EDUCATIONAL EMCEES: MASTERING CONDITIONS IN EDUCATION
THROUGH HIP-HOP AND SPOKEN WORDS

By

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a Dissertation
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy
Education

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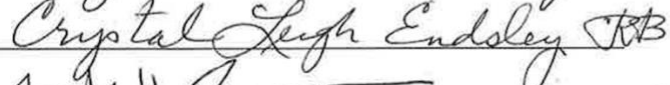|	
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A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at George Mason University.

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Fall Semester 2019
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

ProQuest Number: 27667221

ProQuest.

ProQuest 27667221

Dedication

…for those who beat box

through pen tops

for those who rock sneaks

that don't flip flop

for those who catch rhymes

when the beat drops

for those who break beats

when the pen stops

for those who write-speak

in Hip-Hop

for those who publish papers

on the boombox

for the bodegas

and the trap spots

for the pavers

and the sidewalks

for grandma's prayers

and the scholar talks…

Acknowledgements

To the ed emcees of today:

I see you. I am inspired by you. I appreciate you.

To the ed emcees of tomorrow:

The world needs you.

To the ancestors:

Thank you for the liberating gift of spoken words.

To my husband:

Harry, you are my muse. I love you.

To my Family and Friends:

I am, because of you. Ubuntu.

To Hip-Hop:

You are a knowledge source for the community, and the academy.

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Abstract

EDUCATIONAL EMCEES: MASTERING CONDITIONS IN EDUCATION THROUGH HIP-HOP AND SPOKEN WORDS

Anthony R. Keith, Jr. Ph.D.

George Mason University, 2019

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Inspired by the second wave of Hip-Hop educational research, I asked three questions in this study: 1) What is Hip-Hop educational leadership? 2)What are the conditions Hip-Hop educational leaders make possible for Black and Brown youth learning and engagement in schools? and 3) How does spoken word poetry function in the lives of Hip-Hop educational leaders? I conducted a Hip-Hopography of spoken word poets, rappers, and emcees who also serve as community partners inside urban high schools around the United States. Using poetic transcription and a Hip-Hop aesthetic methodological framework (sample, layer, flow, rupture, affect, embodiment and performance) as data analysis, findings from this study suggest Hip-Hop educational leaders are "educational emcees" who through a series of meaningful practices, invoke love and spoken word poetry as an organic Hip-Hop pedagogy in their pursuit to liberate learning and engagement conditions for Black and Brown youth in American public education.

Chapter One: The "Thing" About Spoken Word Poetry

"Poetry to the Rescue"

Tony Keith, Jr. (2006)

I do this for a reason

this gift is not temporary

it does not change

with the seasons

that means I can spit fire

while the sky is hot

or I can cool it down

while the water is 'freezin

and if words having power

isn't something

that you believe in

then I will spit on my fingertips

reach out my palms

and turn this open mic

into an altar call

and I'll start saving

all of you heathens

because I care about your future

I care about your destiny

I care about your legacy

and I want you to know

my name

I want you to look up in the sky

and say, "is that a bird?!"

"is that a plane?!"

and I'll look out screaming

no! it is poetry

and I'm a poet

a social agent of change

piecing letters to words

and words to sentences

and sentences to sounds

I can leap over metaphors

in one single bound

I am powerful enough

to spark protest for equality

in ghetto communities

talk slicker

than politicians

that create policies

that grant rich folk's immunities

I didn't choose

to be saved by poetry

poetry chose me

poetry crept inside

my momma's womb

and poetry started tickling me

been speaking in rhythmic patterns

since I was in grade 3

"It's Raining, It's Pouring"

Tony Keith, Jr. (2006)

…you got Black and Brown kids

sitting squared up

boxed inside of classrooms

and schools

ready to flow better than

grammar's standard rules

simply by reciting

their A, B, C,'s

so can we please get them

some textbooks

not made in the 1980's?

can we please get them

a curriculum

that teaches them

that not all of their ancestors

were enslaved

getting whipped

and picking cotton

was not all they did

we gotta' get them

back to the basics

Egyptians didn't need laptops

to build pyramids…

What does a poet's desire of an audience to believe in the power of *spoken words* have to do with educational opportunities for Black and Brown [1]kids in American public education? This question, although highly theoretical, is one I philosophically wrestle with as a spoken word (poet), Hip-Hop teaching artist (educator), and an academic scholar (nerd) with over twenty years of experience performing poetry around the world, and leading non-profit, education-based, youth development organizations in my community. I always believed the answer was internal, but never had language to describe the "thing" that occurs when I spit[2]a poem, and the audience dangles on the tips of my words as if I am conducting an orchestra. I also know what it's like to recruit,

[1] By "Black", I am referring to the racialized group of U.S. descendants of enslaved Africans. By "Brown", I mean the expansive group of ethnically and linguistically diverse group of people in America with ancestry from parts of Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, south east Asia, the Middle East, and the Indigenous people of America, as well as those with multiple intersecting racial and cultural identities).

[2] "spit" within the context of spoken word poetry and rapping (emceeing) means to perform rhythmic words.

develop, inspire and learn from teams of teachers and youth workers steeped in their

knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy and youth development to manage

neighborhood tutoring centers, summer college prep institutes, and youth leadership

programs for Black and Brown kids stuck in the socio-economic margins of the world. I

know what it's like to coach principals on their beliefs and approaches to shifting school

culture and climate using spoken word poetry. I know what it's like to support teachers in

designing lessons plans that utilize elements of Hip-Hop to improve student learning and

engagement conditions in classrooms. But when people ask me what it is that I actually

"do", I typically respond with a bowl of word soup, "I'm a community-based educator/

youth development non-profit leader / spoken word poet / Hip-Hop teaching artist /

author / educational researcher".

To be clear, I am one star in a galaxy of people who serve the same bowl of soup.

According to Weinstein's (2018) research, there are *at least* 150 community and school-

based organizations serving youth through spoken word poetry programming around the

world, such as Youth Speaks, Words, Beats, & Life, Inc, Split This Rock, and Urban

Wordz NYC. Noteworthy, is the over 250,000 youth engaged in spoken word poetry

programming in their schools and communities across the nation through poetry slam

competitions such as, Louder than a Bomb, Brave New Voices and Hyper Bole (J. S.-L.

Rose, 2013; Weinstein, 2010). As a professional educator, I continue to perform spoken

word poetry as well as coach Black and Brown youth poets, judge youth poetry slam

competitions and facilitate classroom and school-wide spoken word poetry programming

for schools, colleges and universities around the world. I coached many youth poets like

Malachi Byrd, Nayja Williams, Kosi Dunn, and Eric Powell towards winning poetry slam competitions; who all graduated high school and continue their spoken word poetry pursuits as communal and academic scholarship. I describe the experiences of three of these youth in my chapter, "Consideration for Creative and Intentional Spoken Word Programming" in my 2018 co-authored book, "Open Mic Night: Campus Programs that Champion College Student Voice and Engagement" (Jenkins, Jaksch, Endsley, & Keith, 2017) – which received an outstanding book recognition award from the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Noteworthy, all of my published scholarship is inclusive of original poetry (see: Keith, 2017; Keith, 2017a; Keith, 2012; Keith, 2010; Keith, 2009).

In addition, I have both performed on stages with and co-facilitated spoken word poetry workshops with poet-teachers and authors such as Rasheed Copeland, Elizabeth Acevedo, Joseph Green, Naliyah Kaya, Goldie Patrick and Charity Blackwell. In addition, Weinstein's (2018) research indicates there are a few major roles and identities participants move among as they do the educational work of youth spoken word poetry: 1) the youth poet; 2) the teaching artist; 3) the partner-teacher – who works alongside classroom teachers; and 4) the administrator – who directs programs and organizations. Weinstein's numbers do not include the exhaustive list of national and local school and community-partner organizations that offer academic and socio-emotional programs for students both inside and out-side-of school time like The Afterschool Alliance, Higher Achievement, AmeriCorps City Year, and Turn Around Arts. Several of these organizations are physically housed inside of school buildings with teams of youth

workers executing visions of equitable access to educational opportunity for poor Black and Brown youth.

When I decided to pursue my Ph.D. in education leadership, I was completing my third year of service as the director of a free community-based college preparation program for high school students from my hometown of Washington D.C. I was also an active member of a post-secondary pathways task force sponsored by my state's superintendent for education, which was comprised of approximately 100 different school and community leaders and educational policy makers. Our assignment was to collect, analyze, and report on data indicators about college and career readiness, access, and opportunities for youth in our district. One problem in particular that continued to surface in those network conversations was, "why are students' beliefs and attitudes about their educational experiences outside-of-school generally more positive than their experiences inside-of-school?" We wondered how different kinds of learning and engagement conditions contributed to their beliefs about the purpose of education for their own lives.

I was curious about educational leadership philosophies and practices grounded in theory and research that could provide an explanation for what I was experiencing. I hoped the scholarship published in the field of education would offer up some answers, yet I was surprised to discover that the voices of people like me were remarkably absent. I became an anomaly in most of my classes, and rarely caught a glimpse of myself in the articles we were assigned to read. I learned to translate the discourse between my professors and fellow classmates about educational leaders acting as "superintendents",

"principals", and "policy makers", by re-imagining them as non-profit "executive directors", "program managers" and "youth workers". I became a metaphor about the need for more scholarly work that offers insight into the experiences of spoken word artists who are also community leaders working to solve problems of educational inequity in America. I needed language to describe what we do, why we do it, and how what we do impacts the lives of young people in schools.

To answer these questions, I conducted interviews with ten professional Hip-Hop teaching-artists who serve as community-partners inside of urban high schools around the country. I analyzed their biographical narratives using a Hip-Hop inspired research methodology to illuminate patterns in their stories about life experiences that shaped their beliefs about education, Hip-Hop, and spoken word poetry, and that influenced their leadership praxes in schools and communities. This story is an account of my pursuit of discovering a spoon for scooping up just enough words from the soup that would be palatable to people with diverse perspectives.

In Chapter Two, I begin the story by telling a brief history of the relationship between "spoken words" as an internally sourced Black literacy practice, and "spoken word poetry" as a foundational source of rapping and emceeing in Hip-Hop culture. Then, I synthesize the scholarly work that draws theoretical connections from Hip-Hop culture to educational leadership. My review of literature suggests the thread that binds these two seemingly disparate camps is the racial opportunity gap discourse. With this understanding, I ask an overarching question, what is Hip-Hop educational leadership?

In Chapter Three, I explain my philosophical approach to answering this question using a qualitative methodology rooted in Critical Race Theory, and Hip-Hopography - an approach to the study of Hip-Hop culture that samples methods of ethnography, biography, and social and oral history. Then, I describe my methods for conducting interviews with ten Hip-Hop educational leaders who work in urban high schools around the country, who I call "the squad".

In Chapter Four, I describe my process for analyzing the data from the interviews through a methodological framework based on Hip-Hop aesthetics of sampling, layering, flow, rupture, affect, embodiment, and performance and poetic transcription. Written as a multi-media element, this chapter includes colorful visuals, links to listen to audio, and excerpts of poetry derived from emic data on the interview transcripts. Then, I share my procedures for developing themes from the poems by sampling methods from narrative inquiry and participatory action research. I reference critical hermeneutic phenomenology and the Hip-Hopographical aesthetics of "affect, embodiment, and performance" to describe the experiences of Hip-Hop educational leaders. In addition, I introduce "blackout poetry", "educational emcees", and "stamping" in qualitative research to the public and scholarly lexicon. I conclude this chapter by answering my research questions using emic data from the poetic transcripts.

In Chapter Five, I offer a series of philosophical, theoretical, and practical questions to guide future research about educational emcees within the context of Hip-Hop and educational leadership. Lastly, I present some methodological recommendations

about Hip-Hopography and poetic transcription for critical qualitative educational

researchers.

Chapter Two: From Spoken Words to Hip-Hop Educational Leaders

"In spoken word poetry, there are no formal rhyme schemes, textual analyses, or

complicated rules of grammar. It is simply you, your pen, and the world"

(Dooley, 2014, p. 85)

In an effort to establish a common understanding of spoken word poetry for this

intellectual endeavor, I refer to Endsley's (2016) work which states, "spoken word poetry

is a public poetry performance through which meaning is negotiated...it is always

contextualized historically and also undergoes intermediate social reconstruction and

reproduction during each performance" (p. 4). This cycle of construction and production

is described similarly by Hamlet's (2011) contribution of "call-and-response", or "a

verbal exchange based on the idea that constant exchange between speaker and listener is

necessary in order for any real communication to take place between speaker and

listener...which can be observed from the academic classroom to comedy, rap and rhythm

and blues concerts" (p. 28). In other words, spoken word poetry is a performance of

poetry that invokes call and response and that facilitates opportunities for understanding

between the poet and the audience. With this working definition I will synthesize the

scholarly literature to first, historicize spoken word poetry within the context of

American public education, then to theoretically situate it within the racial opportunity

gap discourse.

Historicizing Spoken Word Poetry

Historically, spoken word poetry in the U.S. evolved from the oral traditions of

enslaved Africans who already had their own languages and literacy practices, and relied

on spoken words to translate and communicate in American English because slave

owners denied them access to books, or the "written word" (Bacon, 2010; Bly, 2013;

Dalton, 1991; Gundaker, 2007). They developed poems and songs about pain, freedom,

solidarity, triumph, joy, and love that contained messages coded with instructions for

survival (Hamlet, 2011). Singing "wade in the water / wade in the water, children / wade

in the water / God's gonna trouble the water" was a road map for enslaved Africans

running towards freedom, informing them to hide in riverbanks to avoid capture. Coping

with the trauma of slavery, racial violence, and compulsory enculturation enslaved Black

people engaged in strategic forms of learning the English language through translation

that was mostly oral and aural (Williams, 2005). Learning to address at least two

audiences simultaneously: members of their own group and members of the group of

outsiders who oppressed them, enslaved Black people demonstrated "double coding",

"double voicing", and "double vision" (Gundaker, 2007). Their capacity to engage in

multiple literacies adds a layer of understanding for what W.E.B. Dubois described as

"double consciousness" in his (1903) scholarly work, "Souls of Black Folk",

> [it is] this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of
>
> measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and
>
> pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts,

two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p. 3).

Learning to "code switch" was integral to literacy acquisition; it required strategy, stealth, creativity, bravery, and hope for survival. Even when slaveowners barred Black people from religious instruction, schooling, or literacy, they encouraged dancing, singing, and storytelling, fallaciously assuming that they would be not be able to both entertain and resist (Gundaker, 2007). For enslaved Black people the spoken word was pedagogy that taught them how to translate, manipulate and utilize American standard English for the purpose of liberation.

According to the peer-reviewed literature in socio-linguistics and education, the resulting language, African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (also referred to as "Ebonics" or "Black English") is a legitimate linguistic system with West African origins, spoken with variation amongst many Black youth and adults in America (Labov, 1969; Muehl & Muehl, 1976; Ndemanu, 2015; Rickford, 2016; Van Hofwegen & Wolfram, 2010). And, that there is evidence of Black students erroneously placed in special education classes because of teacher bias against their use of AAVE in classrooms, which sparked the "Ebonics" debate of the mid-90's (DeBose, 2006; P. A. Hall, 1997; Martin, Martin, & Capel, 2014; Wheeler, Cartwright, & Swords, 2012; Yancy, 2011). According to Hamlet (2011), through various processes, Black people learned to stake their claim to the English language and at the same time reflect distinct African American cultural values that are often at odds with Eurocentric standards. As

Black communities became more literate, there is evidence of poets writing in both "Black dialect" and the American standard, like Phyllis Wheatley's 1773 work, "On Being Brought from Africa to America", or Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem, "Signs of the Times" published a century later. The use of AAVE with rhythm and music is also evident in work by Black literary artists around the time of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's. Price-Styles (2015) expands on this history in her piece about the origins of rap and spoken word poetry,

> Poetry became popular, as poets like Langston Hughes experimented with developing their writing in accordance with jazz rhythms, utilizing freestyle approaches and incorporating various subversions to form. Free-form jazz poetry was then embraced in the 1950s by figures of the Beat Generation, such as Allan Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac, who were drawn to the style as an alternative to mainstream, nuclear America…

> Popular spoken word poetry became more overtly political in the 1960's as artists such as the Last Poets, Sonia Sanchez, the Watts Poets, and Amiri Baraka, among others, spoke out in accordance with the era's civil rights movement. During this epoch, the direct nature of oral forms, coupled with the inherent Black aesthetic, served to carry pressing messages of racial inequality…

> In the 1970's came the greatly influential poet and musician Gil Scott- Heron, whose political poems such as "Whitey on the Moon" (1970) and "B-Movie" (1981) remain pertinent examples of how rhythm and melody can perfectly offset

uncomfortable truths and deep messages. In more recent times modern spoken

word artists such as Donatello Williams, Paul Beatty, and Ursula Rucker, to name

just a select few, continue to create spoken word poetry and frequently collaborate

with contemporary musicians… (p. 12).

According to critical scholars, the Black aesthetic, or the "verbal artistry" of

AAVE speakers is a foundation of eloquence and poetic skill evident in modern day Hip-

Hop culture as expressed through rapping (Camangian, 2008; Desai & Marsh, 2005;

Fisher, 2005a; Kinloch, 2005; Rickford, 2016; Weathersby, 2015). Rickford (2016) refers

to verbal artistry as Black "speech events" which during the evolution of Hip-Hop,

quickly came to be admired and emulated by mainstream and White youth culture, and

helped to counter older uninformed contentions of verbal deficit. Jackson (2013) argues

that an understanding of the nature of talk, and how to be "in conversation," was essential

in engaging young Hip-Hop artists, whose speech events were fully informed by AAVE.

I will explore the argument about spoken word poetry's connection to Hip-Hop in the

next section.

Spoken Word Poetry, Hip-Hop, Rap, and Emceeing

It is widely known that Hip-Hop developed as a subculture and arts movement

during the late 1970's by poor Black and Brown youth in the South Bronx, N.Y., and that

it consists of four foundational elements: 1) dj'ing - scratching records, mixing beats; 2)

emceeing - rapping/rhyming over beats; 3) breakdancing - dancing over a "break beat"

and 4) graffiti - street art, murals. "Emceeing" is the element that links spoken word poets

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with rappers. As emcees (mc's), they are literally "masters of ceremonies" and people who can "move the crowd" with words and a microphone. Like spoken word poets, rappers engage audiences in a call and response of rhythmic talking. What distinguishes rap from spoken word poetry is that rap must have rhyme and is usually performed in time to an instrumental track. Rap at its core, is poetry spoken over a beat. Therefore, rap can take inspiration and borrow from preceding spoken word works and styles, while standing independently as an individual member of the family (Price-Styles, 2015). Legendary Hip-Hop emcees, Scott La Rock and KRS-One make the relationship between rap and poetry explicit in their song, "My Philosophy" on the 1998 album, "By All Means Necessary"

> I just laughed,
>
> cause no one can defeat me
>
> this is lecture number two,
>
> "My Philosophy"
>
> number one, was "Poetry"
>
> you know it's me…
>
> this is not a demo
>
> in fact, call it a lecture
>
> a visual picture
>
> sort of a poetic and
>
> rhythm-like mixture…

However, as Petchauer (2009) points out, because of the commodification and exploitation of cultural forms such as Hip-Hop in the mid-1980s, today most commercial media representations of Hip-Hop portray it as a narrow musical genre synonymous with rap.

Hip-Hop is of particular interest in the field of educational research because it illuminates the powerful social and political voice for people of color and their experiences with racism and classism in the U.S educational system (Emdin, 2017; Irby & Hall, 2011; Petchauer, 2009, 2015). Bridges (2011) suggest Hip-Hop artists are surrogate teachers and Hip-Hop culture serves as an alternative classroom. Situating Hip-Hop within a metaphor about American education illuminates it's fifth element, "knowledge of self" which is often discussed both publicly and within the scholarship as a later addition to the foundational elements. Introduced in the mid-80's by one of Hip-Hop's founding dj's, Afrika Bambaataa of the Zulu Nation, the fifth element, according to Love (2016) emphasizes understanding and developing the skills and sensibilities needed for determining how racial inequity functions in youths' communities, nationally, and globally. Gosine and Tabi (2016) make a similar argument that spoken word and rapping can facilitate the construction of counter-hegemonic identities and enable marginalized youth to oppose the narrow expectations held of them. The educational legitimacy and academic value of Hip-Hop is part of a thriving scholarly discourse about racial opportunities gaps in American public schools. I will expand on this argument in the next section, followed by a synthesis of the literature pertaining to the role of

educational leaders in addressing racial and cultural inequities in education.   in

education.

Hip-Hop and the Racial Opportunity Gap Discourse

In 2016, several school districts from around the country including Atlanta,

Washington D.C., and Chicago, were awarded funding from The Rockefeller

Foundation's six million dollar pledge to bring 100,000 students to see the 2015 Hip-Hop

inspired musical, *Hamilton*, on Broadway (Brooks, 2016). *Hamilton*, which tells the story

of Alexander Hamilton, one of America's "founding fathers" features rapping, spoken

word poetry, traditional-style show tunes, and predominately Black and Brown[3] actors.

The musical grossed roughly 74 million dollars within its first few short years in

production (Hannam, 2017); and according to Sahm's (2015) article, "Hamilton is Saving

NYC's Education System" published on the New York Post website,

> the modern way Hamilton's story is told…weaves rap, Hip-Hop, pop music and
>
> traditional Broadway together in one beautiful tapestry…has led to
>
> underprivileged, minority students coming away from the show with a changed
>
> view of America and themselves

This is the first time I recall ever hearing the terms "philanthropy", "Hip-Hop", "education", "saving", "minority students", and "school districts" mentioned at the same time and within the same context of America's history. However, historical research shows direct corporate involvement in education often includes financial and in-kind contributions to public education and engagement in state, district, and school-based partnerships (McCarthy, Contardo, & Morsy Eckert, 2010). This funding has the ability to leverage public spending and achieve greater impact on student achievement (Reid, 2012; van Fleet, 2010). According to Lipman (2015), Progressive Era industrialists, bankers, and land speculators (e.g., steel magnate Andrew Carnegie; Leland Stanford, governor of California, who made his fortune speculating on land for railroad construction; Johns Hopkins, owner of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad; and John Rockefeller, head of Standard Oil) spearheaded the development of major US universities. While Sahm's article did not explicitly state from what Hamilton was "saving" New York City's education system, I believe Sahm was hinting at the problem of "racial opportunity gaps" in education – an issue which Noguera and Akom (2000) argue is really a problem of inequality in education that can be explained through a critical race theoretical perspective.

