PLAY IT LOUD: HIP-HOP IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Hip-hop music and its place in education has been thoroughly researched over the last two decades by many scholars and educators from all over the world. This research paper discusses hip-hop’s merit in the classroom, building upon prior research from books and journal articles, along with my own research that I conducted with students at a southern Louisiana high school. Educators in the field of language arts must find new methods when it comes to teaching our youth and leave behind many of the traditional ways that previous generations were accustomed to. The idea of hip-hop in education, in this paper, is that it is a genre of not only music, but also history and it is able to teach, promote discussion, and make connections to students’ lives in a realistic way. Hip-hop can also parallel classic literature and can serve as a model for discussing current and historic events. This research was conducted over a 4 month span, but in all actuality, the process of reviewing the literature to concluding results takes place over a year’s time. Hip-hop can be a discourse that teaches youth through not only lyrics, but also from a historic and pop cultural perspective. The intentions of this paper are to make its readers aware of the power of hip-hop and its ability to engage our youth and keep them interested school and promote encouragement and enlightenment.
Introduction

Background

Since the age of about 12, I can say I have been an avid and devoted fan to the genre of hip-hop music, at least until I was 25 (and now that I am 31, I find myself still listening to the same artists that I did when I was 12-17 years old). One can hear this genre of music through pop radio and Clearchannel; in various businesses such as the gyms, malls, the music stores, and even on the automobile radio of various friends; even when I am channel surfing and stumble upon MTV or VH-1 with their reality programming gone berserk and seemingly steering clear of “just music” - all of these places and programming are mediums for what has now become a soundtrack to life in motion and that is hip-hop music. Like it or not, it’s playing at a very loud volume and it’s playing near you. The volume contains, I argue, a value and that is what educational researchers are trying to prove.

I have often speculated if certain (or even the majority of) people analyze hip-hop as simply a form of noise that sort of plays in the background for commercials for Nike and New Balance shoes – to mesh a look with a sound about breaking limits and records and never quitting. Perhaps some justify hip-hop as something that must play in night clubs and parties – its only role to make the environment more lively and entertaining. Do we even need an association for this brand of music that my parents despised me listening to (and still do)? Don’t get me started on my Teddy Roosevelt-loving grandparents (God love ‘em)...well, they thought that I had become brainwashed by the Black Panthers, the devil, and the cast of Goodtimes (my favorite television sitcom growing up, that they wouldn’t allow me to watch in their presence) all at once, because no way does their grandson listen to such vile music, as they often reminded me. I feel badly whenever I tread upon ground that my family tells me is not of worth, but I have
found myself as a teacher who really took notice of those who go out on the limbs and strive for
difference-making in education. Believe me; I take mental notes in proper circumstance. I
cannot, however, pretend to teach something that I do not like. There’s even a fascinating history
worth taking note of when it comes to hip-hop.

When it came to hip-hop, I fell head over heels for the beats and the catchy choruses and
phrases (*You down with O.P.P.? Yeah you know me!*). By the time the mid 90’s had arrived, hip-
hop had sort of disappeared from my niche. Everyone was going crazy over Kurt Cobain and the
grunge and explosion of Indie Rock bands/artists like Beck, Veruca Salt, Sublime, and
Dashboard Confessional, among many more that had arrived onto the mainstream music scene
from out of nowhere. Just when I thought I had outgrown hip-hop, it came back into my life near
the end of 1994. Everyone from my parents to my teachers and even some of my peers had told
me that hip-hop was full of violence and advocated drug-usage and sex (now that *never* happens
in any other music, does it?) and served no purpose in my life. Then, one night as I was sitting up
and channel surfing, I finally saw what these naysayers weren’t seeing. I sat on our den’s blue
suede couch and saw the opening to the group Brand Nubian’s video, “Hold On” and for the first
time, it hit me like a sledgehammer that hip-hop is story-telling and a poetic representation of
reality. What Lord Jamar and Sadat X, the emcees of the group, were trying to promote was anti-
violece, brotherhood, and keeping the peace within our communities. The scene that stuck out
the most was a potential fight about to happen between two males in the video, due to a
confrontation that involved a female. Suddenly, one male (wearing an eye patch), hand stuck in
pocket, reached out of it with nothing, but an extended hand…of which was shook by the other.
From that point on, I began to research other groups like them and bought lots of albums –
reading the lyrics and trying, in my own mind, to decipher what the artists were conveying. That
video and song’s message from Brand Nubian, I think, changed me. I wanted everyone to see and hear it. Maybe one day I would get that chance in some fashion, I thought. This is perhaps what might have shaped some of my philosophy of teaching in a classroom even before I stepped foot in it – my blueprint to start with, if you will.

So, I eventually became a Language Arts instructor (who also has taught Biology and pre-Algebra) and started a humble beginning to my hopeful career in the fall of 2004. When I first got into teaching, I could not figure out how to use hip-hop and even told myself that it was not a good idea (and why that was may be developed from my own secondary education). I could only discuss it with students at various points – break times, lunch hour, etc. I did take notice that they seemed interested in my own interest in this genre. “Mr. M., you listen to Nas?” Answers to questions like these were amazing to some of my students in my first two years – the two years that I really didn’t do much other than what the curriculum guided.

I have observed classes, had my classes observed by principals, vice-principals, mentor teachers, local community college students, parents who punished their children by coming to school and sitting next to them in their classes, and just about any sort of employee from the district, city, parish, and the state. In my four years of teaching, a lot of eyes walked into my classroom to watch me teach. Even though I knew that some of those pairs of eyes would glare at me and pen would hastily write God only knows what while I was teaching a lesson, I wanted to be seen as a different sort of teacher. I was going to be the guy who made class fun and entertaining, and while I did accomplish that in several ways, I began to realize two very important things about my students: “Fun” for them meant anything other than school…seriously. “Entertaining” was everything at school that didn’t involve learning – from schoolyard fights, text messaging during a lecture, seeing significant others between classes, and
pep rallies. When it comes to high school sophomores and juniors (I was fortunate enough to teach English II in 2006-07 and then the following year, English III – meaning that basically I had the same students), there isn’t much you can do to make class fun, unless you incorporate their world, while surprising them with part of yours. My fall of 2007 creative writing class gave me the chance to do just that…and it worked out well.

I had a lot of freedom with my creative writing students and my principal told me, “As long as you keep it educational, you can pretty much do what you have to do.” My principal actually thought he was doing me an injustice by laying this elective on me, on top of teaching five other English III classes, without asking for my feedback. I actually didn’t mind at all and felt fortunate that I did not get stuck with having to “teach” 4-H or photography. Little did my principal know, I would have picked creative writing if I had been given the choice. After all, I would write stories, lyrics, rhymes, random scribble, and fake newspaper articles (I was the competition to the real school paper, but that’s another story) when I was in high school, so this was a nice means of traveling back in time except for the fact that I was going to use a boom box – just a small one, with weak clock radio-like speakers and a very stubborn CD player that seemed to have a mind of its own, as if filtered by some force that thought my services were in fact not educational.

The first ever track that I played for my students in the fall of 2007, was “Travelin’ Man” by Brooklyn hip-hop icon, Mos Def. I wanted my students to hear hip-hop that they might not be familiar with and it just so happened that none of them, an even mix of black and white students, had even heard of him. I will admit…that baffled me, because Mos Def is a huge hip-hop name to even the casual fan. Nonetheless, it made me feel like I had introduced them to one of the greatest hip-hop artists alive – strictly opinion, but one as strong as garlic aroma. The main idea
was more than Mos Def, but it was what is known as “relevant pedagogy”, which is often about balancing the school life with the home and what surrounds it (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Mos Def’s “Travelling Man” was about an artist who travels the world to perform music, but reflects about it, as obvious through the song’s chorus:

Memories don’t live like people do
They always remember you
Whether things are good or bad, it’s just the memories
Memories don’t live like people do-o
Baby don’t forget me, I’m a traveling man
Movin through places, space and time
Gotta lot of things I got to do
God willin I’m comin’ back to you
My baby boo (Mos Def, 1999)

I stand by my belief that there is pedagogically relevant content within these lyrics. My students were not traveling and performing, nor were they even aware of some of the lingo that Mos Def used throughout the song. I had them write responses – what they did or did not like and asked them to mention what they thought was peculiar and even mirrored in to their own lives. Then, I had them reflect on a time when they left home or a familiar place and had to become placed in another world and how they managed to deal. The students’ responses were peculiar and genuine as they were speaking like themselves and not as robots who felt they had to say what the teacher wanted them to say. One girl related to the song because she had lived in four states in two years with three (yes, three) parents. She had left her boyfriend of three years. She related well, as did others and said that this song’s lyrics weren’t necessarily about being simply famous and a hip-
hop star forced to deal with venues all over the world; it was a way of telling us that we all must leave our nests at some point, but hopefully return and see our home grounds as even more special than before. Perhaps the most important part of this experience was the fact that they were writing about difficult times, and I have always believed writing helps to emit the feelings we hold during those times.

Class would remain this way throughout creative writing and the “relevant pedagogy” would become even more evident as I allowed students to bring their own music or even ask me to burn them a CD of some songs that they wanted the class to hear. Most of these songs were from the hip-hop genre. I would bring in new songs as well. To get an ‘A’ in creative writing, students had to participate in the discussions and when it was one’s turn to bring in a song, he/she must supply copies of the lyrics and discuss what he/she thought the representation was as well as teach a mini-lesson on what we can connect the lyrics to. I was and am not interested in finding the rhyme scheme in hip-hop…save that for the middle school children maybe. I am interested in how hip-hop affects communities.

Just about all 20 students who elected to take my class went above and beyond, as they were delighted to share the songs that they had the freedom of choosing, as opposed to just me. Overall, the class was a success. I realized that I was turning a classroom into a forum where students could bring those very songs and put themselves in the mode of sanctuary – probably the very same tunes they fall asleep to and feel safe from the outside world from via their prized IPOD players. Hip-hop was the main form of music out of the genres we explored that got my students to truly delve into the meanings of the lyrical content. I was amazed at how students were learning about what they thought they had despised – literature and the English language. I
camouflaged a lesson the way my mother used to put sugar on bland Wheat Chex cereal and tell me it was “Sweet Chex” when I was young boy. Sometimes, trickery isn’t such a dishonest thing to do.

Introduction to Study

Wayne Au’s (2005) belief that hip-hop being taught in academia can help students in creating cultural assessments as a means of challenging the dominant and more Eurocentric literature that is placed into our schools is one that I agree with. I figured that out when I was bringing in the music and lyrics of hip-hop artists like Mos Def, Eyedea and Abilities, Poor Righteous Teachers, Nas, and Blackstar into my creative writing class. I started my M.A. program at LSU in the fall of 2008 with the hope that I would somehow find my niche, via guidance from a professor or through classmates throwing ideas at or around me. Eventually, however, I just started thinking about what I wanted my pedagogical stance to be in the classroom and realized that hip-hop was something I felt was a part of me and could be a part of the way I taught. So, in the spring I decided to conduct a study and see what I could add to research of literature I had done that fall on the genre and its use in the classroom. The new challenge for me would be to see if my study with high school students from Durant High – my place of research – would bring me clear results about hip-hop in the language arts classroom and back up the research I had previously encountered.

Research Questions

My primary research question was:

Does hip-hop contain any educational value in the classroom?
My secondary research questions were:

1. What connections can students make with hip-hop and real-life?
2. Can students find value in hip-hop’s story-telling ability that goes beyond normal literary and poetic devices and relate to their own lives (allowing prompting of discussion and interaction with each other and give them the power to understand more traditional texts in the curriculum?)

The above questions are the focus of this qualitative study, in which I spent weeks at Durant High interviewing, discussing, and surveying students with these questions. Throughout the few weeks that I would spend in my study, I had hoped to answer these questions through the voices of the students.

Description of Study

I conducted my research at Durant High School (all identifying names have been assigned pseudonyms), a fairly large public high school in an urban neighborhood in southern Louisiana. There are approximately 1,000 students enrolled with a variety of ethnicities - 68 percent black, 26 percent white, and 6 percent Asian/Latin mixture/Native American comprise the small remainder. The class that I conducted my research on is an APA (gifted and talented) Creative Writing class of ten students. The majority of these upper classmen – most of whom are seniors – will be attending school at the next level, whether 4 year university, community college, or trade school.

My study took place over an approximate three month course from late February through early May of 2009. Since my research was done with only this small sample of students, in no way does this study reflect the entire student body at Durant High School or high school students from all over the city, state, and country.
Conclusion

In the next chapter, I review and contextualize the literature on hip-hop music as an effective tool in secondary language arts classes and the collegiate seminar, as well as in a social gathering arena like the “poetry slam”. In order for me to have even attempted my study, it was essential that I look at previously documented literature and data to help me understand more effectively just what it was I hope to accomplish…that is, of course, my own study at Durant High School and results that show students can learn from this.
Review of Literature

“I live and die for hip-hop. This is hip-hop for today. I give props to hip-hop, so hip hop hooray.” When the New Jersey hip-hop trio, Naughty by Nature, recorded this 1993 smash hit, “Hip Hop Hooray” they probably didn’t intend for these words – also the prelude to the track’s undeniably catchy hook - to be used in any type of research report, unless it was one relating to censorship or negative stereotypes that often associate hip-hop and rap music with gangs, violence, drugs, and the whole nine yards of familiar artistic negativity. These lyrics from members Treach, Vin Rock, and DJ Kay Gee do more than embody a feeling about a brand of music that received its name on the streets of the Bronx from Jamaican born DJ Clive "Kool Herc" Campbell. They signify a life-style that is hip-hop.

According to the researchers mentioned in this literature review, hip-hop can be a source of learning within the schools – from middle all the way to college and post graduate schooling. The proponents of hip-hop used within an educational context have been promoting for the last two decades, the significance of its power within everyday language arts and social studies classes. How is it possible for a type of music, which is often associated with strong resentment by many classes and races of people, to provide any educational insight? If only everyone else knew what pioneering and novel educators and researchers have already proven in a quiet, yet inciting, but constructive manner when it comes to the big picture of education, then research into this popular culture force wouldn’t be necessary. This literature review examines three approaches to studying the way hip-hop is used in educational settings. The first section deals with how educators have been able to use hip-hop to reach students in a more effective ways and supplement curriculum, while building upon certain theories and practices (discussed within this review). Then, I turn to how hip-hop can do things such as help teachers teach and not have to
spend time dealing with deviant behavior and classroom management. Finally, I will look at the poetry slam and spotlight artists and contributors, but more importantly show that it is, though not the same, a relative to hip-hop in certain ways and allows youth to become effective writers, speakers, performers, and even musicians.

**What Hip-hop is doing to Bring Teachers and Students Together**

The public schools of America, by 2040, will be predominately not white (Kelly and Van Weelden, 2004); therefore, educators should be aware that the Eurocentric-based curriculum in English and social studies classes, i.e., might have already lost its relevance (there are, of course, exceptions). In addition, the number of ethnic teachers is expected to decrease by 5 percent in the next decade, while the enrollment of minority students will simultaneously rise by 41 percent (Gibbons, 2007). What must be imperatively suggested, be it right or wrong in one’s eyes vs. another’s, is that education must continue to evolve along with its public schools, students, and teachers. Twenty years ago, public schools were adapting their curricula to newfound phenomena such as AIDS and crack-cocaine. Thirty years ago, sex education was based upon avoidance of pregnancy – not sexually transmitted diseases- and health and P.E. classes weren’t concerned with an epidemic being fatally smoked, on a humanitarian level, from a glass pipe. Needless to say, schools evolve over time – much of the change having to do with what’s popular in society. It just so happens, America and even many parts of the world have become obsessed with hip-hop – a musical, cultural, educational, and stimulating form of expression that is indeed sweeping not only the urban streets with uncanny fascination, but also the suburbs and rural nooks of this nation. The position of hip-hop that must be adhered to is that it is part of many of today’s youth – like it or not (again, there are exceptions). The stereotypes that vilify hip-hop as a vile, sexually-demeaning, drug and gun promoting riff-raff are hopefully debunked
in this research. Just like every form of art from music to theater to dance, hip-hop indeed has produced its share of corrupt and socially deviant kernels. Yes, there are artists/rappers who help carry hip-hop’s negative stereotypes with unapologetically immoral messages and conduct that can only be described as vulgar and inappropriate on any level – not just education. To believe only these previous statements is to deny what pioneering hip-hop artists such as KRS-One, Chuck D, Rakim, and Queen Latifah have given their lives for and that is a movement – one that will not compromise and one whose message is verbally, musically, and fashionably illustrated to teach.

This section deals with these academic settings that used hip-hop to help students gain more interest in education and learning. Today’s American schools do still try to instill the same core values that they’ve been trying to teach for years. More vital, perhaps, is that they use daily and ordinary life as subject matter to connect with the learning process – also known as Shor’s Concept of Critical Learning (Shor, 1992). Hip-hop’s four main ingredients, mentioned in the introduction of my research paper, Can we merge hip-hop and its four main ingredients that are emceeing, DJing, graffiti art, and break dancing (Stovall, 2006); as well as its music videos, advertising, and television ascendancy with the likes of William Shakespeare, Lord Byron, or even connect its messages with war and oppression in a history or social studies classroom?

