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Published online: 19 Apr 2023.

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On Being Ed Emcees: Toward Hip-Hop Educational Leadership Theory, Research, and Praxis

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ABSTRACT

Advocating for the advancement of hip-hop based education, critical qualitative research, and leadership for educational equity, I explain a theory of hip-hop educational leadership and discuss findings from my hip-hopography of hip-hop educational leaders who are spoken word artists, poets, rappers, or emcees and serve as community partners inside urban high schools across the United States. Using blackout poetic transcription to analyze data, I suggest that these individuals can be called educational emcees, who invoke love as a condition for learning and engagement in their schools through a series of meaningful practices. These individuals also embody poetry and spoken word as an organic hip-hop pedagogy. Opportunities for additional qualitative research about hip-hop educational leadership and educational emcees are presented, along with implications for education leadership preparation, recruitment, and development.

The foundation of hip hop culture rests on excavating knowledge to produce new ways of being and knowing—critical consciousness tied to communal sensibilities. (Love, 2016, p. 417)

Within the field of educational equity, hip-hop culture is part of over three decades of discourse about the possibilities for critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995) to motivate marginalized students' learning and engagement in classrooms and on college campuses (Jenkins et al., 2017). Written as a response and resistance to the deficit-based scholarly literature about racial opportunity gaps (Noguera & Akom, 2000) in U.S. education, in this article about hip-hop based education (HHBE; Hill, 2009), I clarify how hip-hop functions as a primary cultural, political, sonic, and linguistic window on the world for many students from the African diaspora (Hayes, 1993; Hicks-Harper, 1993). However, with white educators composing over 80% of the teaching and leadership workforce in U.S. schools (Taie & Lewis, 2022), a majority of the 50% Black and Brown students enrolled in public education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022) are learning in culturally mismatched conditions (Villegas, 1988) that, as Ogbu (1987) argued, perpetuate societal, school, and classroom forces that contribute to variability in these students' school performance. Thus, according to Rodríguez (2009), there is a strong likelihood that both preservice and in-service teachers might be historically disconnected from hip-hop culture.

In addition, as Petchauer (2009) suggested, because of the commodification and exploitation of hip-hop as a cultural form in the mid-1980s, most commercial media representations of hip-hop today portray it as a narrow musical genre synonymous with rap music. To be clear, the history of hip-hop is rooted in the speech, tongue, dance, and drum that enslaved Africans already possessed before they were dehumanized as chattel property of white people during the transatlantic slave trade (Keith, in press; Alridge & Stewart, 2005; Gladney, 1995). However, hip-hop's specific cultural origins can also be traced back to a 1973 party in the South Bronx of New York City, hosted by poor Black and Afro-Caribbean youth. The party sparked the emergence of hip-hop culture's five elements: deejaying

(turntabling and mixing beats), emceeing (rap, poetry, and spoken word), break-dancing (free-style battle dancing in a cipher), graffiti writing (public/street art), and knowledge of self (Afrocentric philosophy of freedom; see Forman & Neal, 2012). According to Turner et al. (2013), when left without a clear understanding of how hip-hop culture is linked to their own familial histories, students are unable to make the connection to their knowledge of self and self-image.

I argue that educational leaders' perspectives also are critical to the advancement of HHBE because they have access to institutional power to make decisions affecting pedagogy, curricula, school administration, education policy, and funding for community-based, out-of-school learning. According to Douglass Horsford et al. (2011), educational leaders are key to establishing and fostering the culture and climate of schools. Therefore, educational leaders' epistemologies, attitudes, and assumptions concerning race and culture must be an important part of the discourse concerning anti-racist education. Khalifa's (2013) research suggested that although school and classroom policies play a role in marginalizing hip-hop identities, racism can contribute toward a school culture that is hostile and unwelcoming to hip-hop student behavior and proclivity. Therefore, educational leaders' relationship to, and feelings and philosophies about, hip-hop matter in order to move toward an equitable systemic expansion of HHBE in U.S. education.

For educators who identify with hip-hop culture (in any capacity), we can ask ourselves, How do we embody hip-hop in our work to create and foster anti-racist learning and engagement conditions in our schools and communities? How do we demonstrate a mastery of conditions in education conducive for HHBE to thrive? There is little empirical support for drawing explicit connections among hip-hop, spoken word poetry, and leadership for educational equity that is accompanied with language rich and thick enough to answer these questions. Therefore, I conducted a qualitative study of spoken word artists, poets, rappers, and emcees who are also educational leaders in urban U.S. high schools. First, I present a synthesis of the scholarly literature about HHBE, followed by a theoretical framework for hip-hop educational leadership (HHEL). Then, I explain my hip-hop centric research design, data analysis, and findings, followed by a discussion of implications for the field of educational equity.

Critical hip-hop pedagogy

Emdin (2017) argued that "emceeing, b-boying, dee-jaying and graffiti must be seen as academic subjects and Hip-Hop must been seen as the curriculum and the pedagogy" (p. 484). Accumulating scholarly knowledge about HHBE as critical pedagogy serves to fulfill the aforementioned educational lack (Ladson-Billings, 2006) of equitable opportunities for Black and Brown youth to learn and engage in U.S. schools. More specifically, critical hip-hop pedagogy (Akom, 2009) encourages teachers (primarily in urban classrooms) to reexamine their knowledge of hip-hop as it intersects with race, class, gender, and sexuality, while analyzing and theorizing how hip-hop can serve as a tool for social justice (Hill, 2009; Rodríguez, 2009). As an anti-racist, abolitionist, and revolutionary philosophy, critical hip-hop pedagogy is thriving in English language arts and STEM classrooms, where hip-hop is used as a tool not only to move youth to the center of teaching and learning but also to develop youth's hip-hop identity and promote educational freedom (Emdin & Jones, 2018; Love, 2019). According to Adjapong (2017), the recurring use of hip-hop in the classroom over time can foster students' agency to take on increasing responsibility for their own learning.

