge and to increase possibilities for identity formation.

Chapter three outlines the theoretical framework of the research project. In order to highlight the complexity of hip hop music, culture and education which has been downplayed by mainstream media and public policy literature, I have drawn upon cultural studies, media studies, and critical pedagogy. In particular, I focus on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory of communication which helps to transform conventional interpretations about the transmission of media and messages. In this chapter previous studies have been arranged into three, loosely bounded categories of communication: influence, mediation and empowerment. These categories reveal the different ways that rap music has and is been talked about and when incorporated, they also help to reinforce and expand the ideas that are being expressed in Hall's theory of communication.

The concept of educational relevance is a recurring theme throughout the theoretical framework and the research because it addresses the importance of creating educational experiences for youth that are more significant and applicable to their lives. Chapter three discusses the importance of greater educational relevance by including a description of one young rap artist's journey to learn about the history of Africville in Nova Scotia, a Black settlement that dated back hundreds of years but was destroyed in the 1950's. Following this example, I begin to elaborate on the ways that hip hop culture can be re-imagined as critical pedagogy.

Chapter four discusses the methodology that was used and its appropriateness for the research questions I have explored. As a qualitative interview study, it was important to explain

my paradigmatic stance and role as a researcher as well as my data collection processes and procedures of analysis. This chapter also includes the biographies of those who were interviewed and a description of the interviews I conducted with all five of the participants.

Using Giroux and Kincheloe's (2010) critical pedagogy questions as a guide to understanding the concept of pedagogy and Ladson-Billings' (1992) framework for pedagogical practice, Chapter five describes the findings that arose out of the interviews and provides a framework for rap pedagogy.

Chapter six re-engages the theoretical notions that were discussed in the theoretical framework chapter to further explore hip hop as pedagogy. With the assertion that pedagogy includes theory and practice and political intentions, this chapter discusses how the participants and I have conceptualized the politics of hip hop as pedagogy. Finally, this concluding chapter describes the recommendations that arose out of the study in terms of how the research might be implemented for both practical and theoretical purposes.

1.3 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between rap music pedagogy and social justice based agency and learning. According to McLaren, formal education suffers from a lack of critical focus on and engagement with youth which the inclusion of popular culture might help to address. Through interviews with five participants I hope to learn more about the potentials of this relationship.

1.4 Significance of the Research

Where much of the research on rap music and education has been conducted in the classroom, this study is significant in that it builds on the literature by looking at why rap artists

and community organizers have come together to create educational programs for young people outside of the classroom.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The goal of my research was to discover more about rap music as pedagogy and activism from the experiences of people who have worked with community organizations and youth that use rap music as a source for learning and activism. The literature review chapter covers the areas of research that have addressed some of these concepts and ideas as well as important ideas that have yet to be examined with more depth. Rap as pedagogy is a relatively new concept but the importance of popular culture for youth and education has been around for quite some time. In this chapter I offer examples of the different ways that hip hop culture and rap music have been studied in terms of both differences in paradigmatic stances and the intersection of rap music with other important concepts such as education and activism. While some of the literature tends to focus on the lyrical content of specific genres of rap music, other literature considers both the music and the culture of hip hop as historically situated and interconnected with broader social structures that include urban development, racism, economic disparity, and colonialism just to name a few.

I begin with a look at the literature on rap music and hip hop culture as they have been studied from different theoretical lenses. I then discuss the literature that has addressed the relationship between rap music and education in terms of its incorporation in classrooms and the possibilities that it might offer for addressing students' lack of engagement and for creating educational experiences that are more critical. The final part of literature review includes a discussion of the literature that has focused on rap music and activism. Here we learn about the important role that rap music and hip hop culture have had in vocalizing and bringing awareness to both historical and contemporary experiences of racial oppression. I will also describe the growing concept of "raptivism" which is a term that embraces the pedagogical and activist properties of rap music as well as its global appeal.

2.1 Hip Hop

Hip hop culture and rap music have been studied from different views, using different methods and with different intentions. Researchers and theorists tend to either look at hip hop from a broader, cultural studies perspective (Akom, 2009; Decker, 1993; Grossberg, 1994; Haworth et al., 2009; Ibrahim, 2004, 2010; Kitwana, 2005; Lipsitz, 1994; Low, 2011; McLaren, 1995, 1997; Nielson, 2010, 2011; Pardue, 2004; Reiland, 2011; Rose, 1991, 1994) or their focus is on the specific art form of rap music which is a part of hip hop culture (Cobb & Boettcher, 2007; Harvey, 2009; Richardson & Scott, 2002). Scholars who are of African descent or who take an Africana studies lens (Chang, 2005; Ibrahim, 2004, 2010; Reiland, 2011; Rose, 1991, 1994) tend to locate hip hop culture within the historical genealogy of Africana experiences and aesthetics. In particular, Reiland (2011) describes hip hop culture as arising out of African diasporic and African-American cultural traditions and sociopolitical developments (Reiland, 2011). Reiland (2011) eloquently chronicles how the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights movement, the Black Power movement and the Black Arts movement are the inheritance of hip hop culture. Historically, rap music has been perceived as a politically charged, communicative strategy that allows for the voices of young, urban, Black youth to be heard (McLaren, 1997; Nielson, 2010, 2011; Rose, 1991, 1994). These voices have been historically and systematically silenced but with the development of rap music, these marginalized youth have been able to speak to each other and to the world, across social and geographical barriers. This interpretation is tied to experiences of African-American youth cultures but is not contained by this racial category. For example, Pardue (2004) whose goal it was to create greater awareness about hip hop and to contribute to the literature, found that hip hop functioned as a strategy for the mediation of experiences of marginalization among youth in Brazil. Krims (2000) researched rap music as an example of social mediation and identity building in Canada and the Netherlands.

Similarly, Ibrahim (2004) who comes from a cultural studies perspective and Low (2011) who employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and pays particular attention to the use of language in hip hop culture, analyze the relationship between hip hop culture and identity building in Canada and the United States.

Cobb and Boettcher (2007) writing from a social psychological perspective sought to discover whether misogynistic rap music, rap music that promoted violence against women, increased sexism in listeners. They found that while sexism increased for those listening to misogynistic rap music, it also increased for males listening to rap music that was non-misogynistic. They suggest that this might be due to the way that rap music has been stereotyped and labeled as sexist (Cobb & Boettcher, 2007). Herd (2009) analyzed rap lyrics from 1979 to 1997 and found that there was an increase in violent lyrics but that this was likely due to an increase in violence in United States in general, as well as an increase in commercial music production costs that were buffered through greater profit from the sale of albums that glorified violence.

2.2 Hip Hop and Education

Part of the reason why there is such a generational gap is because so few educators make an effort to understand the times in which they live. You can't apply '60s and '70s methods to teaching in the new millennium. You can't apply a jazz aesthetic to hip-hop heads," says Powell, who lectures at 70 to 80 colleges and universities a year. "You have to meet the students where they are. That's the nature of education. That's pedagogy. (Evelyn, 2000)

A recent research report by the Canadian Education Association that included 93 schools in 10 districts, with the intent of learning more about adolescent student engagement in the

classroom, found that contrary to current literature in this field, levels of student intellectual engagement is actually significantly lower with only an average of 37% feeling engaged and this decreases the longer students stay in school. The report concludes with the recommendation that school work must mean something for students. It should be “relevant, meaningful and authentic” (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009, p. 34) and should incorporate holistic experiences with the material.

As Ibrahim (2004) explains, popular culture should be incorporated in the classroom because the affective nature of popular culture makes it a site where youth learn to socialize their identities and imagine possibilities for their own lives. Herd (2009) who is also informed by Freirian theory suggests that the association between rap music lyrics and violence could be addressed through greater emphasis on media literacy. This recommendation echoes Freire’s (1996) call for both students and teachers to teach and learn from each other through dialogue. In this sense, popular culture, particularly music, becomes a starting point for a dialogue between teachers and students and also validates a part of the students’ experiences that are not always deemed integral to their learning experiences. Kitwana (2005) explored how rap music appeals to a generation of youth who experience rapidly changing racial dynamics and feel less optimistic than their parents did about their economic futures. Both Kitwana (2005) and Dimitriadis (2001) argue that hip hop is an important device for negotiating these changes (Kitwana in Low 2011). When it comes to hip hop culture, students are generally more knowledgeable than their teachers and therefore we have a situation where Freire’s idea of teachers and students learning from each other can become more concretely and readily manifested.

Contemporary rap music permeates many spheres of society from radio airwaves to McDonald’s commercials to cellular phone ring tones but rarely does it become a topic of critical

discussion in the classroom. In the U.S. there are educational media such as the H2Ed education initiative which provides educational resources for teachers that utilize elements from hip hop culture to better engage students in the classroom curriculum. According to H2Ed (2009), their mission is to educate through empowerment;

H2Ed [Hip-Hop Education] is the education initiative of the H2A. Formed in 2003, H2Ed was founded under the premise that Hip-Hop, one of the most influential cultural forces today, has the ability to educate, inform and empower today's youth. We are advocates for education alteration and support educators that use Hip-Hop to reach the youth through Hip-Hop culture by combining a creative mix of standard educational formats and the popularity of Hip-Hop. (Hip Hop Association, 2009)

While programs such as the H2Ed education initiative and Hip Hop Education (HHE) may offer alternative ways of administering the curriculum, they do not necessarily challenge that curriculum. In the majority of cases rap music is used as an alternative method of administering the prevailing curriculum rather than it being linked to a social justice incentive which seeks to fundamentally alter that curriculum (Dimitriadis, 2001). As described above, they want to utilize the popularity of rap music to administer the standardized curriculum.

Rap pedagogy that is student-centred expands on these types of programs in two ways. It first allows for the students to take part in the curriculum development through the incorporation of their own experiences and their own materials (songs, dances, artwork, cultural artifacts, etc.) and their own questions. Secondly, the teacher becomes more of a facilitator who tries to help the students make the historical and social connections between the curriculum materials they have chosen to incorporate. Unlike the examples given by the programs above where the teacher seeks out hip hop education resources with predetermined formats and outcomes, student-centred rap

pedagogy is fundamentally different in that the students and the teachers define the course content together. This in turn, steers the focus away from the teacher and towards the students creating a more democratic classroom. Shor (1995) describes student-centred pedagogy as an important component of education that is empowering; “not permissive or self-centered. Neither the student nor the teacher can do whatever he or she likes. The learning process is negotiated, with leadership by the teacher, and allows for mutual teacher-student authority” (para. Abstract). Stovall (2006) explains how this might create a sense of vulnerability for teachers or facilitators but that the vulnerability is a great way to encourage students to become intellectual leaders and to create a sense of partnership in learning between teachers and students;

Throughout the process, the facilitator engaged in a vulnerability of sorts. The facilitator was considered vulnerable to the fact that the teacher was not all knowing and had a great deal to learn from students. This became encapsulated in the ability to say to the class, “I don’t know, but let’s find out.” (p. 590)

While research continues to expand in the area of hip hop and education we can see a growing number of researchers and educators advocating for greater inclusion of hip hop culture in classrooms as a way to make the classroom more democratic, critical and relevant.

2.3 Hip Hop and Activism

“Raptivism,” a concept which articulates both the pedagogical and activist aspects of social justice-minded rap music, is a growing concept in research that is concerned with rap music and the struggle for social justice. Cheney (2005) describes “raptivism” in terms of organic cultural work which situates rap artists “between intellectual activist and commercial entertainer” (p. 3). For example, Chuck D, the leading member of the rap group Public Enemy which was extremely influential in the 1980’s and early 1990’s, is considered one of the pioneers

of the politicization of rap music (Cheney, 2005). According to an interview he gave to the *Toronto Sun* in 1998, “we wanted to be known as the Black Panthers of rap, we wanted our music to be dissonant” (Chuck D in Cheney, 2005, p. 63). Fukushima (2009), a teacher in the California public school system and a scholar who is currently doing research on rap and activism in South Africa, India, Senegal, Morocco, and the UK writes that, “through this raptivism project, I seek to explore ways in which hip hop can build bridges between people of diverse backgrounds in order to contribute to goals for positive social change” (Fukushima, 2009). I subscribe to and utilize the theory and practice of raptivism in this study because part of the goal of my research is to counter the current static perception of the relationship between hip hop and violence through greater awareness of the diversity of hip hop music and expression.

The creation of ‘other’ spaces for the articulation of marginalized voices has often been found within art, music, dance, poetry and other forms of creative expression. In the case of hip hop culture, these new artistic forms were created because young people in the South Bronx wanted to be able to define their own experiences: “defamed and despised by countersubversive stories, they found a way to contest their erasure, to reintroduce themselves to the public by “throwing out” a new style that made other people take notice” (Lipsitz, 1994, p. 20).

It is not my intention to declare that all rap music should be considered as activism, but it is undeniable that rap is a form of popular culture that has begun conversations about race, class, education, gender and violence that can be continued in a classroom or within the community (McLaren, 1997). Rap music is a very diverse category and should be approached as a means for opening up conversations. It can provide a forum for dialogue for the development of critical thinking and praxis that is reflective of a critical pedagogy. According to Ibrahim (2004), popular

culture should be understood as a site for the formation of identities and should not be kept outside of the classroom;

Here, the question of what I term *the politics of embodiment*: sexualized, gendered, abled, classed, and racialized identities that students bring with them to the classroom and how these identities are formed is vitally important to the praxis of imaginative critical educators. (p. 117)

In terms of rap music as pedagogical and activist, Decker (1993) asserts that rap music can lead to empowerment through a rearticulation of a history of racial oppression. As he put it “the language of nation is appropriated by the hip hop community as a vehicle for contesting the changing discursive and institutional structures of racism in America” (Decker, 1993, p. 2). My understanding of hip hop culture is in line with Decker’s (1993) idea that hip hop culture is an imagined community that identifies with experiences of oppression and that rap music is a strategy to dialogue with and thereby challenge the status quo. As Rose (1994) explains, not all urban centers are the same, but many have undergone similar post-industrial processes which have led to greater economic displacement and growing levels of poverty. She asserts that “these transformations and hybrids reflect the initial spirit of rap and hip hop as an experimental and collective space where contemporary issues and ancestral forces are worked through simultaneously” (Rose, 1994, p. 83). Ibrahim (2004) suggests that through a curriculum of Black popular culture, other forms of knowledge can be validated, education can become more relevant and the disaffection that many students feel in response to Eurocentric curricula can be addressed. It is important to note that while Ibrahim (2004) is focusing on the experiences of Black youth in Canadian classrooms, hip hop is both done for and by, people of many different racial and cultural backgrounds. The foundations of the development of hip hop are rooted in the

frustrating economic circumstances confronted by Black and Puerto Rican youth in the Bronx in the 1970's, but its connection to social injustices and poverty has created global appeal.

The literature review provides insight into the different ways that researchers have approached the study of rap music and hip hop culture. It is an area of study that is growing within academic arenas and it is as diverse as the interests of those who study it. Rap music has important connections to education in that it offers greater possibilities for creating education that is more engaging, relevant, student-centred, democratic, and critical. The concept of “raptivism” is a recurring theme in my research because it helps to give a name to the specific type of activist work that is being done by the people I interviewed. Raptivism also helps to describe the intimate relationship that rap music has with activism, in terms of both its historical development and its current incorporation into every corner of the world as a means of bringing awareness to local and global concerns and issues.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Moving away from the broader scope of the literature review, my theoretical framework brings together notions from cultural studies (youth studies, the cultural studies of music and representation and identity politics); media studies (especially cultural studies influenced by music studies); and critical pedagogy (in particular, Freirean notions of social justice and education). I have organized the literature on hip hop and education into three categories of communication, influence, mediation, and empowerment because this allows me to emphasize the different ways that they have been studied. By incorporating Hall's theory of communication, these categories are reflected in the hypothetical positions he describes in his process of decoding. The process of "encoding/decoding" is employed in the theoretical framework because it lends a specific understanding to the communication structure of popular culture; redefining the process of communication as circular rather than linear and highlighting the ideological nature of the messages being communicated.

After the explanation and development of Hall's encoding/decoding in relation to the concepts of mediation, influence and empowerment, I will briefly describe the experience of a rap artist who produced a documentary about the history of Africville in Nova Scotia because it illustrates some of the key issues that I seek to address in my research such as the lack of educational relevance in mainstream classrooms and the need to incorporate the experiences, interests and histories of young people in their educational arenas. The example of Africville leads us into one of the main focuses of my research which seeks to expand on the notion of hip hop as critical pedagogy.

While there is a considerable body of progressive literature that examines rap music from a cultural studies approach (Decker, 1993; Dimitriadis, 2001; Grossberg, 1994; Haworth et al.,

2009; Ibrahim, 2004, 2010; Kitwana, 2005; Lipsitz, 1994; Low, 2011; McLaren 1995, 1997; Nielson, 2010, 2011; Pardue, 2004; Reiland, 2011; Rose, 1991, 1994), there is also a lot of mainstream literature and public policy literature that has tended to look at rap music in a one-dimensional way that stifles the complexity of the art form, the artists and the audience (Rose, 1991, 1994). Where much of the literature in terms of newspaper articles and public policy studies on rap music have focused on a presumed relationship with negative influence and increased violent behaviours (Cobb & Boettcher, 2007; Herd, 2009), it is important to also include examples such as Rose (1991, 1994) and McLaren (1995, 1997) who have critically discussed this presumed relationship and have offered alternative explanations that question the common-sense nature of the racism that is inherent in some of these explanations. This issue will further be discussed in chapter six. Rap music artists and their audiences are not made up of mindless consumers and producers of violence, they are a diverse group of people who make the music and listen to the music for different reasons that can include or exclude both social criticism and the glorification of violence, for example. Rose (1991, 1994) discussed the importance of critically studying rap music and hip hop culture with an understanding of the racial discourses that inform music as popular culture. Her research focused on the differences in the discourses surrounding rap music and heavy metal music and found that the media positioned the listeners of heavy metal music as victims of its influence, in contrast to the listeners of rap music who were positioned as threats to society.