Derek Greenfield and David Stovall are two educators – one at the collegiate and the other at the secondary level – who did, despite always hearing the negative implications that accompanied hip-hop and rap music. When many of us picture what a middle-aged white professor may look like, we may envision nerddiness, baldness, grayness, and the epitome of a fashion victim. We may even see Derek Greenfield, who just about encompasses all of that and then some. Greenfield started a collegiate hip-hop studies course designed to achieve two primary
objectives: be a critic and learner of hip-hop and also show a group of 50 predominantly minority students that hip-hop can bring races together. Drawing from the likes of Au’s (2005) belief that hip-hop being taught in academia can help students in creating cultural assessments as a means of challenging the dominant and more Eurocentric literature that surrounds, Greenfield encourages his students to see the power in the lyrics of hip-hop, but also debunking the myth that only blacks can understand or even teach hip-hop. Likewise, Greenfield suggests that hip-hop’s purpose is not to promote these MTV video portrayals as he states, “I contend that if those students consuming the steady diet of scantily clad females and violent thugs would only recognize their complicity in promoting an anti-intellectual ethos to the younger generation, they might feel compelled to become wiser consumers (Greenfield, 2007, p. 234).” Indeed, there is a promotion of the economic aspect of hip-hop that is curtained by the all too familiar racial facet of the art form. It is, ironically, believed that hip-hop is the only medium that can meet head-on the negative racial stereotypes and the criminalization of the ethnic teenager (Giroux, 2006).

Greenfield’s classes used tracks like Nas’s “If I Ruled the World” to address concerns of urban America and not confusing lines about smoking weed without police harassment with negativity; rather see these types of lyrics as a wish for a Utopian society and an eradication of so many of the problems that do occur on the streets, along with wishes of marginalized people to enjoy life as they so choose in a peaceful manner. His use of “Throwdown Thursdays” enabled students to showcase their own rhymes and “battle” one another for classroom lyrical supremacy. Perhaps the greatest tribute to hip-hop as a teaching tool was what one black student wrote in a final evaluation of Greenfield in that “(Professor Greenfield) is a clear man…not a white man” (Greenfield, 2007). Perhaps this was the crown reason that the seminar was a success.
David Stovall, a proponent of Shor’s methods, held a creative writing workshop for academically-troubled teenage students known as “Society and Social Inequalities” at a Chicago urban high school – one that was and is to this very day, minority-dominated. The reason – to use hip-hop culture as a bridge that connects real life with the learning process, in the echoing sentiments of Shor, but more importantly, get a group of disinterested adolescents involved in literature; thus, putting off to the side the Anglo-Saxon based culture that they’ve been an outsider to from day one (Stovall, 2006).

Stovall connected various hip-hop tracks with the students’ view what they perceive to be the realistic world. His goal was to achieve a simple foundation with his workshop students and have them decipher, discuss, and relate to hip-hop lyrics. Stovall was fully aware of what Tyson’s *Social Cognitive Theory* suggests, in that youth often find artists that mirror their own lifestyle (Tyson, 2007). Stovall hoped his study and workshop would allow students to garner more interest and foundation in an academic setting. Also, this was an opportunity to show some research to the state’s board of education in hopes of rewriting and replacing some of the curriculum with hip hop.

Stovall’s study would involve hearing hip-hop songs and attempting to get his students to understand the lyrical content and discuss it, but most importantly – relate the lyrics to their own world through the discussion. Stovall also wanted students to view hip-hop as a genre that wasn’t just about the stereotypical images that a lot of hip-hop and rap videos were showing on MTV and BET networks and instead see it as music that is essentially a soundtrack to real life – not fictional. In hopes of finding an audio mirror for his students, Stovall began using hip-hop tracks and lyrics in his workshop’s pedagogy. He used Blackstar’s “Thieves in the Night,” a song that addresses the issue of hip-hop artists not living the way that adolescents see them portrayed in
music videos. The Brooklyn-based Blackstar, comprised of emcees, Talib Kweli and Mos Def and DJ Hi Tek, bring politics and everyday real-life situations into their music, as opposed to just weed, cars, and women – often stereotypically seen as ingredients in the hip-hop song. Stovall also incorporated Atlanta based hip-hop duo Outkast and their single, “Elevators” into his workshop. This is a song that deals with success and the need to use hip-hop as a means of putting food on the table as well as the misconception by the general public that rappers are wealthy and placed upon an untouchable pedestal, but are just like everyone else when it comes to making a living, as indicated by a verse in the track from Andre 3000, one-half of the group:

  Got stopped at the mall the other day
  Heard a call from the other way
  that I just came from, some nigga was sayin somethin
talkin bout "Hey man, you remember me from school?"
Naw not really but he kept smilin like a clown
  facial expression lookin silly
  And he kept askin me, what kind of car you drive, I know you paid
  I know y'all got buku of hoes from all them songs that y'all done made
  And I replied that I had been goin through tha same thing that he had
  True I got more fans than the average man but not enough loot to last me
to the end of the week, I live by the beat like you live check to check
  If you don't move yo' foot then I don't eat, so we like neck to neck (Outkast, 1996)

Stovall also used Mystics’s “Ghetto Birds” as a means of identifying with poverty, crime, drugs, and self-esteem. Workshop allowed the students to be the center of the classroom as opposed to the teacher, who was simply a facilitator. By the time the workshop had become a success, the
matter of its importance to learning became a proposition by the students to hopefully add hip-hop into the state’s language arts curriculum (Stovall, 2006). To defy what many nay-sayers garner from seeing and hearing hip-hop is to also not believe the negative hype associated with the genre (Greenfield, 2007).

Hip-hop has been researched not only to connect the real-life to the educational aspect and as a tool to awaken the oppressed, but it also strongly correlates with literature of the curriculum. Understanding point of view, irony, tone, diction, and satire can be difficult in the perceived complicated readings from the Romantic poets, the Metaphysics poets, the Harlem Renaissance, and even the poetry of the Civil Rights era. One of the first cases of using hip-hop to connect with the more Eurocentric theme occurred in 1991, when African-American Studies professor Houston Baker proclaimed that hip-hop is a “tool” that can teach disinterested students to more effectively engage in the literary studies canon and find a common theme between the two art forms. So, Baker began using it as a connection device in his African-American Studies courses at Vanderbilt University (Baker, 1991). Others would certainly follow when it came to literary understanding. According to Ernest Morrell and Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade’s (2002) findings and many studies, hip-hop is a worthy medium whose ultimate goal should be to be put into the classroom and have its place next to the names of such endeared poets from these previously mentioned eras, as this form of cultural and musical entertainment has become the main voice of today’s urbanized youth. These are the youth who take the elements of poetry and literature and can now fully understand them when relayed through an emcee like KRS-One, whose lyrical genius uses those same poetic devices throughout his rugged, yet honest portrayal behind a boisterous and powerfully thick Bronx accent. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade even discuss the ability to parallel Coleridge’s “Kublai Kahn” with Nas’s “If I Ruled the World” and
Chin’s “Repulse Bay” with Los Angeles rapper Ice Cube’s “Today Was a Good Day” (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Connecting the lyrics of hip-hop artists with traditional texts has perhaps become the most inventive way when it comes to understanding the latter. Whether doing action-based or teacher-based research, these researchers’ findings can, in my opinion, be incorporated into a daily lesson plan or become part of a study, simply due to the fact that these are hip-hop tracks that are paralleled with the literary classics.

**Hip-hop’s Power – The History, the Culture, and Questions of Education and Roles**

The likes of Stovall, Greenfield, Morrell, Baker, and Duncan-Andrade seem to have a central purpose other than to get students involved in something they are fascinated and surrounded with and use it in an academic format. Certainly, it would be nice if hip-hop in curriculum and instruction could make all students certified geniuses in the art of language and even in comprehending literature, but likely it won’t. That, though, is not the ultimate goal. The goal, for now, is to get some sort of focus and connection. Wayne State professor Jeff Wright (2002), however, gets involved a bit deeper and plays on hip hop’s traits, in hopes of doing more than just breaking down lyrical content and holding a simple discussion. He asserts that hip-hop teaches that cult research and awareness can both manufacture composite forms of writing. So, he took the well-known hip-hop term, *sampling*, and used it in his English composition classes (Rice, 2003). Sampling, an art form where a DJ takes sound bites, riffs, or hooks from other songs and creates something new out of it, is so common today that it often goes unnoticed and underappreciated. DJ’s repeat the breaks from songs and before one knows it, there’s a creative and original piece even though it borrows from another artist (Schloss, 2004). So, how does this play into English class at Wayne State? One of Wright’s ideas was to “sample” historic events from 1963 such as a playing a recording of James Brown’s *Live at the Apollo*, and sampling it
with famous photos of Malcolm X and the mourning of a nation over the iconic John Fitzgerald Kennedy. This idea is not just the average PowerPoint presentation. This idea Gathering several important moments and producing one media presentation and paper from a plethora of events equals a knowledge-producing piece that borrows from this, that, and the other. Even though this practice, within hip-hop’s musical methods, was not at all invented by Wright, the term he uses for it, *sampling*, could very well be – at least in this context of educational research. Hip-hop pedagogy, according to Rice, doesn’t have to be a central way of thinking; rather, an alternative route that engages consumerism, for instance, while also fighting against it (Rice, 2003).

While hip-hop and consumerism go hand in hand, so also do hip-hop and individual power and the freedom to make the right choices. Tricia Rose believes hip-hop gives the once voiceless population that ability to become empowered. “Hip-hop music is a contemporary stage for the powerless (Rose, 1994, p.10).” That *stage*, as Rose titles it, may very well be a figure of speech and could be Rice’s students’ way of musically, verbally, and even theatrically portraying this technique of sampling history just like Terminator X of the New York based hip-hop group, Public Enemy, would sample the likes of James Brown and Queen to create his own new songs or Outkast using the theme of the 1978 movie, *Midnight Express*, in their hit, “Return of the G”. Hip-hop borrows and has been borrowing historic pop culture and iconic figures and adding them to samples, riffs, videos, album covers, etc. Now, maybe educators can admit that they must borrow from hip-hop. Is there a history lesson in this as well? I contend one to tell me “no”.

While the remedy for the disinterested has been is still being researched, some researchers and educators find that hip-hop is part of pop culture which is part of students’ daily lives. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2005) conceptualized the critical teaching of popular culture as a visible strategy to increase academic and critical literacies in urban middle classrooms.
Alexander-Smith’s (2004) research and testimony prove that youths use hip-hop to mimic, as she notes in her articles, and that the genre is “one of the cornerstones of today’s popular culture” and “has convinced the media and lexicographers to include its vocabulary and music in news broadcasts, advertisements, and dictionaries (Alexander, 2004, p.58).” She felt that mimicking can possibly mirror something such as Shor’s concept and help those who misbehave in the classroom as a means of avoiding the – what is to them – boring curriculum. Alexander-Smith, a middle school teacher, used hip-hop to diffuse a classroom of 29, most of whom were disruptive and unruly and just flat out discipline cases. In fact, little instruction was effectively delivered as most of this class period of Alexander-Smith’s was spent dealing with these discipline cases.

Alexander-Smith used hip-hop to introduce the poetic device, tone, to these kids and out of nowhere, misbehavior transformed into classroom engagement (Alexander-Smith, 2004). She used Yonkers, NY rapper DMX and his popular 2001 hip-hop/R&B hit, “I Miss You” to help her students understand a mostly positive song that deals with loss, in various ways, of family and friends. This is a theme that often so many minorities, who grow up in urban areas, often deal with, as evident by these lines from DMX:

But I’m about to say a couple of family members gone hate me

but I’m gonna let you know whut's been goin on lately

you know since you left a lot of things bout your kids done changed

yah Jackie's still crazy and i don't know what's up with James

ain't seen Jerry in a while, you know he walks like you

and Rene’s back in jail, you know she talk like you

but Q is doin real good now, she workin'

Rhonda’s still runnin around, trickin, jerkin'
Buckeye's buggin', he gone lost his mind
and Jarvus back outta jail, doin' fine
and Collie he gone changed it's not all about hiself
and my father.... well.... that's sumthin else....
and Butt he's my dogg he done owe his grandma ground
my great gran'ma makin a lot of trips outta town
but that's a good thing, if only I could hear you sing
Oh Lord, the comfort it would bring (DMX, 2001)

Hip-hop can help middle school students and all students, for that matter, understand their world around them and learn how to creatively express themselves (Rice, 2004). Hip-hop not only teaches the troubled youth, but it affirms to the teacher that he or she is a learner as well, much like Alexander-Smith was with her 29 students. This level of instruction may best be described as what Ladson-Billings deems as “relevant pedagogy”, which is about balancing the school life with the home and what surrounds it (Ladson-Billings, 1995). While hip-hop receives resistance from educators – most of whom are “older “or more traditional in their approaches – the idea is about promotion of discourse and understanding of the world that surrounds, as Greenfield implies from his experiences. “Educators who utilize a collaborative style that grants legitimacy and authority to the student perspective not only enhances student motivation and learning, but also can experience their own tremendous intellectual growth opportunities (Greenfield, 2007, p. 242).” Clearly, Alexander-Smith reached such a peak of student-teacher meaningful exchange.

Alexander-Smith used that initial teaching lesson to further enhance her classroom learning. She used jazz singer Billie Holliday’s “Strange Fruit” to illustrate the process of enunciation and word choice. She then incorporated other themes such as beauty, violence, and
death, as she drew from hip-hop/R&B artists like Nas, Lauryn Hill, and the female trio known as TLC. Alexander-Smith gradually shifted from mainstream hip-hop into the art form that is known as “Spoken Word” listening to the likes of underground phenomenon like Suheir Hammad, Jessica Care Moore, and Mariahandessa Ekere Tallie. Her lessons went from identifying tone to understanding social issues and cultural relevance (Alexander-Smith, 2004). In education, it is often recognized that elements of literature, for example, snowball into deeper and more multifaceted themes or lessons. Hip-hop seems to parallel that quite satisfactorily.

There are hip-hop artists such as Common, Kanye West, and Talib Kweli who debunk the often hastily-assumed myths that all rappers are thugs from the “corners” and can only rely on the “rap game” to survive, rather than be lawyer, teacher, doctor, or social worker. These three very popular emcees are all sons of college English professors (Weinstein, 2009). While educated emcees seem to be respected by youth of all types (that will be seen in my research at Durant in the Methodology section), perhaps it is defining and rapping about what Dyson (2001) calls “a generation’s defining moods – its confusion and pain, its nobility and courage, its loves and hates, its hopelessness and self-destruction (Dyson, 2001, 106-107).” Tupac Shakur, often associated with “thug-life” (and by his own admission), is said to be hip-hop’s most powerful conveyer of such sentiments and ideals. It is rappers like Shakur who so ingeniously point out that the nation’s history has contributed to many young minorities’ low position on the socioeconomic ladder (Weinstein, 2009). While Tupac Shakur raps from behind a thick exoskeleton of “hardness” and even a violent demeanor, this is the same young man who as a child, studied acting and dance in at Baltimore’s School for the Arts. Other hip-hop emcees such as Chuck D, Flava Flav, Cam’ron, Ice Cube, David Banner, Lil John, and Rich Boy attended college. Nonetheless, Talib Kweli and Mos Def have advised that people not perceive certain
artists as role models and that is not hip-hop’s function. Instead, it is about powerful messages conveyed by artists like 50 Cent (who Kweli says should never be seen as a role model, but should be looked as a positive man due to surviving a turbulent childhood). The devotion to an artist like 50 Cent is what Weinstein calls as “generous”, but also a probable “necessary interpretation” (Weinstein, 2009, 82). Hip-hop isn’t teaching how to look at role-models and who to look at. It’s instead a discourse that can, in a language arts classroom, teach how to interpret life. Perhaps 50 Cent’s lyrics teach to stray from his lifestyle and if one doesn’t, then be prepared for the worst (like the nine gunshots he received throughout his youth). Even though I advocate hip-hop as a strong teaching tool and my research depends on that notion, it’s not about being role-model music. Well, Mickey Mantle was a great baseball player, but lived a personal life that was surrounded by women and booze. John F. Kennedy was rumored to have slept with Marilyn Monroe and many other females during his presidency and earlier days as a Massachusetts senator. While these men were great baseball players and politicians, respectively, they were not role-models as many kids wanted to believe. The point is that learning and role-model serving are two different arenas of life. While Kweli and Mos Def may be seen as such, they – just like Shakur and 50 Cent – are telling a story and helping listeners relate to life in a realistic way. They’re just doing it via words with music.