In fact, when empowered to narrate their fears, struggles, and dreams, youth can utilize language to unveil hidden truths and inform teaching practices that encourage the development of literacy skills, student creativity, and writing, which ultimately democratize the classroom (Desai & Marsh, 2005). In addition, according to Love (2016), critical hip-hop pedagogy 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. Scholars in this milieu are also writing about critical hip-hop pedagogy as a framework for examining how hip-hop functions as a tool for social justice in critical media design and democratic education, for the purpose of developing students' sociopolitical consciousness, community engagement, and

academic skill building (Dando, 2017; Holbert et al., 2020). Failing to analyze hip-hop lyrics and ideology critically may lead one to dismiss an art form capable of transmitting ideas to a community in dire need of positive solutions (Gladney, 1995).

Critical hip-hop literacies

Abe (2009) suggested that to understand how hip-hop culture fits into the larger context of the educative process, it is useful to incorporate Gardner's (1993) theory of multiple intelligences, which contends that there are a variety of mental operations associated with intelligence. Although criticized by both educators and scholars as a limited theory of ability that presents a static view of student competence (Klein, 1997), I argue that Gardner's concept of linguistic intelligence is relevant to my research because it deals with sensitivity to spoken and written language, the ability to learn languages, and the capacity to use language to accomplish certain goals. Therefore, epistemologically, this linguistic way of knowing relates to how spoken word artists, poets, rappers, and emcees move crowds by speaking rhythmic words on microphones. Endsley (2016) suggested,

> At a very foundational level, the spoken word artist and emcee are working to produce new knowledge about themselves and the world around them. ... Community connection, self-exploration, spiritual endurance, and resistance are key to exploring a deep engagement with the fifth element of Hip Hop, the knowledge of self, and clearly aligns spoken word poets and Hip Hop emcees as members of the same family. (Endsley, 2016, p. 65)

For context, rap can be defined as poetry spoken with rhythm over a timed beat that must rhyme, whereas 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" (Carson, 2017, p. 85). In addition, Endsley (2016) submitted that through spoken word poetry, meaning is negotiated, contextualized historically, and undergoes intermediate social reconstruction and reproduction during each performance of a struggle for power, which often results in the expression of a desire for agency.

Within the scholarly literature about HHBE, spoken word poetry is discussed as a critical hip-hop literacy (Richardson, 2006), which foregrounds how students manipulate language, gestures, and images to position themselves against or within discourse to advance and protect themselves. Critical hip-hop literacies stem from critical English education (Morrell, 2005), which interrogates the role of language and literacy in communicating meaning and promoting or disrupting exiting power relations. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) suggested that the thematic nature of hip-hop texts may lead students to develop thoughtful analyses translated into expository writing, production of poetic texts, or a commitment to social action and community empowerment. According to Belle (2016), incorporating critical hip-hop literacies means inviting students to consider multiple ways of speaking, writing, and learning, and encouraging students to see themselves as valuable members of society by privileging their culturally based literacies, including those tied to hip-hop culture. More specifically, the use of critical hip-hop literacies can create spaces for discussions of power and identity that provide students with culturally relevant tools for disrupting a system that maintains the silence and marginalization of young Black girls (Kelly, 2013). Durham et al. (2013) argued that women and femme poets and emcees amplify teen girls' stories, so studies in hip-hop feminism (Morgan, 1999) focus not only on text-based cultural criticism but also on performative, ethnographic accounts that describe hip-hop as embodied, lived culture.

As a critical hip-hop literacy, spoken word poetry shares a sociolinguistic relation with African American Vernacular English, for without equitable access to the written word, enslaved Africans relied on the spoken word to develop fluency in Standard American English (Keith, in press). The Black idiom (Smitherman, 2017) is the foundation of eloquence and poetic skill evidenced in the modern-day hip-hop music aesthetic and verbal artistry of African American Vernacular English speakers but is problematized in classrooms and on national assessments as a language deficiency (Labov, 1969; Rickford, 2016; Van Hofwegen & Wolfram, 2010; Wheeler et al., 2012). Watson (2013) suggested that providing students space to write freely while denying them opportunities to exercise their multiple literacies further stagnates

academic achievement and can send a disrespectful, underlying message that only one form of English is right, so their native language(s) is wrong. Thus, the maintenance of safe spaces to cultivate spoken word poetry requires practitioners to consider the varied ways in which writing and performance interact with and complicate identity development (Weinstein & West, 2012).

Furthermore, the process of creating a spoken word performance makes students aware of multi-dimensional representations of Black popular culture—an awareness that shapes privileged white students' interactions with students of color and also shapes students' self-awareness of their own performative identities (Endsley, 2013). Therefore, incorporating slam poetry and hip-hop pedagogies in classrooms could help improve racially tense learning environments (Bruce & Davis, 2000). In addition, spoken word poetry can make learning and engagement conditions possible for Black students to develop a strong sense of cultural pride, which H. R. Hall (2007) suggested facilitates acts of agency and resistance against negative psychological forces (e.g., low academic performance, substance abuse, delinquent activities). In addition, as Kinloch (2005) posited, spoken word poetry functions as a democratic engagement (e.g., code-switching, group performances, peer feedback) facilitating student development of critical intelligences, such as agreeing to be listeners, respecting others' thoughts and ideas, drawing on prior knowledge and home practices to interrogate the usefulness of creative and standard academic writing, and refusing to have one's identities and writing styles defined in limited categories (see Fiore, 2015; Fisher, 2005; Jocson, 2005; Muller & Poetry for the People Blueprint Collective, 1995).