3.1 Stuart Hall's Encoding /Decoding

Stuart Hall is a prominent cultural studies theorist, who among other things, drew on Gramsci and Marx in order to address the culturalism/structuralism divide. Hall (2004) highlighted the limits of both theories and through his concept of articulation, sought to link the

two frameworks through Gramsci's notion of hegemony. Where culturalism sees human experience as the key factor in social and historical formation, structuralism sees human experience as being defined through the frameworks and compartments of culture (Hall in Proctor, 2004).

Hall (2004) suggests that cultural production has bona fide ideological and political consequences:

The domains of 'preferred meanings' have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs: the everyday knowledge of social structures, of 'how things work for all practical purposes in this culture', the rank order of power and interest and the structure of legitimations, limits and sanctions. (p. 134)

Popular culture, which is the realm of hip hop and rap music, shapes political and social transformation. Hall's notion of 'encoding/decoding' is particularly useful when it comes to discussing rap music and hip hop culture and the differences in the ways that hip hop culture's messages are consumed by different audiences. Hall (2004) challenged the linear understanding of media communication where the assumption was that the relationship between the sender and the receiver of the message was unambiguous. The conventional model of communication more or less concluded that the messages being sent were transparent, intact and exactly the same when they were received by a passive audience. Hall (2004) exposed the problematic nature of the conventional model of communication through his development of encoding/decoding which describes that the process of encoding and decoding messages is inherently ideological and engages conflicts of meaning that are relative to the social position of both the producer and the consumer. Hall employs the terms producer and consumer instead of sender and receiver because he wants to emphasize the active, rather than passive, role of the audience. The message is never

transparent because between the process of encoding (the production of the message) and decoding (the reception of the message) there occurs, what Hall (2004) describes, as a ‘lack of fit:’

The lack of fit between the codes has a great deal to do with the structural differences of relation and position between broadcasters and audiences, but it also has something to do with the asymmetry between the codes of ‘source’ and ‘receiver’ at the moment of transformation into and out of the discursive form. What are called ‘distortions’ or ‘misunderstandings’ arise precisely from the *lack of equivalence* between the two sides in the communicative exchange. (p. 131)

According to Hall (2004), who employs Foucault’s understanding of discourse as grand systems of representations that gain historical dominance for periods of time, the ‘lack of fit’ happens because communication has no choice but to operate within these sign systems of language and discourses which give meaning to the world around us.

Certain codes may, of course, be so widely distributed in a specific language community or culture, and be learned at so early an age, that they appear not to be constructed—the effect of an articulation between sign and referent—but to be ‘naturally’ given. Simple visual signs appear to have achieved a ‘near-universality’ in this sense: though evidence remains that even apparently ‘natural’ visual codes are culture-specific. However, this does not mean that no codes have intervened; rather, that the codes have been profoundly *naturalized*. The operation of naturalized codes reveals not the transparency and ‘naturalness’ of language but the depth, the habituation and the near-universality of the codes in use. They produce apparently ‘natural’ recognitions. This has the (ideological) effect of concealing the practices of coding which are present. (p. 132)

As Hall (2004) suggests, a sign can have both literal and associated meanings. Literal meanings are described through the term ‘denotation’ and associated meanings are described by ‘connotation’ and it is at the level of connotation that ideology exists because this is where the struggle to legitimize meanings is waged.

This does not mean that the denotative or ‘literal’ meaning is outside ideology. Indeed, we could say that its ideological value is strongly *fixed*—because it has become so fully universal and ‘natural’. The terms ‘denotation’ and ‘connotation’, then, are merely useful analytic tools for distinguishing, in particular contexts, between not the presence/absence of ideology in language but the different levels at which ideologies and discourses intersect (Hall, 2004, p. 133)

Also important to this discussion is Hall’s (2004) explanation of ‘polysemic signs’ which proclaim the capacity of a sign to bear multiple and at times, incompatible meanings that vie for preference based on the authority of particular social, political, and historical meanings at that time. Gramsci’s notion of common-sense is ideal for understanding Hall’s ‘preferred meanings’ because it explains how the ideological is transformed into the literal. Common-sense that subverts the ideological into the universal is integral to the conservation of hegemonic discourses.

Ultimately, Hall (2004) determines that the process of decoding takes place from three different positions that highlight what he describes as the ‘variant articulations’ of the message. In other words, the message being sent will mean different things for different consumers contingent upon the producers of the message. The first position is the ‘dominant-hegemonic’ where the communication is completely transparent and unambiguous. This position supports the common-sense interpretations. The second position, known as the ‘negotiated position,’

privileges the common-sense understanding while also recognizing that the interpretations are flexible depending on their locality. The third position is the 'oppositional' and in this instance, the consumer identifies the common-sense notion and disagrees with it.

These hypothetical positions can help illuminate the different ways that rap music and hip hop culture are being communicated and decoded. For example, mainstream literature tends to decode rap music from the dominant-hegemonic position which understands rap music to be violent, misogynist, encouraging of criminal behaviour and musically unsophisticated. Here, hip hop music is seen through the conventional model of communication where the producer of the message unquestionably influences a passive audience. The intention of the message being sent is straightforward and its meanings are literal. In this case, there is no room for metaphor, simile or braggadocio. From the negotiated position, the understanding would be that mainstream rap music tends to be violent, misogynist and unsophisticated musically but independent rap music, also known as hip hop music, is more positive, socially activist and musically superior. Finally, from the oppositional position, all rap music is politically inclined and serves to highlight social inequalities and racial injustices whether literally, metaphorically or by braggadocio.

By drawing on Hall's (2004) development of encoding/decoding as means to understand the communication of media messages, I will discuss how previous research can be located along a continuum that reflects the changes in the way that understandings about communication have changed from the conventional, linear model to Hall's communication circuit. Rap music is one of the communicative tactics that are employed by those in the hip hop community to dialogue about and challenge dominant interpretations of history, people and institutions. Based on the different ways that hip hop culture and rap music have been studied, I found it helpful to organize the studies into three categories—influence, mediation and empowerment—and while

they are by no means fixed or static divisions, they do reflect the ways that rap music has and is been talked about, as well as the implications for how it should or should not be received. While I recognize that these categories are fluid, I think that they help to better understand how hip hop culture and rap music are communicated differently.

3.2 Influence

Influence as communication can be understood in terms of how hip hop culture influences the attitudes and behaviours of both those who are inside and outside of the culture. Does hip hop culture influence youth empowerment, social criticism, criminality, etcetera? From a conventional understanding of influence that can be situated within Hall's dominant-hegemonic position, as a force for negative influence rap is understood as a promoter of violence, misogyny, and offensive language (Cobb & Boettcher, 2007). Within this theory, an individual's violent actions and language can be attributed to their exposure to violent music. This perception is problematic for two reasons. For one, the rationale behind the logic of negative influence denies the listener's capacities for agency and critique. Secondly, this perception can only be supported if we believe that rap music is a homogenous art form with a singular message. Furthermore, the authors' own findings show that they are unsure as to whether the music itself or the stereotype of the music is more responsible for increased rates of misogyny and violence in listeners.

Cobb and Boettcher (2007) support the idea that rap music might negatively influence young people but I would suggest that this is a research question that depends upon the conventional model of communication; a linear, understanding of influence and knowledge acquisition which denies the complexity of the discourses that are involved in the creation and reception of hip hop culture and rap music. This model is similar to that of formal education

where knowledge is given by the teacher and received by the students. The process of learning in these cases are one-dimensional and place limits on the listener's or the student's possibilities for agency and the engagement of differences.

Contrary to this linear understanding of rap music's negative influential force, McLaren (1997) claims that violent expressions in hip hop have often brought critical awareness to other types of injustices such as police brutality and lack of access to public and political spaces. He asserts that rap music brought about a new type of social and political criticism. Where much of the literature on rap music has focused on its relationship to negative influence, it is important to include examples such as Rose (1994) and McLaren (1995, 1997) who have turned this idea of influence on its head. They can be situated within the oppositional position with regards to the communication of rap music because they privilege the implicit political oppositional force of the music over the literal interpretations of explicit violence. Ibrahim (2004), McLaren (1995, 1997), and Rose (1991, 1994) also remind us of the pedagogical nature of rap music which increases access to public and political spaces by validating the experiences and the knowledge that might be outside of the narrow scope of available definitions in what mainstream media and educational curricula deem relevant or possible.

3.3 Mediation

Mediation as communication can be understood in terms of how different people share their experiences with each other either from local or global levels (Rose, 1994). Mediation is a strategy for dialogue and cooperation. In the case of some rap music, the lyrics that are mediated become forms of political dialogue where difficult knowledges such as racism, sexism and homophobia (Dimitriadis, 2001; Ibrahim, 2004, 2010) are discussed by different types of people with different intentions throughout the world. Ibrahim (2004) suggests that we should

understand hip-hop as “the cultural space or mattering map which accommodates both internal tensions and dynamic cultural ciphers, mediating the corrosive discourse of the dominating society while at the same time functioning as a subterranean subversion” (p. 6). Rap music provided a way of sharing the local with the global. As Rose (1994) who includes a quote from Bray suggests

In rap videos, young, mostly black residents speak for themselves and for the community, they speak when and how they wish about subjects of their choosing. These local turf scenes are not isolated voices; they are voices from a variety of social margins that are in dialogue with one another. As Bray points out, “if you have an artist from Detroit, the reason they want to shoot at least one video on their home turf is to make a connection with, say, an East Coast New York rapper. It’s the dialogue. It’s the dialogue between them about where they’re from. (p. 11)

The idea of mediation reflects the negotiated position in Hall’s hypothetical positions of communication because the role of rap music and its messages are continuously being debated, altered and employed for various reasons which may or may not include political change or social justice. The negotiated position is where I believe most of the hip hop heads (fans of rap music) can be situated because this is also where the debate between commercial rap music and hip hop music lies, in terms of which is more authentic. This debate will be discussed in more detail in chapter six but the main concern here is that commercial rap music is considered less authentic and it tends to be more violent and misogynist because the owners of the record companies believe that the glorification of violence sells more records to an audience that is already submerged in a culture of glorified violence (Richardson & Scott, 2002). Hip hop music is rap music that is more politically concerned and often independently produced and therefore

not subjected to the same pressures to produce lyrical content and music video images that support violence. Hip hop music is considered more authentic because of its relationship to political change and social justice and it is considered more reflective of the voices, the experiences and the struggles of its listeners than its counterpart commercial rap music, which is seen to reflect the voices of the big record company owners and their thirst for profit.

3.4 Empowerment

Empowerment as communication can be understood as the link between critical thinking and sociopolitical development in terms of how hip hop culture has helped to foster possibilities for agency through greater examples of representation and identification. Similar to Decker (1993), Grossberg (1994) writes about the role of music in being able to foster possibilities for empowerment through representation and agency. In line with Hall's oppositional position, Grossberg (1994) claims that while rap music is not always about resistance, it can be about empowerment and offering a way for people to dialogue about their lived experiences. Going back to Hall's positions of communication, empowerment exists somewhere between the negotiated position and the oppositional position. In this sense, empowerment is developed within and because of the communication and what is being communicated. The negotiated position allows for dialogue and the discussion of difficult knowledges and diverse experiences while at the same time, it creates a space to identify and bring to light common-sense notions of understandings. Empowerment then, arises out the mediation of the negotiated position and is materialized in the oppositional position where possibilities for change are created. Critical thinking is born in the negotiated position and employed in the oppositional position.

Drawing on Freirian theory (e.g., *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *Education for Critical Consciousness*), empowerment within rap pedagogy can be understood as the link between

critical thinking and sociopolitical development. According to Zimmerman (1995)

“psychological empowerment is not simply self-perceptions of competence but includes active engagement in one's community and an understanding of one's sociopolitical environment” (p. 582). Ibrahim (2004) discusses the empowerment that can occur when the inclusion of Black popular culture in the classroom can help to authenticate other forms of knowledge that have been excluded from Eurocentric curricula:

In the case of Black popular culture, such a curriculum can be utilized in and as a form of critical pedagogy and praxis. This way, I conclude, we may contribute to bringing in Black students' previously unwarranted and nonvalidated forms of knowledge, address the feeling of alienation that Black students have in relation to Eurocentric curricula, and contribute to a more relevant, engaging and integrative anti-racist curriculum. (p. 119)

This idea is particularly important when we consider the example of the history of Africville that is described in the following section as an illustration of how one rap artist bridged history with hip hop to create more relevant learning experiences. According to Donaldson (2007), discovering the history of Africville was an empowering learning experience that made Canadian history more relevant in his life and furthermore, more relevant in the lives of other Canadian youth he went on to teach.

3.5 Hip Hop Culture as/and Relevance and Identity Building: Illustrated through the history of Africville

The popular is neither a pure sign of resistance by the people or of total domination of the people. It is not the point at which the fight has been won or lost but, rather, a site of continual struggle and negotiation between the two. (Proctor, 2004, p. 28)

Rap music is one of the key artistic elements in hip hop culture, the others being breakdancing, graffiti and dj-ing. According to Rose (1994); “hip hop replicates and re-imagines the experiences of urban life and symbolically appropriates urban space through sampling, attitude, dance, style and sound effects” (p. 11). She argues that hip hop culture can be understood as an arena of collectivity and experimentation where both historical and contemporary issues are navigated through— “rap music and hip hop culture are cultural, political, and commercial forms, and for many young people they are the primary cultural, sonic, and linguistic windows on the world” (Rose, 1994, p. 19). In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the academic pleas for more relevant experiences in education (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009; Stovall, 2006; Ibrahim, 2004) that lead to greater possibilities for agency and identity building.

The idea that learning Shakespeare is relevant to being an educated person as Diorio (2007) offers as an example, carries with it all sorts of political implications that reflect the hegemony within interpretations of what is considered relative between acceptable knowledge and being an educated person. What is considered relevant is a reflection of ‘preferred meanings’ or ‘common-sense’ that can change over time (Diorio, 2007; Hall, 2004).

Such disputes can arise either out of ignorance of the ways in which words and concepts are employed in a particular language community, or out of a genuine lack of clarity of the boundaries of any concept. Furthermore, two-dimensional relevance statements can be deliberately challenged by someone who feels that the analytical meanings they embody are no longer acceptable due to changes in the life situation of the community. (Diorio, 2007, p. 55)

This relationship is at the core of contemporary pedagogical discussions because it brings to light the cultural dominance that exists in what is considered relevant educational content and why

students have a sense of disconnect in classrooms today. More recent authors in educational philosophy (Diorio, 2007) are calling for greater recognition of the inconsistency of meanings and the impact that the privileging of certain knowledge over others has on those who do not feel a relationship with the knowledge.

I have included Donaldson's story about his discovery of the history of Africville in Nova Scotia as an illustration of the problem of lack of relevance in education because it gives insight into how learning about a little-known piece of Black Canadian history provided a young Black Canadian with an empowering and relevant platform for educating other young Canadians. In the short documentary film, *Stolen from Africville* (Donaldson, 2007) the film's producer, who is also visible on camera, responds to how he felt when he first heard about the history of Africville. With excitement in his voice he talks about discovering the story of Africville; "I couldn't believe that there was a Black community out here so deep. That goes back to the 1600's. I was mind-boggled. When I got back, that's all I was talking about. Africville, Africville" (Donaldson, 2007). He could not believe that he had not learned about Africville before and once he became aware of the history, he felt he needed to share it with young Canadians across the country. I have often had similar thoughts throughout my studies after learning about events such as Africville, indentured Chinese labour, and the terrible legacy of First Nations' experiences in residential schools, just to name a few. I learned about most of these issues during my time in post-secondary education and not before that. After browsing through the British Columbia curriculum outlines from grade 1 to grade 12 on the Ministry of Education website, it seems that while it is suggested that teachers address First Nations issues and multiculturalism in Canada, most of the recommendations are for discussions about how the European experiences differed from the First Nations experiences and the differences and

similarities between cultures within Canada and comparisons between contemporary cultures and ancient cultures (Government of British Columbia, 2013). The specific subject matter is left up to the teachers to decide and the practices of comparison and categorization are relied upon to teach students about culture. This method results in the reinforcement of stereotypes and a division between what children learn is Canadian culture versus ‘other’ cultures (Crawford, 1998).

This research explores rap pedagogy and its relationship to activism and as Kaya (2007) asserts; “pedagogy is not simply about self-improvement but also about social transformation aimed at creating the conditions for the oppressed to overcome material, ideological, and psychological forms of domination while reviving and expanding the fabric of democratic institutions” (p. 7). For example, Donaldson (2007) implies that perhaps he should have learned about the history of Africville much earlier than he had and he now creates educational workshops for students so that they can learn about Africville in the classroom. In the online biography of Donaldson (2007), a rapper from Toronto who produced the film “Stolen from Africville” there is a section which discusses how important it is for him to share what he learned about Africville with other people:

Neil found out about Africville through North Preston native Gary James and took the initiative to go out east by himself to Halifax, Nova Scotia to experience historic Black Canadian history. Upon his return after being inspired and self-motivated by the story of Africville and other historic communities of Nova Scotia, Neil began educating his peers and anyone he interacted with about the community of Africville; the interest and reactions were phenomenal with genuine desires to know more about this forgotten chapter in Canadian history. Neil recognized the importance of Africville story and began

formulating a vision of documenting footage from the next annual Africville picnic.

(Donaldson, 2007)

The construction of Africville as a social problem emerged in the 1950's as the town began to be seen as an obstacle to economic development and railway shipping routes. What was described as a "community of intelligent young people" (Clairmont & Magill, 1999, p. 4) in the latter part of the 19th century, became "the worst and most degenerate area I have ever seen" (Clairmont & Magill, 1999, p. 4) by 1957. These shifts in perceptions about the town reflect how the dominant political and economic discourses benefitted from a devalued reconstruction of Africville and its residents. How the discourse of "community intelligence" was transformed into a discourse of "degeneration" provides important insight into whose interests were furthered by this transformation. In a sense, the right to know, access to information and access to identification are denied through static, unchallenged representations of educational content that reflect unequal access to educational design and implementation. When hooks (2003) elaborates on this problem of the politics of identification in her essay "The Oppositional Gaze," it is possible to see how the problem is cause for concern in educational settings. hooks includes a quote from Anne Friedberg in which Friedberg asserts that "identification can only be made through recognition, and all recognition is itself an implicit confirmation of the ideology of the status quo" (Friedberg, in hooks, 2003, p. 96). Similarly, Bourdieu (1977) suggests that the institution of school legitimates certain types of behaviours that fortify societal hierarchies.