Critical Race Theory in Education (CRT)

CRT emerged during the mid 1970's from criticisms of the Critical Legal Studies Movement (CLS) that failed to adequately address the effects of race and racism in U.S. jurisprudence (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). An influential source of CRT, Derrick Bell, a

Black lawyer, professor, and civil rights activist, argued that incorporating race and racism into a critique of any strategy for social transformation is imperative. Critical race theorists claimed that CLS scholars not only failed to address issues of racial inequality directly but also overlooked and underplayed the role that race and racism played in the very construction of the legal foundations upon which our society rests (Parker & Lynn, (2002). Within the context of education, according to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), CRT is used to argue that racism is pervasive in U.S. public education and must be at the forefront of any analysis of problems with student learning, academic achievement, and school performance, and supports the argument for why American educational architects aligned educational programs to ensure any expectations by Black students to the contrary would go unmet (Duncan, 2017). Yet after more than two decades of CRT scholarship in education, students of color are still not graduating at rates comparable with their White peers, are disciplined at disproportionate rates at K-12 schools, and have limited access to postsecondary opportunities (Donnor, Dixson, Anderson, Howard, & Navarro, 2016). According to Ledesma and Calderón's (2015) synthesis of scholarship of CRT in education, the scholarly literature is divided into two subgenres: 1) K-12 education and 2) higher education. In the area of K-12, where I situate my work, are articles that generally address curriculum and pedagogy, teaching and learning, schooling, policy/finance, and community engagement. In higher education, the work is around colorblindness, selective admissions policy, and campus racial climate.

Atwood and López (2014) argue, CRT is not a "theory" per se, but rather a framework for critically attending to issues of race, and that CRT scholarship emphasizes

storytelling as one way to challenge dominant stock stories that construct realities in order to legitimize the power of the dominant group. As a means to uncover and understand the oppressive mechanisms of society, CRT utilizes storytelling—or "counter-storytelling" to engage, legitimize and support the voices of racial and ethnic minorities and to incorporate their experiences into critiques of the dominant social order (Bagley & Castro-Salazar, 2012). An emphasis on experiential knowledge, according to Bernal (2002), allows researchers to embrace the use of counter-stories, narratives, testimonios, and oral histories to illuminate the unique experiences of students of color, and the need for culturally relevant pedagogies that embrace multiple epistemologies that extend beyond the public realm of formal schooling. Brown, Brown, and Ward (2017) argue that pairing CRT and culturally relevant pedagogy through a critical sociohistorical consciousness to Black history allows for historical analysis in the classroom that is critical and relevant to the lives of young people. History is of particular importance to CRT educational scholarship because as Duncan (2017) states,

> "…schools [during early Black education] sought to mediate the psychological adjustment of Black students to the racial calendar by providing them with the curriculum and instruction to make them more proficient or skilled at the same menial task to which they had been previously relegated to performing and to which White communities would seek to restrict them to carrying out in the future (p. 68).

Duncan (2017) also argues that this distorted account of timing in the racialized history of America contributes to "allochronic" discourses in education, and that CRT has utility for examining how socio-temporal notions of race inform the normalization of racial inequality in public schools and society. From a CRT in education perspective, I believe the United States public education system is reminiscent of a time that predated *Brown vs Board of Education* (1954) and *The Emancipation Proclamation* (1863) – a time where the socio-cultural, political, economic, and intellectual conditions that governed the liberated lives of White people also sustained a system that enslaved Africans and their African American descendants. It is reflective of a moment in American history that is inexcusably misremembered and yet continues to crystalize the ways in which twentieth century American education is practiced. American educators often tell students that literary texts such as *The Scarlet Letter, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Romeo and Juliet* offered more insights into the American psyche than most texts on U.S. history (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Dyches (2017) adds, the revered curriculum, to which so many educators have loyally clung, positions British canonical texts as foundational cultural literacy and offer a thinly veiled attempt to acculturate marginalized students into mainstream society. Emdin (2017) refers to this erasure of Black history from U.S. national memory as "cultural agnosia" – "where there is a deficit in recognizing culture other than one's own that is accompanied by an impairment in discriminating forms of brilliance and modes of expression other than one's own" (p. 483). With this theoretical framing, I will explain the racial opportunity gap discourse in the next section.

Racial Opportunity Gap Discourse

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)(2017) and the

U.S. Department of Education (2017) indicate Black youth, who represent 16% (7.5

million) of students enrolled in U.S. public schools, experience a graduation rate from

high school of 76%, are 19.6% likely to receive out-of-school suspensions, 9% likely to

drop out of school, 17.3% are chronically absent from classrooms, 6% are likely to

complete Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and 36% are enrolled in degree granting

postsecondary educational institutions. In comparison, White[4] youth, who represent 50%

(25 million) of public -school students, and who graduate from high school at a rate of

88%, are suspended at a rate of 6.2%, are 5% likely to drop out of school, 40% likely to

complete AP courses, and 45% are enrolled in a degree-granting institution. NCES

(2017) also reports that of 31 million public school teachers, White educators represent

81% (25.1 million) and Black educators represent 7% (2.2 million) of which 6% are

Black women and 1% are Black men (Bryan and Fordam, 2014). A similarly

disproportionate ratio is true amongst Black principals (7%) and White principals (62%).

Yet despite empirical evidence that Black youth are motivated to learn from Black

educators, they are more likely to be taught by an inexperienced White teacher because of

racial bias in teacher hiring practices, and the severity of racial microaggressions Black

educators experience from their White colleagues (D'amico, Pawlewicz, Earley, &

[4] By "White" I am referring to the racialized group of U.S. descendants of European immigrants who colonized America's land from its' first people (Native Americans).

McGeehan, 2017; Djonko-Moore, 2016; Egalite & Kisida, 2018; Yarnell & Bohrnstedt,

2018).
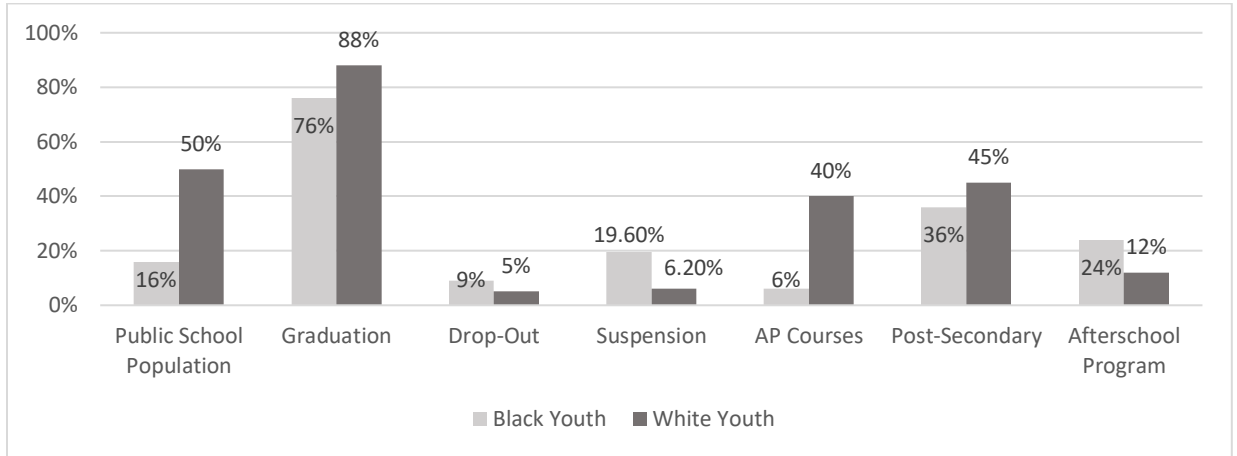
Figure 1: National data about Black and White youth in American public education

(NCES, 2018).
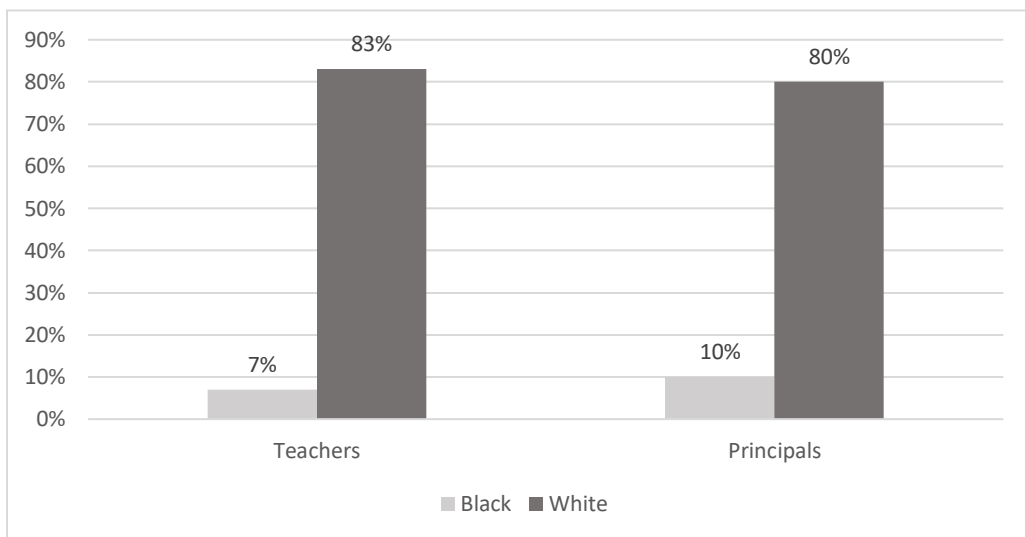
*Figure 2***:** National data about Black and White educators (NCES, 2018).

NAEP scale score
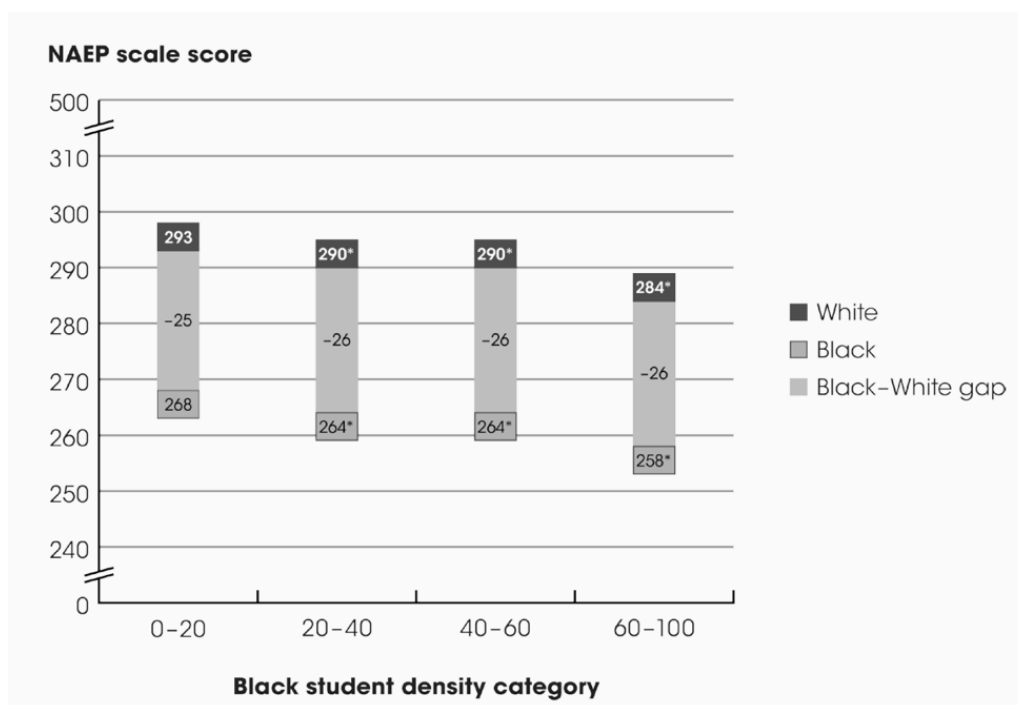
Figure 3: National data about racial disparities on standardized assessments (NAEP, 2015).

In addition, reports from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2015) indicate Black students in fourth and eighth grade score roughly thirty points below White youth on reading and math standardized assessments. In addition, a research report from The Afterschool Alliance (2014), which collected data from over 13,000 U.S. households across the country, indicate that approximately 24% of Black

youth are engaged in afterschool programs, along with 29% of Latinx[5] youth and 12% of White youth. The study also discovered a 60% unmet demand for afterschool programs among Black youth compared to White youth (35%). Relatedly, Hynes and Sanders' (2011) analysis of nationally representative data found that Black youth – particularly those who are poor and most at risk of low achievement – are two times more likely than White youth to attend five hours per week of out-of-school time programming, and that ratio increases over time. It is clear that Black and White youth have drastically different educational experiences that drive twenty-first century public and scholarly discourses about racial opportunity and achievement gaps.

When placed within the broader context of race relations in American society, the causes of the racial achievement gap appear less complex and mysterious; the gap is merely another reflection of the disparities in experience and life chances for individuals from different racial groups (Noguera & Akom, 2000). The term "achievement gap", within contemporary scholarly discourse, has evolved to the "opportunity gap" (Noguera & Akom, 2000) to account for the racially, culturally, and economically disparate levels of access to educational opportunities that would fulfill the "educational debt" (Ladson-Billings, 2006) owed to Black youth. Yet subsequent efforts to close the gap and expand educational opportunity have remained largely unsuccessful because of our uncritical use

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[5] "Latinx" is a term referring to a person of Latin American origin or descent, used as a gender-neutral or nonbinary alternative to Latino or Latina.

of "race" and racial classification in education research (Horsford, 2017). I agree with Carey (2014) that the intentions behind the scholarly talk for framing the "gap" is to illuminate the perpetual and dichotomous hegemonic relationship between Whites and non-Whites that privileges a Eurocentric master/majoritarian narrative that ascribes Black youth as "low achieving" and "below basic", which overlap with terms like "poor" and "urban". As Ladson Billings (2007) states, "we can still walk into schools and hear explanations for poor Black student failure like, parents just don't care…these children don't have enough exposure/experiences…these children aren't ready for school…their families don't value education…they are coming from a culture of poverty" (p. 318). The problem with that narrative is that it reifies a public and academic ethos that fetishizes *gap-gazing* (Gutiérrez, 2008) by not explicitly addressing issues of identity and power. Often, scholars fail to invoke theoretical lenses that counter deficit thinking about students of color as culturally deprived and intellectually deficient, or to provide the kind of remedies that help them to solve their problems (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015).

Warikoo and Carter (2009) suggest that what is thought to be an anti-achievement peer culture among Black youth is actually rooted in other aspects of youth culture – authenticity, Hip-Hop consumption culture, and Black ways of speaking. Hip-Hop in particular cannot be dismissed as merely a passing fad or as a youth movement that will soon run its course; it must be taken seriously as a cultural, political, economic, and intellectual phenomenon deserving of scholarly study of similar movements like Blues, Jazz, the New Negro Renaissance, and the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Arts

Movement (Alridge & Stewart, 2005). However, Hip-Hop's aesthetic in the world of education is often associated with the realm of "leisure" and "anti-intellectualism" (Akom, 2009; Petchauer, 2009). Foundational research about Hip-Hop and the racial opportunity gap by Ferguson (2007) suggests racial disparities on standardized tests scores may be related to the dramatic rise in popularity in Hip-Hop music from Black youth during the late 80's and early 90's. I would argue that Ferguson's notion was a missed empirical opportunity to discover why Hip-Hop appealed to Black youth outside of school. Contemporary research shows that Hip-Hop, when used as a curricular and pedagogical resource, is shown to improve Black and Brown student motivation, teach critical media literacies and foster critical consciousness in primarily urban K-12 educational settings (Alim, Baugh, & Bucholtz, 2011; Belle, 2016; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Irby & Hall, 2011; Prier, 2013; Richardson, 2013). Research also shows that educators of Black youth – who again are likely to be inexperienced White teachers – treat Black language (African American Vernacular English, Ebonics) and Hip-Hop's use in classrooms as a problem, thereby creating racially tense learning conditions (Baugh, 2015; DeBose, 2006; Dyches, 2017; Low, 2010; Scarbrough & Allen, 2014; Wheeler et al., 2012).

Unequivocally, Black youth enter schools where their experiences, histories, and perspectives are largely omitted or discounted. Donnor et al. (2016) ask, how can they be expected to learn and achieve in educational environments where content, instruction, culture, and assessment are racially hostile, exclusive, and serve as impediments for school success? What is needed, according to critical education scholars, is a disruption

of the status quo belief in education as a meritocracy, and support for colorblind approaches to solving problems with student learning and school performance that ignore the institution of race, racism, and White patriarchy that continues to oppress people of color (Bernal, 2002; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Donnor et al., 2016). Scholars in this milieu champion culturally relevant curricula and pedagogies that are responsive to Black youth's intrinsic belief systems, home values, and cultural literacies (Richardson, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lopez, 2011; Morrell, 2005, 2017). One example relevant to this discourse is Critical Hip-Hop Pedagogy (CHHP), which I will describe in the subsequent section followed by an explanation of its theoretical relationship to educational leadership.

Critical Hip-Hop Pedagogy

Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (CHHP) is a fusion of Hip-Hop and Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, which suggests centering learning on student's lives can be used as an important tool for potential teachers to create inclusive educational environments that promote learning for marginalized students. CHHP's origins come from Ladson-Billings' (1995) call for culturally relevant pedagogy that rests on three criteria: (1) students must experience academic success with a foundation for critical thinking; (2) students must develop cultural competence for an empowering self-identity; and (3) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order and develop agency. According to Love (2016),

[C]HHP that draws on the sensibilities and mindsets of Hip-Hop culture is

devoted to teaching resistance, knowledge of self, and self-determination because

those principles are part of the collective identity of the politics of Black life. The

foundation of Hip-Hop culture rests on excavating knowledge to produce new

ways of being and knowing—critical consciousness tied to communal

sensibilities. (p. 417)

CHHP suggests: 1) Hip-Hop is an important lens for socio-political analysis and

representation of marginalized communities, and that youth-driven research on Hip-Hop

and popular culture is an instantiation of reading and acting upon the world; 2)

transformative education for the poor and disempowered begins with the creation of

pedagogic spaces where marginalized youth become aware of how their own experiences

have been shaped by larger social institutions; and 3) students are active agents and as

such should analyze a diverse set of data (Akom, 2009). CHHP constitutes a response to

demands for a culturally responsive pedagogy that emboldens ostracized groups and links

the classroom to their other worlds while teaching scholastic skills that can be used to

challenge the "neoliberal ethos" (Au, 2016; Gosine & Tabi, 2016) that prevails within

mainstream schooling culture. From a CHHP perspective, the education community can

understand why cut backs in arts, music, and after-school programs in underserved urban

communities, during the Reagan era of the 1980s, were key ideological and political

conditions that spawned social and cultural resistance in Hip-Hop (Prier, 2013).

Critical Hip-Hop Literacies (CHHL) stem from new literacy studies (Morrell, 2005), which involve the consumption, production and distribution of print and new media texts by, with, and on behalf of marginalized populations in the interests of naming, exposing, and destabilizing power relations; and promoting individual freedom and expression. According to Richardson (2013),

> Hip-Hop discourse is an extension of the hybrid system of Black discourse, which is itself engaged with mainstream culture and dominant discourses. Black discourse practices influence how Black people read and respond to the social world. They are sociocultural practices forged from existing African ideologies and practices and those that people of Black African descent encountered, developed, or appropriated in the context of negotiating life in European-dominant societies. Hip hop literacies foreground the ways in which people who are socialized into hip hop discourse manipulate as well as read language, gestures, images, material possessions, and people, to position themselves against or within discourse to advance and protect themselves (p. 333).

Critical education scholars argue that Black youth rappers, emcees and spoken word artists demonstrate critical literacies through Hip-Hop aesthetics that are disregarded in the discourse about student achievement (Fiore, 2015; Morrell, 2005; Scarbrough & Allen, 2014), and engages young people in learning practices that have historically valued Black learning. economies of expression, language, social action, and self and community identity (Belle, 2016; Biggs-El, 2012; Fisher, 2003). From this

perspective, spoken word poets and rappers, as emcees ("mc's"/masters of ceremonies),

engage live audiences through a performance of multiple and multimodal ways to

communicate in oral and written form that is not tied to standard American English

(Belle, 2016). The peer-reviewed scholarship about spoken word poetry in education

suggests two main arguments: 1) spoken word poetry functions as a motivating,

culturally relevant literacy pedagogy for urban youth in English classrooms (Camangian,

2008; Fiore, 2015; Fisher, 2005a; Kinloch, 2005; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002;

Scarbrough & Allen, 2014; W. R. Williams, 2018), and 2) as a "liberatory" out-of-school

literacy practice, spoken word poetry promotes youth's critical awareness of the socio-

cultural and political conditions that create their figured worlds (Biggs-El, 2012;

Caraballo, 2017; Eidoo, 2013; Fiore, 2015; Fisher, 2005b). The literature however, does

not provide any knowledge about the teaching artists and how they move as educational

leaders within the American school system. I asked Dr. Maish Winn, author of *Writing in*

Rhythm: Spoken Word Poetry in Urban Classrooms (2006), about this deficit in an e-mail

exchange; she responded,

> "I wish I spent more time sharing Papa Joe's history in *Writing in*
>
> *Rhythm*. Historicizing teaching artists, how they became writers, which writers
>
> influenced them offer new ideas about prospective educators. However, I was
>
> also told by many that they found the teaching artists in my work a bit
>
> intimidating...it was as if these people were unicorns and no one could do what
>
> they did...this certainly was not my intention. In *Girl Time*, I shared profiles of

many teaching artists hoping people could see themselves in at least one."

([February 20, 2018](#))

I wonder how those texts, if used as source materials for educational leadership programs, would inspire school and district leaders to recognize culturally relevant teaching artist as educational assets in classrooms and school buildings. In the next section, I will explain the scholarly discourse about educational leadership for racial and cultural equity through several theoretical perspectives and conclude with a set of research questions for empirical investigation.

Leadership for Educational Equity

Critical perspectives of and within education leadership entails an interrogation of the power structures of education, a critical examination of knowledge production and intellectual resources used to understand and promote leadership, and a concern for social justice (Niesche, 2018). Because educational leaders at the school and district level are key to establishing and fostering the culture and climate of schools, their ways of knowing, attitudes, and assumptions concerning race and culture, and their implications for learning, must be an important part of the discourse concerning culturally relevant and antiracist education (Horsford, Grosland, & Gunn, 2011). According to the scholarly literature, educational leaders oriented to social justice practices can be identified from three different theoretical lens: 1) culturally responsive educational leadership, 2) cross-boundary educational leadership, and 3) applied critical educational leadership.

Culturally responsive educational leadership.

Culturally responsive leadership by simple definition, influences the school context and addresses the cultural needs of the students, parents, and teachers. Khalifa et al.'s (2016) synthesis of scholarly literature about culturally relevant educational leadership, suggest there are five specific behaviors that center inclusion, equity, advocacy, and social justice in school: 1) critical self-awareness; 2) culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation; 3) culturally responsive and inclusive school environments; 4) engaging students and parents in community context; and 5) maintaining high student expectations and the central role of advocacy for students, parents, and community-based causes. Those behaviors are aligned with Horsford, Grosland, and Gunn's (2011) framework for culturally relevant leadership which emphasizes four dimensions critical to the successful leadership of schools in diverse educational contexts: 1) the political context – educational leaders must be sophisticated in their ability to recognize and negotiate the political terrain tied to education policy and practices; 2) a pedagogical approach – educational leaders must incorporate the varied learning styles and perspectives of all students and teachers to meaningfully educate and serve their diverse school community; 3) a personal journey - educational leaders to measure and assess their effectiveness in working with student, family, and community populations are directly connected to their willingness to interrogate and acknowledge their deeply held beliefs and assumptions concerning students who represent racial, ethnic, economic, or linguistic backgrounds or life experiences different from their own; and 4) a professional duty - educational leaders have a duty to adapt to diversity and

incorporate the experiences and perspectives of diverse cultures into the character and culture of their organizations. From this perspective, Hip-Hop educational leaders engage Hip-Hop as pedagogy and context that informs the conditions of their schools and communities and inspires their own critical self-awareness as expressed through Hip-Hop literacies.