HHEL theory

To fully realize the potential of HHBE, scholars must raise new theoretical questions, deploy new methodological approaches, and identify new units of analysis that engage a wider range of hip-hop culture's five elements (Hill & Petchauer, 2013). HHBE research, according to Irby and Hall (2011), documents and evaluates the effectiveness of HHBE in transmitting disciplinary knowledge, improving student motivation, teaching critical media literacy, and fostering critical consciousness in primarily urban K–12 educational settings. Love (2018) asserted, however, that HHBE has fallen short by not integrating all the elements of hip-hop and not basing the centrality of HHBE in the history and community of students. Therefore, toward the advancement of HHBE, in my research, I engaged two elements of hip-hop: emceeing and knowledge of self.

Although I have a professional background as a multicultural administrator and professor in higher education, for the last decade, I have worked for nonprofit community-based organizations throughout Washington, DC (my hometown) that provide free out-of-school tutoring, college preparation, and leadership development programs for mostly poor Black and Brown teens. I am also a professional spoken word artist and poet who volunteers as a coach and judge for youth poetry slam competitions and facilitates writing and performance workshops for schools, libraries, and prisons. So, because of my experiential knowledge, I know how to recruit, develop, inspire, and learn from teams of educators and youth workers steeped in their knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy and youth development. I also know what it is like to coach school principals and classroom teachers on their beliefs and approaches to shifting school culture and classroom climate by using hip-hop and spoken word poetry.

However, as a Black, gay, poet, hip-hop teaching artist, and doctoral student, I was an anomaly at a predominantly white institution where I could not see my identities fully reflected in my dissertation committee, nor in the preexisting educational leadership theories. There were no class discussions, articles, or presentations that drew explicit connections to the embodiment of hip-hop and spoken word poetry as professional praxes in education. To be clear, I am one star in the galaxy of professional teaching artists. In fact, well over 150 community- and school-based organizations reportedly serve more than 250,000 youth and young adults through spoken word poetry programs globally (Rose, 2013; Weinstein, 2018). Many of these entities are nonprofit organizations (e.g., Youth Speaks, DC Scores, Words Beats & Life, Split This Rock, Urban Word NYC) that host youth poetry slam competitions (e.g.,

Louder Than a Bomb, Brave New Voices, Hyper Bole) designed to replicate adult poetry programs (e.g., Beltway Slam, Nuyorican Poets Cafe, Southern Fried Poetry, Def Poetry Jam; see Kaya, 2015).

In terms of leadership of nonprofit organizations that primarily focus on serving marginalized populations, research has indicated that on average, 27% of them have executive directors who are people of color, 16% have all-white boards (Faulk et al., 2021), and there is evidence of racial bias built into funding structures that impact hiring practices (LeRoux & Medina, 2023). So, the same white supremacist conditions that stifle opportunities for Black and Brown student learning and engagement also suppress possibilities for Black and Brown educational leaders to serve their communities within and outside of (in)formal educational spaces. According to research from Afterschool Alliance (2021), on a national level, Black (19%) and Latinx (21%) youth are disproportionately enrolled in after-school programs in comparison with white youth (60%). Understanding race differences in children's participation in after-school programs is particularly important because the strong rhetoric about the potential for programs to boost achievement has not yet been matched by strong empirical evidence (Hynes & Sanders, 2011). Furthermore, as Leos-Urbel (2015) argued, after-school programs are a primary policy lever for addressing problems with racial opportunity gaps outside of the school day, where children receive enhanced development and education.

Niesche (2018) suggested that 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. According to the scholarly literature, educational leaders oriented to social justice practices can be identified by (at least) three different perspectives:

(1) Culturally responsive leadership, which entails centering inclusion, equity, advocacy, and social justice by championing culturally responsive curricula and pedagogy and navigating the political terrain tied to educational policy through community engagement (Dantley & Green, 2015; Douglass Horsford et al., 2011; Khalifa et al., 2016)
(2) Cross-boundary educational leadership, whereby individuals with a strong commitment to social justice and community identity develop strategic partnerships between schools and youth development community organizations that offer educational programs for students (Adams & Jean-Marie, 2011; Green, 2015; Krumm & Curry, 2017)
(3) Applied critical educational leadership, which is grounded in practices framed by social justice and educational equity wherein leadership results from both professional practice and leaders' embodied, lived experiences with culturally oppressive belief systems (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, xenophobia, homophobia; Dantley & Green, 2015; Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2015)

Therefore, I sourced the extant scholarly literature about critical educational leadership and the aforementioned peer-reviewed work about HHBE to construct a theoretical framework for HHEL (see Figure 1).
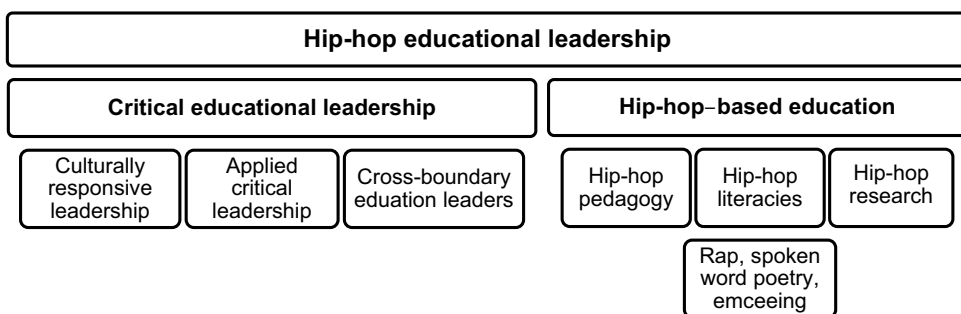

Figure 1. Hip-hop educational leadership framework.