Within the area of research into hip hop culture and hip hop and education there are several authors in particular who focus on the relationship between the incorporation of hip hop culture in the classroom and identity development (Decker, 1993; Dimitriadis, 2001; Ibrahim, 2004; Krims, 2000; Low, 2011; Stovall, 2006). Decker (1993) draws from Gramsci when he

describes rap artists as examples of “organic cultural intellectuals” who use the music as both a resource for historical knowledge and identity building. In other words, hip hop culture is a space where learning is centered on the recognition that history is relevant and it helps to shape contemporary experiences at the individual, social and political levels of our world. Dimitriadis (2001) points out that rap music is a global medium which has helped young people develop “pride in identity” (p. 30).

3.6 Hip Hop Culture Re-Imagined as Critical Pedagogy

It is with the recognition that hip hop culture and social justice minded rap music can be examples of critical pedagogy in practice that are helping to create educational experiences that become liberating through dialogue and problem-posing. “Authentic liberation—the process of humanization—is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1993, p. 60). Rap music provides an interesting medium through which cultural criticisms are being expressed, received, challenged and contested. It embodies a cultural studies guise to social analyses that combine critiques of dominant culture with resistance to its unjust legacies. Rap music is a particularly potent form of counternarrative, born of a history that is intricately linked with experiences of urban renewal, industrialization, poverty and relocation (Rose, 1994). Rap music has provided a medium through which Blacks and Latinos in the United States and now people all over the world begin to question and possibly change the social and historical conditions which reinforce domination and oppression. Chuck D, formerly of the group Public Enemy, has referred to rap music as the “hood’s equivalent to CNN” (Chuck D, as cited in McLaren, 1997, p. 132.). On a more practical level, programs that incorporate rap music within community organizations are offering young people new possibilities for being innovative, for self-

expression through creativity and storytelling and ultimately they are learning skills and abilities that they may never have discovered in a formal educational setting.

According to Yates (2009) and Kimminich (2007), pedagogy is increasingly becoming defined not as a political act shaped by values and morals but as a technical practice:

Removed from the world of practical politics and everyday life, many educators are all willing to renounce culture as a terrain of politics and struggle. Reinforced by the pressures of professional-ism and its attendant calls for neutrality, objectivity, and rationality, there is little room in this approach to engage how ideologies, values, and power shape all aspects of the pedagogical process. (Kimminich, 2007, p. 59)

Giroux (2010) claims that pedagogy is a form of political, moral and social production. The concept of pedagogy can be more readily understood through the questions that they raise (Giroux & Kincheloe, 2010). How do we learn about our possibilities for agency? How is one's sense of agency articulated and engaged? How do we learn to engage with the world? Critical pedagogy takes these questions a step further by asking how do we understand differences in relation to agency and how do we engage these differences (Giroux & Kincheloe, 2010)? They see humans as being both produced and unfinished; a type of understanding which enables the engagement of differences. Ibrahim (2004) reminds us that rap music, as a form of popular culture, is pedagogical because it becomes a space where young people's identities are socialized and their potentialities can be imagined. It widens their possibilities for creating human connections.

According to Scherpf (2001) who draws heavily on Cultural Studies and the Freirian development of critical pedagogy, "rap can function as a type of border pedagogy in the

classroom...a means to disrupt a homogenized, dominant educational discourse and the privileging of whiteness” (p. 78). Scherpf’s “rap pedagogy,” not unlike Fukushima’s “Raptivism” project involves critical pedagogical elements. While the former may be more directly related to classroom curriculum, they both see education as political and critical consciousness as necessary. Scherpf (2001) claims that; “it is through a radical pedagogy that looks towards the knowledges and subterraneous expressions articulated from the periphery that a counter response can be voiced and acted upon” (p. 5).

Based on academic discourses of critical pedagogy and scholarship on rap music, rap pedagogy combines elements from Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Giroux’s *Border Pedagogy*. The pedagogy of the oppressed is characterized by an insistence that education is political and students are diverse individuals. Education becomes liberating when it ceases to impose knowledge and begins to cultivate knowledge and critical awareness through problem-posing. Border pedagogy is characterized by its incorporation of student experience and popular culture as sources of practical knowledge and sources of contradiction and possibility (Scherpf, 2001). Border pedagogy looks at how the experience of marginality can create consciousness that is oppositional and transformative. It analyzes how difference is constructed and it recognizes that students’ subject positions (class, race, gender, ability) do not dictate their responses or reactions (Scherpf, 2001). Building on these two theories, rap pedagogy disrupts cultural domination by providing counternarratives and it allows knowledge to emanate from student experience. It provides a space where no one is excluded and no one is safe (Scherpf, 2001). As an example of student-centred pedagogy, both the teachers and the students become co-authors of the world.

The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but the one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught, also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (Freire, 1996, p. 61)

As Rose (2001) explains, “rap music is a contemporary stage for the theatre of the powerless” (Rose, as cited in Scherpf, 2001, p. 82). For an example of rap music as critical pedagogy, the work of Low, Sarkar, and Winer (2009) highlights how rap music in Montreal is being used as a strategy to problematize Quebec’s oppressive language policies. By using their lyrics to pose problems and challenge rights to language use and definition, they help to initiate dialogue, critical consciousness and co-operation.

Montreal rap acts as and exemplifies a tacit and sometimes explicit challenge to any intention policy-makers had to maintain (or make) Quebec French ‘pure’: as these French schooled youth are mastering French, so are they changing it. Among other forms of protest, the official ‘(standard) French’ identity promulgated and asserted by government and schools is implicitly and explicitly challenged by members of Montreal’s Hip-Hop community. (Low, Sarkar, & Winer, 2009, p. 60)

Throughout the literature, the common themes that arise are; that rap music is influential, it is a form of communication and it is oppositional in its social and political criticisms of power and marginalization. When merged together and redefined within the concept of raptivism, influence, mediation and empowerment help to make the link between education and identity more accessible and nuanced rather than limiting and restrictive. The subjective retelling of history and personal experiences through a concept of problem-posing will help to highlight both the produced and unfinished nature of humanity and provide greater possibilities for identification through recognition.

While there has been growing academic interest in rap music pedagogy, the majority of the research has focused on rap music in the classroom with students and teachers in the traditional sense. My study has sought to expand on this literature by moving away from the classroom setting into programs offered by community organizations while also including the voices of social justice minded rap artists who work with these programs. Often the artists' voices are included in research via the lyrics in their songs, but song lyrics are not always a direct reflection of reality. As Kelley (1996) reports, with regard to Gangsta rap, in many cases, the lyrics are metaphorical:

First, gangsta rappers have never merely celebrated gang violence, nor have they taken a partisan position in favor of one gang over another. Gang bangin' (gang participation) itself has never even been a central theme in the music. Many of the violent lyrics are not intended to be literal. Rather, they are boasting raps in which the imagery of gang bangin' is used metaphorically to challenge competitors on the microphone—an element common to all hardcore hip-hop. (p. 189)

Rarely do we hear the artists' thoughts and opinions about their intentions for their own work (Dimitriadis, 2001). Based on the identified gaps in the literature, my study aimed to build on this increasing body of literature while addressing some of the gaps I have discussed above.

Hall's "encoding/decoding" provides an analytical tool for understanding the production and reception of hip hop music and culture. With the incorporation of the previous studies into categories of communication we can see how Hall's hypothetical positions of decoding support the diversity of understanding about hip hop culture and rap music but also highlight the necessity of critical education and popular culture. What Hall does by reinforcing the circular rather than linear notion of media transmissions, is to highlight that popular culture is subject to

negotiation and not just an agent of subjectification. Education can become more empowering when we understand the communication of knowledge in the classroom as circular rather than linear. When education as a form of communication is negotiated and student-centred, it has no choice but to be more relevant and identifiable. The re-imagining of hip hop culture as critical pedagogy is not the only possibility for education to become more critical but it is unique in its inherent connection to creating awareness about the legacies of racial and economic oppression that persist today. Critical rap pedagogy is especially convincing when we consider the stagnant nature of standardized educational content in Canadian classrooms and their irrelevance when faced with the diversity of student experience.

This chapter has provided a theoretical framework for better understanding how researchers have explored the relationships between hip hop culture and education. From a mainstream, public policy lens to a critical pedagogical lens, hip hop culture and music is communicated and received in multiple ways. With the incorporation of Hall's encoding/decoding, it is easier to understand the nature of the multiplicity of meaning. On the other hand, with the integration of the critical lenses of authors such as Rose (1991, 1994) and McLaren (1995, 1997), and Ibrahim (2004), the conceptual leap that brings popular culture and in this case, hip hop culture, closer to critical pedagogy becomes less problematic or unimaginable.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In the following paragraphs I will describe in greater detail how I conducted an interview study with five participants; including three rap artists and two community organizers. One hour long interviews were done with each of the participants. They were audio-recorded and later transcribed. I also took notes during the interviews. In this chapter, I discuss my research methodology including its appropriateness based on the goals of my research and the data collection and analysis. I offer a description of the study and biographies for each of the participants as well as a discussion of my paradigmatic stance as a researcher and an explanation of the theoretical background that helped to inform my research. In this chapter, I also cover the process of my data collection, data analysis, coding and interviewing, including some of the important details from each of the interviews.

I am a critical theorist who is strongly influenced by constructionism. My paradigmatic stance reflects the ontology of critical theory where reality is understood in terms of 'historical realism' (Lincoln & Guba, 1991). Reality is somewhat tenable in the social structures that have solidified throughout time. Social constructionism understands social reality as being produced and defined through interaction (Gergen, 1985). Epistemologically speaking, the inquirer learns by interacting with others and through these interactions it might be possible to learn more about how these social structures affect people and whether they need to be transformed or supported. Reality is forged through values (e.g. economic, social, political, gender, etc.) and so are the interactions between people. There have been some critiques within social constructionism of the use of interviews in research based on the idea that the data generated from the interview was itself constructed because of the circumstances of the interview (Hammersley, 2003). The fear is that the interviewee is giving performed responses based on what they might feel is expected of them by the researcher and does not necessarily reflect their inner thoughts and ideas. This

critique should be acknowledged but the suggestion that qualitative interview data should not be considered because of it, ignores the greater, overarching criticism that all research is subject to biases and construction and therefore we either acknowledge this or abandon the project all together.

It is true that if we are to conceptualise what we see or how we feel we must do so in a language that is a social product. But this does not imply that such conceptualisations have no referents, or that some accounts cannot be more accurate than others. The fact that how such accounts are constructed can be made a sociological topic does not mean that they cannot also be used as a sociological resource (Hammersley, 2003, p. 122).

Because of my paradigmatic stance and because of the types of data I wanted to collect, a qualitative interview study was the most appropriate kind of study to undertake because it would enable greater understanding of the individual experiences of the participants through subjectivism and dialectics (Lincoln & Guba, 1991; Weiss, 2008).

4.1 Ethics and Participants

This interview study received approval from the University of British Columbia's board of ethics in March of 2010. There are a total of five participants in the study. In relation to maintaining anonymity and confidentiality all participants were either assigned pseudonyms or chose ones themselves (Choice, Havoc, Lisa, Dee and Traveler). This study involved one face to face, semi-structured interview with each of the five participants for a total of five interviews, each of which was audio-recorded and lasted for approximately one hour. During the interviews, I also took notes on a copy of the interview protocol. In addition to the interviews, I sent each of them an overview of some of my initial findings from the interviews and asked if they had any feedback or comments. Although I have included the lyrics from two different rap songs, I have

not done an in depth analysis of them. Rather, the lyrics were included so as to demonstrate the difference in tone between the sub-genres of “conscious” rap and “gangsta” rap.

Three of the interviewees are rap artists of which two are male, Choice and Havoc and one is female, Lisa. All of them are over the age of 30 and this age group was selected to ensure the participants would have lived through and witnessed rap music’s growth from underground to mainstream. Also, because I am interested in their educational experiences, they will have attended formal schooling in Canada. Finally, they will have worked with both youth and community organizations because this indicates a politics and interest in youth. Of the two community organizers, one is male, Traveler and one is female, Dee. They have worked with both rap artists and youth within their community organizations and they are knowledgeable about all aspects of the organization’s functions within the community. The analyses are based on the interviews and how the experiences of the participants relate or respond to previous literature in the field.

4.2 Participant Biographies

Havoc:

Havoc is a 35 year old male who grew up in rural British Columbia. He grew up on a reservation but attended the public school in the small town where they lived. There were not many other First Nations students at the school and he very distinctly remembers feeling different and both witnessing and experiencing racism and discrimination from other students and teachers: “nobody understood me then, I was quite awkward in high school just because everybody was rich and I was a poor Indian dude on my own.” For Havoc, creating rap music has been a way to express his emotions and his experiences. He sees music as an outlet for documenting the changes in his life and his growth as a person.

I used to love gangsta rap, you know, people like Hollow Tip, people like Rifle Man, people like X-Rated, Brother Lynch. Mostly because they were being poetic at what they did. I know Brother Lynch isn't much of a gangster, he talks a lot of it but he's small, he's smaller than me, so poetically it was really something that I clung to when I was young, but now, like I said, I've outgrown a lot of it so to me it's either I create something I want to hear or want to be put out there or I'm just alone with the music.

Havoc describes growing up during the Oka crisis and his later involvement in more militaristic activism but he believes that this type of activism is somewhat misguided through violence. He advocates now for activism that is "tactful:"

I can do activism without being angry. You cannot be a true activist or raptivist if you're watching the news and Native people are getting marginalized and you get angry. It's okay to use anger in an emotional content with your activism, but if that's what's guiding you, you're not going to be thinking clearly.

Havoc's music has accompanied him throughout his life and has provided him with an emotional as well as an activist outlet. He is an avid reader and has dabbled in several different educational and employment areas from culinary school to digital media training. He is now completing an Aboriginal Leadership certificate and is quite active in both the hip hop music scene as well as with the different community organizations and the youth he works with.

Lisa:

Lisa is a 35 year old woman who grew up in Victoria, British Columbia. A place she described as "really white." Her father was Black and her mother was white and she explains that when she first heard rap music, she hated it and did not think it was real music. Her love affair with rap music began after she met two young Black men, one from Toronto and the other from

Oakland, who taught her about African-American history, the history of rap music and hip hop culture.

I didn't know what it was like, that people came from slave ships or any of that, you know, I was totally ignorant in terms of Black culture and when that was shared with me, I earned a lot more respect for it and I was just like okay, this isn't just gangs and guns and people rapping about this and that, this is actually people telling their story about where and what their lives are like and they're doing it in a spoken word form and a music form.

They fast became best friends and the three of them worked on writing lyrics and "freestyling." According to Lisa, her two friends were very serious about hip hop culture and the need for her to learn about it before she did it. She is a self-taught pianist and says she loves to work with other musicians and singers. She describes her music as Jazzy and sometimes political and sometimes fun. She is well-known for her freestyles and prides herself on being one of the fastest and best female freestylers in Canada. While her music has provided her with some financial gain, it is by no means enough to survive and she has worked in various fields from retail to teacher training workshops.

Lisa sees rap music as the "voice of the people" and the workshops she helps conduct with community organizations aim to bring youth together from diverse backgrounds so that they can share and be creative together with the understanding that differences in language and culture are the seeds of creativity rather than conflict.

As long as you have a pen and a piece of paper then you can make hip hop, you know, and share, so I think that's one of the reasons it's become so prevalent and so loved. It's

like, like you know people always say music is a language of its own, right, but hip hop is kind of another extension of that, hip hop music is this whole other thing where people of different languages, we can cross over those barriers and you know what people are doing when they're bobbing their heads.

Choice:

Choice is another well-known rap artist in the city. He is in his mid-thirties and describes himself as a leader among his peers. His first exposure to rap music came from his parents:

I was introduced to rap music, I grew up, my father's African-American so he listened and was heavily influenced from rap music ever since I was a baby and I never really lived with him, so he would come around, you know, once a year maybe, bring me out for toys and he'd play me this music and I was very intrigued by it and my Mom would always listen to it. Not necessarily, she's more into like Motown, kind of like Patti

Labelle, you know, and she'd listen to that so I had a really good exposure to like more of the African influence and being half African American/Canadian.

Choice discovered he had a talent for MC-ing when he and his friends started rapping together. He initially wanted to record a song because he had recently broke up with his girlfriend and he thought that if the song played on the radio, she would come back to him. Ultimately his engagement with hip hop music led him to stop drinking, smoking and even swearing. He started reading much more and when the ex-girlfriend actually tried to come back to him, he was no longer interested. According to Choice, his music is "just real life;" "it's definitely a reflection of me and where I've been, kind of where I'm at at the time, you know a lot of my stuff is just real."

Choice's schooling experience was wonderful and while he says his grades were not always the best, he was always popular and was even voted valedictorian. For him, school was always about the social aspect. After going to school for business administration and linguistics, he then went to film school which he says is perfect for being able to work on his music since they are both in creative spheres. Choice describes rap music as "my way into everything." He uses his music to work with community organizations because he sees it as way to support what he believes in through the capitalization of his notoriety.

Traveler:

Traveler is in his early fifties and has been a program director for a large, urban community centre in a low-income neighbourhood for over twenty years. He has been responsible for creating and securing the funding for after school multi-media projects for at risk youth so they can create and record music, art and video. He describes his community centre as having the highest density of at risk youth in the city and it is also located in one of the poorest neighbourhoods with a large population of new immigrants and families led by single women. The community organization has been an "incubator for projects" and several of them that were developed by Traveler have been around for decades. Some of their most popular programs are the drop-in hip hop classes where kids get to work with real hip hop artists to write and record their own music. As an advocate for both youth and music, he admits that he does not necessarily enjoy rap music but he does have a strong appreciation for its role in youth culture.