Cross-boundary educational leadership.

Cross-boundary Educational leaders (CBL) are individuals who develop strategic partnerships between schools and youth development community organizations that offer educational programs for students (Adams & Jean-Marie, 2011). CBL's view themselves as part of the larger community, and have a strong commitment to social justice, specifically addressing social, cultural, and economic inequities in their districts (Krumm & Curry, 2017). According to Green's (2015) brief review of literature on cross-boundary educational leaders (CBL) role in urban community development, CBL's understand that siloed leadership is insufficient for tackling urban school and community challenges; they leverage networks and serve as bridges between community organizations, and position the school as a central community institution. In addition, CBL's operate across three key levels, which include: 1) leaders on the ground (e.g., administrators, teachers, and community members); 2) leaders in the middle (e.g., school–community directors and coordinators); and 3) leaders in local communities (e.g., civic and business leaders). Lastly, CBL's practices rest on "structural components" that describe how school and community partnerships function, and "normative conditions" which refer to the culture

of shared responsibility and influence between school and community groups (Adams & Jean-Marie, 2011; Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2016).

Within the scholarly literature about educational leadership; however, CBL's are disproportionately underexamined in relation to school building principals and superintendents, despite serving as the key actors in cultivating school-community partnerships Green (2015). Gross et al. (2015) suggest that reciprocally, community partners benefit from their relationships with schools, including learning about schools' inclusive culture, and factors that facilitate successful school-community partnerships including: 1) strong school leadership, 2) an inviting school culture, 3) educator commitment to student success, and the 3) ability to collaborate and communicate with community partners. Notably, 76% of school staff members in Anderson-Butcher et al.'s, (2006) study of 90 school and community based educators, identified a need for partnerships with youth development organizations in out-of-school time that draw connections to the classroom and curriculum, and have a common purpose to solve a problem area of need. This data point is of particular interest for educational leadership because, as Miller (2001) argues, out-of-school time programs can link the values, attitudes and norms of students' cultural communities with those of the school culture as an effective strategy to enhance student achievement. Furthermore, after-school programs are one of the primary policy levers outside of the school day aimed at enhancing children's development and education, and an important component of the effort to close the academic achievement gap (Leos-Urbel, 2015).

Applied critical educational leadership.

ACL transforms a shared vision into reality, with an emphasis on cooperation (vs. competition), incorporating indigenous ways of knowing or cultural intuition and rational thinking in problem solving, where power and influence are shared within a group. According to the literature, ACL is grounded in practices that are framed by social justice and educational equity wherein leadership results from both professional practice and leaders' embodied lived experiences (Santamaría, 2014; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2015). In other words, due to their own experiences with social injustice, educational leaders of color may choose to lead in a way that enables students to participate and succeed in school. In addition, there are nine common ACL characteristics: 1) critical conversations – an educational leader's willingness to initiate and engage; 2) critical race theory lens – educational leaders consider race first, value story as communication, are critical of liberalism, and understand the reality of racism; 3) group consensus is a preferred strategy for decision making; 4) stereotype threat – where educational leaders are conscious of fulfilling negative stereotypes associated with their perceived racial, ethnic, or linguistic group; 5) academic discourse – educational leaders that make empirical contributions to the scholarship on under-served groups; 6) honoring constituents - intentionally including voices and perspectives of the traditionally silenced groups and individuals; 7) leading by example – the work is about civil rights, access to education, and interrupting ignorance as much as it is about leadership ; 8) trust with mainstream - the need to win the trust of the mainstream, as well as the need to prove themselves worthy of leadership positions, and 9) servant leadership - a "spiritual

calling" (Dantley & Green, 2015) to lead with purpose. From an ACL perspective, I argue that educational leaders are influenced by their own racial, cultural and gendered identities, languages and philosophies, and utilize culture as an asset in their work towards closing the racial opportunity gap. I also argue that educational leaders who practice ACL should reflect on the ways in which Hip-Hop culture, given its 40-year history of influencing youth and adults around the world is embedded in their philosophical and pragmatic approach to their work in schools.

Towards Discovering Hip-Hop Educational Leadership

My review of the literature suggests that by examining the racial opportunity gap discourse through a critical race theoretical perspective, it is clear that Black youth's inherent languages (i.e., African American Vernacular English) and out-of-school cultural literacy practices (i.e., rapping, spoken word poetry) are treated as a problem in classrooms, but celebrated within Hip-Hop, and that educational leaders who understand the value of Hip-Hop to Black and Brown youth learning will deem it as an educational opportunity to foster racially, culturally and intellectually liberating learning environments in their schools. The published peer-reviewed literature drawing connections between Hip-Hop and educational leadership is sparse, save for Khalifa's (2013) ethnography of an alternative high school principals' actions towards fostering conditions conducive for students to express their "Hip-Hop identities", which Khalifa describes in his earlier (2010) work as stigmas associated with Black ghettos, stereotypical images of aggressive Black youth, and Hip-Hop oriented street culture.

39

According to Jackson (2013), in the era in which Hip-Hop culture began to assert its power on the cultural and political stage of America and the world, opinions like those above are what many consumers of mass media thought was a "valid" presentation of these dangerous developments in black youth culture.

Khalifa (2013) states,

Though school and classroom policies played a role in marginalizing the existence of Hip-Hop identities in schools – such as rules against "sagging" pants, doo-rags, or "incorrect" usages of the English language in the classroom – the most conspicuous seemed to be the school culture that was hostile and unwelcoming toward Hip-Hop student behavior and proclivity (p. 80).

It must be remembered that the behaviors associated with contemporary Hip-Hop culture are legally sanctioned in society as well, despite their pop media acceptance. Though a great number of traditional White students are also avid fans of Hip-Hop music and culture, there is no evidence that it has had the same impact and informative power on identity formation and appropriation of White students (p. 70).

The principal in Khalifa's (2013) study prompted teachers to respond to the verbal cultural expressions and the Black English language that the students spoke; some even spoke to students in a similar manner. The students were not penalized for their "Hip-Hop behavior" and demeanor, and the principal was able to compartmentalize the

identities from the self-destructive and illegal behaviors associated with Hip-Hop music. The spaces, therefore, in which the students operated, were comfortable for students and led to success for the school. The notion of principals as Hip-Hop leaders in schools is also mentioned in a reflection piece by Benito Mountain (2019) who approached his role of "Hip-Hop Principalship" by grounding his work in five tenets:

1. authenticity - seeking out ways to establish authenticity in interactions
2. speaking truth to power – addressing problems tactfully and courageously
3. challenging the status quo - confronting ineffective practices with research and insight
4. community accountability –collaborating with teachers, students, and families
5. creativity and autonomy - valuing the power of creative expression by creating spaces where students can write, speak and perform in ways that empower them and confront social justice issues

My inquiry seeks to support and extend Khalifa's research and Benito-Mountain's contribution of Hip-Hop to the field of educational leadership by expanding the concept of educational leaders to be inclusive of Hip-Hop teaching-artists who serve as community-partners in schools. And, by making them my units of analysis, I can answer the following three questions:

1. What is Hip-Hop educational leadership?
2. What are the conditions Hip-Hop educational leaders make possible for Black and Brown youth learning and engagement in schools?

3. How does spoken word poetry function in the lives of Hip-Hop educational
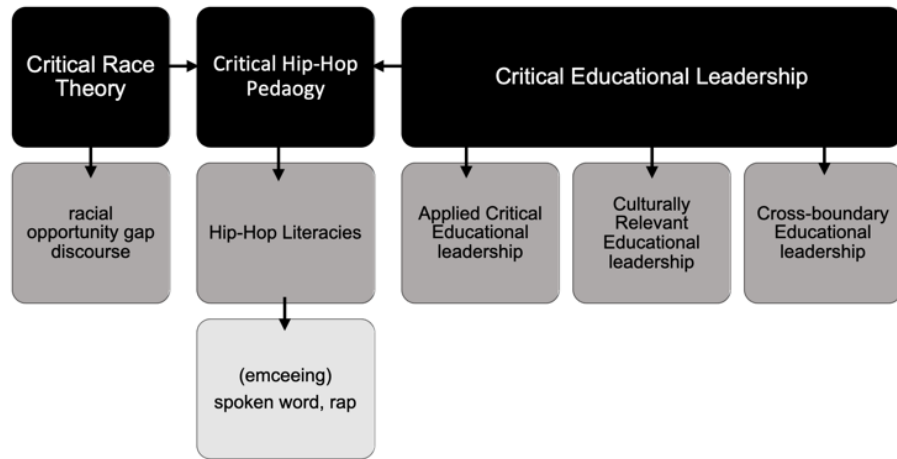
   leaders?

Figure 4: Hip-Hop Educational Leadership conceptual framework

Chapter 3: Hip-Hop Aesthetics as Qualitative Research Methodology

Scholars should never have to wonder if they are too close to their academic interests… if they have to separate themselves from their research in order to achieve scholarly validation...How can they do the questions in their head justice when they do not relate to the methods associated with equity finding the answers? (Mobley, 2019, p. 106).

Legitimized research as an organized sustained commitment of human activity aimed at making sensing of the world we inherit, make and are made by, has progressed in a manner that has deputized (purposefully used here) imperial agents to engage, interpret, and (re)present the lives of *all* people places and things as reality/ies and T/truth/s (McGuire, 2019, p. 76).

I am a Black, American, gay, cisgender man with an Afrocentric way of knowing, who believes that people's stories about their lived experiences are philosophical sites to discover knowledge and truths. I believe for example, that racism is real in American society because I experience myself as an oppressed racialized being every day. Also, as a spoken word artist and educator who grew up with Hip-Hop culture, I believe in its' transformative power as culturally relevant pedagogy, and I intentionally integrate its'

elements in my professional work with young people. Thus, I am unable to philosophically separate myself from this research because I am living the experience of the "thing" I am investigating. I also believe in the value of invoking multiple epistemological positions (ways of knowing) and research methodologies (ways of discovery) in the analysis and interpretation of meanings.

As an educational researcher, my voice causes a disruption in the discourse about quality and validity in qualitative research where the dominate perspective celebrates greater distance between the researcher and the researched, and rarely includes voices from women and Black and Brown people. Essentially, I am antithetical to White supremacy and must practice a "critical race pedagogy", which Ledesma and Calderón (2015) suggests, provides liberating possibilities for Black American intellectuals to reflect upon and teach White people to understand themselves through the history of the other, in much the same way many communities of color understand themselves in relationship to White people" (p. 209). Therefore, I invoke critical race research methodology (CRM) as a perspective to frame my approach to discovering an answer to a question about Hip-Hop educational leadership. Following an overview of the scholarly literature about CRM, I will explain my approach to answering the questions I posed in Chapter 2 about Hip-Hop educational leadership and spoken word poetry, using a Hip-Hop inspired research methodology.

Critical Race Methodology

Critical Race Methodology (CRM) is an analytical framework for education research that provides a tool to counter deficit storytelling grounded in the experiences and knowledge of people of color, and seeks to challenge racism, sexism, and classism and work towards social justice (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race research does not follow any particular set of methods but offers some general aspects that are characteristic (Glesne, 2016; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017; Saldaña, 2014a): 1) CRM is a multidisciplinary political act that focuses on tacit rules that regulate power and voice, and that examines the relationship between theory and practice; 2) CRM reveals the realities of racialized victims through the collection and analysis of their storied experiences with race and racism; and 3) critical race researchers use their findings to challenge the dominant discourse and develop actionable recommendations for racial justice. The notion of "justice" in critical race research is discussed more in the scholarly literature about critical legal studies than it is in education, which many scholars argue is the birthplace of the discipline. However, with increasing policy talks about the "school-to-prison pipeline metaphor" (McGrew, 2016), racially disparate rates of school attendance (Conry & Richards, 2018; Gage, Sugai, Lunde, & DeLoreto, 2013) and academic achievement (Caraballo, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006), the educational research community can benefit from a methodological design grounded in critical race theory that draws connection to critical literacies (Morrell, 2005, 2017), critical pedagogies (Akom, 2009; Caraballo, 2017; Fiore, 2015), and critical educational leadership (Dantley, 2010; Horsford, 2017; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso introduced CRM to the scholarly research literature in their 2002 article, "Critical Race Methodology: Counter-storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research", which described how CRM foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process by: 1) challenging the traditional research paradigm, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color through counter-storytelling; 2) offering a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; 3) focusing on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color; and 4) using the interdisciplinary knowledge base of the ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of color. They define this as a method of telling the stories of people who are often overlooked in the literature, and as a means by which to examine, critique, and counter majoritarian stories (or master narratives) composed about people of color. According to Harper, (2009) master narratives are dominant accounts that are often generally accepted as universal truths about particular groups – such scripts usually caricature these groups in negative ways (e.g., Blacks are hopeless and helpless).

Some CRT scholars with diverse racial and cultural identities deliberately include their own stories as data to document their experiences with the pervasiveness of racism in education (Dyches, 2017; Martin et al., 2014; Martinez, 2014), which can invoke emotional resistance from White educators (Matias, 2013). However, as Matias, Montoya, and Nishi (2016) point out, for educators committed to breaking free from Whiteness, "race cannot be studied without a thorough understanding of White

supremacy and how Whiteness supports it…[educators] must feel uncomfortable talking about White supremacy and the daily manifestations of Whiteness in order to achieve the ideal of antiracism" (p. 15). According to Atwood and López (2014),

counterstories highlight what conventional analytic methods, traditional social science theories, and post-positivist research methods often miss: an understanding that the world is not racially neutral but is always/ already rife with racism...What CRT does seek, however, is a more honest account of the world around us. Whereas traditional research and scholarship searches for truth, CRT scholarship is searching for honesty (p. 1145).

Duncan (2002) suggests CRT scholars should be wary of the pathological tone in their writing (e.g., field notes, memos, interview questions), which might suggest a false empathy for participants. Notably, he adds, "the destructiveness of false empathy of the same-race variety also comes to bear on communities of color when a member or members of the group tells the dominant group what it wants to know about the former group…the latter group then uses this information to destroy or further the oppression of the subjugated group" (p. 91). Notably, McGuire's (2019) critique of qualitative research cites hooks' (1990) argument that institutional modes of writing, thinking, studying, interpreting, critiquing, and creating representations of life are implicated with colonial projects and White supremacist, capitalist, hetero, patriarchal, relations. Critical race scholars refer to this deficit as "academic colonization", "apartheid of knowledge", and "epistemological racism" to describe the narrow knowledge production processes that

function to maintain structures of power and elite interests that exist within and beyond the academy (Bernal, 2002; Perez-Huber, 2009; Scheurich & Young, 1997). With this understanding, I reviewed the sparse scholarly literature drawing connections between racially and culturally based ways of knowing and Hip-Hop research methods in education and learned about "Hip-Hopography".

Hip-Hopography as Critical Race Methodology

> Hip-Hopography can be described as an approach to the study of Hip-Hop culture that combines the methods of ethnography, biography, and social and oral history. Importantly, Hip-Hopography is not traditional ethnography. Hierarchical divisions between the "researcher" and the "researched" are purposely kept to a minimum, even as they are interrogated. This requires the Hip-Hopographer to engage the community on its own terms. (Alim and Hi-Tek, 2006, p. 969)

Scholars agree that Hip-Hopography can be traced to anthropologist James Spady who's 1995 trilogy about conscious rap music introduced knowledge of the aesthetics, values, history, language, culture and modes of interaction of the Hip-Hop speech community (emcees) that are essential to the study of Hip-Hop culture (Alim & Hi-Tek, 2006; Jackson, 2013; Petchauer, 2015). Abe (2009) suggests that to begin to understand how Hip-Hop culture fits into the larger context of the educative process, it is useful to incorporate the work of Howard Gardner (1993) who argued a theory of multiple intelligences, of which Abe relates to the four elements of Hip-Hop culture: linguistic (emceeing), musical (djying), bodily kinesthetic (breaking), and spatial (graffiti).

According to Petchauer (2015), Hip-Hop in educational research is experiencing its second wave in the scholarly discourse. The first wave focused on what Söderman (2013) refers to as "The Academization of Hip-Hop" to describe the knowledge about Hip-Hop as culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy possibilities for schools and institutions of higher education introduced to the scholarly literature (see Chapter 2). Petchauer 's (2009) earlier work describes the first wave as having some distinct features relevant to the field of education and educational research which include teachers centering rap music texts in urban high school curricula. Hip-Hop and the messages constructed in the music are woven into the process of identity formation, which has the potential to be intricately woven into teaching, learning, and nearly all things educational. Published scholarly work in this milieu is rich and centered around the idea that young people are not just knowledge "consumers", but they are also knowledge "producers", and that Hip-Hop is a culturally relevant access point for learning an engagement in classrooms (Akom, 2009; H. B. Hall, 2017; Kim & Pulido, 2015; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). In addition, more higher education institutions around the world, particularly in North America, are engaging Hip-Hop in an academically rigorous manner through courses, research, conferences, and symposia. According to Abe (2009) and Söderman (2013), the Hip-Hop archive at Harvard University suggests there were over 300 courses at American universities related to Hip-Hop in some way in 2005. Furthermore, hundreds of dissertations about Hip-Hop have been written in the past few decades including Carson's (2017) work, *Owning My Masters* which is also a 34-song rap album that tackles issues of racism and rhetoric in academic spaces. However, all

attribute Tricia Rose's (1994) work, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* as the foundation of Hip-Hop educational research. Based on findings from her dissertation, Rose suggests, "rap music and Hip-Hop culture are cultural, political, and commercial forms, and for many young people are the primary cultural, sonic, and linguistic windows on the world" (1994, p. 2).

The second wave, according to Petchauer (2015) entails thinking through how sonic, kinesthetic, linguistic, and visual practices/expressions of Hip-Hop can shape and recreate research The peer-reviewed literature about Hip-Hopography is thin, however, Petchauer (2015) offers - what I argue to be - a methodological framework for "doing" Hip-Hop-centric research, which I interpret as including several aesthetics: 1) sampling – sourcing methods from multiple methodologies; 2) layering – analyzing data within and across levels; 3) flow – organizing the data; 4) rupture – categorizing the data; 5) affect – data analysis; and 6) performance and embodiment – research validity. Inspired by these Hip-Hop aesthetics, I will discuss how I applied them as a framework for my research design in the subsequent sections. in the subsequent sections.

Sampling: Remixing Methodologies and Methods

Sampling is most commonly recognized as a process by which music producers create Hip-Hop instrumental tracks called beats. Specifically, a producer captures an audio sound artifact from a previous recording (usually vinyl records) by using a digital instrument called a sampler. A sound artifact captured might be a drum beat or snare, a section (i.e., stab) played from a horn, or any other part of a

recording. The producer then uses those sound samples from different sources to create a new beat through various techniques. (Petchauer, 2012, p. 138)

Situating Hip-Hopography's framework through a critical race methodological lens for me, became a form of intellectual resistance to traditional qualitative research methods. My initial thoughts about steps for research design and data analysis were anchored to methods I learned throughout my doctoral coursework; however, I was not satisfied with invoking one approach. Therefore, I decided to "sample" certain aspects of different methods that were in alignment with my onto-epistemological commitments, thereby leaving opportunity for empirical innovation (see Table 1). While "sampling" has no foundational source in the scholarly literature about qualitative research methodologies, I argue from a critical race methodological (CRM) perspective, that drawing from multiple empirical approaches satisfies CRM's aim to be inclusive of multiple epistemologies.

In terms of identifying participants for the study, I was inspired by **Black Feminism** and **Participatory Action Research**. According to Few (2007),

Doing Black feminism is to balance a gender consciousness with race consciousness (e.g., race identification, power politics, system blame, and collective action orientation…methodologically, Black feminists and womanists use a variety of traditional (e.g., interviews, surveys, ethnographies) and nontraditional (e.g., poetry, diaries, creative art, photography) data to examine the lives of Black women and their families (p. 455).

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Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an applied research method that integrates members of a community that have traditionally been exploited and expressed under study in the quest for information, and their ideas influence future actions (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009; B. Hall, 1992; Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2007; Whyte, 1989). PAR has a strong affiliation with feminism, since both perspectives have in common their theoretical assumptions, values, and goals about the participatory nature of the process, its critical stance towards social power structures, its democratic worldview, and its commitment to achieving social change through a combination of generation of knowledge and action (Krumer-Nevo, 2009). Lykes, Lloyd, and Nicholson (2018) suggest,

> Post-colonial feminist researchers analyze the circulations of power that privilege some - most frequently highly educated, White, northern hemisphere women and men - while marginalizing others through facilitating a variety of participatory and action research (PAR) processes, including action research, participatory action research, and community-based participatory research. (p. 406)

From a postmodern perspective, according to Jacobs (2016), feminism is seen as a powerful intellectual influence on action research and PAR due to a shared epistemology that knowledge and reality is subject to constant change, and that reality is fluid, local, and constructed in the mind. Feminist researchers focus on power, the relationship between the researcher and research participants, the connections between knowledge and feelings, and the construction of knowledge (Maguire, 1996). Critical qualitative

researchers suggest that the two primary objectives of PAR are 1) the production of knowledge and action directly useful to a community and 2) empowerment through consciousness-raising (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2007; Simonson & Bushaw, 1993). The success of PAR depends on the depth of mutual trust and commitment held by all participants, followed by a joint-agreement on the research design, and concludes with a shared reflection and consolidation of the learning and a reexamination of the political, social, and economic conditions facing communities (Brydon-Miller, 1997). According to Brydon, Miller and Maguire (2009), affirming the notion that ordinary people can understand and change their own lives through research, education, and action, PAR openly challenges existing structures of power and creates opportunities for the development of innovative and effective solutions to the problems facing our schools and communities.

PAR is democratic, non-coercive and participatory, that is, in partnership with people in the community; it aims to achieve social justice and to eradicate inequality through research and development with the people as co-researchers and participants, rather than *on* the people of a community as subjects in inquiries by outside, objective researchers (Cahill, 2007; Cahill, Quijada Cerecer, & Bradley, 2010; Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2007; Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). According to Whyte (1989) "PAR provides a critical safeguard against self-delusion by the researcher and unintentional misleading of colleagues through a rigorous process of checking the facts by those with firsthand knowledge before any reports are written" (p. 381), and is based on the following set of assumptions:

1. the research literature in any single discipline provides a very inadequate base for solving important practical and theoretical problems;

2. the standard model does not represent the one and only way to advance scientific knowledge and limits the possibility of encountering creative surprises;

3. those creative surprises are most likely to occur if we get out of our academic morass and seek to work with practitioners whose knowledge and experience is quite different from our own?