Collectively, the literature suggests that HHEL comprises applied critical leaders who serve as culturally responsive, cross-boundary educators who source critical hip-hop pedagogy and critical hip-hop literacies to solve problems with conditions for Black and Brown student learning and engagement. Therefore, in my research (Keith, 2019), I asked three overarching questions:

(1) Who are HHELs that are also poets, spoken word artists, rappers, or emcees?
(2) What learning and engagement conditions do HHEL leaders foster and create that are conducive for HHBE to thrive?
(3) How does poetry and the art of spoken word function in their roles as HHEL leaders?

Hip-hopography as critical race methodology

Scholarship published in the second wave of HHBE literature, according to Petchauer (2015), is expansive and consists of academic projects exploring how sonic, kinesthetic, linguistic, and visual practices and expressions of hip-hop can shape and re-create research. One of these methodological approaches for conducting HHBE research is hip-hopography (Eure & Spady, 1991), which combines methods of ethnography, biography, and social and oral history with hip-hop aesthetics. Hip-hopography, according to Spady (2013), seeks to answer questions about what strategies should be employed in creating a postcolonial, historical text that reflects emic and etic dimensions of being and becoming in a hip-hop conscious world, while simultaneously situating the text solidly in Afro-diasporic cultures. Jackson (2013) asserted that we need to place the beginnings of hip-hopography in a temporal context; in the early 1980s and the 1990s, there was no unanimity in the public discourse about hip-hop when it began to assert its power on the cultural and political stage of the United States and the world where many consumers of mass media thought Black youth culture was dangerous. As a critical race methodology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), I argue that hip-hopography challenges traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories and offers liberatory solutions through an interdisciplinary knowledge base focused on the counterstories told about the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of people of color.

The peer-reviewed literature about hip-hopography is thin, but Petchauer (2015) offered a methodological framework for doing hip-hop centric research, which I interpreted for this study to include several aesthetics: (a) sampling (sourcing multiple methods and methodologies), (b) layering (revealing levels within and across data), (c) flow (identifying rhythm and cadence in data), (d) rupture/break (categorizing data), (e) affect (identifying data that emotionally move the researcher), and (f) performance and embodiment (a hip-hop inspired, community-based presentation of findings). Next, I discuss how I employed each of these aesthetics in my hip-hopography.

Sample

Sampling is most recognized as a process by which music producers create hip-hop instrumental tracks called beats by capturing an audio sound artifact from a previous recording (usually vinyl records) by using a digital instrument called a sampler. Within the context of hip-hopography, sampling can be used as a structural metaphor to assemble elements of a culturally relevant methodology, and can lead pedagogues to rethink how they use what is already available to them to create something new (Petchauer, 2012). According to Davis (2019), the hip-hop aesthetic of sampling can function as a structural metaphor to assemble the elements of a culturally relevant methodology capable of protest by sampling from the arts-based method of poetic inquiry, culturally relevant pedagogy, and critical race theory. Therefore, I sampled from several methods that were in alignment with my onto-

Table 1. Methods sampled.

Method/methodology	Description	Purpose(s)
Black feminism and participatory action research	Using participatory-based methods to disrupt power dynamics between participants and researchers, with an intentional focus on including the perspectives of Black and Brown women	Participant selection, research design, and data analysis
Poetic transcription	Developing poems from emic qualitative data	Data analysis
Narrative inquiry	Using stories as data; considering temporality, sociality, and place; and analyzing the structure and themes of told stories	Data analysis
Critical hermeneutic phenomenology	Including researcher bias in the interpretive process	Data analysis

epistemological commitments as a Black, gay poet, which include elements of Black feminism, participatory action research, narrative inquiry, poetic transcription, and critical hermeneutic phenomenology (see Table 1).

As Alim (2006) submitted, in hip-hopography, hierarchical divisions between the researcher and the researched are purposely kept to a minimum, thereby permitting the hip-hopographer to engage the community on its own terms. According to Few (2007), the use of Black feminism is to balance gender consciousness with race consciousness (e.g., race identification, power politics, system blame) and nontraditional data (e.g., poetry, diaries, creative art, photography) to examine the lives of Black women and their families. Relatedly, participatory action research 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 (see B. L. Hall, 1992; Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009; Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2007; Whyte, 1989). As Krumer-Nevo (2009) suggested, participatory action research has a strong affiliation with feminism because both perspectives share theoretical assumptions, values, and goals about the participatory nature of the process, a critical stance toward social power structures, a democratic worldview, and a commitment to achieving social change through a combination of knowledge generation and action.

In addition, the desire to learn from participants' 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, things, and events under study), 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 curious about not only the content of stories but also how stories are told, which in terms of traditional methods is 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 was interested in discovering. Within the realm of qualitative research, the notion of embodiment is a key component of critical hermeneutic phenomenology, which 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 researcher biases and assumptions are included and essential to the interpretive process (Mobley, 2019). Finally, I was inspired by poetic transcription as a method for transforming qualitative data into poems, which can then be interpreted and analyzed for meaning (Byrne, 2017; Corley, 2019; Dill, 2015; Glesne, 1997) to develop blackout poetic transcription (Keith & Endsley, 2020).