I know how important rap music and hip hop is to the youth culture, especially in urban centres, I know how powerful an agent of change it's been in places like LA and New York and even here in terms of culture. I know it's an important part of First Nations youth culture and I think that I enjoy working with some of those people in trying to help

mold their output and temper their anger a little bit and refine their lyrics so that it becomes a little bit more sophisticated and a little bit more appealing to a larger audience.

Traveler credits his activism to growing up in the 60's and 70's and feeling that he was part of cultural movement that was somewhat successful. He enjoys his work but is frustrated by the lack of funding for the types of projects he develops and the overwhelming need that he sees. He is particularly annoyed with the lack of value that is given in society to people who do the work that these rap artists are doing in his community organization and others. He credits the standardization of schooling for allowing only certain types of students to excel and suggests that a more cooperative methodology like the one that exists in his programs would create better outcomes.

Dee:

Dee is in her mid-forties and is the program director for a community organization which focuses on inter-generational projects where youth and adults from the community are brought together to work on different creative projects. I was particularly interested in the four-day camp that she organizes every summer where hip hop artists and youth live together and work on a performance and a recorded CD. There are around 40 kids (14-18 years old) and 25 adults who participate in the camp and there is never a young person turned away for lack of funds. While the issue of funding is always a source for stress for Dee, she describes how the community in terms of individuals and companies, have always been very generous.

For Dee, her interest in activism stems from her childhood in India:

I come from India where everything, spirituality is connected to the arts, the expression of the spirit is through the arts and activism is also really an expression of our spirits I think, because we are believing in something so deeply and if we don't have the arts, we

just couldn't express. Yeah, I think we would dry up pretty fast, activists would dry up pretty fast without music.

Similar to Traveler, Dee says that rap music is not her favourite type of music but she recognizes that it is an expression of youth culture which is important and deserving of support. She believes that the success of her organization's hip hop camp is due to cooperative and negotiated nature. The adults are there to facilitate the goals of the young people attending and everyone is assured that it is a safe place to share their experiences and express their creativity.

With regards to education, Dee expresses a need for more flexibility and passion. She remarks on how several of the facilitators from the camp have gone on to work as teachers because they recognized that the system needs to change from within.

4.3 Appropriateness of Methodology

Qualitative inquiry is the most suitable for these types of research questions because I am hoping to learn about the personal philosophies and experiences that help to shape the rap artists' and the community organizers' understandings about their work, their audiences and their activism. As Lincoln and Guba (1994) assert, "human behavior, unlike that of physical objects, cannot be understood without reference to the meanings and purposes attached by human actors to their activities. Qualitative data, it is asserted can provide rich insight into human behavior" (p. 106). Quantitative inquiry, which has its usefulness for other types of research questions that seek to prove or disprove a particular hypothesis, is less suited to the research questions that are being asked here, in that the goal is to learn more about the participants' personal experiences with community organizations, rap music and young people. Experiences which at times may be similar or relatable but nevertheless do not lend themselves to quantification. The purpose of this

research has been to build on the literature about raptivism and rap pedagogy through interviews with rap artists and community organizers.

4.4 My Paradigmatic Stance and Role as a Researcher

It is useful and informative for a researcher to situate herself within the research, to clearly indicate her paradigmatic stance, because her worldview has relevance for the way that she navigates the research process and understands the data that have been collected. As Lincoln and Guba (1991) explain,

A paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the “world,” the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as, for example, cosmologies and theologies do. (p. 3)

According to Lincoln and Guba (1991), these worldviews or paradigms can be somewhat organized into four groups. The first paradigm is known as “positivism” and is seen as the received view which has dominated scientific inquiry including the social sciences. Within the positivist paradigm, reality exists and can be apprehended. The researcher and the object of inquiry are separate entities and the research itself is conducted without the influence of biases and values. The second paradigm is known as “postpositivism” and it arose as a response to some of the critiques that were made against the supposed objectivity of positivism and the realization that generalizability leaves little room for contextuality of experience. While postpositivism addresses the issue of human error and influence in research, it still supports the idea that reality is mostly apprehendable. The third paradigm is “critical theory” where the nature of reality is historical realism. Social structures cement over time and while they are still seen as social constructions, their consequences for the experiences of individuals and groups can be

very real. Within this paradigm, knowledge is developed through interactions with people and structures that are themselves value-laden (Lincoln & Guba, 1991). The fourth paradigm is “constructivism” and within this worldview, reality is relativist and understood as mentally constructed. These constructs are multiple and developed within local or specific contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1991).

As I indicated earlier, I am a critical theorist who is strongly influenced by constructionism. From a private conversation with Dr. Handel Wright, we discussed that the borders between paradigms, at times, bleed into each other and are not so cut and dry as a delineated chart might imply. My own understanding of the world and of interactions between individuals and societies draws heavily from critical theory and constructionism where long lasting social structures create real possibilities and limitations for people and a constructivist worldview, where meanings are dynamic and informed by local and specific contexts and experiences (Gergen, 1985; Lincoln & Guba, 1991). I reject the positivist ontological assumption that knowledge can be wholly deterministic or objective:

An apprehendable reality is assumed to exist, driven by immutable natural laws and mechanisms. Knowledge of “the way things are” is conventionally summarized in the form of time- and context-free generalizations, some of which take the form of cause and effect laws. Research, can in principle, converge on the “true” state of affairs. The basic posture of the paradigm is argued to be both reductionist and deterministic. (Lincoln & Guba, 1991, p. 109)

Knowledge is only fixed for moments at a time within particular contexts that are themselves fluid and changing. The idea that knowledge is predictive or that there is a right and a wrong

knowledge denies the power dynamics that allow certain ideas to concretize within social imaginations in order to perpetuate privilege for some and lack of privilege for others.

In terms of my role as a researcher, I see myself more as a “passionate participant” (Lincoln & Guba, 1991, p. 11). As described by Lincoln and Guba (1991), *“the inquirer’s voice is that of the passionate participant actively engaged in facilitating the multivoice reconstruction of his or her own construction as well as those of all other participants”* (p. 11). With these ideas in mind, I set out to explore how those involved with both rap music and social justice education understood the relationship between pedagogy and activism, as well as their own roles and responsibilities within it.

4.5 Interview Protocols

My interviews were divided into two protocols; one interview was conducted with the community organizers and one with the rap artists. The questions I developed in my interview protocols were designed to discover how the participants understood rap as pedagogy as well as their interpretations of the relationship between rap music and activism and ultimately how these concepts might affect educational experiences. The interview that was given to the rap artists began with questions about their first experiences with rap music, why they became rap artists and the types of messages they conveyed with their music. I then asked questions about their overall schooling experiences and whether these experiences affected their music and their work. The final part of the interview included questions about their understanding of activism and their own activist work. I also asked what they thought about the criticisms and contradictions that emerge with any discussion of rap music. The interview that was given to the community organizations covered some of the same areas such as their experiences with schooling and their ideas about the criticisms and contradictions within rap music. Where the interview protocols

differed was in the questions I asked the community organizers about their roles in the community organization and their understanding of the goals of the particular organizations. I also asked them to describe their experiences with working with rap artists.

Interview Protocol for Community Organization Members

The Community Organization: Education and the Community

1. Can you describe the community organization that you're involved with and your role/s within it?

*keep in mind number of members and areas of responsibility

2. What types of activist work are you involved with?
3. What are the goals, intentions, or expectations for your organization?
4. Some organizations such as "Check Your Head" describe themselves as places where through imagination and creativity, young people can work together to create more "socially and environmentally just communities." Is there a specific message that you endorse or express? If yes, go to 4A & 4B

4A. What is your message/s?

4B. How do you understand the role of media when it comes to your message/s?

5. Who are you trying to reach through your organization?
6. How is education a part of your organization?
7. What types of educational materials do you use?
8. What are your thoughts about the public reception of your organization and its messages?
9. What sort of relationship do you have with the public?
10. Where does your funding come from?
11. How do people usually become a part of your organization?

*keep in mind volunteering versus recruitment

12. What part of the community does your organization engage with?

*keep in mind adult-centered versus youth-centered

13. What are your thoughts about youth in your community?

Working with rap artists

1. How has music played a role in your organization?
 2. What are your thoughts about the pairing of music and activism?
 3. Which projects have you worked with rap musicians on?
 4. In what ways is this particular project important to you?
 5. What guided your decision to work with rap musicians?
 6. How does working with rap artists influence the type of project you develop and who it is directed towards?
 7. What are the processes of decision making between yourself and the artists, in terms of project development and implementation?
- 5A. How has this process of decision making been different than with your other projects?

Personal history of experience with rap music

1. Rap music is just one part of hip hop culture which also includes breaking and spoken word, etc.; so as a community organizer, could you give me a little background on how you were introduced to rap music?
2. Often hip hop and rap music are understood as the same thing. At other times, hip hop is understood as a collection of art forms like tagging and break dancing. What does hip hop culture mean for you?

3. What, if any, do you believe are the values or morals associated with hip hop culture?

Knowledge of raptivism

1. Have you heard of the term raptivism before? > If yes go to 1B
> If no, go to 1A

1A. According to Aisha Fukushima who is researching hip hop culture in 6 different countries, raptivism refers to the “ways that hip hop culture can actively contribute to efforts for human rights and social justice by challenging apathy, injustice, and intellectual oppression”

1B. Do you think that your work, or even part of your work, falls under this category? > If yes, then ask for some examples which relate

Personal history of experience with schooling

1. How would you describe your schooling experience over all?
2. Are there any particular experiences that stand out for you? > If yes, go to 2A
2A. Could you describe it/them?
3. Did your experience with schooling have any effect on your decision to do activist work? > If yes go to 3A
3A. How so?
4. If you could change anything about your experiences with schooling, what would it be?
5. What do you believe is the purpose of schooling?
6. Do you think that in general schools are fulfilling this purpose?
7. Do you think schools are doing a good job?

Further information

1. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about or share with me?
2. Are there any questions you think I should have asked you, but didn't?

Interview Protocol for Rap Artists

Personal history of experience with rap music

1. Rap music is just one part of hip hop culture which also includes breaking and spoken word, etc.; so as a rapper, could you give me a little background on how you were introduced to rap music and why you like it?
2. Often hip hop and rap music are understood as the same thing. At other times, hip hop is understood as a collection of art forms like tagging and break dancing.
What does hip hop culture mean for you?
3. If you had to describe hip hop culture to someone who had never before heard of it, how would you describe it?
4. What, if any, do you believe are the values or morals associated with hip hop culture?
5. Have you been involved in any other aspects of hip hop culture in terms of tagging or break dancing, for example?
6. What do you believe is the role of rap music in hip hop culture?
 - 6A. Has this always been its role or has it changed throughout the years?

7. You weren't born a rap artist, so at what point did you decided that you wanted to be one and what was the first song you ever wrote?
8. How would you describe your own music?
9. If we look at artists such as Flava Flav, who went from being a political rap artist to becoming a dating reality television star, do you see that you or your music have changed throughout the years, and how so?
10. Who are your favourite artists, and why?
 - 10A. Have they always been your favourite artists or have they changed throughout the years? > If yes, go to 10B
 - 10B. Why have they changed?
11. How do you understand the issue of credibility in rap music?
 - 11A. Is credibility important to you?

Audience

1. Some rappers try to pass on messages with their music, to teach their audience something, or to bring awareness to a certain issue or problem. For example, Biggie's "mo money, mo problems" discusses the fact that having more money doesn't necessarily lead to fewer problems in life, and in fact, may lead to more problems. Are you aware of any artists who intentionally put messages in their music? > If yes, go to 1A
 - 1A. Are there any particular artists' messages that you like and if so, why?
2. Do you intentionally put messages in your music? > If yes, go to 2A.
 - 2A. What are these messages?
 - 2B. Do you think that your audience gets the messages that you're sending?

3. Why do you choose to use rap music to communicate?
4. Who do you understand your audience to be?
5. Who do you want your audience to be?
6. What sort of relationship do you have with your audience?

6A. Is this relationship important to you, and if so, how?

Knowledge of raptivism

1. Have you heard of the term raptivism before? > If yes go to 1A

> If no, go to 1C

1A. What is your understanding of raptivism?

1B. Would you describe yourself as a raptivist?

1C. According to Aisha Fukushima who is researching hip hop culture in 6 different countries, raptivism refers to the “ways that hip hop culture can actively contribute to efforts for human rights and social justice by challenging apathy, injustice, and intellectual oppression”

1D. Do you think that your work, or even part of your, work falls under this category? > If yes, then ask for some examples of the participant’s own lyrics or songs which relate.

Personal history of experience with schooling

1. How would you describe your schooling experience over all?
2. Are there any particular experiences that stand out for you? > If yes, go to 2A

2A. Could you describe it/them?

3. If you could change anything about your experiences with schooling, what would it be?
4. What do you believe is the purpose of schooling?
5. Do you think that in general schools are fulfilling this purpose?
6. Do you think schools are doing a good job?

Responses to criticisms of rap music

1. What would your response be to those who say that rap music is associated with violence, sexism, and commercialism?
2. Where do you think these criticisms come from?
3. What are your thoughts about the growth in popularity of rap music since it began?
4. What do you think are the prevailing messages being heard from commercial rap music?
4A. Who do you think are the messengers?
5. Do you think that there are any misconceptions associated with rap music? > If yes go to 5A
5A. What are they?

Rap music and the classroom

1. Have you heard about teachers using rap music in the classroom to help students learn? > If yes, go to 1A
> If no, go to 1B

- 1A. What types of things have you heard about it?
- 1B. Do you have any opinions about the use of rap music in the classroom?
2. How would rap music in the classroom be different than other teaching materials?
3. How do you imagine rap music being used in the classroom?
4. Have you ever brought your music into a classroom? > If yes, go to 4A
- 4A. What were the circumstances and why did you do it?

Rap music and race

1. What are your thoughts about the relationship between race and rap music?
2. Considering your own audience, do you think about their racial differences, and how your music might be received differently or not?
3. Does your own racial identity affect your music in any way, and if so, how?
4. Since hip hop culture began to emerge in New York in the 1970's, it has spread around the world. What are your thoughts about the global reception of hip hop?
5. Is the authenticity of rap music affected by race? If yes go to 5A
- 5A. How is it affected?

Activism and Project Dynamics

1. Can you describe the projects that you're currently involved with, in terms of the project itself and/or the community organization you're affiliated with?
2. What are your goals, intentions, or expectations for the project/s?
3. What role does rap music play in the project?
4. How did the project come to life?
5. Why is the project important to you?

6. Do you work with any community organizations? If yes, go to 6A.

6A. What issues guide your decision to work with a particular organization?

6B. What are the benefits of working with an organization?

Further information

1. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about or share with me?
2. If there are any specific reasons that you agreed to speak with me, could you tell me what they are?
3. Are there any questions you think I should have asked you, but didn't?
4. What would you consider the most important topic that we discussed in the interview and why?

4.6 Data Collection

Involved in my research project were two community organizers, one female and one male and three rap artists, one female and two males. The process of interviewing the participants for my research project spanned a period of time of around seven months. Finding willing participants was less of an issue than securing an actual time to conduct the interviews. Not to mention, that I had recently given birth to a beautiful baby girl and had also moved to Salt Spring Island, meaning that I had to commute to the city for the interviews.

Initially finding participants to interview seemed like it would take a couple of weeks because after reaching out to potential participants, I received a lot of feedback and willingness to be a part of my project. I had attended the "Hip Hop for Peace" music festival in the fall of 2009. This is an annual festival that combines activism and hip hop through performances, workshops and lectures. Through the festival's website, I was able to reach out to some of the artists and organizations that were involved to see whether they would be interested in having me

interview them for my research. I was looking for rap artists who perceived themselves as being involved in social justice work and the festival website included mini biographies of artists where they described their music and the work they did. I sent recruitment e-mails to several people that I thought might be suitable. As it turned out, it was much easier to set up interviews with the artists than the organizers. This might be due, in part, to my observation that there seemed to be more artists than organizers in general. Out of the five interviews, I was able to set up the first four without any complications such as cancellations or no-shows, etc. The last interview proved to be a bit more challenging, the details of which I will get to a bit later.

The three Canadian rap artists perceive themselves as being involved in social justice work. My research explores their ideas about their audiences and their understanding of the relationships between rap music, pedagogy and social justice activism. My interviews with the two community organizers explore their motivations for incorporating rap music into their social justice agendas and their interpretations of this relationship. One hour long interviews were conducted with each participant. All of the interviews were audio recorded and the questions were open-ended. A member check was conducted where the participants were given copies of the initial analyses and they were asked several follow-up questions and were asked to provide any feedback they thought was relevant or pertinent. They were also provided with copies of their own interview transcripts which they could address for accuracy purposes. According to Creswell and Miller (2000) it is through these processes that validity is attained: “we define validity as how accurately the account represents participants’ realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them” (p. 124).

4.7 The Interviews

As I had stated above, the interview process spanned a period of about seven months from when I first sent out the recruitment e-mails to the completion of the final interview. After including the process of transcribing the interviews, the collection of data took about a year to complete. The first four interviews happened within a three month period but I had difficulty with finding and securing the final participant for the study because I had a potential participant who initially expressed interest in having me interview them but when it came time to actually set up a time for the interview, I was no longer able to reach them. I then had to locate someone else who fit the criteria and this proved to be somewhat difficult.

Before meeting with each of the participants, I sent them a copy of the study information and the consent form that they would need to sign. I then brought copies with me to the interviews so that they would have copies for themselves and I would also have a copy of the signed consent form for my records.