Glesne (2016) suggests that PAR is associated with critical theory in that it is action research committed to social transformation and where all participants are full partners in the research process, from shaping the questions, to designing the inquiry, to gathering data, to making meaning of the data and communicating that meaning. According to Zuber-Skerritt (2018), PAR developed in contrast to the "professional expert model" where traditionally, the researcher enters the community or organization, gathers data, interprets the results, and later recommends the proposed action, PAR aims to improve work practices through collaborative inquiry following a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, and to gain a better understanding of the change and development processes. PAR is linked to the theories and work of Brazilian activist and educator Paulo Freire (1970) who coined the term "conscientization" to explain how both educator and student, or by extension, researcher and researched, as equal and active participants in the formation of the educational or research process (Brydon-Miller, 1997; Cahill, 2007; Jacobs, 2016).

My desire to learn from participant's told experiences is a key element of

Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004), which analyzes stories through

temporality - the past present and future of people, places and things and events

understudy, sociality –the social conditions under which people's experiences and events

unfold, and place – the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries or

sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place. I was not only curious about

the content of stories, but also *how* stories are told; which in terms of traditional methods

are in alignment with **Thematic Analysis, Critical Events Analysis** and **Structural**

Analysis in qualitative research (Glesne, 2016; Webster & Mertova, 2007). I am also

aware that as a spoken word poet and Hip-Hop educator working within and outside of

school systems, I am an embodiment of the very "thing" I am interested in discovering.

Within the realm of qualitative research, the notion of "embodiment" is a key component

of **Critical Hermeneutic Phenomenology (CHP)** - the last methodological stance I

sample for my research.

According to Mobley (2019), critical hermeneutic phenomenology is both a

philosophy and a methodology that centers on the subjective experiences of groups and

individuals in an attempt to disclose the world as experienced by those being studied, and

where researcher biases and assumptions are *included* and *essential* to the interpretive

process. In addition, Kakkori (2010) suggets, phenomenology is concerned with finding

the essence of the things, whereas hermeneutics sees that everything has its "being"[6] in language and interpretation. Hermeneutic phenomenology stands in stark contrast to Husslerian phenomenology, which also seeks to illuminate 'being' as an intricate human state, but asks researchers to set aside (or bracket) their own perceptions and experiences of the phenomenon under investigation by decentering their values system and worldview (Glesne, 2016; Saldaña, 2014b). In order to understand the phenomenological idea, according to Yüksel and Yıldırım (2015), it is important to examine the meaningful, significant, and deliberate lived experiences of individuals or groups that invite them to serve as co-researchers in discovering the essence of the phenomena. A phenomenological account gets inside the experience of a person or group of people and describes what participants have experienced, how they have experienced it, and their sensemaking regarding various effects relative to the phenomenon by drawing upon various sources to bring forth multiple understanding (e.g., African-American fiction, poetry, television sitcoms, cinema, and song lyrics) (Harper, 2009; Mobley, 2015, 2019). Harper (2009) states, "the researcher and readers of a phenomenological study should be able to say, 'I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that'" (p. 703). Lastly, as a spoken word artist and a poet, I was inspired by **poetic transcription** (Byrne, 2017; Corley, 2019; Dill, 2015; Glesne, 1997) as a method for transforming qualitative data into poems, which can then be interpreted and analyzed for meaning.

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[6] In hermeneutic phenomenology, "being" is associated "Daesin", a Heideggarian term used to portray that entity or specific aspect of our humanity which is able to wonder about its' existence and inquire into its own being; see: Heidegger (1962/2008) in A. Hofstadter (Ed.), *The basic problems of phenomenology*.

Audience and Positionality

I am clear however, that my personal experiences as a Black man, a Hip-Hop educator, a spoken word poet, and a community leader might suggests a threat to validity within the dominant, Eurocentric, positivist empirical paradigm that substantiates truths as evident through quantitative research methods that hearten the distance between researcher(s) and participant(s). Critical qualitative research on the other hand, where I situate my work, is an iterative, reflexive, and intersubjective process for both the researcher and the participant. From a critical qualitative perspective, researchers are activist scholars - committing themselves to using their privileged position and research for social justice ends (Glesne, 2016). More specifically, according to Leigh (2014), they accept that emotional and intellectual autobiography are not only constructed and reconstructed through research, but are inevitably what draw researchers to their studies in the first place. Furthermore, from a critical race perspective, the notion of colorblindness is disrupted by non-White researchers who center race and racism in their methodology. Thus, my research interests, while personal, present no issues with quality or validity unless I neglect to document and reflect upon my epistemological assumptions and positionality.

To illustrate this point, I will draw from a conversation I had with my husband about my research interests and personal experiences with racism in education. He and I are both Black, gay, cisgender men with graduate degrees. However, my husband attended schools and colleges with predominately Black educators and culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy that presumably affirmed his Blackness and his intelligence.

Whereas the majority of my education occurred in schools with predominately White educators and with curricula that centered European-American history. When I told my husband about my interests in understanding how Black and Brown youth experience race, racism and patriarchy in schools as expressed through spoken word poetry, he laughed and said, "I don't understand why this is so important…of course our education system is racist, that's why I went to Black schools…your research does not speak to my experiences, so I don't get it…and spoken word poetry is not something new or innovative to Black people". He exposed my epistemological assumption that because we are both Black men, we must share the same meanings and experiences with race in education. After that conversation, it was clear that identifying my audience is a necessary first step to approaching quality in qualitative research.

Toward this goal, I submit that I write for those individuals who produce and consume scholarship about racial equity in education for the purpose of improving policy, research and practice in schools and communities that liberate Black and Brown people from institutional racism and patriarchy. Furthermore, my approach to research quality is an emancipatory, political, and literary act that seeks to disrupt cultural hegemony in the academy through critical reflection and social action. Which means I too, must invoke my own "written" and "spoken words" as reflexive practice throughout the discovery process. The following excerpt from an original poem was inspired by this idea:

"Dear Academy"

Tony Keith, Jr. (2019)

and the scholars who talk

and tell their stories

about the academy

remixing their stories

about the academy

that ain't never been for me

about the academy

representin' so poorly

about the academy

that can't even afford me

about the academy

that tries to ignore me

about the academy

scrit-scratchin' up my glory

about the academy

and how they adore me

This poem is an expression of my experiences with racism within

predominately White academic spaces celebrate my creativity but misunderstands my

intelligence. That poem is also about ensuring my scholarship is accessible to Black and Brown communities outside of higher education, which inspired my approach to confirming data findings from this study to be discussed in Chapter 4.

Table 1 *Sampling Methodologies and Methods*

Methodology / Method	Sampled	Purpose
Critical Race Methodology	centering race and racism, and invoking multiple epistemological perspectives	research design
Hip-Hopography	Hip-Hop aesthetics: sampling, layering, flow, rupture, affect, embodiment and performance.	methodological framework
Black Feminism and **Participatory Action Research**	Using participatory based methods to disrupt power dynamics between participants and researchers, with an intentional focus on including perspectives of Black and Brown women.	participant selection research design data analysis
Poetic Transcription	Developing poems from emic qualitative data	data analysis

Narrative Inquiry	using stories as data	data analysis
	temporality, sociality, and place	
	structure and themes of told stories	
Critical Hermeneutic Phenomenology	including researcher bias in the interpretive process.	data analysis

The Squad

I am opting to refer to the people whose stories I learned from in this study as "the squad" because quite honestly, I think it sounds cooler than "participants", and it better reflects the language I use within my community. The squad members assembled for this study come from community-based organizations and youth development non-profits that are housed within urban public high schools around the U.S. Inspired by Cherry's (2019) work, "Unmuted", which documented conversations about social justice with contemporary philosophers who "excite her", I asked some of my favorite people to participate with this project. According to Cherry (2019), "there's nothing wrong with being selfish as long as it benefits others" (p. xiv). Members of the squad are individuals who are a part of a professional network of Hip-Hop artists, educators, and youth developers, who identify as spoken word poets, rappers, and emcees; some refer to themselves with the same word soup I mentioned in Chapter 1. Within the squad of all Black and Brown people are five women, five men, five parents, nine have undergraduate degrees, three have graduate degrees, one has a GED, three identify Spanish as their first

language, and there is a spectrum of religions and faiths represented (e.g., Christian, Islam, Judaism). I used pseudonyms for the squad based on the names they chose for themselves, or the names of spoken word poets, rappers, and musicians that came directly from their transcripts.

Table 2: *The Squad*

Name	Location
1. Amiri	New York, N.Y.
2. AL	Washington D.C.
3. Grace	Detroit, M.I.
4. Jill	Washington, D.C.
5. Lauryn	Washington, D.C.
6. Lucille	New York, N.Y.
7. Mabel	Washington, D.C.
8. Rakim	Manchester, CT.
9. Donatello	San Francisco, CA.
10. Yusha	Washington D.C.

I conducted and audio recorded individual, in-person and virtual interviews with members of the squad that on average, lasted an hour. I asked each of them to share their

biographical story as it related to their personal experiences in education, and with spoken word poetry, and about their journey towards becoming a Hip-Hop teaching artist working inside schools. Because I knew the participants, I approached each interview as if it were a casual yet focused conversation. I am also a professionally trained life coach and believe that by asking people reflective questions about their lives, it allows them an opportunity to access emotions, stories, and beliefs connected to their memory that spark clarity about a "thing". This practice includes listening deeply to understand people's perspectives; permitting time for silence and for people to think; offering personal stories that relate to people's experiences as a practice of empathy and solidarity. While all of the people I interviewed speak English fluently, I encouraged them to speak in whatever language made the most sense for them in describing their experiences, and when necessary asked for a translation.

The data from the squad's interviews resulted in approximately 13 hours of audio data, 10 transcripts with close to 14,000 words each - totaling up to 140,000 words to analyze and discover answers to my questions: 1) What is Hip-Hop educational leadership? 2) What are the conditions Hip-Hop educational leaders make possible for Black and Brown youth learning and engagement in schools? 3) How does spoken word poetry function in the lives of Hip-Hop educational leaders? In Chapter 4, I will discuss my methods for data analysis using poetic transcription and the remaining Hip-Hop aesthetics from the methodological framework (layering, flow, rupture, affect, embodiment and performance).

Chapter 4: Poetic Transcription as Hip-Hop Data Analysis

As a poet and spoken word artist, I have a natural inclination to translate meanings through creative writing and speech. According to the scholarly literature, the method that best reflects my way of knowing is poetic transcription. Inspired by the emerging scholarship about "poetic knowledge" - a term connoting the use of poetry less for expressive and literary means, and more for the purposes of generating or presenting data (Dill, 2015; Furman, Lietz, & Langer, 2006), I decided to analyze my squads data using poetic transcription as a moment for empirical innovation. Poetic transcription, according to Glesne (1997) blurs accepted boundaries between art and science, explores shapes of intersubjectivity, and examines issues of power and authority, including that of the researcher/author through three foundational components: 1) the words would be the participants, not the researchers; 2) pull phrases from anywhere in the transcript and juxtapose them; and 3) keep enough of the words together to represent the participants speaking rhythm, and ways of saying things. Dill (2015) suggests, one of the strengths of generating research and interpretive poetry is that the presentation of poems-as-data can allow a diverse set of audience members to engage with the research, and the poetic form leaves inspires readers to focus on the content and meaning. Poetry as a research strategy can challenge dichotomous thinking; for example, research poems expose the false separation of science and art, which itself is maintained within a web of complex power relationships (Leavy, 2010).

To be clear, as Byrne (2017) argues, poetry has been used as a method to represent data in educational research for some time having been first written about in 1997 by Laurel Richardson's "Fields of Play" but, "to say that educational researchers cannot use poetry in their research because they are not poets is to misinterpret their intent. The primary intent of researchers is to represent their data in alternative ways. Poetry is not their aim but a means" (p. 41). The poetic transcription process takes on several forms depending on the researcher, but Glesne (1997) offers a summary of methods I think are useful:

> "Begin with coding and sorting, read and re-read the transcripts, generate major themes, then code and sort the text by those themes. Use of "action words" like "attending school, being a researcher", etc. Re-read under one theme, reflect to understand the essence of what the participant was saying. Poetic transcription demands less-ordered structure. Try to make sense of the data, but also attempt to use participant's words to convey emotions. Use liberty to repeat words, drop or add word endings, and change verb tenses" (p. 253).

In addition, Byrne (2017) offers, the process of poetic transcription/analysis/interpretation takes as its starting point data, reflective notes, field notes and the literature, which are combined into stanzas which place the participants' words alongside those of the researchers reflections, interpretations and the voices that come from the literature. I will explain my approach for analyzing the poetic transcriptions through "layering" in the next section.
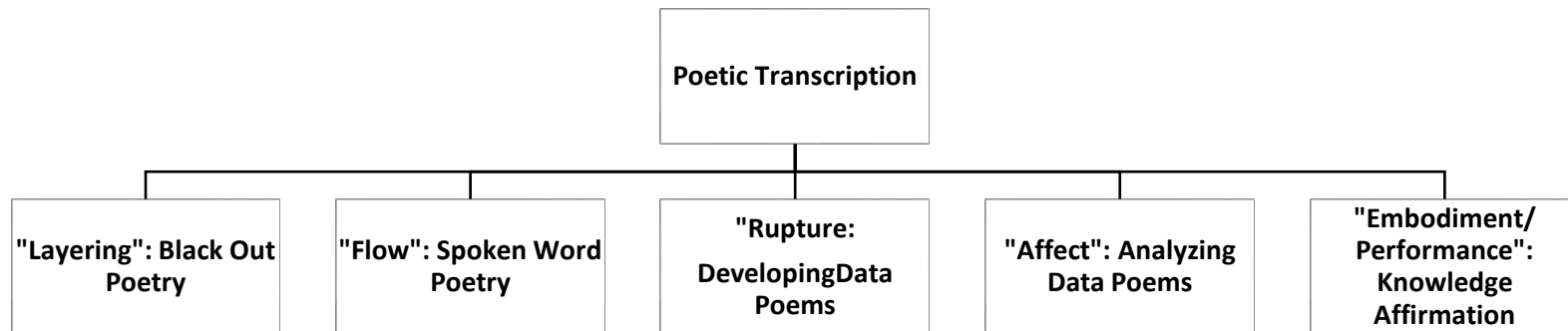
Figure 5: Hip-Hop Poetic Transcription Data Analysis Framework

"Layering": Black Out Poetry

If sampling is the creative process that garners material, "layering" is what is done with the materials? to shroud their identification to untrained eyes and to add style (Petchauer, 2015). Within the context of Hip-Hop, layering is a stylistic component associated with graffiti artists, but it is also evident in the ways in which rappers layer meanings of words in songs across variations of language (Alim et al., 2011; T. Rose, 1994). To begin my layering process and for the purpose of removing any information on the transcripts that would disclose the identities of my squad, I was inspired by the visual element of "black out poetry" I saw on Instagram (@makeblackoutpoetry). Black out poems are created when a poet takes a marker (usually black marker) to already established text –like in a newspaper (see: Kleon, 2010) – and starts redacting words until a poem is formed (Brewer, 2014). The key thing with a blackout poem is that the text and redacted text form a sort of visual poem. Towards this purpose, I used the black color of the highlighter function in my word processor to "black out" any names of people or places that my squad specifically requested not to be utilized in the research, as well as any words or phrases I deemed as unnecessary for the purpose of understanding meaning, that would not disrupt the integrity of the text (e.g., "it", "an", "the", "yeah", "um", "you know what I'm saying" etc.).

Before performing the blackout poetry technique, I read all of the transcripts several times while simultaneously listening to the audio recordings. I noticed that both listening to their voices and reading the actual words spoken from the transcript, triggered

memories from the interview and I began to recognize the rhythm and cadence of the

squads spoken words – which is a process that would inspire the next step in my data

analysis, "flow".

Mabel

when I came in figuring out what the kids felt like their school needed. our job was to transform the school. what does the school needs. A kids don't always talk in the most, palatable language, they be like, "this school is fucked up", this school is dry, this school some shit, teachers don't give a fuck, i'd be like Okay. what I hear you saying is that you would like to dress down, you ? You would like the opportunity to have your cell phones they'd be like, yeah right. out of those conversations birthed these projects one of those projects was Fridays on fleek where kids could dress down for a dollar. money we made was going to Saturday school so t kids can have food to eat at Saturday school, they got to bring in their phones we played music and put up streamers fun stuff on Friday. we created this weekly spirit initiative

Rakim

my mom my father. A my brother and sister. speak Spanglish my mom, went to bilingual emersion school spoke English as a second language she was labeled special education as well as her counterparts. went through remedial education fearful speaking Spanish to us we spoke Spanglish she struggled Everybody in my family speaks English as a second language. impact our educational experience my parents didn't have the best schooling but they tried to navigate in different ways.

Yusha

electives, I no longer want to come to school. good grades math, science, social studies, and English was a byproduct of being the building had some other things I wanted to do. You took away all of the things I wanted to do. So when they say we need more kids engaged, you took away all of the things that makes them engage, because you want them to engage?" y'all stupid? It's not logic. "we need to get these test scores our jobs are on the line, we're not gonna do this with great care, purpose and intention". "We're gonna check it off, if anyone says we didn't do what we were supposed to do, can go back and show we increased time in seats'". the system kids in school", no biggest attendance problems in the nation. kids come to school when they want to. kids need to sit in class, they're not in class, they're leaving...walking hallways find ways to understand why kids won't sit in a class a school completely disengaging for the kid, testing them putting them on sped only way they can explain kids[s] disinterested consistently. "Oh, he must have ADHD" No! He's an eagle but you're trying to make him swim. Let him have his wings. kids highly interested in music aint no music in the school, they're hurting. kids who are artist, aint no art in the school, they're hurting. Where's my inspiration? a girl at school wants to start her own fashion line. She got a logo everything ready. She like, "I can work on my fashion until I come to school..for eight hours a day I can't touch my fashion my school has nothing for me maybe Math she's like, yeah, my Math class ain't they don't address what I trying to do. math should be addressing you trying to do an economic level". actually gave her a four step math problem how much profit she was gonna make for the shirts she was gonna sell. taught this Math I would do it" But I'm like "they're not What they're teaching you book is theoretical, not practical". She aint getting what she need. She a hellraiser and there are many adults in the building say "I wouldn't give that girl one opportunity we've tried to give her opportunities before against them I said, "you never get her an opportunity she wanted." You can't force-feed.

Grace

principal is a fan be tripping that I'm in there on the, radio always trying to play it down. let the kids figure out who i am later. I play it down. can't help the way I look, like artists walking in the door a poet in residence a energy. that school, kids amazing, culturally diverse students, Muslim students, Mexican and white African Americans student population underserved enclosed minority when I come in all the black girls who is that? i dont look like a teacher or talk like one. I am the escape root.

principal working in confines adore s loves his students, but he can't do it by himself. my kids ribbon cutting babies on stage. i take them. My art isn't a separation from my

Figure 6: Black Out Poetry Method

"Flow": Spoken Word Poetry Transcription

Although layering is what is done to the samples, the purpose of this process is not to create a unified product whose parts are seamlessly indistinguishable from one another; samples that are layered "flow" together, and this flow is a key attribute in Hip-Hop music and language (Petchauer, 2015). According to Hanley (2008), the current that flows into the reservoir of rap is the Afri-cultural gift with words, both written and spoken. To develop flow from the layered data samples, I started reading the words that were not blacked out on the transcript out loud and noticed they sounded like a spoken word poem. I then recorded myself speaking these words in rhythm which I later transcribed into poetic transcriptions.

Spoken Word Audio Clip: Amiri

first recorded when I was 14,
I loved it
at this upper class school   played sports   don't go
to become a rapper.   that's not the
narrative.   always knew i wanted to touch my folks
make an impact for justice.   always knew I wanted to make
an impact   on the lives of the people   my family   my
community.   in the George Bush era,
becoming a professional athlete.
hear   stories of Jackie Robinson, Willie Mays and Kurt
ertson,   go to Stanford, play
baseball,   the major leagues,   then   have a platform where
people will listen   Yo, George Bush don't care about nobody
change the tax laws that,   people listen to me. ended up
playing football   never shook the music bug.
literally never went away.   it was not planned.
divinity
for real.
recorded projects   all throughout high school.
got to college,   every   break,   come
home,   set up my stuff   in a closet
recording in my closet   my dorm rooms   ridiculous   I just
never let it go.

first recorded
when I was 14
I loved it
at upper class school
played sports
don't go
to become a rapper
that's not the narrative

always knew
I wanted to touch my folks
make an impact
for justice
always knew
I wanted to make an impact
on the lives
of the people
my family
my community
in the George Bush era

become a professional athlete
Jackie Robinson, Willie Mays
Kurt Robertson
go to Stanford
play basketball
the major leagues
have a platform
people will listen
George Bush
don't care about nobody

Figure 7: Spoken Word Poetic Transcription Example #1

Spoken Word Audio Clip: Grace

Blacked Out Transcript	*Poetic Transcription*

Poetic Transcription

art was never enough for me
I'm a poet
from a Black city
Detroit
a young activist
since 16
Black student leader
organizer against
White supremacist practices

state paper
student paper
a journalist by trade
a poet
studied journalism
political science
I was an activist, first
lending my voice
to organizations
Black student union
took over the university

my roots are activism
going into schools
went back to school
I graduated
spoke to the student body
I knew
I was supposed to go
back inside
and talk
to Detroit kids
that became my life
no matter what
been all over
in front of youth
in Brazil
in front of youth
in South Africa
most memorable '
poetry writing workshops
in Soweto
a game changer

Figure 8: Spoken Word Poetic Transcription Example #2

Spoken Word Audio Clip: Jill

Blacked Out Transcript

fourscore and 33 years

next generation.

artist. Yeah. moving towards installation used to be a poet. writ g was my first art.

middle school. poetry units feeling. words high school def poetry jam, eating it up memorize Saul William poems spit those city at peace write spit

enamored by words academically gifted and talented communication, arts and writing.

school magnet program bus people from home programs white. could count on my hand people of color five. sitting in class internalized shit I gotta prove I didn't get there because of affirmative action I'm smart,

Poetic Transcription

four score and 33 years
next generation artist
moving towards installation
used to be a poet
writing was my first art
middle school poetry units
feeling words
high school
Def poetry jam
eating it up
memorizing Saul Williams poems
spit those
city at peace
write, spit
enamored by words
academically gifted, talented
communication arts, writing
school magnet program
bused people from home
programs, White
could count on my hand
people of color
five
sitting in class
internalized shit
I gotta prove
I didn't get there
because of affirmative action
I'm smart

Figure 9: Spoken Word Poetic Transcript Example #3

Through blackout poetry and spoken word poetry transcriptions, I was able to illuminate approximately 75,000 words for the next level of analysis. I uploaded the poetic transcripts in to NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program, to begin organizing the data into manageable chunks for analysis. My inclination was to *break down* the poetic transcripts into smaller "data poems" - a term championed in the qualitative research literature by Langer and Furman (2004) to connote the use of poetry less for expressive and literary means, and more for the purposes of generating or presenting data. I will explain this process in the next section utilizing the Hip-Hop aesthetic of "rupture".