Then, there are messages that must be adhered to cautiously. African-American youths are still the most devoted fans of the hip-hop genre, which can be positive and certainly negative (Arnett, 2001). Arnett says that youth school-life is often about emulation. The majority of high school violence, according to Arnett’s research, stems from the adolescent African-American male. Coincidentally, the majority of mainstream rappers are also of the same race, despite mostly being older (although there are exceptions as some rappers hit the public eye in their early
teens), and portray a tough image in their videos, with their hard-hitting lexis, and in their marketing campaigns (Bruce & Davis, 2000). The story-telling of violence in hip-hop artists’ songs and videos often get confused with promotion of such. Indeed, there are cautions to adhere to concerning this music. It is crucial to not misinterpret what hip-hop’s true message is, as it is often so powerful that it can convey meanings that we may not be fully aware of. Public Enemy hails from the 1980’s, also known as hip-hop’s “Golden Age”, and presents very powerful sociopolitical messages in many of their tracks. There, are however, tones of racism in tracks like “911 is a Joke” which is themed upon the mostly “white system” that often ignores the emergencies of the black population. “By the Time I Get to Arizona” addresses the western state’s neglect for celebrating Martin Luther King’s birthday as a holiday (this was in 1991, just before every state accepted and celebrated the holiday) and so the group believes protest – to use a term lightly – is in order. There is also “Fight the Power” which is arguably the group’s most popular and certainly powerful anthem and even was the signature track to Spike Lee’s 1989 hit movie, Do the Right Thing. “Fight the Power”, a track with a very heavily bass driven rhythm, is a political-heavy, hardcore track that belittles Elvis and even John Wayne as racist white Americans. The idea of fighting a power might be synonymous with blacks fighting against a mostly white national government or other political “power” (Sullivan, 2003). Tracks like these are often dangerous to use in academia as some youth may very well connect with these tracks in this very way that Sullivan discusses in his writings of rap and race coexisting. While Public Enemy front man Chuck D (Carlton Douglas Ridenhour) is often associated as being a positive role model for black youth (perhaps more up to date, he was one for the youths of the mid 1980’s through the early 1990’s), as he is a graduate of Adelphi State University and is now a producer and author, but has been a loud critic of politicians, going as far as saying that French President
Sarkozy is “like any other European elite: he has profited through the murder, rape, and pillaging of those less fortunate and he refuses to allow equal opportunity for those men and women from Africa” (Chang & Herc, 2005). For the most part, however, Chuck D and his group reach an audience that is often educated and aware – one that controversial rappers such as Los Angeles’s Ice-T (who would record a track in 1991 with his rock band, Body Count, entitled “Cop Killer”), 2PAC (who is known for his often sexual and violent-enticing lyrics and a feud with Brooklyn rapper Christopher Wallace aka The Notorious BIG), and the Compton, CA based group, N.W.A. (who created the critically acclaimed anthem, “F*ck the Police” in 1989) often do not connect to. These groups, for the most part however, are often not appealing to the educated masses (Sullivan, 2003). Groups like N.W.A – gangsta rappers – “write lyrics attacking law enforcement agencies, their denial of unfettered access to public space, and the media’s complicity in equating black youths with criminals (Kelley, 1994, 185).”

Indeed, a challenge must remain for educators – separating meaningful and appropriate hip-hop from what is undisputedly inappropriate and socially meant for the urban street dwellers to absorb and not an educational setting. Former Public Enemy member, Sister Souljah, while viewed in a positive light by many of her listeners, despite never really getting the commercial success as a solo artist, brings this juxtaposition into focus. President Bill Clinton had strong resentful words towards her regarding her own comments about the 1992 “Rodney King riots” as she claimed legitimacy for many of the attacks on Caucasians (Weinstein, 2009). Much like rock musicians of the 1980’s were portrayed as Satanists or anarchists, rappers are often portrayed as “cop killers” or “unlawful”. We, as adults, can understand the myths, but youth are youth and can take messages the wrong way. While I am not advocating that we should not find a place in a lesson plan for Public Enemy or N.W.A., educators simply need to be aware of what messages
can be accidentally sent. Hip-hop, for one, is an extremely strong genre, discourse, and lifestyle. Underestimating its power would be ludicrous and shortsighted for anyone to do such.

**The “Other” Classrooms and Their Components and More Tearing Down of a Wall**

The “poetry slam” is forming a script of its own – based on the power that so many youth are verbally and expressively portraying. The “slam”, while being its own entity and verbal sport, seems to carry a distant relationship to hip-hop in that there is the figment of poetical structuring. The slam has become a raw, poetic variety show and often uses hip-hop’s cousin, “spoken word” as its medium of expression on stage. The name “slam” may just be as raw as its poets are who often rage on stage with such an emotionally charged, rushing energy, that when they are finished reading, many audience members rush the stage to batter them with high-fives and what is often reciprocated energetic support and encouragement due to the poetic muscle that these readings display (Bruce & Davis, 2000). Poetry slams are often sponsored by educators in various fields (English, Sociology, e.g.) and fellow poets from all over. Weinstein (2009) writes about a group of teenage rap writers who thrive on “battling”, where it’s all about reputation and respect (due to this often being a neighborhood activity) and not about having money and being famous. One of the “writers” who Weinstein observed, Crazy, gives the reader a breakdown of what the battle is:

Battle rap? Is like somebody trying to come at you, like trying to shut down your name, usually they’re starting something, trying to disrespect your name, make you feel like you ain’t nothing, that you ain’t got no talent…like street fighting, you know (Weinstein, 2009, 74)?

In an age where violence seems to solve many disagreements (especially in so much of what many think they understand as hip-hop’s main message), the slams and the battles of today are taking on a new meaning of “fighting with words”. Perhaps one of the biggest mainstream
films to showcase battling to those who knew nothing about it was Eminem’s (Marshall Mathers) acting debut in *Eight Mile*, a 2002 feature film, that portrays Mathers as a troubled and struggling youth who gets involved in battling and ultimately wins the title among his peers.

Saul Williams was one of the first to be heard by the mainstream, loudly and clearly, in the poetry slam network. Williams, a Morehouse College in Atlanta, GA graduate, is originally from Newburgh, NY and has become a world-wide success who has played in sold out arenas with the likes of industrial rock kings, Nine Inch Nails and hip-hop legends KRS-One, The Fugees, Nas, and DJ Krust. Williams, however, spends a lot of time performing at liberal arts colleges across the United States. He’s recognized as not only an uncanny performer in music and poetry, but also as a fine actor. Williams starred in the 1998 feature film *Slam*. Williams served as both a writer and actor for the independent film, which would win both the Sundance Festival Grand Jury Prize and the Cannes Camera D'Or (Golden Camera) and would allow Williams to become introduced to international audiences (Aptowicz, 2008). The movie is about a talented poet named “Ray Joshua” played by Williams, who is locked up in prison because of drug charges. Inside the prison, he meets “Lauren Bell” played by Sonja Sohn, who is a volunteer writing instructor for the prison and teaches the incarcerated. She inspires Williams’ character, who in turn inspires her (Bruce & Davis, 2000). Much like the situation with Alexander-Smith’s classroom full of deviants, the criminally-charged “Ray Joshua” inspires his teacher just as much, creating touching scenes that allow us to see the rehabilitation of a man by the use of his powerful writing. Joshua is later released from prison and is invited by Bell to a poetry slam in Washington, DC. That night at the slam, Joshua is called on stage impromptu by Bell to read one of his poems. The highlight of the film is indeed Joshua’s dramatic poem that
powerfully demonstrates his fears, realities, and hopes for black males like himself in such an expressive and joyous manner, giving the penal system a positive cinematic and perhaps even realistic outlook. (Aptowicz, 2008).

The movie, *Slam*, is one that can teach today’s English classrooms (among others) a more commodious language and how to make peace with the world around us. Bruce and Davis (2000) agree that “*Slam* gives us a space for teaching peace (p. 127)” and allows the English teacher to extend his/her role inside the classroom, as the lessons can be paralleled at events like poetry slams. To witness a poetry slam is to engage in something that is uncanny. Writer Michael McIrvin, on the other hand, describes the slam with less passion and skeptical criticism when he writes, “Each poet seems merely hell-bent on blowing the audience away, concerned with effect that is only effect (McIrvin, 2000, p. 94).” Perhaps what went far over McIrvin’s head was the content, which can often be secondary to those who get caught up in the brash theatrical performance of the reading. Take Saul Williams and his lyrics to his 2001 single, “Penny for a Thought”, as Williams seems hell-bent, himself, on delivering a message to his own race of people to not buy into historical fallacies and become caught up in peace and not the constant promotion of slavery in this powerfully spoken word piece:

Suddenly, the ground shivers and quakes

a newborn startles and wakes

her mother rushes to her bed side to hold her to her breast

milk of sustenance heals and nourishes

from the depths of creation life still flourishes

yet we focus on death and destruction, violence, corruption
My people, let Pharaoh go  
What have you bought into?  
How much will it cost to buy you out? (Williams, 2001)

From the poetry slam to his public speaking to his album content (he has released four), Saul’s realistic view of hip-hop could be his best weapon for adolescent students with singles like ‘Telegram”, a 2004 release, that attacks hip-hop’s image and uses the form of a telegram to express his distaste, as well as promote a hopeful return to the music’s core values, which are what educators want to teach in the classroom. The following is an excerpt from “Telegram”:

Please inform all interested parties that cash nor murder have been added to the list of elements. (stop). We are discontinuing our current line of braggadocio, in light of the current trend in "realness". (stop). As an alternative, we will be confiscating weed supplies and replacing them with magic mushrooms, in hopes of helping niggas see beyond their reality. (stop). Give my regards to Brooklyn (Williams, 2004).

While the substitution of drugs in “Telegram” may be seen as a negative promotion, the message from these lyrics is certainly about a more grandiose representation – similar to what Morrell and Duncan-Andrade find with Repulse Bay and Ice Cube’s “Today Was a Good Day”, for instance. While educators are teaching hip-hop to help students relate to things like literary terms and elements of poetry, perhaps using Saul Williams in the classroom might better aid students to see hip-hop in its positive light and ignore the negative elements like those that Derek Greenfield have encouraged students to do and that is to not buy into what they see hip-hop as on television. Williams is promoting the same passion and that, indubitably, can be used in the classroom to assist the students’ understanding that hip-hop’s not about guns, drugs, sex, and clothes. While more teachers and students will go through their life likely not to witness and
experience a poetry slam, much less the productions of Saul Williams, somehow the message that is promoted from within these performances and poets and artists will find a way to navigate into a classroom in some form or fashion. What educators and students choose to do with it is the mystery. What is not ambiguous is that the slam is one of the substitute teachers for when the classroom is absent.

Evidence shows no signs of hip-hop slowing down as an educational phenomenon and that includes just about anywhere one could name as this art form and cultural byproduct has become a world wide trend. Take Germany – a country who has been in love with American hip-hop since 1979, when The Sugar Hill Gang went global with the unmistakable anthem, “Rapper’s Delight”. German hip-hop group, Die Fantastischen Vier would take note of the song and they would become Germany’s first hip-hop commercial success in the early 1980’s. The group would give way to the likes of 1990’s German hip-hop artists Fettes Brot and Massive Tone. Much like the technique of sampling, Germany borrows so much from American hip-hop, as well as other cultures, that these loaned cultural art forms become uniquely German (Schmidt, 2003). Germany was for so long stubbornly a white nation with miniscule recognition of its minorities, that hip-hop would certainly be nothing that the average German would consume. Times, however, change and so does what a nation’s consumers of music buy into. German hip-hop group, Advanced Chemistry, often center their tracks on racism and what Afro-Dutch citizens and immigrants have to face in their daily lives – often racism and bigotry.

Nearly, twenty years removed from the well-known convergence of two separate German states, the German brand of hip-hop from the likes of Advanced Chemistry, addresses the ensuing violence that followed the Berlin Wall’s crumbling by several neo-Nazi groups. The incredible wave of Germany’s educators who base their lesson plans on these internal historical
events has just begun to elevate. The culture of Germany is so rich that hip-hop has become used in German secondary schools and university classes as a means of fueling discussion. German hip-hop educators in America, such as Michael Putnam of Michigan State, teach the strategies of the overseas trend, touching on its use of slang and vocabulary from a pedagogical application (Schmidt, 2003). Hip-hop is being exercised in Germany in similar fashion to what American educators are doing with it. There is just so much to learn about a nation’s history and understanding how people became what they are – culturally and ethnically. Naturally, ethnic music is an excellent advocate for such lessons. The traditional texts, attached with hip-hop and its messages must explore more than race and ethnicity, as it’s all about a wider range of cultural appreciation in gender, class, age, geography, and religion (Kelly, 2004). A nation like Germany, with so much historic apologies to explain to its youth, would benefit tremendously with hip-hop as its story-telling medium.

**Conclusion**

I don’t know how to teach an educator or anyone of any occupation, for that matter, how to fall in love with hip-hop. For me, it might have all started back in 1990 when I was twelve years old and I would sit in my parent’s upstairs den and watch Russell Simmons’s *Def Comedy Jam* on HBO on Friday nights. While the comedic performances were memorable, so also was the show’s beginning – before host Martin Lawrence and the following comedians even came out on stage. The show’s DJ, Kid Capri, would open with the rhythmic bass line of Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power” as the lineup of comedians was introduced. I had never heard anything quite like it as its quaking, funky bass line infiltrated my brain. I’d later see Rosie Perez dancing to the song in the intro of Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing*. From that point on, I became obsessed with hip-hop on a commercial level, not quite yet mature enough, mentally, to
understand what it truly was and represented. I just knew I liked the beats and catchy rhyming.

Trips with my parents to New Orleans and to its French Quarter flea markets often allowed me to cheaply buy bootlegs of Public Enemy, KRS-One, Dee Nice, Biz Markie, and Poor Righteous Teachers, while finding rare mix tapes of musical samples from Terminator X and Professor Griff (both members of Public Enemy who released their own solo records that were unobtainable in the bigger corporation stores in the mall). When it was feasible or birthdays and Christmas would come, I bought many newly pressed CD’s – a marketing phenomenon at the time – from the likes of Naughty by Nature, A Tribe Called Quest, Brand Nubian, Eric B and Rakim, EPMD, Leaders of the New Skool, and Black Sheep. While I bought these beloved artists’ albums, I definitely did not know that I was setting up the substructure framework for my cultural outlook on life. I certainly did not know that I would one day become both a middle school and high school English teacher and that my love for hip-hop would somehow seep out and I would exchange coded language with today’s youth and their verbalizations that occur through their very own hip-hop culture, even though today’s artists are still mostly unappealing to me, with a few exceptions. In any case, I was open to learning about newer and pop-cultured forces of today’s hip-hop and rap like Lil Wayne and Young Jeezy. While I probably could not and would not find a way to use those artists’ lyrics in a classroom environment, I do understand why so many of my students – black and white – found these artists to be compelling and the reasons varied. One definite reason for the love was the understanding of the artists’ messages about struggle, love, and everyday situations. In fact, it was clear to me that these students – most of whom were less fortunate than me – had more of a reason than I did for loving hip-hop. Like me at that age, they just had not been able, themselves, to put the finger on the “why”.
Like me, many of these professors and teachers who are using hip-hop in academia must first understand it themselves. One cannot sell a product without knowing its capabilities and even its hindrances. Today’s youth – the average youth- are not fulfilled by a piece of poetry or prose that was written before our great grandparents were born. Today’s youth are multi-tasking connoisseurs and quick thinkers who understand technology better than my generation and especially my parents’ generation. The technology has instilled in them a new lingo and a completely different mode of thinking and rationalizing compared to previous generations. This millennium’s youth often come from backgrounds that include zero to four parents and countless non-blood related siblings. Sometimes, traditional schoolwork doesn’t fit into their itineraries and it’s not just because they don’t like it. Difficulty in relating to Jack London, Samuel Coleridge, and even Langston Hughes is no accident. These mentioned contemporaries are rarely part of today’s social networks and YouTube. Today’s youth do understand information – the sort that is connected to their method of thinking and not their teachers’. This is why hip-hop is perfect. Hip-hop encompasses everything that is understandable, yet often what can also be trivial and abstract. This form of music embraces diversity and uncannily connects the real world with our own lives.

The bottom line is that educators must encourage students to think and understand the realm that they will inhabit for years to come. Hip-hop can serve as a guide and map to understanding that world by discussing the effects of violence, the issues of single-parenting, self-esteem, relationships, dropping out of school, and so much more. Tyson’s Social Cognitive Theory might be lost upon a classroom full of students, but its fundamental message will not be if exchanged through a hip-hop track. If the idea – that main and crucial idea that is so badly based upon connecting with our students – is to educate, then shouldn’t educators supplement
state curriculum (which is often handed to schools so blindly and deafly by those who have not stepped foot in a classroom since the Reagan/Bush administration) with an art form like hip-hop? Fine Arts has been an accepted subject and elective in schools for years, as it teaches Mozart, Amadeus, and Bach and those classical masterpieces and even the personal backgrounds of these artists. Why not teach the likes of Mos Def, Outkast, and Rakim in the same manner and allow students to study their backgrounds? Wouldn’t the average public school student likely have more in common with Nas than Beethoven and would find greater value in studying the former’s background? It’s 2008 and honestly, we cannot afford not to include hip-hop into our curricula, as popular culture remains the number one societal teacher of youth…not their language arts teacher. I might have started young in my life in a middle-upper class white suburbia, but if I could fall in love with it and understand what hip-hop’s ultimate goal was and still is (not to see who has the most gold jewelry and cars), then so can anyone. Educators must adapt themselves to new ideals such as this so that they can more adequately educate our future and better meet learning style needs. In 2010, it should no longer about being black or white. It’s about being conscious. Only the conscious, then, can see that hip-hop is a cosmic wave of cultural relevance that is teaching today’s youth, with or without the support of those who love or hate it. Attempts to prove its merit in a classroom will be made. Acceptances may vary.
Methodology

This is a qualitative research study completed by an action researcher based on interviewing and observation.