In March of 2011, I met with the first rap artist, Havoc, in a café in a neighbourhood not far from the University. Havoc is well-known, local rap artist in his mid-thirties. He has worked with numerous youth and community organizations around the city as well as with schools at all levels of education. He has taken his music all over Canada and the world. He has also worked in television and radio developing programs for adults and youth. We had planned to meet in a quiet office in my department but plans changed and it became more convenient to meet in a neutral location such as a coffee shop. I think this turned out to be better in terms of creating a more relaxed atmosphere to conduct the interview. Instead of being in the university setting which might have seemed more sterile or academic, we in a public setting which we were both familiar and comfortable with. We found a seat in the back where the background noise would

hopefully not interfere too much with the tape-recording. The interview lasted around forty-five minutes and I was surprised at how well the design of the interview questions actually flowed with our conversation. They naturally seemed to progress from one topic to another. I found that Havoc was extremely forthcoming with his responses. I also thought that he was quite lively and animated. He did not seem at all intimidated with being interviewed or even with describing some of his personal experiences, some of which were painful.

Three weeks later I met with the second rap artist, Lisa, at her home. Lisa is a local, well-known rap artist in the city and is also known for being one of the best female freestylers in Canada. She has worked all over the province with different organizations and youth groups and has worked with many rap artists in both Canada and the United States. We had planned to meet in a coffee shop but when I called her to confirm the interview that morning, she did not have a lot of time and by meeting with her at her home, the interview was less of an inconvenience. I had travelled for several hours to be able to do the interview and I did not mind having the last minute change of location. I also think that because she was a woman, I was less troubled about meeting her in a private location. Meeting her at her house turned out to be a great decision because five minutes into the interview, my tape-recorder, which I had only used once and was unfamiliar with all of the functions, said that it had no more memory and would no longer record. However, Lisa had a back-up recorder complete with a blank tape that she so graciously set up for the interview. I was slightly embarrassed by the technical malfunction as it seemed somewhat of an affront to my professional credibility but I was more worried about how I was going to conduct this long-awaited interview without being able to record it. If I had had to resort to taking hand-written notes, it would have been much more difficult to capture all of the data and not to mention, the emotion. My notes would surely not have done justice to the

interviewee's own words when describing her experiences. But alas, it was only a minor setback and before long, we were back on track with the interview and no other disasters occurred.

A couple weeks later, I set out again. This time I met with the first of two community organizers that I would be interviewing for the research project. Traveler and I arranged to meet in the media lab at the community centre itself. It was an optimal setting because unlike the café, there were no background noises at all. We were in a quiet location that was also public. Traveler is in charge of the media department and its programs offered through a community centre located in one of the most economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the city. This community centre offers a wide range of services from language classes, sports, cultural liaison and music programs. All of which can be accessed for free. The organization is in constant search for funding and is badly overdue for renovations and upgrades. Traveler explained that a large part of his role was not only to run the media lab but to ensure its continued existence through applications for funding from government and private organizations. This participant had been with the organization for quite some time which meant that he was able to describe many of the issues that arise, both good and bad, with the youth programs he had been involved with.

In May of 2011, I met with the third and final rap artist, Choice, who would be participating in the research. I had not received a confirmation from Choice that we would be meeting that day and so I was a little worried that it would not happen, especially since he was a little late arriving. Choice is another well-known, local rap artist in his mid-thirties. He has performed with other well-known MC's from Canada and the United States and has worked with schools, community organizations and activist groups. Similar to the first interview, we met in a coffee shop in his neighbourhood. It was relatively quiet aside from the occasional espresso

machine noises and the hum of small talk surrounding us. All that aside, the interview turned out to be as informative as the others and I was again extremely appreciative that someone had decided to share their time and experiences with me.

The fifth and final interview proved to be the most difficult and elusive. According to my own participant criteria, I needed to interview one more community organizer who was also a woman. I had been in contact with a potential participant back in March of 2011 who seemed keen on letting me interview her but after several attempts to set up a time to meet, I no longer heard from her. I then embarked on a new effort to find someone who fit the criteria and in August of 2011, I successfully located a woman who agreed to let me interview her. Dee is the main organizer for a community organization located in another large city in the province. She organizes a four day hip hop camp for youth where young people from all over the province come together for several days to sleep, eat, share their experiences and produce music and performances. Aside from the camp, Dee organizes workshops in the community where companies and different organizations come together to learn from each other. Her motto is developing projects that are “heart-centered.” Similar to Traveler, a large part of the work that Dee does is around securing funding for each year’s projects. The hip hop camp in particular, usually has a tuition of around \$300 but they will not turn away anyone who wants to participate, therefore they are constantly looking for funding and support from both private and public investors. Dee and I decided to meet at a cafe near her house. Neither of us had ever been there and it turned out to be more of a bar than a café. She did not have much time but I was grateful that she had agreed to meet with me especially considering the struggles I had gone through in finding her. Unbeknownst to me, she had brought along her daughter who was unexpected but not unwelcome. It was a beautiful warm day and we took a seat outside because the background

noise inside was a little louder than we had anticipated. I felt like the interview was a little more rushed than the others had been but it was still very descriptive and enlightening. Like my previous interview with a community organizer, she had worked with the organization for a long time and was able to provide a great deal of information about her experiences with the youth who participated in the programs, the artists who worked with the youth, and the organization's annual struggles to secure funding for the implementation of the programs.

4.8 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data includes both codes that emerged from my readings of previous studies that were included in the literature review and codes that emerged from the interviews that I conducted with the research participants. Ultimately, I have analyzed how these codes indicated common themes and what these themes might mean for better understanding rap music as a form of critical pedagogy. In this section I have included an example of an analysis table that I used to organize the codes and I have described the procedures that were used to maintain the validity of the findings. The final part of the analysis section will give a brief description of the themes that will be discussed in greater detail in the findings chapter.

From the literature review, mediation, influence and empowerment are some of the *a priori* codes that researchers have identified in terms of the relationship between rap music, pedagogy and activism. I have also included inductive codes and co-occurring codes that emerged during my readings of the data. My analysis also consisted of intra-case analyses and cross-case analyses from which I have identified significant topics and keywords and their relevant interview excerpts (Rueckert-John, 2010). By comparing and contrasting between interviewees and interviews, I am looking to highlight the meanings that arise from the participants' own words. Validity is obtained by combining triangulation with member checks

(Creswell & Miller, 2000). Borrowing from the suggestions of Rueckert-John (2010) and Creswell (2007) below is an example of the chart I have used to help me organize the data.

Table 1: Example Analysis Table

<u>Codes: Topics/Keywords</u>	<u>Relevant Interview Excerpts</u>
	Interview/Page-Line #
Storytelling	3/2-8, 5/1-24
Pedagogy	1/3-16, 1/5-17
Raptivism	2/47-13, 1/22-13, 4/18-17

After each interview was completed, I delivered a disc of the tape-recording to a professional transcriber who transcribed them for me in much shorter time than it would have ever taken me to do it. She had both the equipment and the experience for transcribing and she was also comfortable with signing the confidentiality agreement that I required. Following the transcription of the interviews, I printed copies of them and began my initial analyses. During my first reading, I highlighted passages that were of particular interest and made a separate page of notes for each interview. I personally find it much easier to work with paper than on a

computer screen and as Seidman (2006) suggests, working on screen may make issues less apparent than they would be on paper. My second reading involved the assigning of a code to the passages of interest. According to the codes that had emerged throughout the proposal and the interviews themselves, they were specifically identified by the interview number, the page number, and the line number as shown in the table above. This numbered code would then be entered under a keyword column much like the sample table provided above. For example, all of the passages that made reference to the concept of “credibility” were entered as a numbered code (i.e., 2/13-4). The number 2 corresponded to the interview, the number 13 to the page number and the number 4 the column number. After assigning codes to all of the relevant passages, I cut each of the passages out and inserted them into folders that were labeled by code. I understand that there are computer programs that can do this for me and perhaps more quickly but I find it easier to work with actual paper and folders especially when there are so many excerpts to consider.

When it comes to my analysis, I have used triangulation as described by Creswell and Miller (2000) to explore whether the participants talk about these particular themes and relationships and how they talk about them. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), “triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (p. 126). I have worked with both the transcripts of the interviews as well as with the participants in order to triangulate the analyses. It is my intention that my analyses reflect honest descriptions of the experiences of the participants which is why I take the position that we are working together to share our ideas with different audiences in different ways. My analyses are collaborative in that they are built upon the participants’ interpretations along with my own so that we might better

understand the trajectories of our understanding for other contexts (Creswell, 2000). As suggested by Alcoff (1992),

Rituals of speaking are constitutive of meaning, the meaning of the words spoken as well as the meaning of the event. This claim requires us to shift the ontology of meaning from its location in a text or utterance to a larger space, a space which includes the text or utterance but which also includes the discursive context. And an important implication of this claim is that meaning must be understood as plural and shifting, since a single text can engender diverse meanings given diverse contexts. (p. 12)

While it would have been beneficial for the sake of validity to be able to conduct a second interview with each of the participants, I trust that my findings validate their experiences because my interview questions were concerned with asking them explicitly about their intentions for their work and the development of their educational programs. The validity of my findings is also reinforced by the findings of other researchers who have conducted similar studies and have identified similar findings.

This chapter described my methodology and its appropriateness for this type of qualitative interview study. From a social constructionist point of view, the findings from this research were developed through the qualitative interview study I conducted with five participants. This type of methodology was most appropriate for bringing to life the individual experiences of Havoc, Lisa, Choice, Traveler, and Dee who generously and honestly shared their thoughts and ideas on the work they do bringing together community organizations, rap music and young people. This chapter also included a discussion concerning my own paradigmatic stance which recognizes the stability of social structures and systems which can create barriers, limitations and possibilities but are not unchangeable. I can also agree with the constructivist

view of the world which argues for an understanding that interpretations are subject to locality and individuality.

I provided a detailed description of the interviewing process as well as the analysis of the data because this permits the reader to see that the interview study is a process that took time and consideration. It allowed me to become familiar with the participants and their experiences so that when I began to analyze the findings that emerged from the data, they were truly reflective of the participants' ideas and furthermore, of how these ideas might interact or speak to other researchers, theorists or people involved the same type of work.

This interview study produced data that supports the notion that rap music and hip hop culture can be incorporated into a framework of critical pedagogy that can lead to more relevant learning experiences for all types of educational arenas. Young people who participate in these programs learn about their agency by being able to ask questions and incorporate their own experiences and creativity. Their agency and their identities are articulated and engaged through an understanding that people are historical beings with diverse experiences. Youth culture and the experiences of youth are important as are their diversity of skill and talent which are not always equally visible but should be regarded as equally integral. The young people who participate in these programs offered through community organizations learn to engage with the world through collaboration and negotiation. They learn that their own experiences can affect change in the world at local and global levels. In the following chapter, I develop these themes in greater detail within the frameworks of critical pedagogy offered by critical pedagogy questions of Giroux and Kincheloe (2010) and the framework for pedagogical practice developed by Ladson-Billings (1992).

Chapter 5: Findings

Once again, the goal of my research project was to learn more about the relationship between pedagogy and activism by exploring how rap pedagogy can create greater possibilities for relevant educational experiences for young people. I have listed my three main research questions again because this chapter is organized according to what was learned in this interview study about each of the questions. In the following paragraphs I will discuss the participants' responses in relation to these three questions as well as how their insights are reflective of some of the critical pedagogical frameworks put forth by some of the prominent theorists in the field of critical pedagogy (Giroux & Kincheloe, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1992). Following the list of research questions, I have given a brief description of the findings that will be explained in greater detail in this chapter.

1. How is rap pedagogy being defined by the participants?
2. How do community organizers and rap artists interpret the relationship between pedagogy and activism?
3. How and why is rap pedagogy being used in community organizations?

The first research question was concerned with how the participants were defining rap pedagogy. The discussion of this research question will be guided by three critical pedagogy questions that were posed by Giroux and Kincheloe (2010). Drawing on the work of Critical Pedagogy theorists (Giroux & Kincheloe, 2010; Ibrahim, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1992) I have been able to work on rap music and hip hop culture as a form of critical pedagogy and have developed a framework for rap pedagogy which parallels Ladson-Billings' (1992) "Framework for Pedagogical Practice."

The findings for the second research question are characterized by the idea of making something out of nothing or as Havoc explains, “making poetry out of poison.” The relationship between pedagogy and activism is discussed in terms of the relationship that exists between the history of hip hop culture and economic injustice. This idea is further expanded to include a notion of activism that draws on personal experience in order to create communal awareness. The relationship between rap pedagogy and activism is strengthened by its focus on the group rather than the individual as it relates to projects and programs that rely on cooperation and negotiation. Pedagogy and activism are further discussed from a critical educational perspective which recognizes that educational systems are political and can become more overtly political through rap pedagogy. Educational experiences that are empowering are also seen as activist work.

The findings for the third research question arise partly out of the relationship between pedagogy and activism and the specific connection that both hip hop culture and community organizations have with socio-economic struggles. The assertion that community organizations are less restricted than formal schooling with relation to curriculum content and design is another important component of these findings as well as the recognition that youth culture should be incorporated into learning experiences.

5.1 How is rap pedagogy being defined by the research participants?

The concept of pedagogy can be somewhat tough to grasp or define and so throughout my research I have found it useful to examine pedagogy from the basis of three questions that were asked by Giroux and Kincheloe (2010) during a video dialogue that was broadcast on the Freire Project website. These three questions help to illuminate the role of pedagogy in educational settings and its inherent connection with ideological and political aims.

1. How do we learn about our agency?
2. How are our agency and our identities articulated and engaged?
3. How do we learn to engage with the world?

From a critical standpoint, the answers to these questions would be premised on a policy that both supports knowledge cultivation over knowledge imposition and engages difference in relation to agency (Freire, 1996). From my analysis of the interviews I conducted with three rap artists and two community organizers, there were several themes that were common throughout and they can be examined in ways that respond to these three questions. The themes, while not explicitly articulated as responses to these specific questions, can provide a framework for what I found could be understood as rap pedagogy.

Below, I have included a list of what emerged as the common thematic responses to each of the questions followed by a more in depth discussion of how they help us to better understand what constitutes rap pedagogy.

1. How young people who participate in these programs learn about their agency.
 - They are encouraged to ask questions
 - Content comes from their own experiences
 - They learn to police themselves
 - Creative projects bring agency to life
 - Power is transferred from the facilitators to the young people
 - Something can be made out of nothing
2. How their agency and their identities are articulated and engaged.
 - They are understood as historical beings
 - Their abilities and strengths are diverse and multiple

- Telling one's story is fuel for creativity
- They are understood as a process
- It is important to create a safe place to share
- They are not always the star, but are always a part of the larger picture
- Through the maximization of their skills and talents
- Identities and agency are expressed through creative projects
- Youth culture is not only important, it is a right

3. How they learn to engage with the world.

- Through collaboration, cooperation, negotiation, and brainstorming
- By using your own story to create positive changes in other areas

I will begin with the first pedagogical question which asks how these programs that are offered through community organizations in collaboration with rap artists from the community help young people to learn about their agency. The main philosophy that emerges in response to this question is that the life experiences of these youth who participate in these programs form the basis for the creative projects they produce. Traveler describes this philosophy when I asked him about the importance of activism for his programs:

I think music is a powerful tool and it's a powerful agent for kids and adults as well. I think it's, besides being pleasurable, you know, it also brings people together, it heals rifts and wounds, it places people in a really wonderful position to be creative and to explore and uncover new things and to share experiences that they wouldn't ordinarily have had, right.

They are encouraged to share their experiences, to ask questions and also to police themselves in terms of how they relate to each other and their environment respectfully. In this

way, they learn about how their own life experiences are sources of inspiration and knowledge. This ensures that knowledge is cultivated and organic as per critical pedagogy's tenet. The community organizations' programs allow for the inclusion of a part of each participant's experiences whether it is through the telling of their story or the use of their skills. The responsibility of policing themselves encourages them to define their own experiences and become aware that their actions have consequences outside of themselves.

The second pedagogical question is concerned with how the agency and identities of young people are engaged and articulated. According to the community organizers, a large part of the success of their programs can be attributed to their support and encouragement of youth culture and in particular, hip hop culture. The programs they have developed in collaboration with local hip hop artists recognize that success is a consequence of valuing youth culture and its importance in the lives of young people. From Dee's perspective, hip hop culture, as a part of youth culture, is a form of human rights.

What we are trying to promote with the young people writing the music and performing, is a right to be a culture, you know, it's a right to their own culture and to their own voice. You need that as much as human rights. You know, it's promoting young people to speak and for us to hear them, that's actually a part of children's rights.

Havoc echoes this idea when he explains that you have to be able to listen to what the kids are saying before you can teach them; "we need to be asking more questions but, when I teach youth, I ask questions, listen, you can learn a lot about how to teach them stuff."

From speaking with the two community organizers, I found that hip hop culture is reflected in their programs from the curriculum to the product. According to Dee, the programs

usually begin with the kids learning about the history of hip hop and its relationship with social justice.

It's not about the commercial hip hop, it's not about the bling, it's not about the language that's bad, it's about, we always go back to the history of hip hop and so the people who come to us already know what the organization is coming to do or trying to do, in the lyrics there's never bad language which is amazing you know, I mean considering what the lyrics are like outside and we want kids to talk about what's real in life, you know, what's really going on with them in the communities, you know and they choose the subject, we can brainstorm and then they choose a subject and it's not all rap artists were interested in that kind of thing, so those artists who are interested in actually helping people speak from their spirits or speak what's going on inside and using it for social change or something like that and not really just for making money, they come to us.

The organizers and the facilitators understand that young people are more likely to engage with the program because they become the intellectual leaders and the experts. As Havoc explains;

I'm still learning now. You have to transfer power. Like when I do my social programming with hip hop I go; what do you want to do; what are you interested in; what are your strengths? We don't work with people's strengths anymore. They're always like, just do this and shut up.