"Rupture": Breaks in Data Poems

Ayala and Zaal (2016) state, "like art, analysis involves movement and creativity, as straight lines of reasoning are 'ruptured', its pieces re-examined from different angles, then reconfigured to forge a new whole" (p. 7). In order for a rupture to take place, flow must first be established; this pairing pertains to the interruption of a sonic pattern – such as the vital role of the break in Hip-Hop (Petchauer, 2015). This practice is much like *beat juggling* - an aspect of turntablism, wherein a DJ uses two copies of the same record to manually deconstruct a beat down to its basic parts and then artfully reconstruct them into a new form appreciated by listeners. To rupture the poetic transcriptions and develop data poems, I first uploaded them in to NVivo (qualitative data analysis software) as separate data files, which I named according to the squad's pseudonym. Then, I read through the poetic transcriptions several times to identify the *breaks*, which I

determined by the flow of the content from the interview. Due to the diversity of the poetic transcriptions, I created data poems using a variety of methods, such as creating breaks based on the squad's responses to my questioning, or topical changes, shifts in storylines, or completions of a particular thought or idea. Without imposing what I understand their experiences to be, I allowed the poems (and the narrators) freedom to stand on their own, which Corley (2019) suggests represents of each participant's beauty, complexity, and power, and helps "show" what it feels like to live their experiences. The result was 180 different data poems, each with their own flow, which I described, titled and coded (labeled) in NVivo based on words or phrases taken directly from the squad's responses.

Figure 10: NVivo Data Poem Example #1
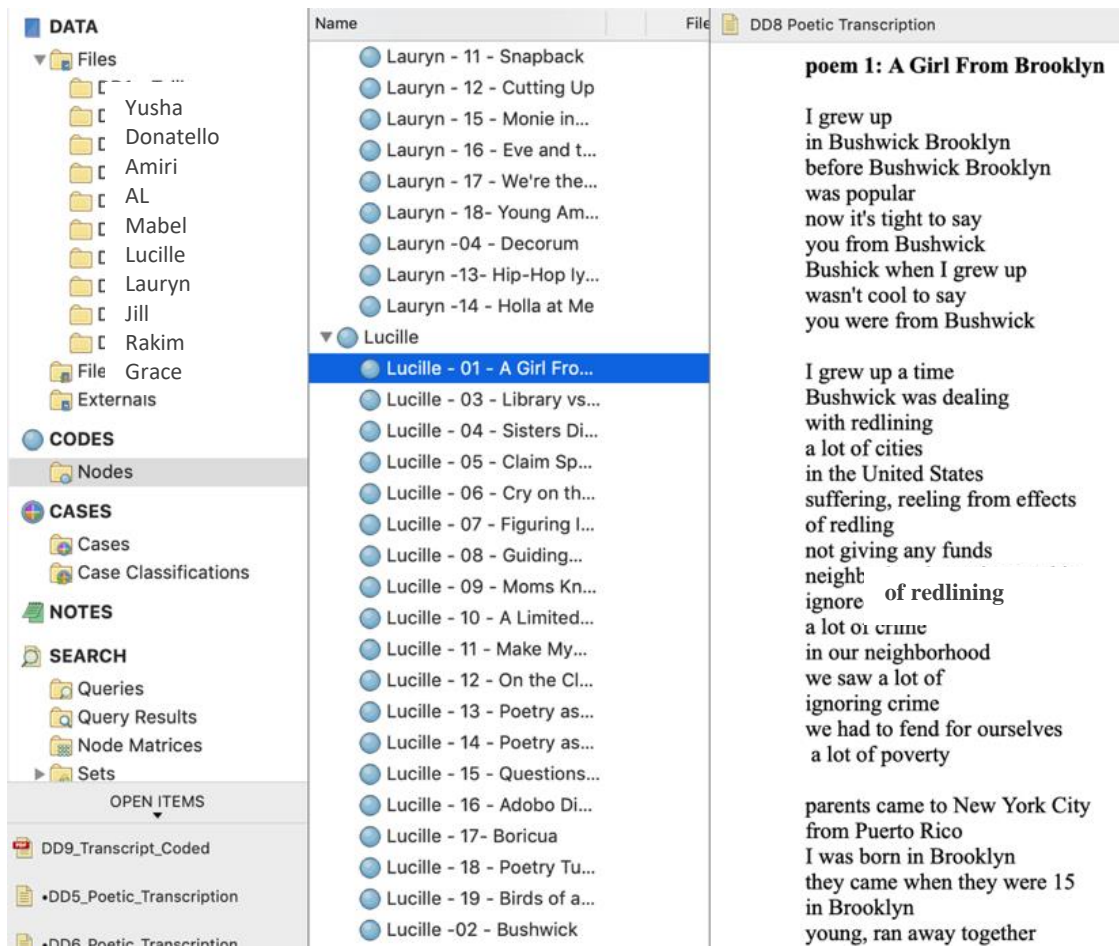
Figure 11: NVivo Data Poem Example #2

The new flow created from the data poems produced yet another opportunity for rupture. At this stage of analysis, I returned back to my research questions to determine how I could answer them by discovering meanings from the data poems. My overarching question, "what is Hip-Hop educational leadership" is both philosophical and theoretical.

Philosophically, I wanted to know what members of my squad *believe* about Hip-Hop and education leadership within the context of American public schools. Theoretically, I wanted to know about their praxis, or ways of doing the work of a Hip-Hop artist who serves as a community-partner in schools. My sub questions, "What does Hip-Hop educational leadership make possible for learning and engagement conditions in American public schools?" and "How does spoken word poetry function in the lives of Hip-Hop educational leaders?" are also theoretical inquiries about praxis. With "belief" and "practice" as ideas for deeper analysis I read through several data poems across the squad and noticed there were two categories of data poems emerging: stories and beliefs.

Story data poems.

Donatello, "Kids Barking"	Lauryn, "Smart and Separated"

we told the kids,
"studio runs
from 3:20pm - 6:00pm"
I was in the studio
with kids until 9 or 10pm
one day I had
more than I could handle
six students
I was working with one
in the studio
other five were in
the teachers lounge
I get a knock on the door
one of the kids like,
    "you should come out here
    come out here
I come out
two of my students
are barking at each other
going hard as fuck
i'm like,
    "shit, calm your nerves
    calm down"
one of my students
was a junior
already had two strikes
in the building
one more, he was gone
I got in his face
I got in his ear like,
"I know you're pissed
if you wanna fight
go to the park
where it's not gonna be seen
he knew what could happen
i'm stopping it
kids keep on barking
	three teams at the school
	the bears
	the stars
	the voyagers
	
	I got on the bus
	everybody like,
	    "new girl
	    what team you on?
	    the stars
	    or the bears?"
	I open my little paper
	"the voyagers"
	they was like,
	    "oh, you were voyager"
	I had no idea
	what that meant
	
	I got to school
	realized all the people
	on the bus
	looked at me, differently
	Black
	
	I was in classrooms
	with a lot of White people
	Black people in the classroom
	not Black people
	that lived in my neighborhood
	it was a different
	I had no idea
	never seen
	these people before
	
	I was greeted like,
	    "how many advance classes
	    do you have?"

Figure 12: Story Data Poem Examples

Story poems were relatively easy to identify because they often included narrative elements like characters, dialogue, time, setting, and a plot; all of which refer to Clandinin and Connelly's (2004) notions of temporality, sociality, and place. For example, Donatello's data poem "Kid's Barking" is about his experience working as a community partner, barely 21 years old, and learning how to be a professional in the school building. In addition, Lauryn's data poem "Smart and Separated" tells a story of a time in her youth when she first confronted race in education. Both of these excerpts contain clear evidence of a story, albeit told from different time periods in their lives: Donatello, adulthood; Lauryn, youth/childhood (Figure 14). In an effort to rupture the flow, I used NVivo to code all of the stories according to when they took place within the lifetime of the squad. To do this, I referred to *explicit* and *tacit* articulations of knowledge to remix the order of each of the squad's poetic transcripts, so that the data poems were in relatively chronological order. For context, the primary difference between the two types of knowledge is that explicit knowledge can be expressed, accurately described and can therefore be subject to one's own, and others' reflection and analysis, while tacit knowledge cannot (Shekdi, 2005). For example, in an excerpt from "Soweto" by Grace, I make the assumption that she is making a tacit reference to a moment from her adulthood, because this story takes place after she graduated school (see Figure 15). AL's poem "Middle School," (appropriately tilted) on the other hand, makes an explicit reference to his time in middle school, which would situate the story from his youth.

Tacit	Explicit
Grace, "Soweto"	AL "Middle School"
going into schools	my middle school
went back to school	was a lot more diverse
I graduated	all different backgrounds
spoke to the student body	Black, White, Asian
I knew	first time
I was supposed to go	I differentiated White people
back inside	we had Russian students
and talk	who didn't speak English
to Detroit kids	I was like,
that became my life	"oh you're White
no matter what	But you're Russian"
been all over	first time I was
in front of youth	next to peers
in Brazil	that didn't look like me
in front of youth	that didn't sound like me
in South Africa	their thought process
most memorable '	and building relationships
poetry writing workshops	and friendships
in Soweto	was different than mine
a game changer	a lot of opportunity there
me and Kabomo	
South Africa	middle school was
poet on tour	the first time
Linton Kwesi Johnson	I tapped into
Capetown	who I was socially
Durban and Joburg	
went to Soweto	

Figure 13: Temporality in Story Data Poems Examples (Emic Data)

The result consisted of 132 story data poems told in two major segments: 1) "as a youth", and 2) "as an adult". This brief timeline interval is appropriate given most of the squad are in their early-mid 30's, with the oldest member of the squad approaching 50. Then, to determine their sociality, or identify *where* the squad was during the time period

and *what* they were doing in the story, I performed a coding query in NVivo to determine

the frequency and category of time intervals represented in the data, which resulted in

several of the 73 poems from adulthood spread across several periods: attending college

(27); attending graduate school (7); teaching in schools and communities (11); and

working as a community partner (40). There were 38 data poems created from stories

about their youth, which include their experiences in elementary school (6), middle

school (8), and high school (23) (see Figure 16). I noticed that several of the data poems

did not include any explicit or tacit references to time, which I will discuss in a later

section about "beliefs".

Nodes	Number of coding refere...	A
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\time\as a youth	38	
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\time\as a youth\elementary school	6	
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\time\as a youth\high school	23	
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\time\as a youth\middle school	8	
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\time\as an adult	73	
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\time\as an adult\college	27	
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\time\as an adult\graduate school	7	
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\time\as an adult\teaching in schools and communities	11	
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\time\as an adult\working as a community partner	40	

Figure 14: NVivo - Temporality, Sociality and Place

Next, I categorized the story data poems based on their descriptions from the

codebook, and labeled them in NVivo, resulting in nine themes: 1) achieving dreams and

goals; 2) coaching students; 3) creating opportunities; 4) discovering purpose; 5)

discovering self; 6) emceeing, poetry, rapping; 7) managing spaces; 8) navigating school conditions; 9) recognizing inequities. Then, I performed a query in NVivo to determine the temporality of the story poem categories in order to construct a quasi-chronological timeline that would explain how these Hip-Hop educational leaders developed. I learned that the majority of the squad members, while on their paths towards self-discovery, were also able to recognize racial, cultural, and economic inequities in their schools and communities by the time they graduated high school; and for some, during their time enrolled in college. In addition, all were actively engaging in emceeing, writing poetry, performing spoken word, rapping or emceeing as a youth, which continued on into their adulthood. Also evident on the timeline is a set of curricular, pedagogical, and leadership practices that developed during their time working in education as former classroom teachers and their roles as school-community partners.

	A : as a youth	B : elementary school	C : high school	D : middle school	E : as an adult	F : college	G : graduate school	H : teaching in schools and communities	I : working as a community partner
1 : achieving dreams and goals	1	0	2	0	5	4	1	0	0
2 : discovering purpose	2	0	3	0	16	9	1	0	3
3 : discovering self	20	4	2	2	2	1	1	0	0
4 : emceeing, poetry, rapping	9	0	7	4	14	3	3	1	1
5 : recogizing inequities	9	1	8	1	6	8	1	1	0
6 : coaching students	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	2	4
7 : creating opportunities	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	2	5
8 : managing spaces	0	0	0	0	9	1	0	1	9
9 : navigating school conditions	0	0	0	0	11	0	0	3	8

Figure 15: NVivo Story Data Poem Themes, Temporality, Sociality

As another layer of analysis, I refer back to the critical educational leadership theoretical framework I presented in Chapter 2, which samples elements from culturally relevant leadership, applied critical leadership (ACL), and cross-boundary leadership, to suggest Hip-Hop educational leaders source aspects of their personal experiences and their knowledge of Hip-Hop culture to enact a set of practices geared toward improving learning and engagement conditions in American public schools. Also, without imposing what I understood their experiences to be, I was inspired by Corley's (2019) method for using poems as data to represent the experiences of participants in her study about Black students and Black single mothers; she states,

> the poems (and the narrators) are free to stand on their own. The goal was not to find themes across participant narratives, common in qualitative work, but rather to give each narrator their own unique space. The poems are representations of each participant's beauty, complexity, and power. They help "show" what it feels like to live their experiences (p. 162).

Therefore, I let the data poems *speak for themselves*, and organized the story data themes in two subcategories: 1) "meaningful moments" and 2) "meaningful practices", which I will discuss in the subsequent sections.

Meaningful moments.

I define meaningful moments by sourcing Webster and Mertova's (2007) description of critical events in narrative research, which essentially are moments

expressed in told stories that influenced an outcome in the lives of the storytellers. I

identified five meaningful moments based on the story data categories, which include: 1)

discovering self; 2) recognizing inequities; 3) emceeing, poetry, rapping; 4) discovering

purpose; and 5) achieving dreams and goals. I will illustrate these themes by drawing

from multiple poetic transcriptions below.

Nodes	Number of coding refere... ⌄
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\meaningful moments\emceeing, poetry, rapping	28
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\meaningful moments\discovering purpose	26
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\meaningful moments\discovering self	22
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\meaningful moments\recogizing inequities	20
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\meaningful moments\achieving dreams and goals	10

Figure 16: NVivo Meaningful Moments

Discovering self.

This theme includes 22 stories about the squad's identity development ranging

from the intersections of their race, faith, work ethic, and career trajectory. In Jill's poem,

"Figuring out Black", she describes her experience growing up in a family where Jewish

and Black cultural and religious traditions intersected with her developing identity as an

artist. In Donatello's poem, "The Good Shit", he reflects on the role his parents played in

influencing his work ethic. Another example comes from Yusha's poem "Black Boy in the 90's" where he describes his racial identity within the context of a career in Hip-Hop.

Jill, "Figuring Out Black"

from a mixed family
Jewish and Black
trying to make sense of that
a person of color
figuring out Black

Jewish synagogue
connected to spirituality
interested in rituals
learning Hebrew
community felt alienating
same way I felt
in academic settings

a teenager confused
hella scared, different
liked visual arts, singing, dancing
family never related to me
as the artist
the creative one
analytical
tracked to be a writer, lawyer

Donatello, "The Good Shit"

my dad
looks like a White boy
green eyes
pale skin, like me
Mexican, Irish
Mexican from his mom
Irish from his dad
My dad busted his ass

parents divorced
when I was in first grade
my dad had to work
two jobs to pay
our tuition
and help my older sister
pay for college
an my brother
pay for high school
the work ethic I have
not just with the youth
the work ethic
I put in my music
what I build out for myself
I get from him
we get a lot from our parent
we forget the good shit

Yusha, "Black Boy in the 90s"

I was a rapper
a Black boy
in the 90s
did what most Black boys
were associated with
I played basketball
and I rapped
started making music
writing rhymes
putting rhymes to beats
it hits me
a job could pay for studio time
started recording
goal was to get a deal
or go to college
for business
double major in music
work for a label
figure out my bearings
start my own

Figure 17: Discovering Self

Recognizing inequities.

This theme includes 20 stories about recognizing or experiencing racial, cultural and economic disparities in schools and communities. To illustrate this theme, I first draw from Grace's poem, "Legacy of a Dream", where she briefly describes her experience during college engaging in activism. In addition, Amiri shares his experience traveling from a predominately Black part of the city, to a predominately White school across town where his athletic aptitude is celebrated, but his intellectual prowess is trivialized. Lastly, in Mabel's poem, "T.A.G." she reflects on the educational opportunities she was afforded through talented and gifted programs that were not offered to other students.

Grace, "Legacy of a Dream"	Amiri, "Black Against a White Back Drop"	Mabel, "T.A.G."
I remember State University taking that motherfucker over 300 students took over boycotted a building laid in front made King a holiday 　"we don't want 　the school shut down 　we want classes closed 　school open 　so we could celebrate 　the legacy of the place 　where King first did 　I have a Dream 　Detroit"	all Black child went to a prep school took the train everyday, north a Black kid from majority Black city took the train to a predominately White upper class city elite private school culture shock wearing timbs, khakis green collared shirt tucked in at this White school trying to adjust White kids think I'm there to play basketball I wanted to take over everything join the band join the poetry club AP and honors classes varsity sports riding my football skills all the way to university identity is fascinating Black thrown against a white backdrop	I was in T.A.G. I didn't go to school in my neighborhood I was in talented and gifted got straight A's up until fifth grade got my first B I was devastated had mostly Black male teachers only had four women teachers until high school in the 90s there was a push for Black Greeks to get in to the teaching field second grade Black male teacher third grade Black male teacher favorite teachers my science teacher principal was a Black male teacher walked around with a dashiki all day not playing no games I realize I was being afforded opportunities, internships field trips only for T.A.G. students

Figure 18: Recognizing Inequities

Emceeing, poetry, rapping.

This theme includes 28 stories about writing, recording, and performing poetry, raps, and making music beats. As Mabel expresses in her poem, "Truth and Wisdom" poetry played a significant role in the person she is today. In Lucille's poem, "Sisters

Diary" she shares the moment she first discovered poetry as a child. AL also tells a story form his childhood learning to record his voice over beats to share with his classmates.

Mabel, "Truth and Wisdom"
I performed an open mics
fashion shows
people invited me
to do poetry
different companies
I would perform poetry
it was a hobby
even though people tell me,
    "oh my gosh
    you're great
    can you do XYZ Festival?"
I will be like,
"no, I'm not a poet
this is just something I do"

I have over 50 published poems
centered on whatever
I was feeling
I wanted to convey
truth and wisdom

marks of my evolution
very clearly seen
to becoming
who I am today
 in the poetry

Lucille, "Sisters Diary"
I started writing poetry
because of my sister
I used to read her diary
I would sneak her diary
from underneath her bed
I was nine
she was five years older
in the state where
she had crushes on boys
she had secrets
she was fascinating

she was my idol
she was beautiful
I wanted to be like her

I knew she had a diary
she would write in
and I knew
where she kept it

Gill, "Playful Remixes"
middle school
I was recording beat boxes
on voice memos
answering machines
    my Nokia
and spit lyrics
over the beatbox
take that joint to school
let people hear remixes

something I did just for me
I listened to it
on the way to school
I had an 8-track
a mini boom box
to record over the 8-track
put them in my walkman
listen to them joints
on the way to school

middle school
started getting used
to my voice
hearing how I sound
from a listeners perspective

Figure 19: Emceeing, poetry, rapping

Discovering purpose.

     This theme includes 26 stories about figuring out their post-secondary careers, which range from internships, entry-level jobs, college courses, and teaching poetry writing workshops for youth in their communities. In Lauryn's poem, "Holla at Me", she

89

tells the story of her experience volunteering to teach Hip-Hop and the arts to young

people, which resulted in a job offer. For Amiri, he was always sure of his purpose,

which according to his poem, "Grits and Turkey Bacon", was internally driven. Donatello

shares a story about discovering his purpose for creative writing in academia in his poem

aptly titled, "Creative Writing".

Lauryn, "Holla at Me"

Upward Bound
looking for people
to volunteer
to do workshops
with young people
I was coming out of college
they were like,
    "yo, we'll give you
     carte blanche
     as long it is creative"

graduated from college
started volunteering
workshops for high school students
started talking to them
called, "Holler at Me"
talking to them
about real life situations
we would use
Hip-Hop and arts
everybody was like,
    "the kids love you"
I'm 23
not understanding the gravity
once it was over
they was like,
    "we want to have you back
     can we pay you
     to come back?"
Im like,
"oh yeah, that's wassup"

Amiri, "Grits and Turkey Bacon"

always knew
I wanted to touch my folks
make an impact
for justice
always knew
I wanted to make an impact
on the lives
of the people
my family
my community
in the George Bush era

become a professional athlete
Jackie Robinson, Willie Mays
Kurt Robertson
go to Stanford
play basketball
the major leagues
have a platform
people will listen
George Bush
don't care about nobody

change the tax laws
ended up playing football
never shook the music bug
literally never went away

Donatello, "Creative Writing"

I got an F
I guess it wasn't good,
structurally
I was like,
"okay, let me
try something different"
I wrote a story
I got an A
I wrote another story
I got an A

he calls me in his office
he's like,
    "what's your major?
    "what are you doing?"
I said,
"business"
he said,
    "why?"
I said,
"what do you mean why?"
he said,
    you're good at writing"
second year of college
I switched over
became a creative writing major
shit, the rest is history
spent six years in college
came out with three degrees
BA in English, creative writing
MA in English, creative writing
MFA in English, creative writing
with an emphasis in poetry
Young OG, killing the game

Figure 20: Discovering Purpose

Achieving dreams and goals.

       This theme is 10 stories about succeeding, achieving a goal, and winning. For Yusha, winning his campaign for student government while in college became a possibility for campus leadership, which he shares in his poem, "To Be Black Leaders". Within a community context, Lucille shares her story about winning a poetry slam competition during her first time performing spoken word at Nuyorican Café. In addition, AL briefly discusses his college application process, which was successful despite challenges with meeting deadlines.

Yusha, "To Be Black Leaders"

in high school
all the White kids
ran for those positions
they always won
so we didn't run

but at an HBCU
where everybody is Black
there was no divide
between race
who is a leader
Black leaders could step up
and be Black leaders
I wasn't naturally going
for those positions
but there was a mentor
who saw me and said
　　"you're a leader...come here".

he pulled me to the side
told me about a position opening
just based on how
he seen me interact
with intramural basketball
he told me,
　　"you have all the tenets
　　of a leader
　　I'm gonna put you in place"
he set me up to run
for SGA
and I won

Lucille, "Poetry is Validation"

Nuyorican Poets Cafe
I remember
going on a Wednesday night
open mic
had no idea
I was walking into a slam
walked into a slam
for the first time
I was like,
"they're going to judge me
on my poetry"
this is weird
my book of poems
I went up there
spit a slam poem
won the slam
first night

it became addictive
like,
"oh I'm good at this"
people validating
poetry is validation
oh you hear me?
you here me
there's an audience
that sees me
there's an audience
clapping for my joy
clapping for my pain

AL, "Faith"

my last year of school
I missed deadlines
and applications
in my college advisor's office
she's like,
　　"are you thinking about
　　going to school?
I said,
"yeah"
she was like,
　　"if you could apply
　　to any school
　　what would it be?"
I said,
"State University"
because in fourth grade
we had a speaker come
a real estate agent
she went to State
and I had seen football games

we applied
they were still
accepting applications
she felt like
it would be a good fit
I got accepted
didn't go on a college tour

Figure 21: Achieving Dreams and Goals

Meaningful practices.