Method Rationale

The concept for this research came not only from my passion and desire to use hip-hop music in a setting of academia, but the many fore-runners whom I have researched and studied who have already helped to make this possible. I wanted this study to work, but maintained an ethnographic-like relationship towards my research and students. In my research, I wanted to explore the idea that students can make educational connections with hip-hop beyond literary devices. I wondered if students would be able to connect the music’s ability to tell a story, talk about history, and parallel story structure. I wanted to really delve into this project of mine. "Is hip-hop teachable and does it hold the important position of being able to teach back and can it parallel language arts lessons?" I believe that it can, but wanted to find out through the research process. I wanted to answer my research questions, while composing propositional statements based on the coding of the data. I would be hoping to answer my research questions while working with these ten creative writing students at Durant High – all in the “Gifted and Talented” academic program.

Dr. Susan Weinstein would introduce me to Durant High School senior creative writing students - a classroom of ten students, all of whom could be considered above proficient when it comes to academic performance and achievement. This group of ten (9 black, 1 white; 6 female, 4 male) would be an excellent sample to engage in my research with. Durant High is a fairly large public high school with about 1,000 students – 68 percent of whom are African-American. My hopes for this research would be to spend 2-3 months gathering different types of research
from surveys to tape recorded discussions, as well as forum/group talks about hip-hop in which I would listen to the students and act as a facilitator who would guide but not dominate the conversation.

Before my research was to begin at Durant High, I had already gathered and stored a lot of terrific ideas, knowledge, and enlightenment through my literature review - all of which have helped drive me in my very own authentic direction of this research. Bringing these ideas, knowledge, and enlightenment to these ten students would undoubtedly become a challenge because none of them had to participate in this voluntary project, which of course would leave me in quite a bind. Luckily, all chose to participate and do so with diligence and inquisitive demeanor.

I used an initial survey of these ten students at Durant High School, as well as an entire two and a half months of observation (with trips made once a week to the school) of the students discussing hip-hop and delivering their findings from weekly homework assignments. The survey asked them questions about their current view of hip-hop music, how it could be effectively included in the classroom and how it couldn’t, which artists were good examples to learn from (and which were not), as well as identifying and connecting lyrics of hip-hop to curriculum based studies in poetry and literature. Since Greenfield (2007, p. 234) was able to use songs such as Nas’s “If I Ruled the World” as poetry that addresses the need for a Utopian Society and calls to eradicate the many problems occurring on the urban streets, why not follow his lead and introduce the ten students to similar songs and artists that not only contain poetic elements and devices that one would comparatively see in any Glencoe high school English text (which is their standard text), but also learn culturally via music?
As each week progressed, I wanted the students to attempt to learn about new artists and songs/lyrics, learn from each other, and find ways to use this form of music in the classroom to supplement certain literary units. I also would interview three of the 10 students - informally talking about hip-hop and its cross connection with their own lives and experiences and their education. All 10 students would participate in the exercises, discussions, and activities, but I chose three that I got to know and figured would give me some excellent discussion for my research. At the end of our collaborative meetings, I wanted to give another survey to the students, which allowed them to answer questions based on what they had learned in our research. Whether they saw value in hip-hop in the classroom or not, I wanted them to at least explore their own intuitions and come up with their own definitive answers. These approaches were designed to help me answer my research questions 1, 2, and 3.

Choosing Participants

Dr. Weinstein had asked me to accompany her to Durant High and to see some students whom she had been working with on interviewing skills. It just so happened that this same class was recommended to me for doing my research. I had originally wanted to look at two to three different schools, but I could not deny that Dr. Weinstein had introduced me to an excellent group, as she, with her expertise, knew that these students would be happy to engage in attempting to study hip-hop in academia and if that was not her intent, it certainly was a coincidence.

Instead of “picking” participants (which I would have done in a larger classroom), I decided that all ten of the Durant Creative Writing students would offer my research something insightful, so I extended them an invitation to participate. The three participants that I selected to do individual and audio-taped interviews with were done so because of personality traits and
their ability to do a comfortable informal interview. I selected 2 females and 1 male. From the in-depth interviews, I would attempt to find key words and phrases that all three interviewees would have in common. Then, I would hope to link these words/phrases and find a way to make them show that my study has a purpose. See appendix for a copy of the interview protocol.

The Participants

Jerrell

Jerrell is a 17-year-old senior at Durant High. Jerrell is a well-dressed and groomed African-American male who enjoys making videos in which he uses original songs from artists and creates his own unique production with his video camera and friends. He also enjoys reading fantasy, specifically Harry Potter books and believes that reading and writing are fundamental elements of education. Jerrell has a quiet, but confident and somewhat odd manner about him, as he dresses more “preppy” than many of his peers. Jarrell plans to attend Centenary College in the fall of 2009 and wants to study journalism. Polite and mild-mannered, but well-spoken, Jerrell believes he would be good at field reporting in journalism. His favorite part about Durant High is the amount of diversity and people that are from all races, creeds, and backgrounds. Meanwhile his least favorite part of school at Durant is the amount of cliques of people who are not tolerant to others’ differences.

Gigi

Gigi is a 17 year old senior. A very polite and bright African-American female, Gigi enjoys shopping more than anything, as far as hobbies. She loves the mall and goes there any chance she can. She aspires to be in the field of biosciences when she goes to Southeastern University in Hammond for the fall. Gigi is polite and seems very educated as she talked about her desire to one day be living in New York City, as she seems to be a huge lover of cultural
diversity, herself. She is also easy-going and enjoys spending time with her friends and family and believes that education is important in getting somewhere in life. Currently, Gigi holds down a part time job at a local movie theatre.

Beth

Beth is a 17 year old African-American female in her senior year at Durant High. Very reserved and hesitant to interview, Beth began to open up a bit and discussed her desire to go to nursing school one day, after she begins attending Southern University in the fall. Beth enjoys science and does not like reading and writing, even though she makes good grades in all of her classes. She is not a fan of music and part of that, I gathered, was because her brother plays hip-hop so loudly at their home. She seems ready to leave high school and thinks that the administration at Durant does very little for the needs of students. She believed that Durant needed to be torn down and built all over again. It was clear to me that despite being educated and very laid-back, Beth definitely had a cynical side to her.

DaRon

DaRon is an 18 year old African-American male who is also a senior at Durant. A Hurricane Katrina transplant (but not a victim, he claims, as his family had planned on moving from the New Orleans area anyway), DaRon is very involved with church and his parents are both pastors. DaRon seems to enjoy the musical end of being involved with his church as he says he is a future “Minister of Music” and enjoys playing the keyboard/piano and guitar. He also enjoys video games, but feels that education should come before play. He plans on attending Texas Southern University in the fall and plans to major in Music. In his very little off time from church and his family, DaRon also works at a local grocery store as a stock boy and also enjoys movies, games, and music. DaRon is an avid fan of hip-hop, R&B, and especially gospel. DaRon
enjoys school and really thinks Durant has a great music program, which he says his other previously attended schools did not and for that he says, he is grateful and appreciative.

**Tabatha**

Tabatha is a 17 year old African-American female at Durant High. A senior, Tabatha is a very pleasant, polite, and soft-spoken girl who wears a smile even when she speaks. Very educated and well-spoken, Tabatha aspires to one day be a teacher in the field of language arts as she describes it as her favorite subject in school. Outside of school, Tabatha can be found dancing, listening to music, and shopping. Her insights, thus far, have been as keen as any, as she sees hip-hop as a driving tool for urban children (to learn the same things that are learned in a normal classroom setting) when it comes to elements of literature.

**Larry**

Larry is an outgoing seventeen year old African-American male who is quite busy in his senior year of high school. A host of a local poetry slam and also an aspiring writer/hip-hop artist, Larry can be constantly found working on his “rhymes” and he also enjoys all forms of poetry. When Larry graduates, he plans on attending Clark University in Atlanta and wants to continue exploring the avenues that poetry, poetry slams, and hip-hop have already introduced him to. Larry is one of the more talkative members of the group and has greatly impressed me with his ability to research and connect hip-hop to an academic setting. Larry appears to be a positive influence in his school environment and doesn’t focus on negatives. Maintaining a positive attitude seems to be his motto that he lives by. Sometimes a wearer of eyeglasses, Larry definitely brings the intellectually cool look into play. His love for hip-hop is obvious, as he can discuss artists from three generations.
**Krista**

Krista is a sixteen year old African-American female who is one of two juniors in the class; nevertheless, she seems to be one of the more vocal and confident ones. Krista speaks her mind and definitely carries a presence with her that exudes confidence, as she is well-dressed, well-spoken, and seems to have a chip on her shoulder. Krista already plans on attending Southern University in Baton Rouge and wants to become a traveling nurse, as she calls it. Krista believes that “helping people” is her calling in life and since she has five younger siblings, Krista feels that she already has a handle on her career – a preliminary version of it, anyway. She likes music a lot and feels that hip-hop is educational, but doesn’t seem quite sure if there is a relevant connection in it with school. She does think, however, that southern schools will adapt hip-hop in the curriculums sooner than “north ones” do.

**Jam**

Jam is the other junior in the class – a sixteen year old petite African-American female who is very pleasant and friendly. Jam is heavily involved with her church and not just the religious aspects of it, but also sports and dance competitions (which I had to admit, the notions of such did perplex me somewhat, considering I figured churches would frown upon dance especially), as well as singing in the choir. Jam seems to use church as her inspiration in doing well in school and being a person that people will want to be around and like. Jam believes that she will one day pursue a career in nursing and get her degree from Southern University in Baton Rouge. Like her classmate, Krista, Jam believes that she would be great at taking care of people. Jam is a fan of hip-hop, but only the types of it that contain a positive message which she feels is very prevalent within the industry.
Brianna

Brianna is an 18 year old African-American female senior, who seems quite busy in the school environment – both academically and socially. An A student, Brianna is very vibrant and outgoing and definitely the most well-spoken and confident of the group. Brianna enjoys the arts and is involved in writing, poetry and performing at poetry jams and for her team, as well as singing and dancing. As far as my study goes, she is the epitome of what you would like from a research participant as she answers questions very thoroughly and with great consideration to what she’s saying. Brianna is still unsure about her future, but thinks she will be attending Howard University in the fall, in hopes of studying business. Brianna admitted that the college process was stressful and she wants to get it over with. She thinks that business would be her calling so she could attain a degree with such to an already, what she feels, is a well-rounded academic and street education. She likes Durant High a lot and says it’s a family and that there are a lot of bright students on campus. She does feel, however, that a lot of teachers are there just to fill in and very few deeply care. Brianna definitely is a hip-hop fan and seemed excited to explore into my study.

Kyle

Kyle, the only Caucasian of the group, is an 18 year old male and senior at Durant. Covered in tattoos and piercings, Kyle gives a rebellious impression, but he’s actually quite polite, mostly friendly and respectful, and very intelligent. Kyle is unsure of his plans after high school and believes at some point that he will attend a college or university. Kyle likes Durant, but does not like rules and overuse of authority. Kyle gets suspended every now and then (including during my research) because of his inability to follow rules. He’s not a trouble-maker,
but gets caught skipping classes and with items like cigarettes. An art and music fan, Kyle enjoys
skateboarding and graffiti. He feels that he is a good artist and an improving skateboarder.

**Interviewing Phases**

I recorded short, roughly 5-minute interviews with each student in order to help me select the three I would use for in-depth interviewing. This process took three days, as I found it somewhat difficult in being able to see all ten students at once on a visit. Nevertheless, I did the 5 minute interviews with each student, asking him/her a range of general questions such as where they were from, what their hobbies were, what their future plans were, and their feelings toward hip-hop and music and the arts in general. No student was too shy as I was able to ask questions and probe to get richer responses. The interviews were done in quiet and in two different places depending upon where the class met, as some days they met in the classroom and on others they met in the library to work on their collaborative media project. Both places allowed for minimal distractions and optimal opportunity for the students to answer candidly.

I explained to the students that their names would be confidential in my report and that anything they told me would also be confidential, except for within the research data. I sought and got permission from each student via the assent and parental consent forms to audiotape them in the interviews. I also was able to take notes in my field journal, but I tried to minimize this as much as I could as it seemed to make a couple of the students uncomfortable (Krista and Gigi) as they continuously seemed to worry about what I was writing down. The main goal I wanted to accomplish was to appear relaxed and informal in front of the students so they would do the same for me. I reminded them that these questions were “a piece of cake” and that I appreciated their honesty and candid answers.
Based on these succinct, but informational interviews, I was able to pick three students with whom to conduct an in-depth interview. I would have liked to have done more, but I knew that time and their other schoolwork and activities would not work well in my favor in that regard. Each one lasted from 20-25 minutes. The three students whom I chose to interview – Tabatha, Larry, and Brianna – were because of their ability to discuss and engage well in the forum discussions, as well as their first interviews. These three seemed to possess the most knowledge of hip-hop and although I would have liked to interview those who were not as knowledgeable to contrast, my decision was based solely on my opinion that these three students would give informative opinions and not be swayed by any external biases (for complete transcriptions of the interviews, please see Appendix B).

**Data Compilation and Analysis**

Once I had collected the surveys, I analyzed and correlated the students’ surveys and the interviews and discussions in an attempt to find common themes. I opened up a separate word document to list and record all of the commonalities and then I coded the data in order to find emerging patterns by using the constant comparative method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).
Data Analysis

Data collection procedures

I passed out my surveys and then went over the questions so there were no misunderstandings. I told the students that I would be back on various days for personal interviews (time was not allotted to allow me to interview every student in one class period) and more “forum talk”, which would be the centerpiece of my research as I allowed students to openly discuss how hip-hop has affected their lives and how they can connect it with academia. I also had to run back and forth to the school (conveniently located five minutes from my university) to gather various forms and surveys. My survey consisted of 8 questions, which I created on my own, but believed to be essential to my research and they would also help me to understand what the students thought about hip-hop prior to this study. It was difficult to get everyone to complete and hand in their surveys (two students filled them out and lost them almost immediately) at the same time and on time, but once the task was completed. I began analyzing their responses to the 8 questions (For the survey model, please see Appendix B).

After analyzing the student’s responses, as well as our discussion forums, I noticed several words or phrases. Throughout the survey, the following words/phrases appeared: real, real-life, deep, expressing/expression, story, creative, words, writing, structure, intelligent, learning, poetic, poetry, lyrics, educated, rapper, relate, flow, help, I don’t know, and students.

Based on these words and phrases, I was able to create the following categories:
Perceptions of hip-hop in general, connecting hip-hop to the classroom, social concerns of hip-hop, and eliminating associated negatives of hip-hop. After analyzing these surveys carefully and tallying and recording results, I would be able to create several propositional statements, based
on their responses, but decided that four of these statements completely reflected the survey results, discussion forums, and in-depth interviews that I did with the participants.

**Perceptions of Hip-hop in General**

The first part of the survey (#1) asked the students to briefly list no more than three of their favorite hip-hop artists and why, while #2 was a question asking them how big of a part of their lives hip-hop was. Most of the answers to #1 varied, with artists Kanye West and Tupac Shakur being the only ones who were chosen as favorites by more than one student (West was chosen the most at three times). Reasons as to why varied, but the biggest common thread that I saw as to why certain artists are their favorite is because of the ability to relate, creative lyrics and self, how educated the artists appears as, and if that artist is poetic. When it came to the 2nd question – “How important is hip-hop to you?” – 3 students answered that it was “extremely important – as much as anything”; 1 student responded that it was “important to me – not the most important thing”; 4 students responded that it was “somewhat important – not something I need everyday though” and 1 student answered that “It’s not important at all – I have very little use for it in my life.

Based on the students’ responses to the first two questions and the categories that I have created to analyze the survey, I was able to create propositional statements which are concise sentences that allowed me to formulate some conclusions. I have been able to create the following propositional statements:

1. The majority of students view hip-hop as something that is positive.
2. Students like rappers who are able to express themselves in a more intelligent manner.
3. Students can find connections to hip-hop and education beyond just literary devices.
Connecting Hip-hop to the Classroom and Campus

Questions 3-5 pertained to how hip-hop could be used in an academic setting. The 3rd question asked students to briefly list some connections that they could make with the music with the classroom setting. One student did not fill out this part. Answers varied and in the following ways: Grammar, structure to stories, lifestyle/real-life, relating, vocabulary, changing the way literature is learned, Methods of hip-hop being used in writing, and expressing thoughts like poetry. Even though these are diverse answers, they are, in my mind, connected in a way that is very close to the writing and reading process – the foundations of Language Arts/English classes.