The squad

To identify members for this study, I recruited 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. All of the participants work for community-based organizations and youth development nonprofits that are physically housed within urban public high schools across the

United States (i.e., Detroit, MI; Washington, DC; New York, NY; Manchester, CT; San Francisco, CA). I refer to them as The Squad because it better reflects the language we use in our community and more accurately describes the cocreative nature of our relationship. To honor the multiple identities and diverse perspectives of The Squad, I requested optional demographic information on an anonymous questionnaire about how they identify in several categories: race, ethnicity, gender, age, abilities, nationality, language(s), faith, sexual orientation, family status, and highest educational background.

Collectively, the ten members of The Squad represent the diversity of Afro-diasporic and Latin American communities: an age range from late 20s to late 40s; five women, five men, and five parents; three with a graduate degree, six with an undergraduate degree, and one with a GED; three identifying Spanish as their first language; and a spectrum of religious and faith traditions. Their pseudonyms are Yusha, Al, Mabel, Lauryn, Grace, Donatello, Rakim, Lucille, Jill, and Amiri. Over the course of three months, I conducted and audio-recorded individual interviews with members of The Squad about their biographical journey toward becoming a HHEL leader who is also a spoken word artist, poet, rapper, and/or emcee. I then transcribed the interviews to generate qualitative data for analysis using the blackout poetic transcription method.

Blackout poetic transcription

Blackout poetic transcription (Keith, 2019) is a method for performing poetic transcription in qualitative research by infusing elements of blackout poetry (see Brewer, 2014; Kleon, 2010) with aesthetics from hip-hopography. The process includes creating a poetic transcript of the interviews and breaking them into data poems (see Corley, 2019; Davis, 2019; Glesne, 1997; Prosser, 2009). The poetic transcript serves as the main source for researchers to conduct further qualitative analysis. Data poems are not intended to function as art for art's sake; they serve as the remixed space for sourcing language to provide rich and thick descriptions to answer qualitative research questions or further advance research goals. Blackout poetic transcription is a reflexive scholarly praxis that functions as an anti-racist, decolonizing qualitative research method that disrupts mainstream methodologies (Keith & Endsley, 2020).

The hip-hop aesthetics that align most with blackout poetic transcription are layer, flow, rupture/break, and affect. Layer is associated with how graffiti writers add layers to their pieces to shroud their identities, how poets and rappers layer meanings in songs across variations of language, and how deejays layer samples in producing beats. Flow is the interaction between beats and rhythm in hip-hop music and Black oral traditions such as poetry and spoken word, as well as the momentum with which graffiti writers draw their lines. A rupture is a break in flow like deejays would create to incite break dancers to battle in cyphers or graffiti writers would choose to make cuts in their lines. Affect is the production of an effect upon someone or something such that it generates an emotional response or an act of change that causes influence. Within a hip-hop context, deejays, poets, rappers, and emcees can emit sound vibrations that affect crowds, moving them to dance, sing, call, and respond.

I performed blackout poetic transcription on The Squad's interview transcripts, resulting in approximately 200 different data poems, which I organized into two overarching categories: stories and beliefs. I shared examples of individual data poems with each member of The Squad; all of them confirmed that the poetic transcriptions were created with care and that their words remained true to their original articulations of experiential knowledge. Without imposing what I understood their experiences to be, I allowed the data poems freedom to stand on their own, which Corley (2019) suggested represents each of the participants' beauty, complexity, and power and helps show what it feels like to live their experiences.

Story data poems

Story data poems include narrative elements such as characters, dialogue, time, setting, and plot, all of which refer to Clandinin and Connelly's (2004) notions of temporality, sociality, and place. I organized the story data poems into two categories. The first is meaningful moments, or what Webster and Mertova (2007) described as critical events in narrative research, which essentially are moments expressed in told stories that influenced an outcome in the lives of the storytellers. I discovered five types of meaningful moments in the data: discovering self (stories about The Squad's identity development, stemming from the intersections of their race, faith, work ethic, and career trajectory), recognizing inequities (stories about recognizing or experiencing racial, cultural, and economic disparities in schools and communities), emceeing/poetry/rapping (stories about writing, recording, and performing poetry and raps and making music beats), discovering purpose (stories about figuring out their postsecondary careers, which ranged across internships, entry-level jobs, college courses, and teaching poetry writing workshops for youth in their communities), and achieving dreams and goals (stories about winning and success; see Table 2 for examples).

The second category of story data poems was meaningful practices, which refers to the HHEL theoretical framework I presented earlier to describe how The Squad demonstrated aspects of critical educational leadership and HHBE in their work. Four types of meaningful practices were present in the data: creating opportunities (stories about providing opportunities for students to learn and engage in and outside of school), navigating school conditions (stories describing the atmosphere, culture, and climate of the schools where HHEL leaders work), coaching students (stories about guiding students toward discovering their purpose, passion, and inspiration and pursuing their dreams and goals), and managing spaces (stories about developing, cultivating, and curating spaces in schools to shift culture, climate, and conditions to spark student learning and engagement; see Table 3 for examples).

Belief data poems

Some data poems did not include any elements of a told story or any evidence of temporality. After reviewing them further, I noticed these were moments when The Squad expressed certain beliefs about education, racial inequities, cultural knowledge, and hip-hop, which offered intellectual depth for further data analysis. These beliefs are centered around five overarching themes: access and opportunity (describes how The Squad responds to students' concerns about school climate and conditions by offering them access to opportunities to feel connected to the communities they come from), girls/women/mothers (describes the need for an intentional focus on the socioemotional well-being of Black and Brown girls and women in education), words/sounds/vibrations (describes the metaphysical relation among hip-hop, spoken word, sounds, and vibrations, and their impact on the brain and spirit of listeners), emcees/poets/rappers/educators (illuminates the relationship among educators, poets, and rappers and their connection to communities), and hip-hop (describes beliefs, ideas, philosophies, and theories about hip-hop culture; see Table 4 for examples).