I would also suggest that the success of the programs were the result of the partnership between the organizers and the artists because while the organizers might have had respect for hip hop culture, by working alongside the rap artists, the programs gained a greater level of authenticity in the eyes of the kids. The two organizers I spoke with enjoyed rap music to a certain extent but did not consider it their preferred choice of music. As Dee declared; "I always say it's not my

favourite form of music, it's not what I listen to in my car but I support the voice of young people" whereas, the facilitators were wholly engaged in hip hop in terms of being practitioners and participants of the culture. The difference between the organizers and the facilitators in terms of their involvement in hip hop culture is articulated by Choice as he describes his relationship to hip hop culture; "it's just kind of in me, you know, it's kind of been in me since I was just, even before I was born it's kind of instilled in me, it's inside of me. I couldn't dislike it even if I wanted to." The rap artists I interviewed could relate to the young people in the programs because they understood what it felt like to be discouraged by the lack of validation that is sometimes felt in a formal educational setting. According to Havoc,

I knew it wasn't right but I was, I felt like I was being kind of like held down and can feel oppression, it's not hard to feel oppression and so I just said fuck it and I dropped out.

You know, to the dismay of my mother and family and I never looked back. I did a lot of digital media training, did a, you know, video editing and script writing, development and got into the TV film thing and music and just did it like every day. I knew that if I wanted to be in music I had to do it every day because there was no way I was going to make it if I didn't work it like a job, right. So that's what I did and ended up touring the world doing it, so that was my teaching, my educational experience.

The third pedagogical question asks how these community programs encourage and teach young people to engage with the world. Two overall themes could be determined in response to this question. The first highlighted the importance of working with others and was expressed through words like collaboration, cooperation, negotiation and brainstorming. The second theme advocates for the inclusion of young peoples' experiences as the inspiration for creating changes

outside of themselves and within the community. Dee, who organizes the hip hop camp, identified these themes in her program. She stated that

It's incredibly cooperative work and for me, that's what's very, very special because I don't think in our culture we learn to negotiate. You know, we can say what we want and do what we want, I mean this is actually negotiating with each other and sometimes kids can be very different, you know kids sometimes come with mental health issues and having to negotiate with them or somebody who's just come out of prison, having to negotiate with them and their thoughts or someone who's come from an abusive situation. And, some who have come from nothing much, you know, nothing so deep or painful, and to sit and listen to each other and understand.

Through these processes, the program participants were able to engage their own experiences, differences and skills in order to create a final product and performance which then became both an expression of their individuality and their teamwork. Ultimately, their performance and their music became proof of their agency as well as a reflection of their identities.

I have found that these pedagogical themes are similar to the recommendations for critical pedagogy that are outlined in Ladson-Billings' (1992) framework for pedagogical practice. Although her framework comes out of classroom experiences, I think that her suggestions are reflected in the work being done by the community organizers and the rap artists I interviewed. She suggests that her framework supports a more productive learning environment that is founded on relevance (Ladson-Billings, 1992). I would also suggest that relevance is the concept that seems to be the key to why the community organizations are able to create learning environments that are more critical than the traditional classroom where relevance is not always achieved in relation to the lives of young people. Below, I have included Ladson-Billings' (1992)

framework for critical pedagogy alongside the framework for rap pedagogy that emerged from my interviews so that it might better summarize how the rap pedagogy that is framing the programs I highlighted in my research is quite similar to the critical pedagogy that is prescribed by Ladson-Billings (1992).

Table 2: Comparative Frameworks for Pedagogical Practice

Ladson-Billings' Framework for Pedagogical Practice

Framework for a Rap Pedagogy

1. Students whose educational, economic, social, political, and cultural futures are most tenuous are helped to become intellectual leaders in the classroom. →

- Transfer power from facilitators to youth
- Create a safe place to share
- Maximize on skills and talents
- Students police themselves

2. Students are apprenticed in a learning community rather than taught in an isolated and unrelated way. →

- They are part of the larger picture and not always the star
- Collaborate, cooperate, negotiate, brainstorm
- The program is understood as a process
- Encouraged to ask questions

3. Students' real-life experiences are legitimized as they become part of the official curriculum. →

- Storytelling
- Using your story to enact change
- Content comes from youth experience
- Making something out of nothing

4. Teachers and students participate in a broad conception of literacy that incorporates both literature and oratory. →

- Abilities and strengths are diverse and multiple
- Identities and agency are expressed through creative projects

5. Teachers and students engage in a collective struggle against the status quo. →

- Youth culture is important

6. Teachers are cognizant of themselves as political beings →

- Organizers, facilitators, and youth are understood as historical beings

5.2 How do the participants understand the relationship between pedagogy and activism?: Poetry out of Poison

The relationship between pedagogy and activism is very interesting when it comes to hip hop. According to the participants, one of the foundations in rap pedagogy is the ability to make something out of nothing or as Havoc explains; “poetry out of poison.” This foundation is at the root of hip hop history and development where young Blacks and Latinos living in the South Bronx created music without instruments and without musical instruction, in the classical sense. They used their mouths, their bodies, and the streets for creative expression and social status. It is in this idea of making something out of nothing where we can find the link between pedagogy and activism because the “nothing” is really not a “nothing,” it is an idea, a story, an experience or any other intangible concept waiting to be expressed. The “something” then is the music or the art, the dance or the style, which comes out of the experience or in the case of activism, it is as Dee explains, how we use “what’s inside for social change.” When we tell our stories, we reveal ourselves and our communities and therefore bring awareness to circumstances which either need to be supported or changed.

On another level, the participants I interviewed discussed how these hip hop programs offered through community organizations and their facilitators, created safe places where young people could work together to make music or art out of their painful experiences. For example, through the hip hop camps, youth come together for four days and through collaboration, cooperation, negotiation, and brainstorming they learn how to tell their own stories and give voice to their own interests. The camp is seen as a process which culminates with a performance and the production of a music CD. Through this process, they are able to see how their own ideas are productive and more importantly, how painful experiences can be drawn upon for creative expression and influence.

In terms of being pedagogical, this process differs from the formal education experience where students and teachers are expected to leave their personal experiences at the door so that they do not interfere with the learning experience. Contrarily, a rap pedagogy that is critical purposely engages the personal experiences of the students as a foundation for learning about the world. It then creates a space where these experiences can affect the world in a positive way.

During my conversations with the participants about their activist work, they would frequently speak about education as activism. As Lisa suggested, education becomes a way to make a difference in people's lives by giving them tools to be productive on their own terms. She says it is also like a "wildfire" because when you teach one person something, they will teach others. Education becomes activism when it is empowering.

An important pedagogical component of these programs is the way they broaden the definitions of success. Contrary to commercial or mainstream hip hop's limited interpretations of success that are often based on financial gain, sexual conquest and violence, the facilitators of these programs define success in less material ways. Empowerment can mean success when young people gain both self-confidence and learn new skills. These community programs often help the kids to produce a performance, a CD or both. That the focus is on a group achievement rather than an individual one is also somewhat different than the expectations for success that are defined in a formal education setting through standardized testing. In the hip hop programs I learned about, young people work together in different ways, utilizing their different abilities towards a common goal. The focus is on collaboration and cooperation so where one person is skilled in writing lyrics, another might be more skilled in performing them and even another might be more adept in sound production or stage lighting. In this way pedagogy is no longer

only about self-improvement but is also about facilitating social transformation as well, as Kaya (2007) implores.

When discussing the different activist work that the rap artists were engaged in, they seemed to see themselves as being the tools for creating awareness about a particular cause through their notoriety as rap artists and their ability to entertain. Their activism works in two ways: the first is through their facilitation in programs that work with youth and secondly, through their ability to attract audiences and therefore awareness, of a particular social problem that is seeking support. For example, Choice has worked with organizations such as MAWO (Movement Against War and Occupation), BWS (Battered Women's Society), and the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). These organizations focus on different social problems such as war and occupation, violence against women, and racial injustice but they all are recognizing the way that rap artists and their music can capture the interest of an audience and they are drawing not only on the relationship that hip hop in particular, has with a history of inequality and oppression but also on its foundation of making something out of nothing or in the words of Havoc; "poetry out of poison."

5.3 How and why is rap pedagogy being used in community organizations?

If we go back to the educational continuum that I described in the introduction where formal education lies at one end, with rap music at the other end, and community organizations occupying the middle, the answer to this question is reflected in the middle ground where community organizations lie. Because they are less inhibited by the goals and expectations that govern formal education and those that work within it, community organizations have more flexibility with the administration of their programs and their content. On the contrary, because they are unable to rely on guaranteed funding as is the case with formal education (this is not to

negate from the fact that formal education is constantly being underfunded, but it is different from community organizations because public schools are still publicly funded, unlike community organizations who apply for government grants without the expectation of receiving them and make up the rest of their budget through fundraising or charging a fee for their services) community organizations are on a constant crusade to maintain their budgets.

Community organizations occupy a space between social structure and popular culture. As institutions that respond to the specific needs of the communities they represent, the organizers I spoke with recognized that the incorporation of rap music and hip hop culture addressed three of their main concerns:

1. The problem of lack of funding
2. The need to privilege the cultural experiences of the young people they sought to engage
3. The need to create more possibilities for empowerment through skill development, emotional development, and identity building

One of the main reasons that community organizations incorporate hip hop culture in their youth programs relates back to the idea that you do not necessarily need a lot of funds to do hip hop. Not to mention that rap music and hip hop culture are important components of youth culture in general, they have an intimate relationship with economic injustice that make them well-suited to the funding struggles that many community organizations also face. The issue with lack of funding with the organizations I interviewed makes their incorporation of hip hop culture almost commonsensical. According to the interviewees, you do not need anything to do hip hop. And while it might be nice to have sound equipment, it is not necessary for the creation of hip hop music. When talking about the roots of hip hop in New York City, Havoc explains,

they had these, these outlets that were, you know, it didn't cost anything to throw a party, it didn't cost anything to grab a record and spin it back and forth so, you know, it's that whole making poetry out of poison thing, you know.

Similarly, Lisa reiterates this connection between hip hop music and economics,

for one thing, it speaks to the, usually to the lower class, like I don't want to say lower class, but it speaks to those that are kind of on the bottom of society, this ladder, you know, it's just like you don't have to have money to listen to it, you don't have to have this and that so it becomes this voice of the people once again.

According to Dee, "you can actually have hip hop without anything. You don't need a mic, you don't need instruments, you can simply go out and perform. For me that is just beautiful."

Choice also made several comments about the connection between poverty and hip hop music in terms of it being a creative outlet and form of stress relief.

I think there's a kind of persona that goes along with that, you know people were being, you know African-American, young, you know poor, poor like I said because to be entertained at being poor you've got to be creative, right.

The program directors at these community organizations understand the economic practicality of hip hop programs from two levels. First of all, they do not need to purchase equipment to implement a basic hip hop program and secondly, their programs create possibilities for young people to learn skills both in terms of emotional development and employment development that they might otherwise not have the opportunities to engage in. When discussing the work that Lisa does for his organization, Traveler explained to me the impact that their programs have and how important they are for young people:

she's already touched one kid that I've been working with for quite a while, he's a First Nations guy, about 21 now, he's a composer and he uses electronic software to compose songs and he's integrating dance music like house beats and trans beats and that kind of stuff so I've linked him up with Lisa and she's taken his work now to another level because she started adding lyric and doing improve around some of his beats and stuff, right and it's had a remarkable effect on him. He's gone from Mr. Depression to this hundred megawatt smile that he walks around with all the time because he just feels so good about himself.

Traveler is describing a connection between skill development and emotional development. When there is growth in confidence about one's abilities this can affect their overall sense of well-being and happiness. The organization Traveler works for is in the heart of one of poorest neighbourhoods in the city and he explains that while the families he works with can provide the basic necessities of survival, there is nothing left over for other activities like sports or music. This is the void he is trying to fill with the programs he puts together. Traveler incorporates rap music because he sees it as a vehicle for change and understands that it is an important part of youth culture:

besides being pleasurable, you know, it also brings people together, it heals rifts and wounds, it places people in a really wonderful position to be creative and to explore and uncover new things and to share experiences that they wouldn't normally have had.

These programs do not only cater to youth who come from lower socio-economic statuses or who are considered "at-risk" but their goal is to offer youth in general, different types of experiences and expose them to alternative possibilities for being creative than might be possible in the traditional education system.

The goal of my research was to learn more about the relationship between pedagogy and activism by focusing on rap music as a form of critical pedagogy that leads to more relevant educational experiences. What I learned about this relationship from interviews with two community organizers and three rap artists supports the critical pedagogical assertion that greater possibilities for agency and greater definitions of agency can lead to an increase in community awareness and engagement. When we engage young people's experiences within a framework that recognizes they are socially and historically constructed, they can be imagined as more flexible and subject to change. The insights provided by the participants revealed that the programs they developed are examples of critical pedagogy that parallels the framework of Ladson-Billings (1992). The critical rap pedagogy in these programs provides a more focused incorporation of youth culture. That hip hop culture was the overarching framework for creative expression made the goals of the program more focalized while at the same time hip hop culture's historical connection with activism as social change offered an avenue for the youth to draw a connection between their own experiences and engagement in the community thus reinforcing the notion that a critical rap pedagogy can lead to a greater inclination for activism.

Chapter 6: Hip hop culture and violence: A misconception

The purpose of this chapter is to go back to the notions that I indicated in the theoretical framework chapter that were central to exploring hip hop as a form of pedagogy. Pedagogy involves both theory and practice with a political purpose and in this chapter I will explore how these theoretical notions play out in hip hop in general and in how the participants and I conceptualize hip hop politics and as pedagogy through the concepts of mediation, influence and empowerment. This chapter also incorporates a detailed discussion of some of the common criticisms of rap music and hip hop culture with particular attention paid to its perceived relationship with violence. Following in the footsteps of other Raptivists who seek to question and challenge the conflation of hip hop culture with violence, various responses to these criticisms are analyzed from the perspectives of academics, journalists, film makers and the research participants.

It is not uncommon for me to be asked to defend rap music. When I start to talk about my research and the educational potential that rap music might offer, I am often questioned about the significance of violence and misogyny within the messages and lyrics of rap artists. I am given the impression that this critique of rap music is almost considered common sense. In other words, rap music is commonly associated with violence and misogyny (Rose, 1991, 1994). My father wants to know; “why do they have to put all that violent stuff in there?” He doesn’t listen to rap music, so I wonder how he came to adopt this perception of the music. My usual response to these critiques is to highlight the multidimensionality of rap music and hip hop culture. They do not encompass a single art form or message. NWA’s “*Fuck the Police*” is a song which draws attention to police profiling and brutality, while “crump” is a form of dance which troubles long-standing ideas about what defines authentic dance and movement (Rose, 1994). While one

rap artist is glorifying violence in her or his lyrics, another is using their voice to bring awareness to the violent consequences of the diamond trade (Kanye West) or political prisoners (Common).

I attended a documentary screening of independent filmmaker, Byron Hurt's film; "*Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*" in Vancouver. It was presented by the Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS) and promised to offer an analysis of the roles that violence, homophobia and patriarchy play in hip hop culture. The schedule for the evening was to begin by watching the film and end with a panel discussion and audience questions. The goal was to engage in a proactive discussion about the ways and strategies that could be employed by rap artists to oppose violence against women. At the end of the evening, I left feeling somewhat irritated by the discussion because I felt that while they addressed some of the structural issues surrounding the commercialization of rap music, they ignored others. The issue of white ownership of the rights to Black music and content was highlighted, as was the prevalence of violence in American culture in general as opposed to solely in rap music. On the other hand, the marginalization of rap music as an authentic form within the larger body of popular music was left untouched, as were the issues surrounding the steady essentialization of the values that are attributed to hip hop culture and rap music. Through both the media as a vehicle for social imagination (Anderson, 1983) and neoliberal, capitalist structures which suppress individual expression in favour of quantity; "value replaces values" (Ball, 2003, p. 218), hip hop culture and rap music have trouble being re-imagined and allowed to diversify within the public perception.

Throughout the film, violence against women is depicted as a ramification of rampant homophobia and homo-eroticism in hip hop culture, founded on mythologies of hyper-masculinity in which aggression and misogyny are valued. The complete devaluation of anything

feminine, in conjunction with suppressed homosexual desire, is offered as the rationale for the relationship between rap music, men and women and violence. This sort of rationale mainly highlights the individual as the agent of oppression while at the same time it pathologizes the rap artist through homophobia. I would suggest an alternate explanation which encompasses a more nuanced view of violence in hip hop. Within a culture that values violence and financial success, where the attainment of both becomes the responsibility of the individual, one could perhaps become a means to the other. For example, ideologies about success such as “the survival of the fittest” and “fighting your way to the top,” support the idea that the road to success is paved with the casualties of those who did not try hard enough.

Ball’s (2003) Foucauldian inspired essay on the “terrors of performativity” offers a complex analysis of the emotional and physical consequences of neoliberal management structures for teachers in the classroom. These structures rely on impersonal abstract techniques and the “biopolitics of disposability” (Giroux, 2006) which apply categories of worth and worthlessness to human beings and their productive and emotional abilities. According to Ball (2003),

The performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of ‘quality,’ or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgment. (p. 216)

The issue of the “field of judgment” is a key concept within the culture of hip hop and rap music because the dissemination of the music is contingent upon the “field of judgment” of the record companies which have access to the means of mass production. I propose that if record companies achieve economic success through the production of violence and misogyny, then

artists whose lyrics are in line with this “field of judgment” will be more likely to be mass produced. Expressions of violence are not only glorified in some rap music, this pattern is also prominent in the media and film industries but rappers, unlike actors, are held individually responsible for the rhetoric and the change. Why is violence in the movies considered natural, while it is pathologized in the rap industry? I suspect that the answer to this lies in who has access to the “field of judgment.” Rose (1994) writes about the lack of control that rap artists have in the music making processes and decisions but with the growth of websites such as Youtube and with the greater affordability of video recording devices, rap artists are more able to become independent producers and marketers of their music and therefore are better able to control the formats and the messages they transmit. This is indeed true for the artists I interviewed because they have been able to create their own music and distribute it without relying on record companies. As Havoc explains,

Everything’s controlled, it’s all graded and controlled. Especially in Canada, we have such a fascist telecommunication system here where you watch what they want you to watch. People who have the balls to go on Youtube and educate themselves with some, yeah, I mean looking for markets, I mean I’m looking for people who are looking for freedom within their artistic expression and stuff, if they want to hear the music and if they don’t, I mean it’s not made for them at this point in time.