Question #4 was another short response question in which students were given the following scenario: “If you were a teacher, what is a hip-hop song you might play for your class in hopes that they learn from it and receive inspiration, guidance, motivation, education, etc.? The songs chosen were as follows: “Express Yourself” by N.W.A.; “Papa Roach” by Nas; “The Show” by Doug E. Fresh; “Changes” by Tupac Shakur; “Slap” by Ludacris (this student greatly helped me out on this question by telling why he picked out this song – “It talks about the government” – which made me realize that I had erred by not asking “Why?” after this question); “I Know I Can” by Nas; “Something by Public Enemy that teaches community/English/history (again, nice that this student put why)”; “Dead and Gone” by T.I. and Justin Timberlake; “Miseducation of Lauryn Hill (the entire album I presumed).” These choices highly reflected the artists that were chosen for the first question. While I do regret not asking the students why they would play this certain artist’s song and for what effect, knowing all of these songs picked, I was able to see as to why these claims were, as later in our discussion, they would provide quality insight to back up their surveys. This really made me feel good about the survey process. Next,
Question #5 was a scale question, asking students from 1-10, to rate how educational hip-hop is to them, with 10 being the highest score. The following numbers indicated by the students added up to 74: 8, 10, 5, 10, 10, 8, 9, 6, and 8. The average of this score would be 8.2, which tells me that hip-hop as at least regarded as somewhat educational by all students and on a grading scale, it would have to receive a solid B. Based on the students’ responses to the questions 3-5 and the categories that I have created to analyze the survey, I have been able to create the following propositional statement:

These students view hip-hop as a tool that can teach aspects of literature reading and writing in the classroom, as well as relate it to their own lives.

Social Concerns of Hip-hop

Questions 6-7 were about gender and race in hip-hop, respectively. These were two questions that required the students to give short, explanatory answers. I wanted to see if students felt that these two categories were either possibly the reason as to why hip-hop was not widely used in schools, as well as get their thoughts on two big social issues, not only in hip-hop, but in modern society. If we are going to use hip-hop in the classroom, it is important that we understand its social issues and know what to use and what to avoid.

Question #6 asks if gender played a significant role in hip-hop and was answered by the 9 in the following ways: “Not important. There are some sick chick rappers out there”; “Nothing at all”; “I think males tend to verbally abuse women in their music”; “Unimportant”; “It’s really not that important it’s just what they say”; “it’s really not that important if any gender raps”; “Males dominate the hip-hop world, but life has two sides. So, to hear things from a female’s point-of-view, is good. It shouldn’t be important, but it is”; “Extremely important, because both genders have different stories and situations to tell”; “In the hip-hop industry, it will make a lot
of difference, but if you’re talented…then kool!” It occurred to me that some students’ idea of important was different as some were saying important in terms of having females involved in hip-hop production and some viewed important as meaning that it either was or wasn’t a big deal in modern day. Despite the variety of answers, I was able to understand each opinion.

Question #7, about how important race is in hip-hop, was answered in the following ways: “It used to be. Now I’m not so sure”; “Nothing great”; “I think it’s almost minor, because different races have different feelings and tend to express them in other ways”; “Unimportant. Other races excelling”; “Not important”; “Not that much important to me”; Blacks dominate the industry, yet Eminem has broken the color barrier. He is a good rapper. Race doesn’t matter”; “Even more important than gender because race influences hip-hop”; “I think sexism plays a bigger role than racism in hip-hop”. Again, I was able to see that important means different things to different students, but the majority of students obviously felt that hip-hop should not be about race, even though it often is portrayed as such.

Based on the students’ responses to the questions 6-7 and the categories that I have created to analyze the survey, I have been able to create the following propositional statement: Students vary on their feelings of race and gender being important in hip-hop, but believe neither should play a role in being able to succeed in the industry

**Eliminating Associated Negatives of Hip-hop**

Question #8 asked students to list no more than three things that might give hip-hop a bad name and prevent it from being used in an educational setting. I felt it was essential to find out from students what their perceptions of negatives in hip-hop were. I asked this question because I feel hip-hop has stigmas and associations that are negative due to certain influences. The following words were given among all 9 students as their choices: Profanity, violence, drugs,
sex, guns, poor choice of words, degrading women, influencing the wrong thing, ignorance, ridiculousness, and misunderstanding. The choices for profanity and violence tended to dominate more than the others.

Based on the students’ responses to the question # 8 and the categories that I have created to analyze the survey, I have been able to create the following propositional statement: Students point out that violent behavior, use of profanity, and overall ignorant statements as being negative aspects of hip-hop.

Based on the feedback from each student’s survey, the following are my propositional statements:

1. The majority of students view hip-hop as something that is positive.
2. Students like hip-hop artists who are able to express themselves in an intelligent manner.
3. Students view hip-hop as a tool that can teach Literary and Poetic Devices, but more importantly – tell a story.
4. Students believe race and gender are important in hip-hop, but believe neither should determine who can and should be able to appreciate it.

Interviews

I set up short “get to know you” interviews with all nine students, so that I could get to know them better and use their answers and commentary in an attempt to clearly portray who they were. I simply asked each student, in an informal manner, to tell me a little about them and what their hobbies, goals after high school, and home life were like. These informal interviews lasted about five minutes and were done in the school library, as well as outside by the many portable classrooms where it was very quiet. These interviews were more important for me in deciding whom I would like to interview for my in-depth question and answer session about hip-
hop and education. I asked each student initial general questions (such as what they would want to do after high school and what they like about school) and then moved into questions and perceptions about hip-hop music in general.

From there, I picked out the three that I thought would offer me the best discussion for my research. I chose Tabatha, Larry, and Brianna due to their abilities to openly discuss without being afraid of my tape recorder, as well as the things they told me in my short, “get to know you” interview. Larry, for instance, grew up with hip-hop and not by choice, as his father was a big fan of the 1980’s artists like Run DMC, Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, Boogie Down Productions, and EPMD. Tabatha was just very open and honest – not just about hip-hop, but everything. I knew she would give my project a lot of information – right or wrong. Brianna was simply as charismatic as a young girl can get as she came across as outspoken and full of life. I would then interview each on three separate days. I interviewed Tabatha and Brianna in the school library and Larry outside by the portable classrooms. I asked ten questions to each student, getting mostly different feedback. I tried to ask the exact same questions to each, but of course I often had to probe in certain instances. The questions that I asked were all about hip-hop and how it might be used in the language arts classroom and how each felt about the idea of such a notion.

I chose not to do an in-depth interview with DaRon, Jam, and Jerrell not because of their own admissions that they weren’t the biggest fans of the genre to begin with, but mainly because they didn’t seem as interested in being interviewed and often and these were also three who were hard to catch up with due to absences or having to make up tests for a core class or detention. I chose not to do in-depth interviews with Beth and Gigi because they were extremely shy and gave no indication that they wanted to get truly involved. Gigi said hip-hop would definitely be a positive art in the classroom, but really wasn’t clear as to why. Beth…well, it was difficult to get
her involved in anything, as she was the only one of the ten who really just didn’t care that much about it or any type of music. Jam was not a fan of the cursing contained in many hip-hop songs; Jarrell didn’t spend as much time listening to music as he did reading fantasy books and making short films and videos; DaRon was much more into rhythm and blues and gospel music and also didn’t care much for the vulgar side of hip-hop – he, being a minister’s son. Beth was not a hip-hop fan to begin and virtually did not participate in the discussion. Gigi was not present on this day. In any case, I thought, overall, that the three I did choose would make for interesting research.

**Discussions about Hip-hop**

Our discussions took place over three days. These discussions basically relied on spontaneity, as opposed to a planned outset of instructions to follow. With the exception of me not playing music, the forum talks were very informal and laid-back. We sat in a semi-circle and I encouraged the students that this was their time to talk and that I was not anything more than a facilitator. I began each discussion with an opening topic. For example, I invited the students to share their favorite artists and songs of hip-hop and to tell me why. I also wanted them to discuss their current school curriculum and try to ponder upon ways that hip-hop could be incorporated into it, as well as how it could supplement the current curriculum without having to take any component of it out. I will use my propositional statements as headings to separate and connect my findings through the discussion, along with bits and pieces of the surveys and interviews.

**The Majority of Students View Hip-hop as Something that is Positive**

Students were encouraged to participate in discussions and use some of their favorite artists to help make their points about hip-hop clear. Students defended their favorite artists and
explained how their music might promote the wrong idea at times (violence, sex, profanity), but should be seen and heard with a deeper eye and ear at all possible times.

Krista brought up Los Angeles rapper Tupac Shakur (after our discussion of his rival, Notorious B.I.G., with whom Shakur feuded) as the hip-hop artist she loved most. Krista compared Shakur (also known as 2 Pac) to Brooklyn rapper Nas, claiming that he was just as instrumental to hip-hop and also similar in creativity. Although she admitted that Shakur wrote and recorded a lot of songs about sex and even violence, she also acknowledged that he did songs that were very positive. The first song she discussed was "Dear Mama" - a dedication to his mother in the form of an epistolary hip-hop ballad. "It told a story," Krista said and she discussed its positive message toward the mother figure. Krista believed that this song was able to reach so many people who take their mothers for granted.

Krista couldn't think of the name of the song, "Changes" (Larry and Kyle gave her the answer when she started singing the chorus). In "Changes (That's Just the Way it is)", Krista believed that he wrote and rapped that song to all races...that society has to change. Krista felt that this anthem spoke to many and their hearts and was a call to make the world a better place. Krista believes that Tupac is "one of the most prominent hip-hop artists of all time" Krista even mentioned that he had written a book of poems (The Concrete Rose) which definitely shows that Shakur was more than just a “rapper” He was a poet and a story-teller who attended a school for the arts. “He wasn’t a gangster the way people believed and if he was…he was an intellectual gangster,” Krista proudly added. Krista’s portrayal of Shakur was absolutely positive.

Jerrell believed that hip-hop icon, the Notorious B.I.G. (Christopher Wallace) had a positive message and that some of his songs could be used as positive story-telling. Jerrell said that he researched the Notorious B.I.G. due to his passion for what he contributed to the cultural
world with his music. Jerell said that the Notorious B.I.G., a Brooklyn based rapper, was one who "let us know what's going on behind the scenes on the streets...the real life that television's glitz and glam on MTV leaves out." Jerrell used Notorious's 1994 hit "Juicy" to explain what he felt was a story about rising to success. Other students agreed with him, including DaRon who said that the song was an inspiration to those who are living in rough times and conditions and how to never give up on your dreams, even though they seem so far out of reach. Dreams…quite a huge part of this particular song which Jerrell also brought up, as indicated by this following verse which he mentioned (and I will use the actual quotes to illustrate what Jerrell was alluding to):

   It was all a dream

   I used to read Word Up magazine

   Salt'n'Pepa and Heavy D up in the limousine

   Hangin' pictures on my wall

   Every Saturday Rap Attack, Mr. Magic, Marley Marl (Notorious B.I.G., 1994).

Jerrell and DaRon both believed that artists like Christopher Wallace become stars the hard way and it is rappers like him who help give so many inner-city high school students the message that you can succeed and the sky’s the limit (which by the way, is the title of another Notorious B.I.G. smash hit, recorded in 1997). Both feel that is something we should be teaching our students, many of whom are ready to give up in many avenues of their lives.

   Students Like Artists Who are able to Express Themselves in an Intelligent Manner

   As indicated in the surveys, students want more than a good beat and a catchy hook. They want the artists to be able to teach them through their use of words, puns, stories, etc. Tabatha went the extra mile and came prepared to the discussions with research that she had done prior.
She began to speak about Public Enemy, a group that says that she researched a lot and said that even though they were controversial, Public Enemy told history in their lyrics of slavery and injustices towards black people. Like it or not, she said, Public Enemy was retelling factual textbook type knowledge in the form of rapping. Tabatha was very impressive in her response and also talked about a lot of what she had learned from hip-hop was paralleled to her English classes in that a story is being told, and often its language and its function to tell a story very much seems parallel to the stories she reads in her English classes.

Brianna was very emphatic and enthusiastic about another artist who she felt as taught her a lot. "I wanna talk about my home girl, Lauryn Hill." Brianna, a well-spoken girl, was quite astute in her reasoning as to why Lauryn Hill's lyrics and music are educational. "Lauryn Hill, I think, is so beautiful inside and out," she explained and began discussing how successful Hill was as a solo artist and with her original group, The Fugees. Brianna discussed how brilliant she thought that Hill's album, "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill" was and how the title was so "right on" as she put it. "I think the title is misleading but in a good way...a lot of people, you know, think you have to go to school to get a real education and that's the only way to learn and you have to take the core subjects to be smart and what not." Brianna got even keener as she continued…

"But there's a lot of stuff, not only book sense, but also street sense to survive in life...and so even though she had the school education, there's a lot of stuff you can learn without. Her rapping can be explicit, but it's real and she puts so much behind it. In each song, you can hear her laughing and crying and being angry. Even though she's not PG, she's real and gives a message through her songs. She's just so poetic."
Brianna then talked about Hill's song, "To Zion", which is dedicated to her son. Brianna mumbled through and even sang part of the song (and it’s obvious that Brianna was blessed with a singing voice) and explained the meaning of the song - it was about people telling Hill to get out of the business, now that she was having a child. Brianna admires Hill for writing "such a cool song" and how the title is appropriate, because not only is Zion her son, but it's also "a religious place" as she put it. Brianna said she admired Hill for her continuous belief that she could still be in hip-hop and that she is a role model to anyone who becomes a mother. She added that Hill was one of the best there is when it comes to telling a story and educating listeners.

Spirituality also seemed important to Kyle as he believed that a lot of The Notorious Big’s music held allusions to heaven and hell and how earth, as he said, “is somewhere in between” and comprised of both. Also, he felt that the “rapping” aspect of hip-hop was spiritual in that it was probably one of the few true escapes that many artists had. Even though he didn’t label himself so much of a hip-hop fan, DaRon discussed his passion for gospel music and said he liked a lot of hip-hop that seems to have spun off that genre. DaRon, being a future Minister of Music for his church, believed that many artists have the ability to educate us in a very positive way. Larry echoed what Krista had said earlier about sex in hip hop and how "sex sells" and too much of hip-hop and music in general focuses on that. He then talked about how groups like The Roots never getting many radio hits, despite being around for twenty years. Larry felt it was because they never rap about "sex" much and that they cater to a more educated audience and that they seem fine without all of the pop radio hits and acclamations. I could tell the students were, in a way, trying to prove (or so it seemed) that hip-hop had a lot more substance to offer than just sex and other vices that so many people tend to associate with all of it.
Tabatha brought up an interesting point regarding how so many "rappers on the radio" are strictly in the business for entertainment and that some artists that we often do not hear on FM stations have the most substance to their music. Kyle agreed and looked at me and said that since I grew up in the 90's, I was able to hear fresh music that was "part of a movement" as he put it. "The hip-hop you grew up with had a purpose and it had a lot of educational value in it," he said, still looking at me. "Now a days...when I was in middle school, all the crunk stuff like Lil John was going on and being played a lot...I had to get into that because that was being played...but I like all the raw stuff that you grew up with and I think that's the hip hop that can teach." I felt like it was my place to back up what Kyle said, as I explained to the group that the 1990’s were a unique place in time for music, as there was a lot of new types of sounds, both in rock and hip-hop and that today's music is quite different, to affirm Kyle’s point and question. I also said that hip-hop has evolved, but that it will always offer artists of all kinds. Much like any genre of music, there will be those that teach, preach, and reach and there will be those who will not.

Kyle brought up Compton-based N.W.A. - the late 80's to early 90's five member group whose initials stand for "Niggaz with Attitude". Kyle's point was very ardent as he stated, "Some of the bad stuff sometimes has a meaning like even toward maybe the law like all the N.W.A. stuff...cause I know personally, down here...sometimes the cops down here...I had a gun pulled on me by the police just for having a cigarillo unopened in my hand." Kyle then wondered, aloud, if what he was telling was even educational. I affirmed his conclusion, telling him that it was a story and stories are what we use to entertain and draw our insights from. I made that point to affirm, but then quickly wanted to take myself out of the continual discussion. I then thought to myself, even though I had wanted to leave the more explicit "gangsta rap" out of this, Kyle had insisted that education does not just mean learning in a classroom. While
profanity often gives hip-hop a bad name or might even be unnecessary, some students justified it as necessary. Jerrell said, "Some of the time, hip-hop artists use cuss words to fit into their rhyme." Brianna said that when she often writes rhymes, that she often has to interject curse words into her lyrics because "I just feel like I have to." I wanted to tell them that hip-hop doesn’t have to contain vulgarity to be real, but at the same time, hip-hop is real. Profanity is real and sometimes people use it without even knowing or use it to be more demonstrative in their making of points. The question then indeed – just because it has vulgarity, does that make hip-hop a wilted art when it comes to educating?