The themes of practice I discovered in the poetic transcriptions include: 1) creating opportunities; 2) navigating school conditions; 3) managing space; and 4) coaching students.

Nodes	Number of coding refere... ⌄
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\practices\managing spaces	11
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\practices\navigating school conditions	11
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\practices\coaching students	8
Nodes\\Story Data Poems\practices\creating opportunities	8

Figure 22: Meaningful Practices

Creating opportunities.

This theme includes 8 stories about providing opportunities for students to learn and engage inside and outside of school. For Grace, she provides opportunities for students to identify with someone in the school who reflects freedom, and opportunities to support the principal working in confines of school district policies in her poem, "My Art Isn't Separate". In Lauryn's "Cutting Up" she describes a time where she created an opportunity for students to develop a play about school conditions through the lens of culturally relevant films. In addition, Rakim shares his experience creating a class about global art and Hip-Hop for students in his school in the poem, "Rhythm of the World".

Grace, "My Art Isn't Separate"	Lauryn, "Cutting Up"	Rakim, "Rhythm of the World"

principal is a fan
be tripping
that I'm there
on the radio
always trying to play it down
let the kids
figure out who I am, later
I play it down
can't help the way I look
like an artist
 	
walking in the door
 	
an energy in that school
 	
kids, amazing
culturally diverse
Mexican and White
African American students
    population underserved
    enclosed minorty
I come in
all the Black girls ask
    who is that?
I don't look like a teacher
or talk like one
I am an escape root
 	
principal working in confines
adores, loves students
but can't do it by himself
 	
my kids
ribbon cutting babies
on stage
	every day
	I'm going
	I'm teaching
	I'm researching
	I'm watching
	I'm writing
	Beyoncé dropped "Lemonade"
	I'm processing
	
	"we're going to do
	a Hip-Hop theater piece"
	do a play about
	things in the school
	they didn't like
	same concept
	as "Sister Act 2"
	students were concerned
	about uniforms
	didn't feel like
	they were learning anything
	schools got big
	disengagement problems
	and the response is,
	    "these kids don't wanna learn"
	I pushed back,
	"I don't think
	you're a bad teacher
	maybe we're not
	thinking creatively enough
	maybe the strategies
	are old"
		humanities
		goes with music
		we go through
		all these hoops
		they let us teach
		the class
		called
		"rhythm of the world"
		my previous teacher
		a coach
		at the school
		was the teacher
		from American studies class
		had risen up
		she was a curriculum coach
		for the school
		I was like,
		"yo I really enjoyed
		my experience
		with American studies
		one of my other homeboys
		really liked the experience
		the vibe
		the mentality
		we want new classes taught
		at the school
		we pitched this class
		they picked it up
		rhythm of the world
		co-taught with language arts
		and social studies class
		about music
		artivism
		activism
		different forms of art
		focused on global Hip-Hop

Figure 23: Creating Opportunities

Navigating school conditions.

This theme includes 11 stories that describe the atmosphere, culture and climate of the schools where Hip-Hop educational leaders work. In Yusha's data poem, "Buck the Systems", he describes the school system as lacking purpose, care and intentionality in their work to improve student learning and engagement. Lucille describes the racially and culturally hostile conditions of her school after introducing herself as a Boricua, a poet, and community-partner to a school of predominately White teachers in her data poem, "Boricua". Lastly, in "Bark and Bite" Jill describes the apathetic tone of teachers in her school, who questioned her ability as a teaching artist to transform culture.

Yusha, "Buck Systems"

I am not the only person
in the school building
who believes
that you can be
a master of fate
and captain of your soul

I am not the only person
who believes
that you can be
the cause of your future
But, we are few
and far between

lack of intentionality
in the building
not a lack of care
there's a lack of intentionality
I can see when people
who care deeply
burnt out
being held, restricted
by the same systems

teachers are adults
they can see it
whole situation is jacked up
not a lot teachers
you can talk to

Lucille, "Boricua"

first came
into the school
here I come, Boricua
more connected with students

students were like,
        "you sound like us
        you look like us"
we are taught
to be a bit weary
of people that look like us
the world and society
paints us to be
the bad guy
we always look at each other
even if we try to help each other

students gravitated
to me very quickly
some students were like
        "where is the White lady?
        because White people
        are the ones here to help
        you sound too much like us"

I introduce myself to teachers
with a poem
"New Brooklyn"
a poem about gentrification
in Brooklyn
I wasn't really popular
after that poem

Jill, "Bark and Bite"

I love people
who work
in school buildings
not an easy job
jaded people project resentment
bad energy
some people excited
some people skeptic, like
        "you're going to
        get people riled up
        have fun, but not be substantive
        a teaching artist
        with students
        enforcing discipline
        handling mediation
        came to do the fun part"
trust building
had to happen
        "all bark and no bite"
I could bite,
bite towards healing
and transformation

Figure 24: Navigating School Conditions

Managing spaces.

This theme includes eight stories about developing, cultivating, and curating

spaces inside of schools to shift conditions and spark student engagement. As described

in Donatello's "King Cobras" and Amiri's "Studio Space", creating recording studios in

schools for students to create Hip-Hop music, beats, and poetry inspire engagement from

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the entire school body. AL's poem, "Expression Sessions" on the other hand tells the

story of creating a space in his office for students to express their feelings and emotions

that impact their desire to learn engage in class.

AL, "Expression Sessions"

the space I opened
up to students
I had a group of
freshman girls
they had expression sessions
they came in
they thought it was a mediation
but I let them
call it whatever they want
we have a group texts
they named "mediation"
we're not doing any mediation
we're just sharing
but that's the mindset
that they're in
when they all come together
and there's a conflict
a thing to sort out

expression sessions were powerful
they were intentional
they were opportunities
to enter space
with something heavy
on their heart and mind
and leave the space
with hopes that days
could be lighter
be relieved

Donatello, "King Cobras"

I had a handful of students
whose grades grades were low
didn't give a shit
sometimes only come to school
when I was there
come fuck with me
in the studio
principal was like,
        "we need to strategize
        how we can utilize the studio
        like,
                'you can be here
                if you're coming
                to do your shit'
that's exactly what we did
we told them
"straight up,
it's been dope
now we're switching up

studio is available during lunch
and after school time
from this time
to this time
however, you need
to get your shit done
you need to be in the building
if you cut class
you can't come
i'm gonna check
with your teachers"

Amiri, "Studio Space"

holding space
on purpose
with intention
my energy
hear my music
I'm a musician
I want you to feel
to have a studio space vibe
I grew
students' interest
similar to my interest
we need to make this place functional
went from ornamental
to functional
secondhand stuff
broken down speakers
keyboard
a drum set
some teacher found
students committing
to their own skill sets
and passions
and learning styles

challenging students
find equipment that you want
you have the dream budget
best bang for your buck
musical equipment
students identify things they want
started buying equipment
copping dope, top-of-the-line stuff

Figure 25: Managing Space

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Coaching students.

This theme includes eight stories about guiding students towards discovering their purpose, passion, inspiration, and pursuing dreams and goals. In "Wrote it Out", Donatello describes a moment where he coached a student to perform a poem during graduation, which became an emotional and liberatory moment for both himself and the student. Jill describes her experience coaching students to lead a schoolwide assembly and the positive impact their leadership cultivated in the "vibe" of the school. Lastly, in Amiri's "Stigma" he shares his approach to coaching students to explore alternative pathways to careers that within the context of race and racism, would be considered criminal.

Donatello, "Wrote it Out"	Jill, "School Assembly Takeover"	Amiri, "Stigma"

she came to me constantly
    "can we practice more?"
i'm like,
"yes, lets do it"
 	
her poem is very personal
her relationship with her mom
reunification is a bitch
for young people
whose parent's dipped
when they were under
the age of five
now, they're back
they're grown
there's not that connection
one part of her poem
she tears up
gonna to lose it
"there's a fine line
in poetry or performance
when that moment comes
you need to
learn to swallow that
keep that voice
keep that energy
swallow that and
instill it in people
in the audience
so they cry for you"
that's exactly what she did
	school assembly take over
	students ran
	the whole show
	performers
	generacion futuro
	Spanish-speaking population
	a lot of segregation
	based on language barriers
	cultural stereotypes
	students translated
	first time
	community experienced
	student leading
	
	transformed auditorium
	blue paper on the wall
	draped, covered bright
	and beautiful
	people walked in
	music playing
	students cheering them in
	students excited
	substantive, but fun
	at the same time
	student performers
	student run
	a showcase
	motivational speaking
	transformed the vibes
		change the mentality
		around students
		shift what they think
		about students
		hood niggas
		with do rags
		talking crazy
		want teachers
		to think about them, differently
		kids say,
		    "I'm trying to get into horticulture
		    Pharmaceuticals"
		"look in to the justice issues
		for marijuana"
		White men making money off this
		you might be in jail
		for a nonviolent drug offense
		it's not fair
		think about ways
		to make it legit
		be a business person"
		and money exchanges
		and transactions
		your rights as a person
		in this country
		where cities and states
		making things legal
		are demonizing you
		making billions
		prosecuting people
		like you

Figure 26: Coaching students

Table 3: *Story Poem Data Themes*

Story Data Poem Themes	
Meaningful Moments	**Practices**
1. Achieving dreams and goals	1. Creating opportunities
2. Discovering purpose	2. Coaching students
3. Discovering self	3. Managing spaces
4. Emceeing, poetry, rapping	4. Navigating school conditions
5. Recognizing educational inequities	

As I mentioned earlier, there were some data poems that did not include any elements of a told story nor did they include any evidence of temporality. After reviewing them further, I noticed these were moments where the squad expressed certain beliefs, which I will explain in the next section.

Belief data poems.

Several members of the squad shared their individual philosophies and beliefs about education, racial inequities, cultural knowledge, and Hip-Hop, which I think offers intellectual depth for further data analysis. I labeled these as "beliefs" in NVivo according to the following five overarching themes derived from their descriptions in the codebook: 1) access and opportunity; 2) girls, women, mothers; 3) vibrations and sounds;

4) Hip-Hop; and 5) emceed, poets, rappers. To rupture the illustrated, collective voice and flow from the squad in the previous section about story data poems, I decided to source emic data from the poetic transcripts of a single author for all but one (Hip-Hop) of the belief data poem themes as a way to represent their individual voices, and because many of these beliefs were spoken in-between the telling of their stories. I opted to return back to the collective voice to emically illustrate the theme about beliefs in Hip-Hop at the end of this section because the diversity of the data poems is so complex and compelling.
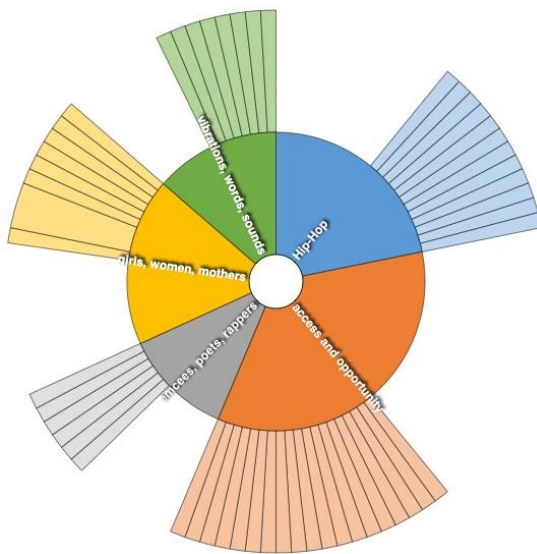
Nodes\\Belief Data Poems\access and opportunity	19
Nodes\\Belief Data Poems\Hip-Hop	12
Nodes\\Belief Data Poems\girls, women, mothers	10
Nodes\\Belief Data Poems\emcees, poets, rappers	7
Nodes\\Belief Data Poems\vibrations, words, sounds	7

Figure 27: NVivo Belief Data Poems

Access and opportunity.

This theme describes how the squad responds to student concerns about school climate and conditions by offering them access to opportunities to feel connected to the communities they come from. There are 19 belief data poems coded as "access and opportunity". The emic data for this theme comes from Mabel's poems, "Fridays on Fleek", "Community Lens", and "Meeting Diddy", where she describes her experience listening to students express their frustrations about school culture and how she made it possible for some of them to meet Hip-Hop legend, P-Diddy, which includes calling the school principal to ask for last minute permission.

Mabel, "Fridays on Fleek"

kids don't always
talk in the most
palatable language
be like,
     "this school is fucked up
     this school is dry
     this school some shit
     teachers don't give a fuck"

 I'll be like ok,
"what I hear you saying
is that you would like
to dress down
you would like
the opportunity
to have your cell phones

they be like,
     "yeah, right"

Mabel, "Community Lens"

the work was built around
access and opportunity
school transformation
was not great
but they had to leave
and go to the same community
I needed to find a way
to make them feel
connected in the community
from the minute I got there

Mabel, "Meeting Diddy"

11 o'clock at night
I called my principal like,
"hey girl
I know it's 11 o'clock at night
you probably wonder
why I'm calling
but the kids
have an opportunity
to meet Diddy tomorrow
I need emergency approval

we can call
every single parent
get the verbal yes
then send out permission slips
the next day
 after letting them know
this is what happened
you agreed
your kid had a great time
thanks for saying yes

my principal was like,
     "dang I got a meeting
     I wish I could go
     yes, you could do it"

Figure 28: Access and opportunity

Girls, women, mothers.

This theme describes the need for intentional focus on the socio-emotional well-being of Black and Brown girls and women in education, including both youth and adults. There are 10 belief data poems coded as "girls, women, mothers". The emic data for this theme comes from Lauryn's poems, "Snap Back", "Conditioned Pain" and "Monie in the Middle", where she describes her experiencing working with young

women in her school to develop positive and healthy relationships with themselves and each other using Hip-Hop as a culturally relevant reference point.

Lauryn, "Snap Back"

it was important
for me to start
understanding girls
in education
starting to see
the parallel
of girls behavior
challenging mother-daughter relationships
the way in which
women view each other
stops the creativity
and relationship
between women
what we going to do
for the next generation
if you have women
who have no interest
in each other?
have no value
in each other
they can't create the energy
to create a girl child
stopping in the whole society
stopping the whole society

Lauryn, "Conditioned Pain"

how do I teach that concept
to a girl
who's mother
don't even know

Hip-Hop mama
is necessary for that fact
not a conversation
you have on the street
that's a conversation
I can remix
over a Cardi B beat
and be vicious
in how I say the shit
they rocking to Cardi
learning about their body

that's intention
that's creation
that's how we going
to get our girls
going to teach it

Lauryn, "Monie in the Middle"

I know my mission
is to make sure
I'm working with
the wellness of
women and girls
that's the backdrop
the front drop is
you got two jobs
when you're talking about
how we're going to impact
you've got to be
saying something of value
you got to be interesting
and you better be both
when you have
an exchange with somebody
it has to be a deposit
that leaves enough
for something to grow

Figure 29: Girls, women, and mothers

Words, vibrations and sounds.

This theme describes the metaphysical relationship between Hip-Hop, spoken words, sounds, and vibrations, and their impact on the brain and spirit of listeners, or the

audience. There are seven belief data poems coded as "vibrations and sounds". The emic

data for this theme comes from Jill, who shares her beliefs and understanding of sound

science in the poems, "Power of Sounds", "Molecules" and "Hip-Hop Vibrations".

Jill, "Power of Sound"

doing all this reading
about sounds
the power of sounds
on your brain
on your spirit
like vibrations

Jill, "Molecules"

thoughts spoken out loud
meditating on the word
love, love, love
hate, jealousy, peace
have vibration
low vibration words

high vibration words
love, joy, harmony,
compassion
have vibration
words frozen molecularly
look like snowflakes
symmetrical
geometric shapes
all different

low vibration words

Jill, "Hip-Hop Vibrations"

a vibration
Hip-Hop sounds
an artist
interested in sound
beyond music
sound vibration different
sounds different
instruments different frequency
sound scientist
studying the impact
of sound
on the brain
like gibberish rap
a mantra chant
might not even know
what the word is
but there's something about
the cadence

Figure 30: Words, vibrations, and sounds

Emcees, poets, rappers, educators.

This theme illuminates the relationship between educators, poets, and rappers and

their connection to communities. There are seven belief data poems coded as access and

opportunity. Emic data for this theme comes from Donatello's data poems, "Emcees

Become Educators", "A Career Emcee" and "Feeling the Moment", where he shares his

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beliefs about the intersection of emcees and educators that is connected to his stories from his youth and adulthood.

Donatello, "Emcees become Educators"

never called myself
a rapper
I was always
a poet
a distinction
rap
is literally poetry, timed
i'm an emcee
emcees become educators
letterwise
the literal "m" and "c"
can be:
master craftsmen
master of ceremonies
mister community
community is a big part

Donatello, "A Career Emcee"

pursuing a career
as an emcee
came from my cousin
been rapping for years

high school
I was bumping his music
watching him grow

inside I wanted
to do it too

Donatello, "Feeling the Moment"

teachers know i'm a poet
I am emcee
English teachers are like,
        "yo, you want to collaborate
        on some curriculum?
        you can come run a workshop"
I love that shit
puts me in a class
job is not a classroom gig
you work with the kids
when you can work
with the kids
being in the classroom
on the other side
of the desk was interesting
I never had someone
at the front of the class
talking like I was talking

Figure 31: Emcees, poets, rappers, educators

Hip-Hop.

This theme describes beliefs, ideas, philosophies, and theories about Hip-Hop culture. There are 12 belief data poems coded as "Hip-Hop". By sampling Yusha's poem, "Hip-Hop is a Spirit", AL's poem, "Discipline and Structure", and Donatello's "Fifth Element", the theme about Hip-Hop beliefs is that it is a spiritual consciousness, soul liberation, written and spoken expressions, a source for knowledge, and the performative elements: emceeing, djying, graffiti, and breaking (see Chapter 2).

While thematic analysis is a common approach that develops throughout the coding process in qualitative research, my inclination to understand the relationship between the theme and structure of the squad's stories was innate. To be clear, I am aware of Labov's (1972) model of narrative analysis in qualitative research, which is based on an assumption that some actions have different meanings depending on when and where in the narrative they take place. Notably, I reference Labov's socio-linguistic research about African American Vernacular English in Chapter 2, which suggests "non-standard" languages are self-contained systems (see: Labov, 1969; 2014). I would argue from a critical race theoretical perspective, that as a native speaker of AAVE, my natural inclination to analyze the structural system embedded in the way the squad told their stories (who are all Black and Brown people) is evidence of my epistemological commitments using critical race methodology. I will explain my approach towards confirming the themes discovered from the data poems using emancipatory research methods in the next section.

Yusha, "Hip-Hop is a Spirit"

Hip-Hop is a spirit
it is a consciousness
born in the idea
in the Bronx
if you won't give us
what we need
we will make it
out of whatever is available
we will use it
to make a way
pull ourselves up
by our bootstraps
cause you're not gonna help us
fine
we're gonna do it our way
using our language
our concepts
our codes
our methods
that's what we're gonna do
that is what Hip-Hop is
every situation
you're looking at a new generation
of Hip-Hop
Hip-Hop soul
connected to liberation
but liberation
isn't tear down around you
if you're not
gonna give it to us
that's fine
get the fuck
out the way

AL, "Discipline and Structure"

Hip-Hop
there's a structure
and a discipline
but it's not a limit
there's something about
being structured
and disciplined
without limits
a lot of times
we get them confused

teaching this curriculum
there's not much
you could do
discipline and structure
but your creativity
thrives when you're
challenged by that structure
and discipline

Mos Def describing Hip-Hop
said it was a "school unaccredited"

a lot of times
you hear that expression
is now what you say

Hip-Hop is how we say it

that form of writing
form of expression
is how we say it
because for so long
our words
and our learning information
that we seek has been blocked

Donatello, "The Fifth Element"

Hip-Hop is what you do
the elements:
djying
graffiti
breakdancing
beatboxing
rapping
KRS 1 has the fifth element:
knowledge

RZA broke it down
in his book, "The "Tao of Wu"
beautiful, powerful book
about faith,
religion
spirituality
Taoism
divine mathematics
numerology
how it all came together
in Wu Tang
wisdom

knowledge is one of twelve jewels
in Islamic philosophy
twelve jewels
everyone obtains in their lives
knowledge is number one
break that down in two words
"know" and "ledge"
RZA broke it down,
    "you need to know the ledge
    of who you are
    know your edges
    know your boundaries

Figure 32: Hip-Hop

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Table 4: *Belief Data Poem Themes*

Belief Data Poem Themes
1. Access and opportunity
2. Emcees, poets, rappers, educators
3. Girls, women, mothers
4. Words, sound vibrations
5. Hip-Hop

Name	Files	References
▼ ◯ Belief Data Poems	10	66
▶ ◯ access and opportunity	9	28
▶ ◯ emcees, poets, rapper…	6	10
▶ ◯ girls, women, mothers	4	13
▶ ◯ Hip-Hop	7	12
▶ ◯ vibrations, words, soun…	5	9
▼ ◯ Story Data Poems	10	136
▼ ◯ meaningful moments	10	99
▶ ◯ achieving dreams an…	6	9
▶ ◯ discovering purpose	8	27
▶ ◯ discovering self	10	23
▶ ◯ emceeing, poetry, ra…	9	25
▶ ◯ recogizing inequities	10	22
▼ ◯ meaningful practices	10	38
▶ ◯ coaching students	5	9
▶ ◯ creating opportunities	6	20
▶ ◯ managing spaces	6	13
▶ ◯ navigating school co…	5	13
▶ ◯ time	3	10

Figure 33: NVivo Coding Ed Emcees

"Affect": Knowledge Affirmation and Emancipation

Educator and philosopher, Paulo Freire, during a (1984) interview with Bruss and Macedo said, "I think that people get their history, their liberation, their total liberation, and their independence when they also get their language into their own hands" (p. 221). Freire, known for developing an educational praxis and pedagogy rooted in the liberation of oppressed people, inspired my approach to this research. The possibility for liberation through qualitative research is closely aligned with what Cho and Trent (2006) define as "transformational validity", or the "emancipatory process leading toward social change that is to be achieved by the research endeavor itself. From this perspective, research participants that tell their personal stories find *their* validity in the ability to raise consciousness, provoke political action and remedy solutions to structural social problems (e.g., racism, sexism, poverty). In addition, as Cammarota (2017) points out, transformational validity in critical youth participatory action research leads to "pedagogies of resistance" that have the potential to transform young people's subjectivities while allowing them to envision ways of learning to counteract oppressive and reproductive schooling. The notion of emancipation as expressed through the manipulation of language and power, and through the voices of young people drives my research interests about the possibilities for Hip-Hop to solve problems in education. I will explain how I invoked those elements in my steps towards conforming findings from this research in the subsequent sections.

"Stamping": making knowledge accessible.