Through independent, online distribution, they are able to develop their own audiences. Their reliance is not on the marketability of a particular song or message rather it is whether their music and their message resonate with a listener out there on more of an aesthetic level. Here, the content becomes both the choice of the artist in terms of what she or he wants to produce and of the music consumer in terms of what she or he wants to hear.

In June, 2012, an article was published in *The Star* newspaper in Toronto. The title of the article was “How Hennessy Cognac became linked to the Danzig St. shooting” and it sought to explain how a party where two people were shot dead and another twenty-two were injured was directly linked to rap songs where the drinking of Hennessy was glorified. Because several of the party-goers tweeted that there would be free Hennessy at the party and there are well-known rap songs that talk about drinking Hennessy, the writer decided that this was obviously the connection that led to the ensuing violence.

What was supposed to be a children’s barbecue on Monday night might have been planned that way, but on July 7, somebody going by the name @2ToneShorty tweeted “#hennessyparty” with a photo of a bunch of bottles of the premium French cognac.

From then on, @2ToneShorty and his “tweets” kept announcing that on Sun., July 15, there would be a “blocko” or block party on Danzig where the Hennessy would flow.

But when Sunday came, all that poured was rain, not cognac, and so @2ToneShorty announced the #hennparty was postponed until Monday. The rest is horrible history, with two dead and 22 injured.

“DJ keep the mix them tight yo, Hennessy and Red Bull make me get psycho.”

— “Breakout” by Sean Paul

For two decades, Hennessy cognac has been associated with hip-hop culture. It also figured prominently in tweets about the Danzig St. party. (Zerbisias, 2012)

The last two lines of the article quote signify the extent of her analysis of the scenario. Listening to rap music plus drinking Hennessy equals violence. This analysis is further complicated when her article begins to talk about the link between Hennessy and the Black, urban demographic.

While the article makes no mention of the racial backgrounds of the party attendees, the latter part of the article talks solely about the success that Hennessy has had with the Black demographic, through being featured in *Ebony* magazine and also that they are supporters of the NAACP. So, the reader is led to the conclusion that this was also the demographic of the party. These are the types of conceptual leaps that are founded on racial stereotypes which McLaren (2007) has discussed. The writer has already made the link between rap music, drinking Hennessy and violence explicit but she now goes a step further with telling the history of Hennessy's commercial relationship with Black people which in turn, implicitly describes who was attending the party that ultimately resulted in violence and death. When I interviewed Choice he talked about how these conceptual leaps are made all the time especially with regards to rap music and its listeners. He remarks that "no one ever asks what Hitler was listening to." And while the statement itself is somewhat comedic, it also hints at the levels to which hip hop culture is enshrouded within racist and stereotypical assumptions that are considered common sense.

Peter McLaren (1997) asserts that rap music is a new method of social criticism exemplified through events such as the Los Angeles riots. In contrast to the media's portrayal of the riots as a result of gang activity and lawlessness, rap artists like Ice Cube instead, emphasized the racist and abusive policies (both symbolic and material) of different Los Angeles law enforcement agencies. Rap artists draw from many of the same cultural sources of imagination as film producers, authors and politicians but the descriptive power of the metaphor figures prominently within rap music and helps to trouble the stability of condensation symbols: "Some gangsta songs for instance, promote a stereotypical (re)framing that depicts the gangsta rapper as both sociopath and criminal. Stereotypes are recast and refigured so that the negative

connotations (of laziness, violence, etc.) become positive attributes of strength, of power, and of resistance to white domination” (McLaren, 1997, p. 163). The following lyrics are from NWA’s song “Fuck the police” and they provide an example of the way that violent language can be employed to bring awareness to injustices. This song was attacked in the media for promoting violence and for being anarchistic. On the other hand, it was beloved by many fans because it was applicable to the lives of many young, Black and Brown men and women. Ice Cube finally brought life to what many had experienced and, on top of it he was loud and confrontational about it.

“Fuck the Police”

Coming straight from the underground
Young nigga got it bad cause I'm brown
And not the other color so police think
They have the authority to kill a minority
Fuck that shit, cause I ain't the one
For a punk mother fucker with a badge and a gun
To be beatin' on, and thrown in jail
We could go toe to toe in the middle of a cell
Fuckin with me cause I'm a teenager
With a little bit of gold and a pager
Searching my car, looking for the product
Thinking every nigga is selling narcotics
You'd rather see me in the pen
Then me and Lorenzo rolling in the Benzo
Beat the police outta shape
And when I'm finished, bring the yellow tape
To tape off the scene of the slaughter
Still can't swallow bread and water
I don't know if they fags or what
Search a nigga down and grabbing his nuts
And on the other hand, without a gun they can't get none
But don't let it be a black and a white one
Cause they slam ya down to the street top
Black police showing out for the white cop
Ice Cube will swarm

On any mother fucker in a blue uniform
Just cause I'm from the CPT, punk police are afraid of me
A young nigga on a war path
And when I'm finished, it's gonna be a bloodbath
Of cops, dying in LA
Yo Dre, I got something to say (NWA, 2013)

Common on the other hand, uses rap music in a different way. His lyrics talk about violence but are not themselves violent. Both Common and NWA talk about abuses of authority but they do it different ways. NWA uses a confrontational tone and there is a sense of immediacy whereas Common's lyrics are more reflective and thoughtful. He wants us to learn from the experiences of others and by highlighting the inner strength of a woman who was wrongfully imprisoned for being part of the Black Panther Party.

“A Song for Assata”

In the spirit of god.
In the spirit of the ancestors.
In the spirit of the black panthers.
In the spirit of assata shakur.
We make this movement towards freedom
For all those who have been oppressed, and all those in the struggle.
Yeah. yo, check it-

There were lights and sirens, gunshots firin'
Cover your eyes as I describe a scene so violent
Seemed like a bad dream, she laid in a blood puddle
Blood bubbled in her chest, cold air brushed against open flesh
No room to rest, pain consumed each breath
Shot twice wit her hands up
Police questioned but shot before she answered
One panther lost his life, the other ran for his
Scandalous the police were as they kicked and beat her
Comprehension she was beyond, tryna hold on
To life. she thought she'd live with no arm
That's what it felt like, got to the hospital, eyes held tight
They moved her room to room-she could tell by the light
Handcuffed tight to the bed, through her skin it bit
Put guns to her head, every word she got hit
'who shot the trooper?' they asked her
Put mace in her eyes, threatened to blast her

Her mind raced till things got still
Opened her eyes, realized she's next to her best friend who got killed
She got chills, they told her: that's where she would be next
Hurt mixed wit anger-survival was a reflex
They lied and denied visits from her lawyer
But she was buildin' as they tried to destroy her
If it wasn't for this German nurse they woulda served her worse
I read this sister's story, knew that it deserved a verse
I wonder what would happen if that woulda been me?
All this shit so we could be free, so dig it, y'all. (Common, 2013)

NWA are considered 'gangsta' rappers, whereas Common would be considered a 'conscious' rapper. The difference is that the former is often charged with being confrontational and with the perpetuation of violence and misogyny while the latter is seen as a messenger of the positive, social justice oriented, political side of hip hop that addresses injustices. I would assert that they are both confrontational and that they are both conscious. They represent different expressions within hip hop and they embody different consequences of the terrors of performativity which deny access to emotional expression, while also denying access to the production of new ideas. Both songs offer possibilities for teachers and students to discuss multiple levels of injustice and power concerning race, gender, class, ability and worth. A more complete discussion about violence and rap music would include examples from artists whose lyrics are not defined by glorified violence such as "Black Union" and "Common." It would also look at how violent expressions in hip hop have often brought awareness to other types of injustices such as police brutality and lack of access to public and political space.

I have included these two songs so that readers may gain a greater understanding about how people have perceived the difference between rap music (commercial rap music) and hip hop music (conscious, independent rap music). Throughout my interviews, the participants routinely talked about these critiques in terms of a difference between mainstream rap music and non-mainstream, or independent, rap music. The idea of 'storytelling' in terms of describing

one's own experiences through music, was mentioned by all of the participants but this idea and its relationship to credibility or authenticity was seen as being a very complicated issue especially when the music became more commercial. Because historically rap music is intricately linked to experiences of marginalization, the question they seemed to be asking was; how does an artist maintain an authentic story in the wake of commercial success? We will further discuss these ideas in this chapter because they surfaced in every interview and created questions that everyone struggled with. Similarly, they expressed concerns about how the commercialization of rap music has created a dearth of lyrical content that highlights violence, capitalism and misogyny because they are marketable. Within the programs developed by community organizations and rap artists, their goals are often to help the young participants create music that is more thoughtful. They often brainstorm about how things can be said differently and they are pushed to examine why mainstream rap music tends to be limited in content. As Lisa explains,

Rap music in particular, I think it has to be done with people that respect it. Like the teachers, it's not just like okay, we're going to do a thing on rap music. I think it has to be like English teachers or teachers to really experience it themselves and make their own decisions before they're like okay, this why we're going to look at this piece. Because I think if you just take a piece of music and say, this is why rap is bad, and they play some Eminem song and they've never done any research or know anything about this person, it's like well, you're coming from a, it's like a lawyer making an argument before they've done all the research, right, they don't have any of the information.

Rap music production has not escaped neoliberal hegemony and neither did Byron Hurt's film screening as the individual and personal choice, rather than critiques of power and structural

barriers, were highlighted as the main tools for combating violence against women in hip hop. The introduction to the film described it as an analysis of the “roots of race, commerce, systemic oppression and violence in hip hop culture” (MacDougall, 2008). While this assertion claims to offer a critical look at structural elements, by the end of the film and panel discussion it was clearly suggested that structural change would be less effective than changes made by artists themselves. In contrast to this binary of fault, my idea would be to incorporate both areas into every discussion about violence, gender, and change. It is this complete discussion that I felt was lacking from the evening.

The prevalence of violence in rap music is considered a consequence of both powerlessness and contrasting definitions of “manhood.” It is suggested that because Black and Brown men lack access to forms of abstract power such as political, social and economic, they compensate with physical power. Physical power, in the film, is seen as the power to do violence and this is interesting because it denies the many examples of non-violent physical power, such as dance, voice, art and fashion that have been employed by hip hop artists. The assumption that physical power has to signify violence is another consequence of the reduction of hip hop expression.

A common challenge in these programs is to create an environment and a product that allows for creativity without compromising self-expression or the authenticity of one’s experiences whether they are bad or good. As Lisa explains, “as long as you are telling your story, that’s what hip hop is to me, you know. And you’re sharing what you really believe in, then just how you choose to do it and how you respect other people.”

6.1 Mediation

In the literature review, mediation was described as being a strategy for dialogue and cooperation. It is a way to share the local with the global and vice versa. My research revealed that while this is true, it actually goes further than this by sharing the personal with the local and then the global. So, in other words, mediation has been interpreted more at the group level where different groups from different corners of the world dialogue with each other in order to shed light on their particular experiences. The people I interviewed shared this interpretation of mediation, but focused more on mediation at the personal level with regards to how individuals tell their own stories and share their experiences. Lisa highlights the importance of storytelling as she talks about when she first started learning about rap music as an expression of history and an art form worthy of respect.

Well, this isn't just gangs and guns and people rapping about this and that, this is actually people telling their story about where and what their lives are like and they're doing it in a spoken form and a music form.

Dee took the idea of mediation in another direction when she discussed how the incorporation of rap pedagogy can lead to greater possibilities for mediation between youth and adults. Where music is often seen as a cultural divide, a realm of misunderstanding, between younger and older generations, she suggests that popular culture and in particular, rap music can provide an opening where adults might begin to learn more about youth culture and what is important to them: "I want youth to be able to speak to each other and to us and for adults, I mean, and for adults to be able to hear they're saying and to me, that's what's important."

6.2 Mediation and Authenticity

The importance of storytelling to rap pedagogy is at the heart of the concept of mediation but I noticed that throughout the literature and the interviews I conducted, there seemed to be a recurring struggle between the right of storytelling and the promise of authenticity. When describing his own music, Choice states that

My own music is interesting, it's definitely a reflection of me and where I've been, kind of where I'm at at that time, you know, a lot of my stuff is just real, like a lot of love songs for sure because love is real. A lot of darkness too you know.

More specifically, the question that begs to be answered is; is the artist telling the truth and does it even matter? The idea that music is a reflection of an authentic self is interesting because there is a relationship between music and identity (Hudson, 2006), but artists are often performing exaggerated identities that do not necessarily represent their actual experiences. The struggle of identity is integral to the debate in hip hop culture between what is known as hip hop music and what is known as rap music. Where hip hop music is considered to represent real identities and rap music and more specifically 'gangsta' rap, represents exaggerated identities or performed identities (Kelley, 1996; McLaren, 1997) that are more for entertainment purposes than educational ones. When I asked Choice about what hip hop culture meant for him, he brought up some the distinctions between hip hop and rap music and how they affected his own identity formations.

Hip hop. That's a good question, I'm glad you actually bring that up because people say I'm a rapper, I don't like to use that term, I like to use the term, I'm an MC and the difference is really, I think, when I hear rap, I think gangster rap, I think of mostly somebody's uneducated, somebody, because the rap music talk, you know the songs don't really need to convey a message, it's just about anything. Does your chain hang

low, do the soldier boy, in the club type of stuff. That's more rap music, right? But I think hip music is more about, you know, advancing intellectually, consciously educating and what hip hop to me, what it means is actually to move a youth. And hip being young, urban, you know, adolescence. Hop mean to move not only physically but, you know, like I said before, intellectually, advance them spiritually.

Part of the problem is that rap music as described by Choice, is considered more commercially viable and floods the airwaves so that hip hop, also known as conscious rap, is not heard as frequently leading the public who are unaware of the distinctions between the two, to believe that all rap music is "gangsta rap." These are just a few of the issues that complicate the incorporation of rap music into a learning environment. We talked about these complications in the interviews and the community organizers, more so than the artists seemed to take issue with whether "gangsta rap" should have a role in their programs. The artists were less concerned with the lyrical content of the music and were more intent on making sure the kids in their programs produced music that reflected their own experiences or their own creativity. In other words, it was less important to the artists that the kids being truthful about their life experiences, than it was with them expressing themselves through creativity be it metaphorical or not. Low (2011) who has done extensive research about the role of rap music in the classroom and in identity development is a strong advocate for moving away from literal interpretations of the music.

I advocate for a critical rap pedagogy in which rap music is studied as aesthetic and cultural production rather than mirror of the real—as a product of the imagination shaped by, inventing, overturning, and sometimes transcending certain conventions of representation. (p. 27)

According to Low (2011), the concept of authenticity encompasses six elements;

1. Blackness
2. The “street”
3. “hard” heterosexual masculinity
4. The importance of representing the place and culture you are from
5. The importance of being true to yourself
6. Politically conscious, “underground” hip hop (p. 31)

My research has also shown that these elements have a relationship with authenticity but they were expressed in different ways. For example, in terms of Low’s (2011) first, second and sixth elements, the three artists I interviewed, talked about the importance of remembering the roots of hip hop culture as it relates to periods of racial discrimination (Blackness) and economic oppression (the Streets) in New York City in the 1970’s where opportunities for education and employment were rare. The idea of being “hard” was not necessarily understood as an element of authenticity, rather it was seen by the interviewees as a consequence of marketability and record company influence. As Havoc explains,

Hip hop it doesn’t matter, if you’re good, you’re good. People will recognize good music, you don’t have to be a gangster to do it but if you wanted, if you tried to get that market then maybe credibility is something but most of the time the record label just creates that image for you anyways, right.

An understanding of marginalization was a key element for authenticity with the participants I interviewed but to expand on Low’s (2011) typology, they also highlighted that an integral part of being authentic was actually being good at rapping and performing. Lisa articulates this element when she discusses being a performer:

I think that also comes back to the importance of being a good live performer, right, I mean so much, people these days are produced and in the studio and everybody can make a record, right, everybody can make a CD these days, so it’s kind of like, well, what else can you do, you know? You going to engage people or are you going to share?

Lisa develops this idea of “being good” even further when she discusses how ability and talent is able to transcend some of the other social divisions that are often highlighted in relationship to hip hop culture such as race and gender.

I get asked all the time, what’s it like being a woman in hip hop, do you ever feel any sexism dadada. I’m like no, because the people that do real hip hop look past all that and if you are good at what you do, they’re not thinking oh, you’re good because you’re a woman or you’re good because you’re white, it’s just like if you’re good, you’re good or you’re not, you’re not, you know. And unfortunately those of us that are doing real hip hop and have messages to say don’t see those divisions.

Authenticity was determined in four ways that became apparent in the interviews. First, rap music can be a tool for telling your own story, secondly, rap music is a tool for creativity which means that the story being told does not have to be literal but can be both metaphorical and imaginative. Thirdly, authenticity is linked to an artist’s proficiency or skill in the art of rapping. Lastly, authenticity in rap music is expressed through an understanding of its history and relationship with economic oppression and an alliance with those that are victims of oppression. Havoc describes this idea of alliances after I asked him whether he thought that the authenticity of rap music is affected by race:

I mean, hip hop or rap music can be done by anybody, right? Vanilla Ice did a rap piece. But there’s certain artists that are, even rich white kids do hip hop but, you know, some people have said, how can you embody hip hop if you’ve never embodied the struggle, right? But I know white artists who are poor and embody the struggle and even if they’re not poor, they talk about the struggle and try to empower it, empower people. It’s just more energy within the true hip hop than there is rap music, you know.

That participation in and enjoyment of rap music crosses racial lines, supports the idea that rap music, while rooted in African-American experiences of oppression, is a political practice that creates bonds between experiences of marginalization, racial and economic oppression. For example, West (1983) writes that

African-American music is first and foremost, though not exclusively or universally, a countercultural practice with deep roots in modes of religious transcendence and political opposition. Therefore, it is seductive to rootless and alienated people disenchanted with existential meaninglessness, disgusted with flaccid bodies and dissatisfied with the status quo. (West, as cited in Haworth, Pruyn & Garcia, 2009, p. 3)

As Haworth, Pruyn, and Garcia (2009) argue, rap music is articulated as a form of class consciousness that requires the recognition of both the heterogeneity of individuals and experiences, as well as the commonality of the experience of wage exploitation. These understandings about class consciousness and common experiences of marginalization are echoed by the women and men that I interviewed and become the foundation for their interpretations of the concepts of credibility and authenticity in their own music and the music they choose to listen to.