Students View Hip-hop as a Tool that can Teach Literary and Poetic Devices

Students were able to recognize that lyrics of hip-hop can fundamentally serving to the purpose of learning just as other traditional poems when it comes to not just literary devices, but story-telling. Larry spoke about 1980’s and 90’s icon, Rakim, who is known for his smooth temperament and lyrics, as he rarely yells or raises his voice in his raps, yet still has the ability to be heard as a “loud emcee” Larry had been very passionate in his one on one interviews and Rakim was one artist whom he felt had a tremendous story to tell, as well as creating verses and rhymes that he felt rivaled anyone in a literature book. Rakim's "Microphone Fiend" was an example of a hip-hop emcee using a lot of elements found in poetry from an English IV text. "Rakim uses a lot of descriptive language and puns and his verses are well-constructed like stanzas,” Larry said.

DaRon didn’t talk in discussion as much as I thought he would and unlike Larry, I did not do an in-depth interview with him. Still, I liked his input. DaRon admitted to being a bigger fan of gospel and R&B over hip-hop, but professed his liking of “Summertime" by popular artist Will Smith. DaRon's description of the song was keen as he compared the song being very much
like a beautiful poem and how "Summertime" was about being out in the open, in a car, with the windows down and enjoying the beauty of summer and all that it has to offer. There are so many poems about nature by the likes of Whitman, Emerson, and Dickinson and in my opinion, DaRon made an accidental connection with a very modern pop hip-hop song and 19th century poetry often found in student textbooks.

Jarrell also talked about and favored Will Smith and L.A. rapper, Slick Rick and said, "When they say the lyrics, I feel like they are actually saying them to me. They are just good at telling' a story. They're just talking' about a normal day. When we say stuff like that, it's just...ordinary. When they do, it's just like...um...magic, ya know?" Brianna agreed and added that hip-hop and just music in general from "back in the day" had so much meaning to it and then she began to talk about her distaste for current rapper Akon, who she felt was just making the same song over and over again.

The connections with literary and poetic devices were obvious. I had hoped students would focus more on the other avenues previously mentioned that I wanted them to be able to connect hip-hop with. I talked a bit about story-telling and to make sure that the students understood that so many stories and poems from Dickens to Coleridge to so many of the 20th century's best when it comes to story-telling and being able to make the reader feel a place or time or feeling...well, hip-hop artists can also do this and perhaps even more effectively.

Brianna, out of nowhere, started talking about Prince (Prince Rogers Nelson) and his hit "Purple Rain" as she said, "That song goes sooo hard!" and talked about how he "could do everything" and every song he did was a story or poem about love, abuse and neglect, society, and even despair. Prince might not be labeled as “hip-hop”, but his music and lyrics are versatile and he has covered rock, R&B, dance, and hip-hop in his impressive tenure as a musical icon to
millions. Brianna discussed, in her interview, Kanye West’s ability to tell stories from all
vantage points – including the boy he once was before his fame.

Kyle, fervent to continue to speak and share, also discussed Eminem and at first how so
many people thought he was being very silly with his song "My Name is..." in which he made a
video for in 1999. Eminem, in this particular video, was dressed in silly costumes and made
satirically witty but sharp points about pop culture. These points, however, led us into the
element of Eminem’s satire and how it connected with the satire that they had read in some of
their story units. The group began to talk eagerly (and at one time) about how Eminem might
have appeared as a joke in his first video, but his use of satire was quite authentic in that he wore
a Superman outfit - perhaps indicating the preposterous notions that rappers and hip-hop icons
are seen as super heroes. The group had collectively picked up on the satire bit and added their
points, with the exception of Gigi and Beth, who were listening but not yet adding to the
discussion. I hoped that this would change. I must admit that I never thought this particular song
by Eminem would ever arise in an educational discussion, but it is indeed a song of satire as his
verses contain bits about kids doing exactly as he says, which made me think back to the
instances of the 1980's, when teenagers committed suicides due to a song by Judas Priest or the
many murders in the black community due to the violent messages portrayed by "Gangsta Rap".
Satire is indeed a prevalent theme in authors like Jonathan Swift and Lewis Carroll.

Still, many of the students felt that they could learn from hip-hop as much as they could a
curriculum that they didn’t seem to understand because it failed to relate to their lives. Brianna
believed the stories she has read in her English classes have been “bland” and the stories are told
“through the eyes of white people who really don’t even have a connection with America
anymore.” Brianna went further with her explanation by talking about how all of the English and
even history classes she had taken were British or American. “Where’s African-American History? Why can’t we study Spain’s history? Brazil’s?” Krista then asked, “Why, every time we read a story about African-Americans, does it have to be about slavery or the first African-American this or that?” Kyle then added that these stories were “just stories” and he didn’t necessarily see a point. Tabatha, though, seemed to bring up a great point when she said, “We read stories based on history and race. Why can’t we just read a variety of literature and learn about all cultures?”

I listened to their questions and asked them if they felt hip-hop could perhaps supplement some of the curriculum that they didn’t truly understand. The unanimous answer was “yes”, even from those who weren’t true “hip-hop heads” to begin with. Tabatha and Larry had both indicated to me, in their in-depth interviews, that the curriculum had become dry and boring and that many students were dropping out because of their inability to understand what was being taught (of course, many students drop out for various and complicated reasons). Tabatha aspires to one day be an English teacher and mentioned that she was somewhat fearful of trying to get a lot of kids – many of whom are extremely deficient in language arts – to understand and relate to the content. Presently, Tabatha felt that Language Arts classes had become boring because, “You never get to learn what you wanna learn about. It’s all about the curriculum and what they (the makers of the curriculum I assumed she meant) want.” This wouldn’t be the first such gripe.

Students undoubtedly made intelligent points about the connection of hip-hop to the curriculum. Larry had mentioned that when reading *Macbeth*, he felt a similar story was told in a Jay-Z (Shawn Corey Carter) song. Larry had understood that *Macbeth* was about power hunger and felt that this Jay-Z track (which he could not recall the name of) eerily, but spectacularly paralleled the Shakespeare classic. Gigi and Krista were both fans of Langston Hughes’s poetry,
which they believed had a truer and realer value – actually having a point to make in learning. Gigi was a fan of Hughes’s *Harlem* and Krista preferred *I, Too*…both believed this type of literature more closely resembled hip-hop.

**Students Believe Race nor Gender Should Determine Who Can Appreciate It**

I knew many hip-hop artists express race in their music. After all, hip-hop is a form that is often considered “black music” by some and while that is true to a degree, with respect to the founding artists of it, these students did not necessarily think so (remember that 8 of the 9 are African-Americans). In their eyes, hip-hop has evolved racially and within the topic of gender. Tolerance of one another’s skin color and sex, it seemed, is becoming less of an issue – at least based on what these students had to say in surveys, discussion, and interviews.

I first posed the following question to the group, in hopes of getting some excellent discussion and analysis: "Do you think hip-hop is perhaps now teaching us to be more culturally and racially tolerant?" I received a very quick chorus of "oh yeahs" and "it's about diversity." Larry even discussed about how he now knew of Asian rappers. In his interview with me, Larry talked about how big of an advocate he was of bringing racial harmony into the forefront and also talked at length about his involvement with teen poetry slams and that the object of those events was not to win, but to unite teens of all walks of life and meet and learn from new people.

Krista said that hip-hop was evolving as it was once a type of music "for black people but if you look at hip-hop now…it's like…we got a lot of Caucasians out there. If you look at Eminem (Marshall Mathers), he is one of the most influential rappers out there…not just because he's white but he makes it funny…like he tells stories…it was one of his first songs called "Stan"…I love that song. It's so bad. Eminem broke that racial barrier."
Krista continued with her assessment of the white female pop hip-hop artist, Fergie (Stacy Ferguson), a woman often seen as beautiful and creative and one who spun a solo career out of her involvement with male-dominated hip-hop group, The Black Eyed Peas. “Now you see Fergie out there...she broke it open for the white women,” Krista said. I also had to take into account all of the things that Brianna had told me in discussion and interview about Lauryn Hill. In her interview, Brianna talked in detail about Lauryn Hill and her ability to make “the perfect music”.

Krista also was one who believed that artists such as Tupac Skakur, as much as he had degraded women in some of his sexually explicit material, was advocating for females to rise up and make good decisions. Such is evidenced in Krista’s analogy of Shakur’s 1991 ballad hit, “Brenda's Got a Baby” which tells a story of the difficulty of a young 13-year-old girl going through pregnancy and ultimately killing her baby behind a trash dumpster with a clothes hanger. Krista believed that this song was a message to young females about sex and the consequences of such, as well as abstinence. Tabatha whole-heartedly agreed and believed songs like this should be a wakeup call to promiscuous teenagers who could always end up suffering tremendous and unbearable consequences.

With the previously mentioned appreciations for Eminem, as well as the interviews I had with Tabatha, Larry, and Brianna, hip-hop was undoubtedly teaching cultural tolerance as much as it was teaching anything. Even though hip-hop has had its share of racist and sexist attitudes, much of what is being heard today is being rapped, played, sung, performed, and produced by an audience that is comprised of several races – not just black.
Listening to the Hip-Hop…and Learning from It

I wanted to play several hip-hop tracks for the students, but knew that time was limited and it had been very difficult getting all nine students together at one time during my visits to their classroom. I decided to use Saul Williams, a very well-respected and educated veteran emcee and spoken word extraordinaire. His 2001 track, “Penny for a Thought” was a song that I thought students’ might not have heard (and I was right) and I wanted them to hear the powerful lyrics and then be able to tell me what they saw in them. I passed out the lyrics to each student (see attached copy in appendix) and then played the song from my IPOD deck that I had toted to class with me. My purpose was for students to see a hip-hop track that was less concerned with catchy rhythms and choruses and more with opening up minds with thought-provoking lyrics. The song was about 5 minutes in length. After the song had played, I opened the discussion forum.

Kyle was the first to speak and said that he liked it very much and thought that the song had a great beat, but also very powerful lyrics. He pointed out that his favorite lines were the ones that discussed “hands in the air” in different forms and how he felt these lyrics were pointing out the ability of humans not being able to make choices for themselves, as bank robbers, Christian ministers, and even hip-hop emcees can each command crowd to throw their hands up in the air without thinking as to why.

Brianna liked “Penny for a Thought” also. She felt that so many hip-hop artists construct “beats” and music first and then add lyrics, but she felt that Williams was a “poet” who let the music follow his principal lyrics. “This man is a poet…and the beat came after. His lines are powerful. He has a lot to say and there’s a lot to be learned, even though we may have the wrong idea about the message…but it seems educational.” I followed her thoughts with a question to
the group, as I asked them what they thought these lyrics’ point was. Larry spoke up. He offered his thoughts and said the song was about “thinking for yourself.” He even thought the title of the song was about the cheapness of thought and that if everyone was getting paid pennies for each thought then that is all people would do – think in hopes of getting paid. Larry enjoyed the song mainly because he appreciates the solid writing and “flow”. Larry, who aspires to be a hip-hop artist and is involved in youth poetry slams (sometimes hosting them, which is impressive at age 18), knew of Saul Williams but had not heard this song. Kristen did not say much, but did say the song was “different” and that it could be something we learn from. Tabatha thought the song was “great” and the best part of it was that the lyrics were complex, but profound and there was a positive message involved. It occurred to me that the students who liked the song the most were the same ones who had demonstrated to me that they were huge fans of hip-hop. Kyle said that more hip-hop should follow in this sort of mold – intellectual lyrics and a “dope beat”.

When I asked the question, “Did anyone not like it?” Jam spoke up. “I thought the lyrics were confusing and this wasn’t really my type of hip-hop” she said, hoping she wouldn’t hurt my feelings in her soft-spoken words and squinting eyes. I encouraged Jam to just continue her honesty. She didn’t care for it and it appeared by her facial expressions and vocal disapproval, that she didn’t really find any value in the lyrics. Jerrell and DaRon also spoke up about it not being something they particularly enjoyed. I began to think back to the short individual interviews I did with each student just to get to know them. This wasn’t a huge surprise. Jerrell said, “I liked the song. It was really creative, but…well; it’s just not my thing.” At least he was honest.

Still, the use of Saul Williams was not to make new fans of him (although that would have been a bonus), but to portray him as a man of conscious thoughts and storytelling, as well
as allowing listeners to be able to think and relate. Larry believed that these lines associate with the likes of Rodney King and his run-in with the Los Angeles Police Department in 1993. While it is my belief that there are some paradoxical lines in these lyrics, Larry believed that this was a reflection on the police and their relationship with the minority communities. Whether he is right or wrong, Larry used his knowledge of recent history to relate – an ability that I feel is still keen.

Kyle, clearly moved by the song, brought to my attention the lines about the child watching a “Barney the Dinosaur” video, only to be told by his teenage father that he isn’t real life. While Kyle thought that “Barney” was totally suitable for most children to watch, he did indicate that he felt that these lines spoke of hiding children from the harsh realities of the outside world.

When it came to the powerful line of Williams, My people…let Pharaoh go, Brianna believed that this referred to African-Americans not being able to let go of their slavery to commercialism and the things that people blindly buy into. Tabatha and Jerrell agreed. Tabatha, meanwhile, while reading over her page containing the lyrics, said she think she got the entire meaning of “What have you bought into? How much will it cost to buy you out?” She felt this pertained to the media and the constant blind addictions that consumers seem to have with buying into the media and even commercials. As far as the meaning of the title, “Penny for a Thought”, Tabatha believed it meant, “How much money do I have to give you to where you understand?” Much like Larry’s analysis of Rodney King, I wasn’t quite sure if I agreed with Tabatha, but I admired her ability to discover her own meaning and even recalled when I did that with lyrics as a youth.

Much like Greenfield with his Hip-hop seminar class, I wanted to play certain songs to parallel certain English lessons. I was unable to do that because these 10 are not my students and my time with them is limited. I also was not their English teacher and they were part of a Creative Writing class. Not to make excuses, but it would have been terrific if I could have had a
week to two weeks – everyday – with the students. But being with these students and listening to music was quite liberating for both parties. When students are offered something they love as much as anything (most anyway) – music – and look at in an educational context, I believe the results can be mostly positive. I did want the students to understand the importance of my research and not view it as fun and games. They obliged my request with diligent effort and a very mature sense about themselves when discussing. Most of these students will go on to attend a college or university at some point, whether in the fall or later. I believe that their ability to learn from hip-hop speaks for their fellow students who won’t be attending such institutions of higher learning.

The main goal I interpreted from this musical exercise answered one of my propositional statements: Students who embrace and are devoted to hip-hop will find educational value in it easier than those who do not. Kyle, Larry, Tabatha, and Brianna – the students who had earlier professed their love for hip-hop in their short interview segments with me – got more out of the exercise than the others. Nevertheless, three of the other four students, even though they did not care for “Penny for a Thought”, admitted the value in learning by listening and reading. Jarrell commented that he would love to listen to music in class. Beth really gave no answer and I wasn’t going to force her to. Nevertheless, I feel that certain students, even if they do not like hip-hop, can find this learning much easier than constantly reading poems and stories that will go over their heads. This, again, ties in with beliefs of those such as Shor and Tyson.