Stamped *as research affirmation*

Because of the participatory nature of this study, I met with a few members of The Squad at the onset to discuss the research process and intended outcomes for the findings. Collectively, we decided that this hip-hopography must achieve four essential agreements:

(1) Authenticity: Throughout the research process, everyone should feel affirmed to be hip-hop, which meant an acceptance, appreciation, and love for the use of language, phrases, vocabulary,

Table 2. Meaningful moments data poems.

Discovering self	Recognizing inequities	Emceeing/poetry/rapping
"A Prophet" by Amiri	"T.A.G." by Mabel	"Playful Remixes" by Al
born a prophet parent's barren recklessly conceived, apparently, my name came in a dream before I was delivered an earthly name a heavenly name complications with my birth doctors said I will be born brain dead the nurse helping to operate was a choir director my grandmothers prayed I was literally prayed into the world faculties intact brain functioning I take my heavenly name seriously a prophet call me distinguished the name my beginning an American legacy that celebrates African American history the birth of a Hip-Hop legend	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 … I realize I was being afforded opportunities, internships field trips only for T.A.G. students always felt like me and my friends were the same gifted program was different boxed shaped learning experience we got to high school those who were not in talented and gifted were dejected with school they didn't enjoy school I had fun all my teachers liked me whereas they were being treated as problem children class was not interesting they weren't being challenged	middle school I was recording beat boxes on voice memos, answering machines, my Nokia, spit lyrics over the beatbox take that joint to school let people hear remixes something I did for me I listened to it on the way to school I had a mini boom box to record over the 8-track put them in my Walkman listen to them joints on the way to school started getting used to my voice hearing how I sound from a listener's perspective I did playful remixes let my friends hear we laugh about it I was selfish with my music and my poetry it was something for me

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Discovering purpose	Achieving dreams and goals
"Creative Writing" by Donatello	"Queen of Campus" by Lauryn
declared business	City University
as my major	always acting
I think, "ohhhh money"	always writing poetry
English class college teacher,	running for
a super laid back White boy	Queen of Campus
I wrote your basic	trying to figure out
structured essay	what to do
got an F . . .	for the talent portion
I wrote a story	
I got an A	this dude was like,
I wrote another story	"yo, you got
I got an A	one of them voices
he's like,	you could do something"
"what's your major?	a memorable voice
"what are you doing?"	
I said, "business"	I get it now
he said, "why?"	
I said, "what do you mean why?"	I was like,
he said, "you're good at writing . . . "	"I'm going to to use this
	as a skill"
second year of college	I already write poetry
I switched over	I'm sure I can rap
creative writing major	I would write long ass rhymes
shit, the rest is history	I had so many words
spent six years in college	broken down pieces
came out with three degrees	I would write altogether
BA in English	be out of breath
MA in English	
MFA in English	I wrote a rap
creative writing	for the competition
with an emphasis in poetry	performance before graduation
young OG,	I won.
killing the game	
	it's when the light turned on
	I can use rap as a vehicle

Note. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 3. Meaningful practices data poems.

Creating opportunities	Coaching students
"Rhythm of the World" by Rakim	"School Assembly Takeover" by Jill
I wanted to create a Hip-Hop class but they wouldn't let me so, I combined with one of my homies to teach a humanities class humanities goes with music go through all these hoops 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 we would use photography take different lens of what would get young people engaged Don't Panic, We're Muslim use them in the curriculum had our young people connect with them dope sisters who use Hip-Hop for social transformation	school assembly take over students ran the whole show "generaciòn del futuro" Spanish-speaking population a lot of segregation based on language barriers cultural stereotypes 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 student led assembly teachers saw students different more capable trustworthy students steward the work
Managing spaces	**Navigating school conditions**
"Cared for the Space" by Yusha	"Boricua" by Lucille
I remove everything that looks like a classroom aint no desk just some bean bags always nice music Hip-Hop good vibration *my* music smells good in my room kids walk in like, "yo I always love coming in here because it makes me feel like I'm at peace and as soon as I walk out the door it feels different" I wanted kids to feel the difference between the hallway and the threshold of my room. It has been achieved. they come in knowing that this space is different feels good in here feels like somebody cares and respects me cares for me cared for the space	first came into the school a lot of micro aggressions thrown my way Boricua loud, unapologetic don't cater to respectability politics introduce myself to teachers with a poem about gentrification in Brooklyn forces us to confront truths about colonization and displacement to ask ourselves questions on our complicity students were like, "you sound like us" "you look like us" gravitated to me very quickly 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 this is who I am this is what I'm about I'm here for my young people

Note. All names are pseudonyms.

Table 4. Belief data poems.