At the onset of this intellectual endeavor, I shared my dissertation proposal with members of my community who are youth and adult spoken word poets, Hip-Hop education scholars, non-profit program directors, authors, local politicians, friends and family members. My ask was for them to simply tell me, from their individual perspectives, whether or not any of it mattered, and to "fact check" my accounts of Hip-Hop history, and Black education. Feedback from my community was overwhelmingly positive and in agreement with the purpose of the research to their own lives (see: Figure 33).
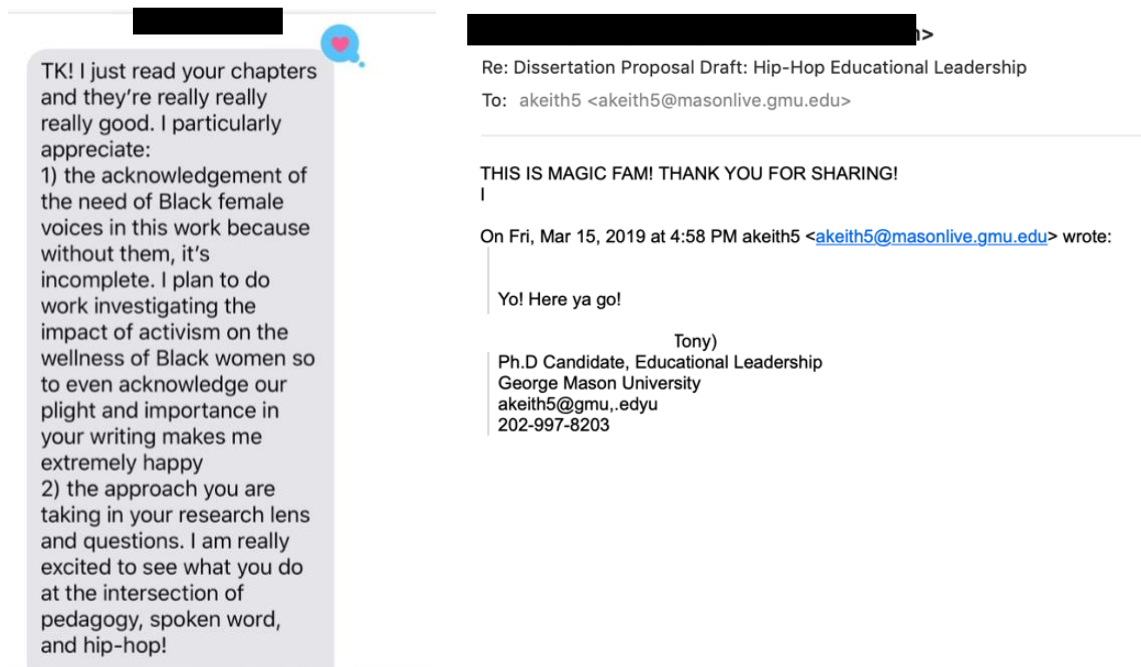
Figure 34. **Community stamping**

In addition, I invited both Yusha and AL to offer their perspectives about the research design during several brainstorming sessions. We utilized a whiteboard to scribe and map out our thoughts (see Figure 6). During our session, we discussed what kinds of data to collect, and how to go about capturing the data, and added an additional research question, "What conditions do Hip-Hop educational leader's (HHEL) make possible for Black and Brown youth learning and engagement in the classroom?" In terms of data, we decided on a need for stories and poems about HHEL's personal and professional experiences with Hip-Hop and educational leadership. We were inspired by our collective desire to disrupt the ways in which higher education safeguards its' supposed power of language and knowledge by making the research assessible for Black and Brown youth. We know that most of the scholarly knowledge disseminated through peer-reviewed journals celebrate and publish text laden with academic jargon that is dismissive of the language and culture of today's youth. Therefore, we agreed to use the term "stamped" - a confirmatory word used by many urban youth to signify value and validity (Urban Dictionary, 2018) – in lieu of "quality" to instantiate the research. In dominant culture, this is analogous to receiving a "stamp of approval". In addition, we decided that for the research to be "stamped", HHEL's and others who consume this scholarship should feel affirmed to "be Hip-Hop", which meant an acceptance, appreciation, and love for the use of language, phrases, vocabulary and pop culture references (e.g., the use of AAVE, profanity, and terms like "tripping" and "holla"). We also discussed "liberation" as a metaphysical aspect of "stamping"; which from Yusha and AL's perspectives should feel "ecclesiastical" or almost "sermon-like", which I will highlight in the next section about

"jewels". Lastly, I shared drafts of poetic transcriptions with several members of the squad; which, according to their emoticons [7] were overwhelmingly positive and affirming (see: Figure 34).
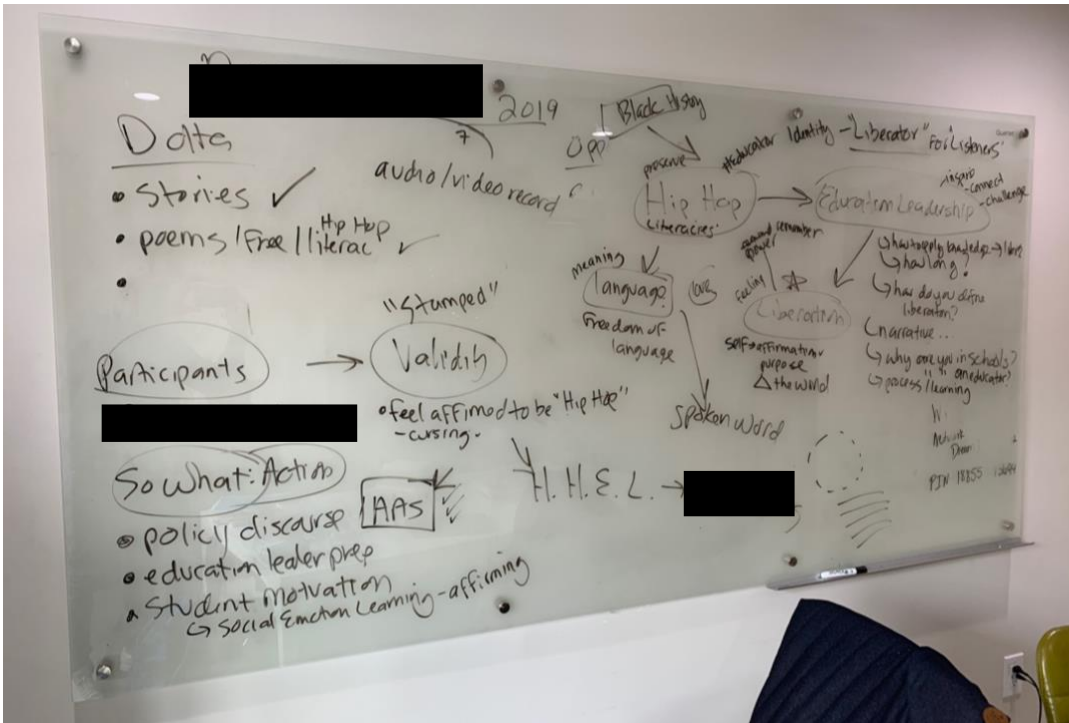
Figure 35. Brainstorming session with Yusha and AL
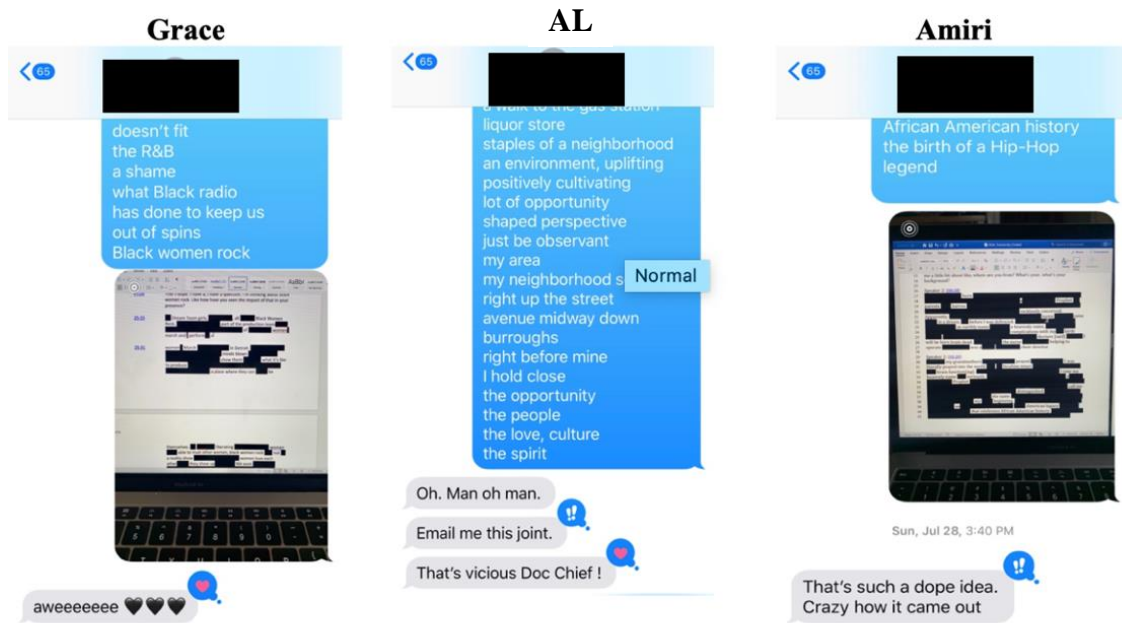
Figure 36: Member Checking

Discovering jewels in data poems.

Hip-hop's accessibility and relevance to the stories from Black and Brown youth about social resistance and liberation, and its consumerists appeal to White America make it an ideal site to perform qualitative inquiry rooted in critical race methods (CRM). According to Hahn's (2014) article on the politics of race in Hip-Hop, ever since the industry acknowledged in 1991 that White, suburban teenagers consume 80% of all Hip-hop music, mainstream culture's emphasis on characteristics appealing to White men (e.g., sexuality and violence) shifted from its earlier nexus, namely political and social commentary. These "converging interests" in Hip-Hop addresses the need for more CRT

scholarship that explores the intersection of race and property as analytical tool through which we can understand social inequity (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Donnor et al., 2016). According to Hanley (2008), "a study of popular culture, and in this case, Hip-Hop, can also help educators understand the extent of its effect on the consciousness of students who are Hip-Hop artists and may crack open the supremacist world view of educators enough for them to perceive the many nuances and voices at play in youth culture" (p. 147).

There are growing number of studies that invoke qualitative methods to illuminate how youth and young adults recognize the relationship between liberatory Black politics and the literary functions of rapping and spoken word poetry (see: Camangian, 2008; Desai & Marsh, 2005; Fisher, 2005; Kinloch, 2005). Furthermore, critical scholars argue that youth-driven research, rooted in critical hip hop pedagogy, suggests transformative, or "liberatory" education begins with the creation of teaching and learning spaces where Black and Brown youth can develop a "critical meta-awareness" of how their racial and gendered experiences have been shaped by social institutions (e.g., schools, communities) (Akom, 2009; Caraballo, 2017). Therefore, my research is stamped when Black and Brown youth not only have access to the knowledge discovered, and the ability to critique and evaluate the findings for relevance to their own lives, but they must experience liberation through the expression Hip-hop literacies. I argue that Black and Brown youth spoken word artist, poets, rappers and emcees are engaged in a pedagogy of resistance to the standard American English literary cannon that reifies White supremacy.

Therefore, I enlisted support from J. Marley, a 22-year-old, Black male rapper, who is an alumnus of a college prep program I ran for several years, to offer his perspective on what he "saw" in the poetic transcripts. I was curious how someone who was roughly two decades my junior would interpret the meanings behind the data poems. To be clear, my usage of the term "youth" reflects my experience running youth development programs and leading educational organizations that served individuals from the ages of 14 – 24. J. Marley and I spent several hours reviewing transcripts together, while simultaneously listening to his original Hip-Hop music, and brainstorming ideas on a white board. Much to my surprise, he also saw elements of "stories" and "beliefs" in the data; which for me, served as affirmation that my epistemological and methodological approach to conducting data analysis was accessible from a younger person's perspective (see Figure 40). He also identified parts of the poetic transcription that sparked wonder, inspiration, and emotionality, which he called, "life stanzas". One of these moments occurred after her read Lucille's poem, "Make My Life an Education" where she reclaims her rights to learn and discover knowledge despite only posseting a GED (see Figure 39). This stanza particularly stood out to J. Marley because her story resembles much of his own educational experiences. To continue with emic approaches to data analysis, we decided to label these as "jewels" based on how Lauryn, Donatello, and Yusha used the term in their poetic transcript. Essentially, to "drop a jewel" means to share precious knowledge in a way that inspires transcendence. As Biggs el (2012) states,

"rappers and spoken word artists…assume a role akin to evangelists spreading

good news, bearing witness, …declaring truths, … and promise [through]

emancipating voices that are stark testimonials filled with proclamations of

redemption and hope - each an oration from the latest chapter of the book of life

of a people with a long history of struggle" (p. 163).

We decided not to code any of the jewels we found in the data poems because

there were far too many, and we did not always discover the same jewels, which makes

them highly subjective. I did, however, decide to search the poetic transcripts for

moments I personally believed are jewels derived from the emic data, that also answer

my research questions.

I was a part of student government
trying programming but
they weren't responding
I realized it was too late
I'm dealing with adults
difficult people
set in their ways
you gotta go to the kids

Poem 5: To Be Black Leaders

I was always a leader
I knew how I moved
I was a rapper
on the sports team
I played basketball
I ran track
I was always connected
with the Future Business Leaders of America

in high school
all the White kids
ran for those positions
they always won

All beliefs ! Turned into a story but it's uncertain at that point that he knew what he really wanted to be ! -

From imported document
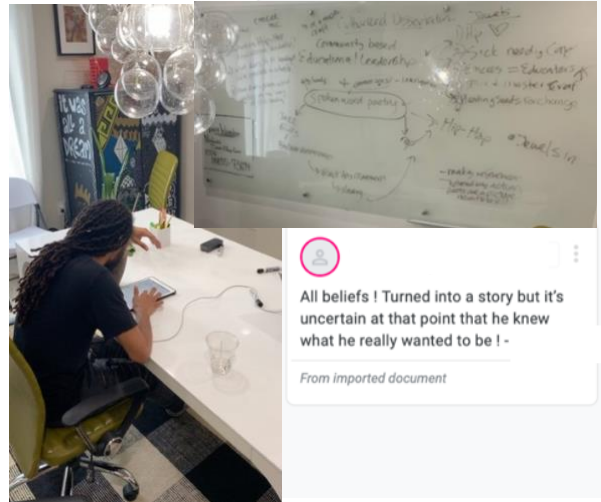
Figure 37: Validating Belief and Story Data Poems #1

in school now
become the parents
of the kids"

two generations that will
experience the change
the only way to get there
is the schools
but I was stuck on doing music

my senior in college
everybody is like,
        "hey, we gotta get these jobs,
        we gotta get these internships"
and I'm like
"I don't want to go
to the corporate world
I've seen it
it wasn't for my people"

in my marketing class
professor goes,
        "marketing is finding out
        what people want

10:34 AM Sep 10   Resolve

This is a story that can be a b

From imported document
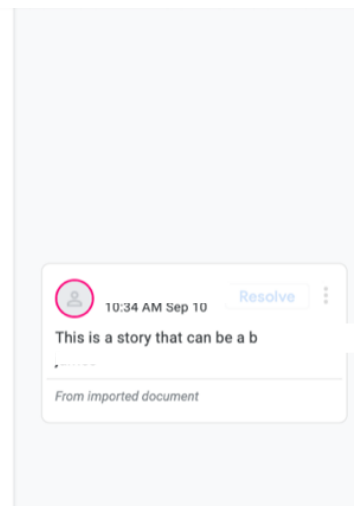
Figure 38: Validating Belief and Story Data Poems #2

```
there was no-one to guide me
I didn't have any friends
16, all my friends
are in high school
you leave everything behind
that's what life does to you

my daughter was taken
by her father's parents
had to figure it out
a lot of my life
was figuring out the next day
where was I going to stay?
where was I going to live?
where was I going to be?
went back
got my GED at the age of 22
I would go to work
I'll go visit my daughter
I will come back
and feed myself
```

11:31 AM Sep 10 — Resolve

Life stanza

From imported document

11:33 AM Sep 10 — Resolve

Life stanza / story

From imported document
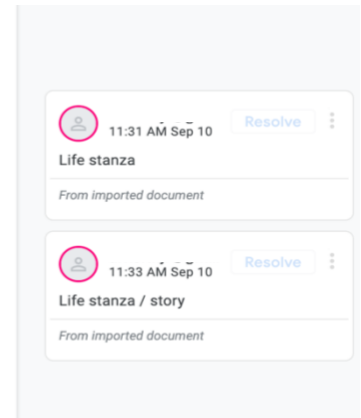
Figure 39: Discovering Jewels Example #

```
I still don't have
a higher degree
my highest degree
is still a GED
I reject every notion
that I'm only as worth
as what I've survived
I refuse those messages
in the media
        I'm going back to school
        everybody would clap
I can't go back to school
I have kids
I got a daughter
I got to take care of this
there's no time
but that does not  mean
I forfeited my chance to learn
the world was telling me
        "you got to pick a struggle
        go to school
        take care of your kids
        go to work
        but you can't do
        all those things
        at the same time"

I was like,
"fuck it
I'm gonna make
my life an education
that's what I did
I've dedicated myself
to make my life an education
```

10:31 AM Sep 11 — Resolve

Her conditions toggled with her beliefs creating a diss to herself

From imported document

11:38 AM Sep 10 — Resolve

Jewel

From imported document
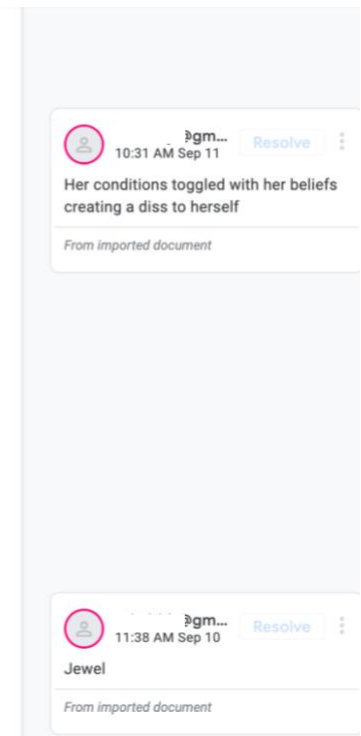
F*igure 40*: Discovering Jewels Example #2

Yusha, "Drop the Vitamin"	Donatello, Fifth Element	Lauryn, "Princess of Controversy"

"I'm in between"
my father was a preacher
but I was raised by hustlers
hardcore rap
and this North Carolina
gospel Bible Belt
that's in me
in the middle of that
is truth
in there
 wrapped up in the music.
I'm teaching a class
I'm going to drop jewels on you
I"m going to drop jewels on you
but if you're not listening to me
then subconsciously
my music is still
getting in your mind

knowledge is one of twelve jewels
in Islamic philosophy
twelve jewels
everyone obtains in their lives
knowledge is number one
break that down in two words
"know" and "ledge"
RZA broke it down,
    "you need to know the ledge
    of who you are
    know your edges
    know your boundaries
    know how you can transcend
    know what's around you
a great book
without that book
I wouldn't know
where I was

looking at all the women
in Hip-Hop
who stop doing Hip-Hop
when they became mothers
why is that they stopped?
what the hell?

had my daughter
learning so much shit
that needed to be
in a rap

you got monumental women
like a Lauryn Hill
contributing stories
until they become mothers
in motherhood
you hope you to
drop more fucking jewels
than ever before

Figure 41: Discovering Jewels in Emic Data

Answering research questions with jewels.

What is Hip-Hop educational leadership? To answer this question, I referred to the belief data poems about emcees, poets, and rappers, and was inspired by Donatello's jewel, "emcees become educators", in his poem with the same title. I argue that the data findings from this study supports a thesis that Hip-Hop educational leadership is a form of "educational emceeing", or "mastering the conditions of education". "Educational emcees", or "ed emcees" are spoken word artists, poets and rappers who source the liberatory knowledge and power of Hip-Hop's culture in their pursuit of liberating

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learning and engagement conditions for Black and Brown youth in American public

schools.

Donatello, "Emcees Become Educators

never called myself
a rapper
I was always
a poet
a distinction
rap
is literally poetry, timed
i'm an emcee
emcees become educators
letterwise
the literal "m" and "c"
can be:
master craftsmen
master of ceremonies
mister community
community is a big part

Figure 42: Donatello, "Emcees Become Educators"

What are the conditions Hip-Hop educational leaders make possible for Black and

Brown youth learning and engagement in schools? To answer this question, I referred to

the belief data poems about Hip-Hop, and was inspired by AL's jewel, "Hip-Hop makes

love possible", in his poem, "Hip-Hip Possibilities". I argue that the data findings from

this study supports a thesis that Ed Emcees invoke love as a condition of possibility for

learning and engagement in American public schools. To determine "how" they make

love possible, I referred to the story data poems themes about practice to suggest that Ed

Emcees perform four key functions: 1) coach students to pursue their passions and dreams; 2) manage school spaces conducive for creative expression, healing and wellness - especially for Black and Brown girls and women; 3) create Hip-Hopcentric curricular and co-curricular educational opportunities; and 4) navigate school conditions with an unwavering commitment to "show up" as their most authentic selves.

AL, "Hip-Hop Possibilities"

Hip-Hop makes love possible
there's a connection between self
and what comes out of self
that excites you
or inspires you
to have love
for a thing
created by you
or a theme
that is written by you
written by you
kept close to you
that you don't have to share

a lot of students
don't have space
to themselves
in their physical homes
to learn and grow
space to create
within yourself
to be free
to express
and be truthful
to have discipline
and structure
but not limit
the way you express

Figure 43: AL, "Hip-Hop Possibilities"

How does spoken word poetry function in the lives of Hip-Hop educational

leaders? To answer this question, I referred to the story data poems about emceeing,

poetry, and rapping, and was inspired by Grace's jewel, "now we use words like

'practice' and Hip-Hop 'pedagogy'… I laugh at all the pedagogy… I breathe this shit…

ya'll be writing about it … I am a living example of this in action" in her data poem,

"Laughing at the Pedagogies". I argue that the data findings from this study support a

thesis that spoken word poetry functions as an organic Hip-Hop pedagogy for Ed

Emcees. According to the story poem data timeline, all of the Ed Emcees I interviewed

for this study began writing and performing poetry and raps at an early age without any

formal or standardized instruction. The knowledge they sourced to create their rhythmic

spoken words was both internally driven and externally sourced from their communities.