To conclude this part of my research, I must say that it was a thrill to work with these individuals. I still have a lot of questions that are unanswered. There are still issues that will always be problematic with hip-hop, especially the whole Ebonics debate. Hip-hop, in the eyes of these students, is often attacked because of what Larry says is “seen as dumb niggas who
cannot speak proper English and can’t read and write in King’s English” Weinstein reflects such thoughts in her book. There are those who will see hip-hop and its use of Ebonics as a tool for the “weak” – as in, uneducated. Then, there are those like Professor Griff, formerly of Public Enemy, who as Weinstein states, “Turns the tables on “them” by taking an official-sounding, scholarly tone to claim legitimacy for the language he speaks.” (Weinstein, p. 42-43, 2009)

In my opinion, this research helped induce critical thinking and using lyrics of hip-hop as a way to understand the world and each other, as well as the core subjects like Language Arts. Morrell, Duncan-Andrade, Alexander, Stovall, Greenfield, Baker, and so many others have already legitimized that hip-hop is a teaching and learning tool. I must say that the students I worked with fit this mold as well. I will conclude in the next chapter by discussing what hip-hop, as a genre, has been infused with – the Regan years through the Obama term. Through wars and national crises and from New York to Los Angeles, hip-hop is a big social and historical part of what the world has been through and become – almost like a musical timeline. I will also discuss the students I worked with and how they fit into this way of seeing hip-hop, which will also include my observations of a poetry slam that I attended. It is an event like a slam that can give the youth empowerment. Even though a poetry slam is not the same as hip-hop, I have to be inclined to believe (on my own) that the two are related in ways of inducing creativity and generate a buzz – whether that buzz is discussion, snaps of fingers, or claps and hugs. Hip-hop, in the minds of these students as well as my own beliefs, is poetry indeed. This is why, also, Morrell and Andrade were correct, in my opinion, in their beliefs that certain hip-hop artists’ names belong right there next to Shakespeare and Whitman as far as reverence in a language arts community.
Conclusion

Hearing is Believing

I am a devout believer in a notion that what we hear is as powerful as what we see. This is why I feel that the merging of these two senses is a potent mishmash that lets sound bring emotion and voice into text, as well as letting the fine construction of words give reason and meaning to the sound. Hip-hop music is a medium that allows for such an amalgamation of sight and sound, meanwhile construing and implementing the techniques of storytelling and the personal narrative. In this study, I hoped to show that hip-hop has a place in the language arts classroom as a teaching tool. Much like North Carolina State University Professor Derek Greenfield did with his Hip-hop seminar class, I wanted to play certain songs to parallel certain English lessons for these students who took part in my research. Instead, I was only able to play one song, due to time constraints, but had hopes that the one song would speak for the hundreds of others I had envisioned in my mind. Why did I pick “Penny for a Thought”? I wanted students to hear a track with fresh ears as opposed to picking a track that most might have already heard. Fresh ears, fresh insight, and fresh discussion – I wanted what Greenfield and Stovall and the like had done to come alive in my own research. If I would have had an entire semester with these students – had they been my own – I could only imagine the powerfully lyrical songs we could have listened to. How awesome it would have been to learn via a geographically patterned method of fused music and lyrics, the hungry voices of New York City’s Public Enemy, KRS-One, Rakim, and Nas; New Jersey’s “tell it like it is” songs from the likes of Naughty By Nature and Poor Righteous Teachers; Atlanta’s sociopolitical commentary masters, Outkast and Goodie Mob; The harsh and often too fast realities of life in “Big City Texas” from The Geto Boys, Underground Kings (U.G.K), and Mobonix; The “west coast” philosophies of California-based
artists like Tupac Shakur, The Pharcyde, and Dilated Peoples. The possibilities of learning about each other, our society, our political leaders and government, and our future are within the lyrics of so many of these artists’ songs. These geographically diverse artists, different in accent and perhaps even cultural philosophies, still are a part of a soundtrack to real life and they represent what these students’ lives often depict.

What interests me is just as we have and still do read authors and poets from Great Britain to the United States to even Japan, the teachers (artists) within hip-hop are doing the same thing and that is telling stories of what life is like in their regions, but also, united, they are using hip-hop as their medium of expression and it is often an awesome combination of story and poem merged in one. Listening to their messages via their music can be a rush that can lead to so many unveiled and suppressed emotions. As my propositional statements have indicated, the majority of students with whom I interacted and researched viewed hip-hop as something positive and also a tool that can not only teach literary and poetic devices, but tell a remarkable story – one that students often see as somewhat similar to their own or perhaps identical.

As indicated by my observations, interviews, and surveys, students appreciate hip-hop artists who express themselves in an educated manner. The lone song that I chose to play for the students from my IPOD deck, “Penny for a Thought,” by Saul Williams, did not take a whole lot of deliberation on my part, because in my eyes he was the epitome of an educated artist. Williams is a college graduate and spends less time recording songs about drugs and violence (he has spoken against both, not only in his music, but as guest speaker at university and societal gatherings; he’s even appeared on Oprah) and more time bringing up social concern issues and with his tremendous vocabulary and wordplay abilities, he’s able to tell a story. I also chose Williams because I see him as one of the most powerful voices in both the hip-hop and spoken
word/poetic realms in modern day (whereas, some of the strictly hip-hop artists I have mentioned might be viewed as “old” or “old school” by high school students). But being with these students and listening to one single song by Saul Williams was quite liberating for both parties. When students are offered something they love as much as anything (most anyway) -- music -- and look at in an educational context, the feedback will be tremendously insightful (as indicated in my data analysis) as students begin to look into their own lives and understand that the music, rather catchy beat/hook or not, is speaking to them.

One of the main objectives I interpreted from this musical exercise answered one of my preconceived statements: Students who embrace and are devoted to hip-hop will find educational value in it easier than those who do not. Kyle, Larry, Tabatha, and Brianna, the students who had earlier professed their love for hip-hop in their interview segments with me, appeared to have gotten more out of the exercise than the others and not coincidentally were the four who offered the most feedback in the forum discussion that followed the playing of the song. Nevertheless, three other students, even though they did not care for “Penny for a Thought”, admitted the value in learning by listening and reading. Jarrell commented that he would love to listen to music in class for educational purposes and that the power of music and sound trumps reading from a book over and over again. Brianna believed that hip-hop offers a fundamentally better way of learning about American culture and each other as opposed to being overflowed with stories and poems from one region of the world for an entire year (she was referring to her distaste for British Literature). As far as the meaning of the title, “Penny for a Thought,” Tabatha believed it meant, “How much money do I have to give you to where you understand?” Larry. I wasn’t quite sure if I agreed with Tabatha, but I admired her ability to discover her own meaning. After all, when reading Robert Frost or Emily Dickinson, are students always correct of their assessments
on those particular works? came up with an analysis that revolved around Rodney King, as he recalled a time in American history that was fueled by anger and one that he believed that hip-hop played an important role in as he alluded to those who, sparked my a violent incident, became enraged at another race of people.

Most of these students with whom I worked will go on to attend a college or university at some point, whether in the fall or later. Hip-hop spoke to these high-performing students, so I wondered if the genre could engage those who were, shall I say, “average to below average” in academic performance and attitude towards schooling, in general. I am speaking of those students who show up to school every single day of the week and view it as jail -- an enemy. For many students, school is the distraction from the reality of their lives and offers nothing but a reminder that they are failures because they do not understand Walt Whitman (Dyson, 1996). Rather than encourage the students to rebel and pull a coup d'état against the teachers, principals, and school board over the curriculum, perhaps research indicates that we should rethink the idea of what the curriculum suggests and implies. What, after all, are we teaching and motivating our youth to accomplish? Rather, are we going through the motions and covering our own job safety, as teachers, by ensuring we list every benchmark and objective in our lesson plans as we systematically try to mimic the comprehensive curriculums that we are instructed to follow, as well as focusing on teaching solely for spring testing? Based on what I have found through interaction with these ten students, hip-hop might just do more than teach. It might actually save a life (no reference intended to the Lupe Fiasco single, “Hip-hop Saved My Life”). That saved life may be an exaggeration for a saved education and another diploma given out at a graduation ceremony, as opposed to a GED or even an official dropout.
The Poetry Slam – The verbal sport

To lend even more credibility to hip-hop’s influence on our youth, I want to discuss an event that I first learned of via a flyer that I was handed by Larry, after one of my research visits. It was an invitation to a youth poetry slam and even though it was not open to the public until April 24th, Larry invited me to attend a private showing, if you will, filled only of the involved students, their coaches, and a select few others. I respectfully accepted the invitation, as it would fall on the evening of my last meeting with these ten students. While my literature review touches on the slam, writing about it isn’t the same as witnessing and experiencing it. I asked Larry to share with the group the “benefit” of being a part of such an organization/event. It was, after all, not forced upon him and definitely appeared to be time consuming. I wanted to know, firsthand, where the passion derived from when it came to Larry’s involvement. Larry’s first statement about his teen poetry slam said it all. “It’s not about competition…it’s about community and unity. It’s about socializing with other youth and learning from each other. It’s about diversity.” I then thought, “Wow. Is there a core curriculum class or any class that teaches that?” There are P.E. classes that do the opposite of that – often a “Darwinistic” hour of school that displays who is athletically sound and who isn’t, which, in my experience of teaching, often leads to segregation amongst students and unintentionally emits labels (sadly, popularity often arises from such classes or rather feeble infamy for those who cannot kick, hit, or catch a ball). I was really struck by Larry’s description of this event. I knew that a poetry slam was an outside of the classroom activity, but why couldn’t we incorporate some of that into the setting of academia? Larry, a huge fan of hip-hop, admitted that the genre was a springboard into his involvement in poetry slams. If only the slam could serve as a core class at Larry’s high school. If only he could get a grade in that.
Observing the Slam

Voluntarily, I decided to venture through a few neighborhoods from my quarters to attend the poetry slam that Larry had genuinely spoken so highly and frequently of. As I drove down one of the city’s busiest and community-intersecting highways and into the neighborhood streets, I noticed that the houses were appearing less and less dainty and pleasing to the eye. The roads appeared more trodden and jagged. The inhabitants of these roads and less elegant homes were walking around outside and loitering on the steps of their and their neighbors’ abodes, as opposed to staying locked inside their parlor rooms and dens. As I drove these roads that many people in my own community purposely never see, I saw that I was coming upon my destination – a two-story teen center, protected by graffiti-doused scarlet brick walls, that neighbored a well-sized church and was a comfortable walk from residential houses, a pawn shop, grocery store, and liquor store. I was arriving at a place that didn’t need to reflect upper-crust society to prove its merit as one where those with intellect congregate.

I arrived early to the slam and was let inside the narrow two-story teen center with no problems. Even though I was told that no students would be performing on this special night, I had greatly hoped that I would still get something out of this event and have something to use and connect with hip-hop in education. I walked upstairs into a graffiti plastered, large rectangular room – complete with a stage, worn beige couches, fold up tables and chairs, two bathrooms, televisions, soda machines, and even a kitchen, where pizza and soda were served. Yours truly even helped out with the slicing and pouring. I mingled with some of the adults, even seeing some faces that I had run across on LSU’s campus. Everyone was friendly and openly inviting, whether they recognized and labeled me as an outsider or not. I spoke with parents and event sponsors and somehow hip-hop music would come into the conversation, as I was
introduced as a researcher of the genre. One woman had heard from Larry and Brianna about my research and meetings with the students and that I had used a Saul Williams song to demonstrate how we can learn from this. Before you knew it, this woman and I (who also happened to be a high school English teacher) were talking about A Tribe Called Quest and Leaders of the New Skool who were both artists we had grown up with, cherished, and learned from. This affirmed my belief that many teachers are going this route of using hip-hop as a teaching tool.

Little by little, teenagers began to climb the narrow stairwell and appear into the large room. Minute by minute, the couches contained less space and the pizza boxes contained only grease. There were approximately 70 kids by the time the session was starting. Despite learning that none of them would perform or “do battle” (a one on one competition to see who can emit the most skilled lyrics – often freestyle), I wanted to observe these students and see their reactions to being a part of such a unique event. Most of us would think after-school activities in April would consist of baseball or soccer or some type of outdoor sporting activity. Not for these teens – as they were gathered to play the verbal sport of stage performance poetry.

The faces that I watched pour into the teen center, if meshed into one, would form a very golden tan color. Blacks, whites, Asians, and Hispanics were there in one place to, as Larry had earlier said, come together. The stage was five feet off the old, tiled floor and on it was a table that was used by a deejay who was spinning hip-hop records to entertain the crowd before the event was to proceed. The host of the evening was the man who had put these youth slam projects together and while he made jokes and was light-hearted on stage in his introduction, he made it well known to these young poets that this was not about winning or losing -- that anyone can win or lose on any given day and that it is up to the judges. Wearing a floppy hat on his head and a very casual dress, the host looked comfortable, which seemed in turn to make the kids feel
comfortable. As the huddled flock of quiet teens stood in front of the stage to listen, the host said the same things that Larry had told me earlier during my final day of research. “This is about coming together and meeting new fellow poets,” the host said with a very stern look on his face. “This is about words changing your life. This is for some of you a beginning to a never-ending love.” No, I wasn’t going to see any of the young poets battle (Larry had told me that it might happen, as did Brianna), but I did get to see some awesome interaction. The host, standing at his microphone, told students to find others with their shoe size or their favorite dishes. One round (of what I like to call “mad teenage scramble”) was spent finding others with the same zodiac sign. The last “mad scramble” was to find someone you had never met and converse with them for five minutes. When time was called after each scramble, the host would ask each group to identify themselves. “Pizza.” “Pisces.” “10 and a half.” and “Fried Chicken.” were, among others, shouted back toward the stage. Whether they understood or not, the kids were having a grand time. When the host had seen enough, he explained to the kids that this was an exercise meant to loosen them up and to make new friends. I thought it was a genius idea. I really enjoyed seeing these young poets talking at ease with a complete stranger. From that point on, there would be a lot less strangers as this was only the first night of many more to come of slam events.

After that exercise and another pizza and soda break, it was time for the host to garner the attention of his young poets. Tonight, he explained, was about watching, listening to, and experiencing some of the adult readers (most of who were veterans of this verbal sport and practically treated as celebrities by many of the youth who had been involved in the slam) and their poems and/or freestyle raps. The readers were introduced by the host the way that ringside announcer Michael Buffer would introduce an Evander Holyfield vs. Riddick Bowe boxing
match. Indeed, the host portrayed the first two battling readers as heralded verbal heroes -- both having competed in adult slams from New Orleans to Chicago to New York. One was an African-American man; the other, a Caucasian woman. Both would captivate the crowd with their readings. The man did not even read his well-rehearsed rhymes from paper, as he chose to freestyle, meaning the ability to spontaneously rhyme (Chang, 2005), a poem about the community he sees outside of his window, a metaphor for his eyes. He received snaps from the crowd (a sign of being positively affected by a verse or two, as well as an indication that his/her reading is getting approval) as he rhymed and built off of metaphors, onomatopoeias, and figurative, but culturally relevant language. His lyrics described the violence of his surroundings, but also the hope that could erase and rectify. I was reminded right away of the night I wrote about in my intro in Brand Nubian’s “Hold On.” The woman, when it was her turn, read from her paper, but used such an authoritative and confident voice that it was truly difficult to even notice that she was in fact reading. She was emphatic and captivating, as she rhymed through her story about being a single female, who instead of relying on a man for support, relies on friends and intuition. This type of reading reminded me of the likes of hip-hop legend Queen Latifah, who advocated power to women. Both readers were well received by the younger audience of teens, who silently, but respectfully gazed and listened from the floor. These students were witnessing accomplished spoken word veterans who in turn, would hopefully inspire them to become writers and readers in their own right. The battle was determined a tie, as indicated by an equally explosive applause for both poets.

I would leave soon after so that I could record these reflections and hopefully capture my reader’s mind with what a poetry slam offers. I included this event despite there being no hip-hop involved other than the deejay spinning such records prior to the start of the slam. It is, to
those like Larry and Brianna, because hip-hop is more than just music. It has, for them, branched off into gatherings like poetry slams and has become an infectious part of students’ lives as they listen to their favorite artists through head phones, while constructing lyrics of their own onto scratch paper with a pen. Hip-hop is also, as mentioned in the Literature Review section, more than what it appears as. It is a cultural force comprised of writing, records, art, fashion, and dance that originated in the Bronx by the likes of Clive Campbell aka DJ Kool Herc (Chang, 2005). The art and writing have both been encouraged by schools as long as they’re within the academic framework. There are “Creative Writing Classes” offered as electives and they’re often merely schedule fillers. What are teachers really trying to do in these classes? Are they playing hip-hop music in hopes of opening educational avenues for their students? If they aren’t, then hopefully there is a teen center and a group of dedicated adults, on standby after school lets out, who can offer these students a forum where they are encouraged to listen to hip-hop, write creatively and freely, and do what Larry so passionately spoke about – “come together.”

The ten students whom I worked with are capable of learning from just about any culture, style, and framework that someone could throw at them. They’re already doing that. What struck me is that these students are not really learning from much of the literature they are being forced to read, according to our discussions. I am not advocating that we throw out everything and listen to hip-hop 24/7 and never take tests, but it’s clear that these students aren’t necessarily appreciative of learning from Glencoe text books. Rather, these ten students are reading and comprehending what they are given to obtain good grades and appear as topnotch language arts masters among their peers, so that they can be accepted into an institution of four-year, higher learning. Just imagine what those “other peers” think of what they “have to” read and learn
about. Still, some of these ten students said that *Macbeth* was somewhat enjoyable and fun to read, but when it comes to *Romeo and Juliet*, we may not find harsher critics anywhere (and I was not a big fan, either).