Access and opportunity	Girls/women/mothers	Words/sounds/vibrations
"Erykah Badu" by Mabel	"Monie in the Middle" by Lauryn	"Cadence and Flow" by Amiri
Erykah Badu with the first person to say "yes" to do a meet and greet with about 60 kids she talked to them for two hours equivalent of manifesting Barack Obama pulling up to my door once I was able to do that a light clicked, "what else could I do?" started hitting people up like, "I see you got Big Sean, Gold Link... they wanna meet some kids?" people kept saying "yes" the apex was when Diddy said "yes" I needed my kids to be a part of Hip-Hop history even if they don't understand the importance of it	spiritually . . . divinely placed in schools where girls have challenges with their mothers coming to me expressing their relationships with their teachers I got married became a mom experienced the magic of creating something from nothing started looking at all the women in Hip-Hop who became mothers you got monumental women like a Lauryn Hill contributing stories until they become mothers why is that they stopped? what the hell? in motherhood you hope to drop more jewels than ever before now we aint talking? what lessons are girls getting?	focus on the cadence and the performance words matter the nature of my mouth my drum the vibration of the words I'm saying it's code we used to communicate with each other its ancient and present at the same time switching a double entendre code switching is not just to make White people comfortable it's for us to communicate Black code of Sankofa present and ancient codes which we can listen and operate from a position of deficit the gumbo from Afrobeat, jazz to trap to funk to soul code switch they all do a thing: love

Emcees/poets/rappers/educators	Hip-hop	
"Numbers and Words" by Al	"Hip-Hop Is a Spirit" by Yusha	
never wrote a song specifically for East High I was more focused on that other version of writing and observation that demands I show up more as an educator always felt like I fused my love for writing and my love for words and my connection with words to numbers the way I speak to my students they say, "oh, you're preaching sound like you about to do a poem" it comes out because of how it's rooted in my language I show up I wrote things that allowed me to express the need to be centered and the way we aim to shape our communities and prioritize the healing for the world	understand that when people think about Hip Hop they think about rap they think about a song 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 to make a way pull ourselves up by our bootstraps cause you're not gonna help us we're gonna do it our way using our language our concepts our codes our methods Hip-Hop is connected to liberation but liberation isn't tear down around you if you're not gonna give it to us get the fuck out the way	

Note. All names are pseudonyms.

and pop culture references (e.g., the use of African American Vernacular English, Spanglish, profanity, and terms like *tripping* and *holla*).

(2) Accessibility: The knowledge produced must be relevant, valuable, and applicable to the lives of people within the community where the research takes place.
(3) Emotionality: During the research process, there should be a metaphysical moment that sparks wonder and feels ecclesiastical or sermon-like.
(4) Liberation: Findings from the research should influence future educational policy and practice.

According to The Squad, should we achieve these objectives, the research will be stamped (*stamp that* is a confirmatory term used by many Washington, DC youth to signify value and validity; Urban Dictionary, 2018).

Toward achieving authenticity, during the creation of the blackout poetic transcriptions, I did not censor any words or phrases that might be deemed inappropriate by conventional language and literacy standards. To ensure the findings were accessible to communities outside of higher education, I enlisted support of Lul Marley, a 22-year-old, Black, male rapper who is a former member of a youth development program I ran for Washington, DC, high school students. I was curious about how someone who was roughly two decades my junior would interpret the meanings behind the data poems. We spent hours reviewing transcripts together while listening to his original hip-hop music and brainstorming ideas on a whiteboard. Much to my surprise, he saw elements of stories and beliefs in the data, which served as affirmation that my epistemological and methodological approach to conducting the data analysis was accessible from a younger person's perspective. He also identified parts of the poetic transcription that sparked wonder and inspiration for him, which aligns with the third agreement, emotionality. One of these moments occurred after he read Lucille's poem "Make My Life an Education," in which she reclaims her right to learn and discover knowledge despite only possessing a GED:

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

The three lines within quotation marks toward the end of this data poem particularly stood out to Lul Marley because Lucille's story resembles much of his own educational experiences and how, through hip-hop, he continues to produce and consume knowledge. We decided to call these emic lines in the data "jewels" to reflect the ways rappers, spoken word artists, poets, and emcees drop lyrical bars in their poems, songs, and performances. The emotionality we experienced from the data relate to the affect aesthetic of hip-hopography.

Affect

As Petchauer (2015) argued, the philosophical stance of pragmatist aesthetics suggested by Kline (2007) focuses on affect in hip-hop culture through the concept of kinetic consumption:

> Hip-Hop is meant to be felt and not to be just seen and/or heard . . . whether this is dance, nodding one's head, or scrunching one's face at the sound of a moving beat. Almost uniformly in Hip-Hop spaces, if folks are not moving something, something is wrong. (p. 55)

Toward the discovery of language providing a rich and thick description about HHEL leaders who are also spoken word artists, poets, rappers, and/or emcees, I read through the poetic transcripts in search of jewels that I felt answered my research questions.

First, I asked, Who are HHELs that are also poets, spoken word artists, rappers, or emcees? I derived language for the answer from a jewel I discovered in a data poem by Donatello entitled "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
> letter-wise
> the literal "m" and "c"
> can be
> master craftsmen
> master of ceremonies
> mister/mistress of community
> Hip-Hop was built
> from the community
> then it became capitalized
> like most things
> emcees, beyond people
> who do music
> beyond people skilled
> with the pen
> a true emcee
> gives back
> beyond the music
> they're teaching

By joining the words *educator* and *emcees*, I created the term *Ed Emcees* to describe HHEL leaders who are also spoken word artists, poets, emcees, or rappers. Similar to moving a crowd at a hip-hop party, Ed Emcees demonstrate a mastery of conditions for Black and Brown student learning and engagement through hip-hop and spoken words. This language speaks to the call-and-response relationship between performers and their audience that is analogous to educators and students. Thereby, instantiating "hip-hop artists as surrogate teachers and hip-hop culture as alternative classrooms" (Bridges, 2011, p. 326).