6.3 Influence

The concepts of mediation and influence are connected within the ideas I discussed about authenticity, alliances and identification. As I discussed in the *Toronto Star* article, the public perception is that when young people listen to music that glorifies violence and criminality, they are more likely to engage in violent or criminal behaviour. The problem associated with making these types of conceptual leaps is that they support the idea that some people are more inherently criminal than others and they deny all of the other social implications for the prevalence of

violence. Not to mention that the media focuses more on the violent behaviours of some people than others. My goal here is not to delve too much into this issue but it is important to be aware of the racism that exists with regards to public perceptions of musical preference and influence. Instead, I would like to focus on how the concept of influence was articulated by the five people I interviewed. What came out of our conversations was the idea that influence can be conceptualized as inspiration. Lisa talks about how she loves to teach young people how to do hip hop music because it inspires creativity and confidence:

Like my favourite kind of audience is the 15, 16 year olds that are getting into it and that you can inspire, you know, who may be, at the beginning of the week of a hip hop camp didn't think they could write well, by the end of it they're coming up to you like hey, Lisa, look at my raps I wrote, or they're happy that you shared with them how to make music happen in bars and forums or help them in the studio to go from sounding okay to sounding like yeah.

Both the artists and the organizers felt responsible for positively influencing the youth they worked with. Lisa, Choice and Havoc all expressed awareness that their positions of notoriety meant that people were looking towards them for guidance. As Lisa explains, "in terms of like social activism work and when there's a name behind it or something it's like people take you more seriously." Choice discusses how his involvement in a particular event ensures greater awareness by virtue of his ability to guarantee both an audience and an engaging experience:

But what happens with me is a lot of people have a lot of schools and stuff and organizations have a hard time getting people out because it's not easy, you need money to go out, you need to buy food and supply entertainment so what happens a lot of the time is they book me to come because they know people are going to come, and they'll

get there, you know, their speeches or have a guest speakers, actually the speakers but few of the * getting so small and getting so short but it's a great way, you know it's a great way for artists to give back, it's a great way to get involved you know, so it's involvement with communities, to know what's going on and the people will come out. And nobody, let's face it, nobody wants to hear a talking head including myself you know.

By using their own music to garner support for different social issues, they were hoping to inspire others to do the same. Havoc discusses this sense of personal responsibility: "it is what it is in the sense that it was created and now it's something I can control but if someone is able to raise up and speak to the people, show them what is real, then maybe something will change."

By incorporating the authentic experiences of the rap artists within the structure of the community organizations and the goals of the particular programs, the hope was to inspire young people to be honest, creative and more aware of themselves and the world and their ability to affect change. The artists realized that they had special positions of authority and authenticity with both disadvantaged youth and youth in general, given their notoriety and expertise in the culture of hip hop. All three of the artists I spoke with were deeply invested in using their fame to create awareness for social issues and felt a sense of duty or responsibility for doing so. Lisa draws on the debate between hip hop music and rap music to explain that she understands hip hop music and culture as a form of grassroots movement towards social change. She believes that as a hip hop artist, she has a responsibility to speak out:

It's important, yeah, it's totally important to share your message and have your words be heard and that's part of the responsibility of a hip hop artist as well, right. Not hip hop in the commercial scene, but especially underground and people that are forcing kind of

social change. We have voice and people listen to us and that's something you can't take for granted too, is whether you want to do it or not, people are going to listen so you'd better be prepared to be heard, you know, and respect that which is kind of sometimes hard to, it's taken a while to figure that out, too.

6.4 Empowerment

As the literature has shown us, empowerment as a concept, occurs both internally and externally (Ibrahim 2004; Zimmerman, 1995) because when people begin to feel empowered with their own abilities and identities, they are more likely to feel the confidence to engage with their communities and work towards social change. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Soanes, 2001) to empower someone is to “give authority or power to or to give strength and confidence to” (p. 292). While I find that the dictionary definition explains part of what empowerment meant to everyone I interviewed for this project, I think that they took it a step further in terms of taking empowerment from the self to a more communal level as described by Ibrahim (2004) and Zimmerman (1995). Lisa describes empowerment as being similar to an oral tradition where knowledge and skills are passed down from generation to generation.

I mean I think that that I do it with my music and that's what's great about it, you know that's one of the celebrations I can be like wow, at least I'm proud that I can actually make a difference in some ways by giving people tools to do this on their own and it's just a, it grows like wildfire, right, you teach one person something and then it goes on maybe to someone else and it's like oral tradition.

Lisa also talks about those who are involved in hip hop culture as choosing the culture because it is a powerful agent of change. She makes a connection between identification with hip hop

culture and a proclivity for social change. In other words, she thinks that people who identify with hip hop culture recognize each other and the value of creating social change.

It's like, like you know people always say music is a language of its own, right, but hip hop is kind of another extension of that, hip hop music is this whole other thing where people of different languages, we can cross over those barriers and you know what people are doing when they're bobbing their heads, right, you know what a person who dresses in hip hop clothes, you know, you say wow, they're probably going to like this show, you can give them a flyer to a hip hop show and they're going to be like, they're going to come out, you know like and that I think is the most powerful thing that I've seen in a long time, it's just like wow, a lot of people who want to see change have chosen hip hop and recognize that it's a really good avenue for teenagers and youth that are in trouble.

One of the most important values in hip hop culture as expressed by the interviewees is the ability to make something out of nothing or "poetry out of poison" (Havoc). This is fundamentally the key to why hip hop culture and rap music are considered empowering, especially in the lives of disadvantaged youth. Havoc discusses this idea when he talks about the global reception of hip hop culture and its values;

Places like Brazil, places like, like some places in Canada even I see hip hop values still running through where, you know, a ghetto Native kid can break dance and change his life or, you know, start rapping and change their lives instead of, you know, where people have money, it's just people throwing money at the camera, yo, yo, yo, you're too broke to do this, you're too broke to do this, right? It's the medium hip hop was about before, it

was about, you know, it was about getting out of the ghetto, but, it's about that value of making something out of nothing. That to me, is the biggest thing.

Chapter 7: Recommendations

As I explained in the introduction to the thesis, there are differences in the educational functions of formal education, community organizations and rap music. Between the hierarchy of roles and the intentional goals of formal education at one end and the informal and participatory nature of hip hop culture at the other end, there are community organizations. Community organizations seek to address the voids that are created by formal education's efforts to standardize curriculum content. They draw on hip hop culture's ability to speak to and advocate for youth experiences. It is important to learn more about how and why some of the people who work in community organizations and some of the people who produce rap music are coming together to develop more empowering educational experiences. My research has shown that by learning more about these programs and their connections with community activism, we can try to encourage greater acceptance of the importance of youth culture in formal education as a means of addressing both the lack of relevance students feel and the narrowing possibilities for agency.

The following recommendations are a combination of what I have learned while researching this topic, what the participants have suggested, and what has been recommended by other scholars in the field. I begin with some recommendations about future studies that could potentially offer new and different insights into critical rap pedagogy. Secondly, I discuss some recommendations for greater cooperation between community organizations and formal educational arenas. I also take a look at what my research and previous studies have shown about how rap music can be better incorporated into the classroom and whether the use of rap music in the classroom is antithetical to the idea that rap should be kept as pedagogy that is only performed and conceptualized by rap artists themselves. Finally, I draw on some of the

participant quotes to highlight what they suggest are the important aspects to remember about the relationship between rap music and activism.

7.1 Future Studies

The area of research into rap as critical pedagogy is a fairly new field of study so there is definitely a need to conduct further studies from different perspectives. For example, a longitudinal study that follows young people from adolescence to adulthood could provide very interesting information regarding the long-term effects of participating in critical hip hop programs, both in their personal lives and their careers. My research did not include interviews with the actual young people who participated in the programs but I would suggest that further research focus on how they perceived their own experiences within the programs and whether they feel that their experiences support the claims that rap pedagogy provides greater possibilities for agency, empowerment and educational relevance. What are their motivations for participating? How is it different from their experience with formal education? These are the types of meaningful questions that should be asked in future studies. I would also recommend that researchers look at youth programs that are collaborative efforts between community organizations and schools to learn more about how working together is different, better, challenging, and etcetera.

There are quite a few examples of studies that explore the use of hip hop for social justice at local levels, but not that many that explore the global phenomenon of rap music and the reasons that it is taken up by local artists and activists as an outlet for expression. The artists I spoke with commented on the global appeal of rap music because it is so deeply connected with social justice but it would be interesting to learn more about what has personally motivated various activists and musicians around the world to draw on hip hop culture.

Another important area of research that should be explored is the relationship between public policy research and the reception of critical hip hop pedagogies and the wider social reception of rap music and hip hop culture. How have previous studies reinforced negative stereotypes or reflected political agendas? What does rap music and hip hop culture mean for those who do not listen to it or engage with it?

7.2 Community Organizations and Formal Education

Where community organizations and formal education differ is in their goals and the way they achieve them. Community organizers acknowledge that their organizations occupy a social and physical space between the diverse needs and expectations of the communities they represent and the wider institutional structures they and their communities engage with. As institutions that respond to the specific needs of the communities they represent, the organizers I spoke with recognized that the incorporation of rap music provided a way to address their lack of funding, to incorporate youth culture and to generate skill development. I would recommend that formal education which also encounters some of the same issues described above could find ways to partner with community organizations and model some of their programs. For example, schools might look to incorporate rap artists as mentors or examples of people who have unique or alternative skills. Low (2011) talks about the distance that exists between schools and community organizations and she advocates for greater communication and cooperation between the two:

Keeping in mind that not all the skills from one realm are transferable to the other, ideally teachers and youth leaders could work to forge relationships between these two worlds so that skills that are transferable, such as initiative, creativity, commitment, and leadership, get recognized and supported in both places. (p. 151)

On another note, when I talked with Dee, she spoke about her collaboration with other community organizations as a way to increase their resources:

They have equipment, they have the kids, they have the space and we have the artists and we have the connections with youth workers and artists who have done this so trying to sort of piggy back on that sort of helps us.

The identification of gaps and surpluses is a good way of exploring how schools and community organizations might be able to work together more effectively or “piggy back” with each other’s resources.

7.3 Rap Music in the Classroom

In most cases when rap music enters the classroom, it resembles the rap music one might hear in a McDonald’s commercial on television, where the use of rap music is more of a marketing tool to get the student’s attention. The lyrics and the music are simplified and uncritical and the focus is on the product or in the case of schools, the curriculum is the focus.

While these resources can help teachers tap into some of the pedagogic potential of hip-hop culture, many of the use rap music as a gimmick or a hook to engage students in the standard curriculum rather than reimagine a classroom and curriculum significantly shaped by youth culture. (Low, 2011, p. 146)

Rap music and the complexities of the culture of hip hop are less of a concern. Hip hop scholars critical media literacy (Ibrahim, 2004). Low (2006) takes it even further and proposes that a better understanding of cultural change can only be achieved when popular culture becomes a central focus in curriculum design. Her argument speaks directly to Hall’s (2004)

“Encoding/Decoding” which reinforces the notion that popular culture shapes political and social transformation. Low (2006) describes the idea of “generational anxiety” where older generations

make claims against the literacy of younger generations because of the former's inability to understand the language or the codes of young people.

The interrelatedness of youth culture and mainstream culture suggests the complaints that the younger generation is less literate, found across history, stem in part from generational anxiety, for youth challenge and eventually make changes to the language, value-systems, and culture of their parents. One defense against such anxiety might be to transform competencies—new skills and interests—into deficits. (p. 100)

Generational anxiety is clearly a way to deflect from the fear of not being able to understand the messages. This supports Hall's (2004) argument that the relationship between the sender and the receiver is ambiguous. There is what Hall (2004) describes as a "lack of fit" so that the messages being sent mean very different things to different people based on their structural and social positions. Generational anxiety can be seen as the result of a "lack of fit."

Low (2006) explains that the relationship between popular culture and education has been studied from two vantage points. Primarily popular culture has been seen as a way to bring youth culture into the classroom. Secondly, popular culture has been seen as a place to develop critical literacy by analyzing media representations, stereotypes and etcetera. Low (2006) goes on to suggest a third vantage point which echoes Hall (2004) and recognizes that young people are at the forefront of cultural change and therefore popular culture needs to be at the forefront of curriculum development. This would imply that changes in the curriculum of teacher education programs would also have to occur so that educators would understand the role of popular culture and have the tools for making it more relevant in their classrooms.

Teachers face many restrictions in terms of the content they can bring into classrooms and in terms of the time restraints they have to teach their students what they need to know so

that they can pass their examinations. The debates in education between standardized models and more flexible models are long-standing and deeply entrenched in wider political and societal debates. While I do not imagine these struggles to subside very quickly and with the growing trends in the decline of funding for arts and music programs, I would suggest that educators make use of any flexibility they might have in the curriculum to engage with a more student-centred pedagogy. Increased dialogue between educators and community organizations might help make hip hop programs more accessible to more young people which could lead to greater possibilities for funding.

7.4 Rap Artists and Rap Music Pedagogy: Who gets to do it?

An argument against rap in the classroom calls for the need to keep rap as pedagogy as performed by and conceptualized by rap artists as a distinct form of pedagogy in its own rights. The relationship that rap music has with organic intellectualism and what Low (2006) calls “counter-literacies” which are frequently fluctuating and changing in response to social changes make rap pedagogy difficult to encapsulate and define in terms of a specific outline for the classroom. This is also why rap pedagogy works well in community organizations that are constantly changing and updating their programs in order to respond to the changing needs of the communities they represent. I think that rap pedagogy as a form of critical pedagogy relies heavily on the ability to be collaborative and cooperative. School administrators should acknowledge the relevance of educators working with rap artists and bringing artists into the classroom to share their creativity and skill.

The rap artists I interviewed were extremely keen on bringing rap music into the classroom and all three had at one time or another worked with schools at all levels of education from elementary school to university. Lisa talks about going into elementary schools and being

able to show the kids that creating rap music can be fun and can be a great way to express themselves. She has also had a lot of experience performing at universities and teachers' conferences and she remarks on how she enjoys being able to change people's minds about rap music and hip hop culture.

Most people don't want to admit when they're wrong, but you know, especially people are going to be like how many people are going to say oh yeah, you know this actually changed my mind. Until you see somebody that makes you go wow, now I understand.

What they consider vital to the implementation of rap pedagogy is that it always maintains a relationship to the roots of hip hop culture. A cultural expression that arose out of the restrictions of economic and social oppression coupled with the need for young people to have creative outlets and the freedom to share their experiences. The framework for rap pedagogy which mirrors the critical pedagogy framework of Ladson-Billings (1992) is a good reference for developing ideas for classroom pedagogical practices. By not only bringing hip hop culture into different learning environments through its cultural artifacts; music, videos, etcetera, it is essential to collaborate with hip hop artists and scholars so that the conversation includes not only those who study it but those who are deeply invested in it.

7.5 Rap and Activism

The dictionary definition of activism is "the doctrine or practice of vigorous action or involvement as a means of achieving political or other goals, sometimes by demonstrations, protests, etc." (*Random House Dictionary*, 2013). The rap artists I spoke with would consider themselves activists and that much of what they do is activist work. According to Choice, hip hop is activism because the goal of hip hop is to educate:

What hip hop actually means, it means to move a youth. And hip being young, urban, you know, adolescence. Hop means to move them not only physically but, you know, like I said before, intellectually advance the spiritually. So that's what it means. So that's the rawest form of hip hop in my personal opinion, that you can get is to be teaching, educating, especially the youth, right, so that's my definition of it.

What this highlights is the need to broaden the definitions of activism. From the participants' perspectives, educating young people is activism in itself and I think that if we rely on the dictionary definition of activism, we tend to imagine activism in terms of large scale demonstrations and social upheaval rather than small groups of young people in a room learning to dance or to rhyme about their experiences. So while large scale demonstrations bring awareness to a particular social problem such as lack of relevance in education, the work that is being done by the participants I interviewed is actually addressing this social issue and making changes to it through critical rap pedagogy. We need to reinforce the relationship between education and social change, a relationship which becomes more visible within critical pedagogical frameworks than "schooling and teaching as a technical activity with straightforward aims" (Yates, 2009). Furthermore, these programs ignite a chain reaction where young people are learning about how their own experiences are connected to their communities and vice versa. Dee discusses this connection when describing how the kids in her hip hop camp wrote rap lyrics with the artists:

We want kids to talk about what's real in life, you know, what's really going on with them in the communities, you know and they choose the subject, we can brainstorm and they choose a subject and it's not all rap artists were interested in that kind of thing, so

those artists who are interested in actually helping people speak from their spirits or speak what's going on inside and using it for social change or something like that.

My research focused on the relationship between rap music pedagogy and activism in terms of how this relationship is mediated by agency and educational relevance. I have explored how rap music is being used pedagogically and I have explored how rap pedagogy is being taken up by community organizers and rap artists as knowledge that stimulates and social justice. What emerged from the interviews with the participants was a framework for understanding rap pedagogy as a form of critical pedagogy. The close relationship that hip hop culture has with social justice work and political contradictions makes it an ideal candidate for critical pedagogy in the classroom, but I would also suggest that the framework of rap pedagogy could be adopted for other forms of youth culture and music. The strength of rap pedagogy is that it draws on the contradictions, difficulties and triumphs that are linked with hip hop culture and it allows for discussions about race, gender, socio-economics, violence and other social justice issues that help to define our experiences in multiple ways and are always present in the null curriculum, but do not always make an explicit appearance in the classroom.

Rap pedagogy creates a situation where there is a focus on diversity of personal experience with group engagement towards a goal of community awareness. From the perspective of social constructionism, there is an understanding of the connection between the individual and the social forces that inform her interpretations of her experiences, but also of our own abilities to either support or deconstruct these same social forces.

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