Grace, "Laughing at the Pedagogies"

Gill Scott Heron
        Sonia Sanchez
Amiri Barka
        Ntozake Shange
teaching them
Black Arts Movement writers
showing them
the connection
between Hip-Hop
and my generation of poets
that came out in Hip-Hop
the Black Arts movement
connect Black arts
and music artists
like the Last Poets
Non-Prophets
teaching inside of jail

I am a mama
it's a part of my practice
very organic
        jargon
now we use words
like "practice"
and Hip-Hop "pedagogy"
I laugh
at all the pedagogy
I breathe this shit
ya'll be writing about it
I am a living example
of this in action

Figure 44: Grace, "Laughing at the Pedagogies"

According to my data analysis, educational emcees are spoken word artists, poets and rappers who practice an organic Hip-Hop pedagogy, and who invoke love in their pursuit of liberating learning and engagement conditions for Black and Brown youth in American public schools. Most ed emcees, while on their paths towards self-discovery, experienced meaningful moments of racial, cultural, and economic inequities in their schools and communities by the time they graduated high school; and for some, during their time enrolled in college. In addition, all of the ed emcees I interviewed for this research were actively engaging in emceeing, writing poetry, performing spoken word, or rapping as youth, which continued on into their adulthood. In addition, the themes from this research suggest that educational emcees espouse core beliefs about educational equity, the effect of vibrations and sounds on listeners, the power of Hip-Hop consciousness, and the health and wellness of Black and Brown girls and women in education. Also evident in the data is a series of curricular, pedagogical, and leadership practices ed emcees employ in their work to inspire liberating learning and engagement opportunities in schools. These include coaching students to pursue their passions and dreams, creating opportunities for student leadership and to amplify student voice, managing Hip-Hopcentric spaces to inspire student learning and schoolwide engagement, and navigating through school systems as a cross-boundary educational leader with authenticity and agency. In the next section, I will introduce the final aesthetics of Hip-Hopography, "embodiment", and "performance" as it relates to my discovery of educational emcees as the "thing" of curiosity I discussed in Chapter 1.

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"Embodiment" and "Performance": Ed Emcees

According to Petchauer (2015), the nexus of affect underscores the quality that Hip-Hop is fundamentally a participatory culture. He states, "one does something to be down and *embodies* Hip-Hop by what they do" (p. 86). Towards approaching this final stage of Hip-Hopography, I hosted "Ed Emcees" - a public performance of my dissertation at a popular restaurant known for its' community activism, celebration of cultural foods, and cultivation of a spoken word poetry culture in my hometown. There were close to 100 people present at Ed Emcees, including family members, friends, school principals, business owners, college students, teachers, college administrators, neighborhood elders, Hip-Hop artist, poets, and preachers spread across racial, culture, gender and generational lines. In addition to sharing my preliminary findings, I also featured poetry performances from some of the ed emcees who I interviewed for this research (Al, Yusha, Lauryn, Jill, Grace, Lucille, and Donatello). While pseudonyms were used for their names in the written dissertation, the squad openly identified as participants during the performance dissertation. Photographs and videos from the event were uploaded to an online Drop Box. In addition, the ed emcees also curated a Spotify playlist for the event and distributed a "zine[8]" featuring some of the jewels from ed emcees that answered my research questions.

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[8] A zine (/ziːn/ ZEEN; short for magazine or fanzine) is a small-circulation self-published work of original or appropriated texts and images, usually reproduced via photocopier. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zine

Figure 45: Ed Emcees Event 1

Figure 46: Ed Emcees Event 2

Figure 47: Ed Emcees Spotify Playlist

Figure 48: The Drop: Jewels from Ed Emcees (Zine)

Also present at the event were several academics with doctorate degrees whose research explored racial opportunity gaps, language and literacy. After the event, I received several emails, phone calls and text messages congratulating me on "embodying" my research and making the knowledge accessible to communities outside of higher education. Their feedback is directly in alignment with my goals for "stamping" this research.

You were so engaging and
impressive tonight. You
embodied your research!
Thank you for reminding me
to keep my work grounded
in academics AND the
community. You've inspired
me to think of a creative
way to share my work. I'll be
conceptualizing an event
soon! I'm so inspired.
Thanks for sharing with us.

It's amazing how much out
research, the groundwork
about cultural mismatch in
classrooms, align!

Congrats on a though
provoking night!!

Figure 49: **Stamping from the Academy 1**

Hi Tony –

Thank you so much for inviting me to the Busboys
& Poets event last night. It was great to see this
vision you've had for a long time come to life. I
was excited to see your research get
communicated to a broad audience of people. It is
hard sometimes for education research to leave
the academy and I was thrilled to see you share
what you've been doing with the community so
they could engage in not just the results of what
you found but also the process you used to
develop the knowledge.

I've been thinking about disruption since last
night. Joyful disruption. Meaningful disruption.
Necessary disruption. Disruption of power by the
expression of power in places that have been
thought powerless. Often the work of education is
difficult and challenging and can feel hopeless
and dark. Like the problems are insurmountable
and the systems too entrenched. Your work and
the work the leaders spoke about last night brings
light into that darkness.

***Figure 50*: Stamping from the Academy 2**

In addition to hosting "Ed Emcees", I am reminded to sample from critical hermeneutic phenomenology which champions transparency of researcher bias and positionality. And, inspired by Aja Martinez's (2014) plea for critical race theory counter-story from researchers of color, I introduce my personal narrative within this manuscript because, as she declares "I must write this essay as testimony because I cannot continue to forge an academic career without documenting the persistence of racism in... the academy at large" (p. 34).

from Tony da Poet to educational emcee.

I grew up in predominately Black and Brown urban and inner suburban low-income communities and attended public schools where the majority of my teachers were White women. I am also a first-generation college student with undergraduate and graduate degrees from large predominately White state universities. In addition, I am a professional educational leader with over a decade of experience working for non-profit youth development organizations that serve Black and Brown students from low-income families, and that are led by White male executives. I have been and continue-to-be the victim of countless racial microaggressions by White educators and White students. According to Sue et al., (2007), racial microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (p. 271). In addition, Sue et al, (2007) suggest racial

microaggressions appear in three forms: 1) microassaults - explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions; 2) microinsults - characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity; and 3) microinvalidation - characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color. I have been the recipient of each of these forms of racial microaggressions.

For example, I once experienced a microassualt from a White colleague at a predominantly White university who told me I was "too Black" because I did not know that my last name (Keith) was also the first name of Keith Richards from the English rock band "The Rolling Stones". She apologized after I explained I grew up listening to R&B and Hip-Hop music featuring mostly Black artists. I remember feeling angry. In addition, it has been my experience that White educators project microinsults by ignoring my Blackness when discussing problems with the race and racism in U.S. society. For example, I once sat through an entire lesson about the history of racial segregation in the U.S., where the instructor showed images and videos of lynched Black bodies, and Civil Rights protests where Black people were attacked by police dogs and called "nigger" by White people while walking through their schools and neighborhoods. I remember feeling rage and pushing back tears while trying to engage in an intellectual discourse with my White classmates about the historical foundations of racism that created the conditions for why I was the only Black person in the class. At another time, I had a

White male professor trivialize my description of Black and Brown people as "of color" in my writing because according to him, "don't we all have color?" I remember feeling invisible and misunderstood because the racialized colors of our skins dictated drastically different life experiences. I did not speak up because I was taught by my elders to be cautious of White men in positions of power. A similar moment of microinvalidation occurred in a class taught by the same White man from the previous example, where the topic of discussion was "racial microaggressions in education". As the only person of color in the class, I was asked to share some of my experiences (which in and of itself is a microaggression). I shared that while there are many moments to pull from, the most common is when White people tell me how articulate I am, as if somehow, they are surprised. A White woman classmate responded by saying, "well Tony, you really *are* one of the most *articulate* people I've ever met". I remember feeling unheard.

I am also reminded of the ways in which racism impacted how I understood "what" I was supposed to learn, and "how" I was supposed to learn. I was not afforded opportunities to learn about my Black history either through course materials or school programs, save for one high school field trip to watch the 1997 film, "Amistad[9]" during Black History Month. On the bus ride back to school, I remember my classmates and I

[9] Amistad is a 1997 American historical drama film directed by Steven Spielberg, based on the true story of the events in 1839 aboard the slave ship La Amistad, during which Mende tribesmen abducted for the slave trade managed to gain control of their captors' ship off the coast of Cuba, and the international legal battle that followed their capture by the Washington, a U.S. revenue cutter.

discussing how angry we felt about what happened to "the slaves", but not truly grasping the fact that the actors in the film were portraying the lives of some of our enslaved African ancestors. I also remember my teacher staring at me with her piercing blue eyes at the front of the bus, mouthing almost silently "don't you dare". I wonder if she associated Black kids in transit with enslaved Africans on ships, and did she fear our resistance. In addition, I was required to read and write about the works of European authors like Aldous Huxley, Fyodor Dostoevsky, William Shakespeare, Dante Alighieri and Homer, instead of Black poets and writers like Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, Nikki Giovanni, James Baldwin, and Langston Hughes. I also sacrificed my fluency in Black language (slang) at the bequest of my White teachers who demanded that I speak and write "properly". According to Harper and Davis III, (2012) for a typical Black boy in a K-12 educational setting taught almost exclusively by White educators who combine an insufficient anticipation for his academic achievement with high expectations for disruptive behavior, intellectual stupidity, and a dispassion for learning that will ultimately culminate with high school dropout. Fortunately, I always excelled in academics but was labeled as a student with behavior problems from many of my White teachers. Apparently, I "talked too much". I remember feeling like my circular and *musical ways of thinking* were in direct opposition to the linear, neatly formatted logic that I was expected to perform in class and on standardized assessments. I still feel this way. My SAT scores never reached above 950 and I was denied admission to graduate schools because my GRE scores were "too low".

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As a youth, I began reconciling with myself and my words inside and outside of school by writing poetry to express the myriad of emotions I experienced as a Black person caught in the "gap" of American public education. I discovered one of these poems tucked away in a box in the back of my closet not too long ago:

Keith, "Untitled" (1999)

Tick

Tick

Tick goes my heart

As it races with the clock

The seconds are flying

Not forward, but rewinding

My feet are tapping

on the pale stone tile

My legs are giants

as they shade the center aisle

My head is leant back

resting on an oak wood board

My eyes are like daggers,

but stabbing like swords

My fingers are lifeless

like a neck at a lynching

And faint in the background

my ears pause to listen

To hear the grumbling monstrous voice

as it swells to mention

Causing me to arise

and pay attention

Tock

Tock

Tock goes my mind

As it competes with the time

Hours and seconds

become infinitized [sic] labor

And like a dyslexic child

my mind organizes the paper

On my neck

I can feel a breath

But not from inside

It's an open window,

where the leaves play

It's the breeze from outside

My back is glued to this plastic body brace

The look of exhaustion

and boredom can be traced

Along the wrinkles

on my forehead and

the crimson on my face

Tap

Tap

Tap goes the sound

Of my foot on the ground

Impatience

has become

my only acquaintance

although transparent and imaginary

the small sand drenched man

who flys [sic] like a fairy

the smell of perspiration and thinking

inside my soul is sinking

the misty chalk

commands my eye blinking

Throb

Throb

Throb goes my pulsating brain

The matrixes filled with numbers

are used to count my pain

It's a fever

beyond 100° degrees

My inferno is singed

to the point, my thought freezes

Can anyone relate

to this common virus

That's causing this lethargically,

feverish crisis

Senioritis!

Tick
Tick
Tick goes my heart - - - -
as it races with the clock - - - -
The seconds are flying ~~fast forward~~
Not forward but rewinding - - - - - -
My feet are tapping on the pale stone tile - - - -
My legs are giants as the shade the center aisle - - -
My head is leant back resting on an oak wood board - - -
My eyes are like daggers, but stabbing like swords - - -
My fingers are lifeless like a neck at a lynching - - -
And faint in the background my ears pause to listen - - -
—to hear the grumbling monstrous voice as it swells to mention -
Causing me to arise and pay attention - - - .
Tock
Tock
Tock goes my mind - - - -
As it competes with the time - - -
Hours and seconds have become infinitized labor - - -
And like a dislexic child my mind organizes the paper - - -
on my neck, ~~Pleas~~ - - -
I can feel a breath - - - -
But not from inside - - - -
Its an open window, where the leaves play
Its the breeze from outside - - - -
My back is glued to this plastic body brace - -
The look of exhaustion, and boredom can be traced - - -
Along the wrinkles on my forehead and the crimson on my face. - -
Tap
Tap

Figure 51: **Tony Keith, "Untitled", 1999 #1**

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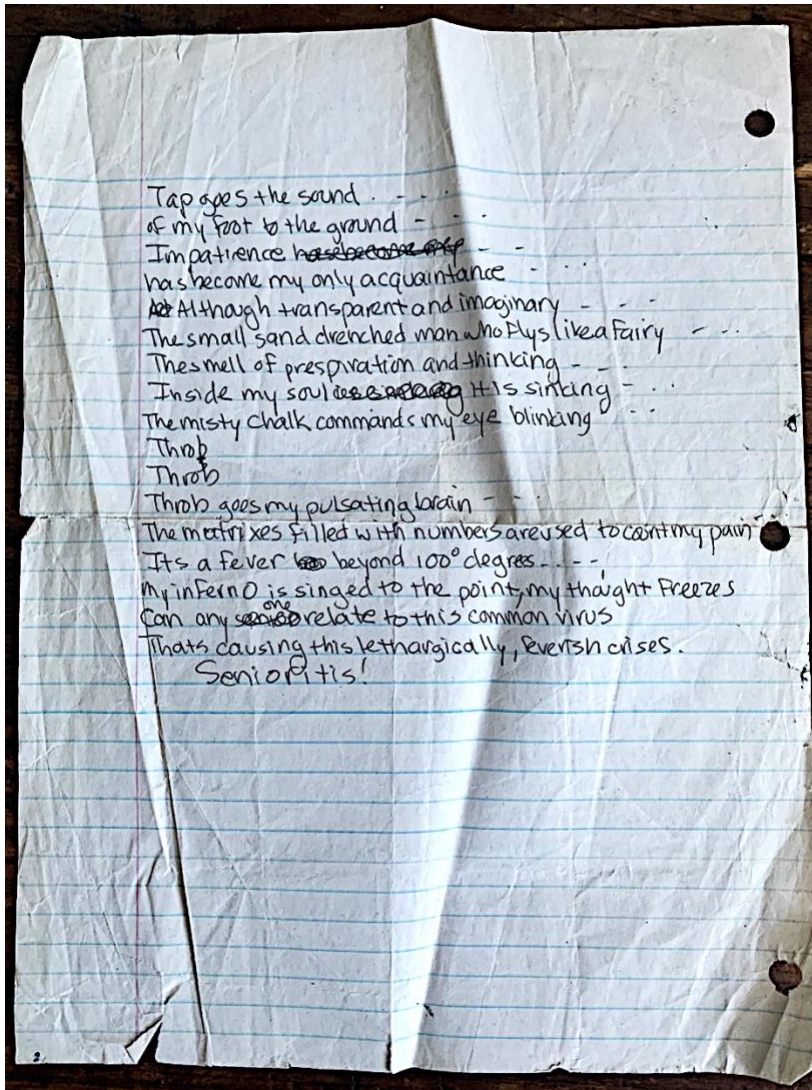
Figure 52: **Tony Keith, "Untitled", 1999, #2**

In that poem, not only do I describe my feelings as a disengaged youth learner,

but I am making references to Black history (i.e., lynching), my learning process (i.e.,

mind organizing the paper), the audience (i.e., can anyone relate), and European-

American literature (Dante's Inferno10). I never shared my original poetry with teachers

for fear of their disproval; my classmates, friends and family members were my only

audiences. By the time I enrolled in college, HBO was screening "Russel Simmons Def

Poetry Jam" featuring Hip-Hop poets like Yasiin Bey (Mos Def), Donatello Williams,

Kanye West, Lauryn Hill, Shiahan van Clief, and legendary poets Sonja Sanchez, Nikki

Giovanni, and Amiri Barka. That is when I discovered "spoken word poetry". I was

inspired by their performance poetry for an audience and began translating my written

poems to stage performances and would later become known as "Tony da Poet", which at

the time "da" was a nod to Black language in lieu of "the" in the American standard. I

featured spoken word performances at open mic venues, churches, college campuses and

community-based open mics. I performed with award-winning authors and poets like

Rebecca Dupas, Leslie Saint-Julien, Patrick Washington, and Bomani Armah.

Ultimately, I believe in the true power of knowledge and discovery that education

can offer, especially when race, culture, and liberation are at the forefront of inquiry and

practices. Therefore, I am curious about the ways in which Black youth, like Tony da

Poet, navigate an educational system that was historically designed to suppress their

intelligences, how they cope through the cumulative racial trauma they carry from their

enslaved African ancestors, and how they express resistance to the oppressive conditions

10 Inferno is the first part of Italian writer Dante Alighieri's 14th-century epic poem Divine Comedy.
The Inferno tells the journey of Dante through Hell, guided by the ancient Roman poet Virgil.
www.wikipedia.org

in their lives through Hip-Hop culture. I am also curious about the teachers and the educational leaders who love them, and the scholars who center their experiences within their research. By "love," I mean engaging in public actions of social justice for the purpose of liberating them from racial, cultural, intellectual and economic oppression. Therefore, my study is inspired by Black history, Hip-Hop, and emancipatory academic endeavors.

My professional goal is to canonize the voices of Black youth in the curriculum and pedagogy of the history of U.S. education. And, to counter the hegemonic dominant ideology of Whiteness that drives the discourse about school policy and student achievement by centralizing communities as the focus of my research endeavors. I know that my approach to liberating Black people, youth, and those whose voices are discounted in the rhetorical discourses about racial equity and disparate "gaps" of achievement between White and non-White students, will invoke White emotionality (Lac, 2017; Matias et al., 2016). I practice a critical race pedagogy (CRP), which according to Ledesma and Calderón (2015), provides liberating possibilities for Black American intellectuals to reflect upon and "teach" Whites to understand themselves through the history of the other, in much the same way many communities of color understand themselves in relationship to Whites. Lastly, I am a Black American, gay, cisgender man oriented to critical theoretical perspectives and research methods that critique Whiteness and patriarchy in American education. My voice is a disruption in the majoritarian discourse about the history of race, racism, and education in the United States that continues to position me as "other". I am also aware that my approach to

research seeks to disrupt patriarchal and racist values of leadership that ignore the counter narratives from Black people, especially Black girls and women. Endsley stated in her (2016) work on spoken word poetry as social justice pedagogy, of which I was a participant:

> Tony rebels against the same discourses he willingly takes a part in – so they will be overlapped with new and different discourses that provide better options for his own objectives. Tony works to counter the very culture he participates in by singing his own melody throughout the illusion of harmony. (p. 19)

According to the findings from my research, I am an educational emcee because I too know what it is like to experience racial, cultural and economic inequities. I also began writing poetry about my life experiences during my youth, which undoubtedly served as a form of therapy and cultural identity development. I would argue that those experiences are what propelled my growth as an award-winning spoken word artist and an educator. In addition, I believe in the power of Hip-Hop consciousness and have spent much of my professional life pouring love, and the healing power of spoken words in my work to inspire young people to pursue their passions and dreams. The question now becomes, what is possible for educational emcees within the context of educational research and scholarship? I will address this question and present additional ideas about future implications from this research in the last chapter.

Chapter 5: The Possibilities

When I asked my dear friend, Jason Reynolds, who is not only a poet, but a New York Times best-selling author, and revolutionary writer of young adult fiction featuring Black and Brown youth as lead protagonists, about the best way to close out my dissertation story, he said, "to assert that there are more unasked questions than there are answers seems like the purest form of scholarship if you ask me" (2019). Therefore, I will introduce a series of questions to both inspire my own research endeavors about ed emcees and guide future scholarly work about the intersections of Hip-Hop and educational research.

I began this intellectual journey with an understanding that I was only one star in a galaxy of educational emcees and that our stories were omitted in the scholarly literature about fulfilling the debt owed to Black and Brown youth in American public schools (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Perhaps it was the word soup; we needed language bright enough to make us visible in the discourse. Now, with new language, the educational research community has an opportunity to ask more questions about educational emcees. And not just the philosophical, highbrow academic inquiries about Hip-Hop epistemologies or the sound science of spoken word poetry. I mean a question like, what are accessible educational and professional opportunities for a ten-year-old kid who hates school, but dreams of a career as an ed emcee? What are career pathways for ed emcees? Where do you tell a principal or a school district to look for educational

emcees in their communities? How do schools develop partnerships with educational emcees, and what are these partnership structures? How can the knowledge we learn from and about ed emcees inform the integration of Hip-Hop in educational leadership programs? What are scholarly frameworks for an educational emcee leadership development curriculum?

I would also argue that spoken word poets and rappers are not the only kinds of educational emcees. We know that within the realm of artistic and performative expressions in Hip-Hop are dancers, singers, visual artists, music producers, and managers who also serve in roles as community-partners in schools around the world. What can we learn from their stories? How would an educational emcee, who is also a graffiti artist manage space, coach students, navigate through school conditions, and what kinds of opportunities do they create for their young people? What do we know about DJ's who also manage afterschool tutoring programs in their neighborhood? What do we know about educational emcees who are also educational researchers, college professors and university administrators? Certainly, we cite their scholarship, but what does their way of knowing and being help us better understand about Hip-Hop and educational leadership? Who are ed emcees working on educational policy? Yes, these people exist, and no, their stories are not included in the scholarly literature.

To answer those questions methodologically, and to generate more questions, I believe Hip-Hopography, poetic transcription and "stamping" offer innovative and emancipatory opportunities for critical qualitative researchers. I also think it is important to point out that I taught myself how to use NVivo for my data analysis, which within the

context of Hip-Hop's consciousness, is an embedded belief about the possibilities for

remixing available resources and technologies for the purpose of innovation that shifts

culture. I wonder however, what is possible for a Hip-Hopcentric qualitative data analysis

software rooted in the aesthetics of sample, layer, flow, rupture, affect, and embodiment.

When I committed to this pursuit of discovery, I was steadfast in my belief about

experiential knowledge as power, and that intellectual liberation is true freedom.

Learning about other educational emcees whose stories run parallel with mine is an

affirmation of purpose, and it is my hope that future ed emcees will see themselves too,

normalized in the public and scholarly literature. Knowledge is power.

"Brilliant"

Tony Keith Jr., (2012)

we are purposely meant

to be here

so the sick

can become a healer

so that the timid

can become a leader

so the weary

can become a teacher

and so the boogey man

can become a poet

Appendix

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Office of Research Development, Integrity, and Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-5445; Fax: 703-993-9590

DATE: April 25, 2019

TO: Meagan Call-Cummings, Ph.D
FROM: George Mason University IRB

Project Title: [1204135-1] Understanding Educational Leadership Experiences with Hip-Hop

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: April 25, 2019
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited review category #7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The George Mason University IRB has APPROVED your submission. This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted materials.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form unless the IRB has waived the requirement for a signature on the consent form or has waived the requirement for a consent process. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the IRB office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed (if applicable).

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This study does not have an expiration date but you will receive an annual reminder regarding future requirements.

- 1 -   Generated on IRBNet

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of five years, or as described in your submission, after the completion of the project.

Please note that department or other approvals may be required to conduct your research in addition to IRB approval.

If you have any questions, please contact Kim Paul at (703) 993-4208 or kpaul4@gmu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

GMU IRB Standard Operating Procedures can be found here: https://rdia.gmu.edu/topics-of-interest/human-or-animal-subjects/human-subjects/human-subjects-sops/

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within George Mason University IRB's records.

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Biography

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