My second question was, What learning and engagement conditions do Ed Emcees create and foster that are conducive for HHBE to thrive? I referred to the belief data poems about hip-hop and was inspired by a jewel I found in Al's data poem "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
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 no limits

Love, according to hooks (2018), is an act of will, both an intention and an action. When used as language spoken by the Ed Emcees in this study, love represents a philosophy of solidarity and an unwavering commitment to unconditional equity. Love is what informs their work to transform schools into educationally liberatory spaces for marginalized students via the meaningful practices discussed earlier. Therefore, the Ed Emcees create and foster love as a learning and engagement condition in their work. Notably, at the time of this study, Al was an Ed Emcee working in the District of Columbia Public Schools (2017) system, for which a part of the vision for their strategic plan was that "every student feels loved, challenged, and prepared to positively influence society and thrive in life" (p. 3).

My final question was, How does the art of spoken word function in the lives of Ed Emcees? I referred to the story data poems about emceeing, poetry, and rapping and was inspired by a jewel from Grace's data poem "Laughing at the Pedagogies:"

I'm not anti-academia
I know its weight
I also know
it's not the only way
to become successful
logic didn't come
from academia

I don't have
a Ph.D. in poetry
get the fuck out of here ...
I teach poetry
and creative writing
poet in residence
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

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. Therefore, poetry and spoken word functions as an organic hip-hop pedagogy for Ed Emcees. As Biggs-El (2012) contended, performance art fosters such agency by enabling artists to reclaim their bodies from oppressive and repressive academic praxes that downcast the role of cultural identity construction. Furthermore, as an illustration of hip-hop's fifth element, knowledge of self, Endsley (2016) argued that spoken word poetry as a social justice pedagogy places emphasis on the relationship between the audience member and the artist, thus commanding an awareness of others and an increased awareness of the self as critical.

Embodiment and performance

According to Petchauer (2015), the nexus of affect underscores the quality that hip-hop is fundamentally a participatory culture; "one does something to be down and *embodies* Hip-Hop by what they do" (p. 86). Toward approaching this final stage of hip-hopography, I hosted "Ed Emcees," a public performance of the research at a popular restaurant in my hometown known for its community activism, celebration of cultural foods, and cultivation of spoken word poetry culture. The event was funded by a local arts grant's agency and had over 100 people present, including family members, friends, parents, school principals, business owners, college students, teachers, college administrators, neighborhood elders, hip-hop artists, poets, and preachers, spread across racial, cultural, gender, and generational lines. In addition to sharing my preliminary research findings, I also featured performances from some of the Ed Emcees who

were a part of The Squad. Finally, the Ed Emcees curated a Spotify playlist for the event featuring hip-hop music inspired by the research, and distributed handmade zines[1] featuring visual art, poems, and jewels from the study.

Discussion

According to Liou et al. (2017), there is a pressing need to identify structures and elements that can make education more conducive to students' learning needs and to allow individuals and groups to be understood and valued in ways in which their collective success matters to everyone in the school community. However, educational leaders often struggle with how to identify and promote inclusive practices in schools, particularly when underlying norms and assumptions reinforce inequitable practices that are deeply embedded in a school's culture and reinforced by societal expectations and power differences (Bustamante et al., 2009). As Green (2015) suggested, principals can gain support to change school culture by connecting with community-wide initiatives (e.g., community goal to improve graduation rates) and partnering with local organizations to address key school-community concerns (e.g., low educational attainment rates, gang activity). In addition, in order to close the racial opportunity gap, educational leadership preparation programs need to place issues of social justice and equity at the center of training and practice to promote the recognition that every group of people has cultural and social capital (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Khalifa, 2010). Furthermore, as Santamaría and Santamaría (2015) argued, entering into leadership spaces with informed knowledge of—or a willingness to learn—the sociopolitical, cultural, and linguistic context surrounding the learning environment (i.e., hip-hop culture, pedagogy, and literacies) can counteract educational injustice.

The knowledge, wisdom, and understanding gained from this hip-hopography illustrate how Ed Emcees, as HHEL leaders, offer theoretical and pragmatic solutions for problems with culturally mismatched school environments. Endsley (2009) argued that hip-hop artists and spoken word poets not only provide examples of academic social theory that critique a mainstream point of view, but also offer much more than a slick illustration; the magnetism for these cultural practices lies in the work of production. To be clear, Ed Emcees are not the only type of HHEL leaders; within the infinite 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. Several of these organizations are physically housed inside school buildings, with teams of youth workers who have been either furloughed or underemployed by their nonprofits because of COVID-19's financial hit on the philanthropic community. Prior to the pandemic, I was speaking at a Career Day program at an elementary school in my neighborhood, which is predominantly Black and low income, and many of the students asked, "How can I grow up to be an Ed Emcee like you?"

What if Ed Emcees were permanently funded positions within schools and community-based organizations that provide educational services for racially, culturally, and economically marginalized youth? What conditions could they be or are they making possible for students within the context of the #BlackLivesMatter movement? How would a HHEL leader who is also a graffiti artist manage space, coach students, and navigate through school conditions? What kinds of opportunities do HHEL leaders create for young people? What do we know about deejays and break-dancers, for example, who also manage after-school tutoring programs in their neighborhoods? What do we know about HHEL leaders 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 the HHEL leaders working on educational policy? To answer these questions methodologically, and generate more questions, I believe hip-hopography and blackout poetic transcription offer innovative and emancipatory opportunities for critical qualitative researchers in education.

My hope is that scholars inspired by this research will advance the work about HHEL leaders from multiple perspectives, research interests, and methodological designs that intend to disrupt coloniality in higher education and advance liberating educational polices informed by HHBE research.

Notes

1. "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 a copy machine" (Wikipedia, 2023, para. 1).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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