Krista was quick to be the spokesperson of the group when it came to *Romeo and Juliet*, as she saw the work as “a waste of time” and a storyline that is “fake and absurd and meaningless for today’s youth.” Several of her peers nodded and agreed. Krista, a junior and American Literature student, did say that she enjoyed Langston Hughes’s poetry that she recently read just two months ago. Gigi, remembering her junior year, also said she liked Hughes. When I inquired as to why, I was given the “real life” answer. Hughes’s poetry was profound, but the stories somehow reminded Krista and Gigi of their own lives. Still, I found their further analysis of Hughes and the writers of the Harlem Renaissance period quite interesting. Gigi described the poem, “Harlem”; as one that she understood because it seemed “real” and it made her feel sort of nostalgic (might I mention that her grandmother lives in New York City). Krista really enjoyed Hughes’s “I, Too” for the same reasons. Larry echoed the opinions. “I don’t really remember the name or nothin’, but I liked this one poem about (Hughes) trying to think about what essay to write. It was like he was trying to tell the teacher what *he* wanted to write about and what was going on in *his* mind.” It is my opinion that language that is more modern and closely analogous to these youths’ own language is much better received than the more “primitive” authors’ poems and stories.
Listening, Reading, and Digging It

I asked the students what they thought the point was in reading so many non-contemporary stories from ages ago in order to find out their true take on the literature that the state curriculum mandates that they read. Answers varied from “History” to “Expand your mind” to “Preparing us for the future,” which Tabatha said was important as she admitted to knowing nothing about “The Great Awakening” period and then feeling fulfilled once she did learn more about it. In all actuality, though, none of them appeared to come up with what they felt was the right answer as each response was practically emitted back in its own form of a question, as Jam asked, “I mean I guess we’re learning from it, right?” It seemed to me that none of them really did get the point even though they gave, what they felt, were honest and candid answers. I decided to ask a question that I wasn’t so sure I should, but then again, why would I be researching? “Would you like to throw maybe a story or two out and replace them with some very structured and meaningful hip-hop…or could we at least supplement hip-hop into certain units?” “Yes” was quickly given. Brianna believed the stories she has read in her English classes have been “bland” and the stories are told “through the eyes of white people who really don’t even have a connection with America anymore.” Brianna, when she said this, had me thinking of that incredible stat in my literature review about how quickly public schools are becoming less and less white as far as students go, but also less and less black as far as educators go. After hearing Brianna say that, I think I knew that what these students wanted was a connection to the world and the society that they understood. Even though it’s “their world”, there is still so much to learn about it. “We need to dig this,” Brianna said with a laugh.
Difficulties Encountered

The major difficulties I have encountered in this research process have been time and availability. These are not my students and I am not their teacher. They have had a lot of obligations to meet outside of doing this research with me. Most of these students are graduating in early May, which made it very pressing to get all of their information in, without feeling like they are being pressed. Also, these students are working on a very serious project in which they are trying to get a large grant from a well-known electronics corporation, so I had to pick and choose a lot of my research days based on their schedules. I wanted to get my research going on various particular days, but their projects and busy schedules have caused me to delay a good bit and even shorten up my time to visit them. I, also being a full-time student, have had great difficulty and getting my schedules and theirs to coincide. Luckily, these difficulties are only minor obstacles and not complete stoppages. Other minor difficulties have been getting them to bring back all proper forms and surveys without delay. Also, some of the survey questions were hastily filled out and their answers to some of my questions were not as in-depth as I would have liked. The main frustration, other than time, was getting only 9 surveys back instead of 10. I was disappointed that one of them chose not to do the survey, yet participate in the study, but I could not force anything on anyone because this was voluntary. Overall, I have been able to go about my research and have been able to see these students regularly, without disrupting too much of their routine. Reluctance to participate was not an issue.

Ethics

It was important to me that these research participants knew ahead of time that they were not being graded upon this. At any time, I told them, any student could quit the research, no matter the reason and it would not be anything personal. This was a choice and if they signed the
assent forms and had their parents sign the consent forms, then they were allowed to voluntarily participate. Each student in the class did participate. No one completely sat out.

In addition, I submitted a research proposal to the Institutional Review Board at LSU for their approval of my research project proposal. For me to receive their approval and/or exemption, I had to complete and pass an online training course for which I received a certificate proving that my training was successful and measured up to standards. After receiving permission to progress with my study, I passed out the appropriate permission and consent forms to the students and their parents and was also approved by Durant High’s principal, who enabled me to come to their campus and conduct my research.

The Final Verdict

Hip-hop may not be for every single school because very few ideals, arts, and genres are appreciated by everyone or are for everyone. There are many schools that are designed to prepare youth with a standard curriculum – College prep, Catholic and other religious affiliates, and various private academies. The public school, meanwhile, is where the average American family sends their children for education. In my four years of teaching, I came to realize that many of these kids, school is just a place to receive two hot meals and be off the streets for a few hours. It may even be a place to go to rest from working first jobs or sent to socially cogitate and interact with peers. Rarely, is it seen as a place of true higher education as there are often shortages of certified and qualified instructors and an abundance of kids who do not enjoy school. The dropout rates prove this. So, is there any harm, at all, in teaching kids what they already feel a connection towards? Or are we just too caught up in what author Michael Eric Dyson (1996) discusses in his book, *Between God and Gangsta Rap*, as music that is portrayed by “artists who are scapegoats” and who are demeaned by Senator Bob Dole and former Educational Secretary
William Bennett. These men are two of many who have degraded hip-hop as “Gangsta Rap” and have become frightened by a pop cultural force (Dyson, 176). Judging by not only my research with the 10 Durant students, but also so much of the literature that I have read, I feel that the words education and hip-hop do connect. In my opinion, hip-hop can teach the same principles and values that our traditional curriculum stories and poems are teaching. What exactly are people like Dole scared of? I won’t answer that question, in fear that I will open up a whole new topic of research, but I will ask the following: If this research design used country or jazz music instead of urban hip-hop, would Senator Dole and others who share his view feel differently?

Let me also add that if we are to use the medium of hip-hop music in the classroom, then we must be cautious and selective when it comes to the materials (the songs and artists) that we select from. We certainly do not pass out issues of *Penthouse*, collectively read Hunter S. Thompson novels, nor do we watch movies like *Dude Where’s My Car?* and *Basic Instinct* in the classroom. We wouldn’t supplement with them, either. Artists who use hip-hop as a source to boast about money, fame, women, and drug use probably have no place in k-12 schools. It is important that we, the teachers, control what is to be played and heard and also read. This is a powerful pop culture powerhouse we are dealing with. The kids are already hooked on it without it being a part of the classroom. Still, they’re hooked on what they know, based on my research, because hip-hop music connects to students’ lives.

Tolerance seemed to be a constant topic of discussion in my interviews and forum talks with these ten students. As Dyson (1996) says, “Hip-hop was born in bleak conditions” and endured through much of Reganism to be accepted as it is today. The students with whom I discussed this phenomenon with see it as a once black, but now color-blind art that is expressive of their communities, their lives, and the world they live in. Hip-hop is now a part of black,
white, Hispanic, German, and Asian cultures. As indicated by my last of four propositional statements, students believe race and gender are important in hip-hop, but neither should determine who can appreciate it. From our political leaders to our teachers, it seems that we all should want racial and gender harmony, with respected cultural diversity. If hip-hop cannot bring this ideological view into place, than I truly believe that no other medium can. This small sample of students that I worked with has shown their love and appreciation for hip-hop as an educational tool and not just one to connect to literary devices. We want our students to know about the stories and meanings behind events like World War II, places like Communist China, and the gist of The Watergate Scandal and The Civil Rights Movement. Educators are not concerned with reading about these events, places, and stories and finding internal rhyme or meter. Hip-hop contains a bit of both – the literary and poetic devices and the storytelling. Still, the bulk of the learning and appreciation for what is learned comes from the story-telling aspect that hip-hop offers and the research with the Durant students certainly seemed to help theorize that. We learn from stories in our history and English texts. Hip-hop’s powerful, moving, profound, or harsh lyrics can offer the same pattern of learning.

It is time that we, as teachers, allow what students love and appreciate to be part of their academic experience. This is an era that arguably has more history to tell already, as opposed to hundreds of years ago. I feel that we should find a place for hip-hop in the language arts class to continue to teach these types of stories. School and learning just might have the ability to be fun.
References


Appendix A

Interviews

Tabatha

Q: Tell me in your mind what is hip-hop?

A: Hip-hop is an urban musical form of expression…kind of like a culture with a form of music that, to me, is prevalent in very urban areas.

Q: Do you think you see a carryover of this music from perhaps Africa and the tribal traditions that took uproot from there? The elements of song and dance and word?

A: Oh yeah…Um, I do because just from things I have learned from in school, that a lot of story and dance comes from there…and that’s what hip-hop is.

Q: What are your earliest memories of hip-hop? Think back as far as you can…as far as your memory takes you. What do you see?

A: Um…Naughty by Nature. That’s the only one I can think of. The earliest one.

Q: What do you remember about Naughty by Nature? OPP? Or is there another one?

A: Um…I think it was another one?

Q: Was it “Hip-Hop Hooray”?

A: (excitedly) Yes! That was it

Q: That’s interesting…ok…what did you build upon that? What did you think when you heard that song?

A: Well, when I first heard “Hip-hop Hooray”, I was very little…I didn’t really understand what hip-hop was. I just liked the way the words went…then I just liked the music. For me to like a song, I actually have to like the music and here, I also liked the words, ya know? But as I got older and I actually analyzed it, I was like, oh this makes so much sense.

Q: Got ya…well that kind of leads me into my next question: But who are some of the other hip-hop artists you came to like as you got older…maybe think back a bit more recently.

A: I honestly wasn’t a fan of hip hop really. Ya know, R&B was my favorite as…as far as my heart. So, back then I wasn’t really, like, into anybody, but now I love rap. I’m really into rap.

Q: Ok, what is it about rap and what age do you think you became when you started to accept it and like it?
A: Um…middle school…just because it was something everyone else was listening to. Everyone would be like, listen to *Ludacris* or listen to *Jay Z*…so that’s who I got hooked on. *Jay Z* is amazing. I guess everyone else listened to it, so I just kinda drifted to it, but now I listen to it on my own…independently.

Q: That’s very cool. Middle school is when I got into it also, so I understand…anyway, how has hip-hop inspired you? In what ways can you think of?

A: Well, in general, hip-hop is very (a little unsure of herself) – I hate to use the word “explicit”, but it’s very real. It’s not censored as much and I like it because they can talk and rap about things that I can relate to. Um…it’s story-telling. It’s entertaining. Some of it is educational. Some of it is story-telling…um, some of it is really good…music. I dunno (laughs). When you just listen to it, it just puts different things into your head. You learn from some of the things they say or um…they talk about something you’re going through, so it helps you with your problems and what you can relate to. Um…some rappers are just really good rappers…like they…they read into different things. It’s like, some songs they make references to things you don’t know about. So, you’re like, “Well I don’t know what this word means. I don’t know who that person is. So it just directs you into other things…not just that uh…one thing that you think rap is about.

Q: Yeah…right. Kind of has its own vocabulary?

A: I would agree.

Q: Cool. Well tell me what you think are the positives of hip-hop?

A: Um, positives…it’s something that everyone can relate to. It can be educational…it, I don’t know why, but it’s fun to listen to. It’s um…good music and there’s nothing bad about good music.

Q: Ok, so on the other hand, what are hip-hop’s negatives?

A: They always talk about degrading women…cause I mean you cannot degrade a woman who is already degrading themselves. So, I guess like everyone’s writing about degrading women. Also, like the language…they curse it a lot.

Q: Ok, so about the degradation of women…do you feel that hip-hop videos are a part of that?

A: I have to say this first…I don’t like it when people say “the music degrades women”. Because I’m a woman and hip-hop doesn’t degrade me. These women degrade themselves. So, that doesn’t affect me…but I can understand why people say it because there is bad language in hip-hop and they talk about all kinds of stuff that degrade women, and in the video – it’s a totally different story because I have seen a video that talks about a completely different thing but there is half-naked women in the videos. So I guess sex sells.
Q: I agree that that’s a negative. Ok, so what is a song, recently…or an artist who has really made you say, “Wow”…someone who has really reached you?

A: Um, I would have to say Kanye West. Um, Kanye has a new album and in it he just talks about a lot of different stuff…and talks about all walks of life. He just, um, talks about how it is being an artist and how it’s being a regular person and I don’t know…it kind of speaks to me because I can understand how everyone idolizes a person and then, but you know – that person can be doing the same…and everything he says is um…kinda like gold to me (laughs). So…I’m kinda biased.

Q: I get it and I understand. He’s a guy I can think, whether you like him or not, people feel strongly about. That said, how do you think that hip-hop can parallel a language arts discussion or an assignment? Lesson in Creative Writing?

A: I English, we are…well, we were discussing satire….we were reading A Modest Proposal and um, a lot of the kids weren’t paying attention and they didn’t get it, but when we started relating it to music videos and television, more people started to understand what satire was and understood how to use it.

Q: So, in a pop cultural sense, kids liked it better than literature? I see what you’re saying. Build on that if you could, please.

A: And…in creative writing, hip-hop is like a way to express yourself. So, by listening to music, you just draw this from that, ya know? And…um…creatively, you just go from there. Creatively, you can grab so much from it and make your own music or lyrics and make a video. Just you know…add something from it. Individuality…add your own individuality to it.

Q: What does hip-hop have to offer that say, other forms of music do not?

A: I think it depends on that person. Because…I’m a very eclectic person. I listen to many things, so hip-hop speaks to me in one of my areas. Like, hip-hop is one of my favorites, but I like all kinds. Hip-hop can speak to a person the same way that country or rock speaks to others, so I guess it just really depends on that person. Um, their experiences and what they like and what they don’t like…it can be for everybody. But hip-hop speaks to me…it’s always, “Oh my God, I know what they’re talking about! Oh my God, I saw that yesterday!…so, um (giggle)…so it just depends on what kinda person.

Q: I got ya. Ok…well…I really want you to think about my next question. By the year 2040, it has been acknowledged that all public schools will be minority dominated…not just some or most. You will be alive. Do you feel that this fact could open doors for hip hop?

A: Oh yes (enthusiastically) …we talk about this all the time. Senior year is British literature. We’re in America. Not many people care about British literature…it doesn’t speak to us. I’m not gonna say that we don’t wanna learn it, but…it doesn’t speak to us. It’s not interesting to us.
Using hip-hop…it’s our culture and it’s what we wanna learn about all the time. So many people make connections with others through music. So, by bringing it to the classroom, you get people involved. I think that would be a GREAT idea, like that would be more effective than the stuff we’re reading now.

Q: Yeah, I was in school in the 90’s and so many of us were the same way. I learned the value of learning that…but in 2040, do you think what we’re doing now should just be thrown out the window?

A: Oh…no…because there’s always, like…there’s always a good value, but like I said, it’s not interesting enough for many of us to want to learn about it. So, I’m not saying we should want to throw it out, but if we start implementing it now…by that time, it should catch on and we can adjust.

Q: Last question…what do you say to the nay-sayers who do not think hip-hop has a place in education?

A: That they’re very closed-minded. There are so many people in school…like you said…minority dominated, but there are so many different kinds of kids. There are so many cultures. Not everyone learns in the same way. I think a hip-hop class would change that and everyone would get excited about learning. It would change things. It won’t be like, “Man, we’re going to English IV and I don’t understand A Modest Proposal.” And I like the fact that we try to incorporate something like hip-hop that people love…put something in school that people love and they’ll love coming to school. I think it’s a brilliant idea. I wish we had it now. I guarantee that the dropout rate wouldn’t be so high. I think we have to take the dropout rate seriously. This curriculum is ridiculous…it’s overwhelming to people who can’t handle it. It’s pressuring people so much that they just give up and so they drop out.

Larry

Q: What is hip-hop? What does the word mean to you?

A: Hip-hop, to me, is not a color…a gender. It’s more of a…self-expression of where you come from.

Q: What do you mean when you say self-expression?

A: Different artists express themselves in different ways. Kanye (West) is very versatile. You have artists who express their way through lyrics. You have artists who express their ways the way they dress. Uh…I mean it’s different things –

Q: So, it’s more than just music? Is it a lifestyle?
A: It’s more than music. It’s more than a lifestyle. Like lifestyle itself is all – it’s like a cocoon…and you know like a butterfly comes out.

Q: Interesting…You seem to be a big hip-hop fan. What are your earliest memories of hip-hop? Think back as hard as you can.

A: (takes a minute to think, staring up at the sky) I can remember when…um, the first time I remember listening to a hip-hop artist was like LL Cool J…um…it was like Sittin in my room or something…I forgot the name of the song, but it was by LL. Me and this dude Howard Brown used to sing it to all the girls in our class…like it was a love song or something. But…I can’t remember the name.

Q: I really wouldn’t know, either.

A: I can remember bits and pieces of it…yeah…I wasn’t really as big on hip-hop as I am now. Like back then…you know…being young, you always pay attention to stuff. Like when Nas came out with “I Know I Can”, that’s when I started getting into it. I started listenin’ to KRS (KRS-One) and “The Bridge is Over” and I can remember getting into it. My dad…he was always talkin’ about Big Daddy Kane and Kool Moe Dee and stuff.

Q: So these artists of present day that you listen to have made you want to go back in time and hear the older stuff?

A: Yea. I’ve listened to Nas and his stories that he raps and I just think…Man…I wish I could have been there (very sentimentally).

Q: Yeah, I understand where you’re coming from. You sort of answered my next question, but what are some of the other artists you began to get into and why…you said LL and Nas. Who else and why?

A: I liked Rakim. He was like…intelligent…ya know? He came from a whole different perspective. He could convert people into Muslims (laughs). That was crazy! I like…um…I like MC Lyte. You know Queen Latifah kind of set the bar for women…and uh, Ilike Jay Z. I listen to Jay Z and Nas more each and every day. And every day when I listen, I think…man; I wish I was really paying attention to them when they had the rivalry. Like I wish I could just have paid attention to every song they both done made. Cause Nas is like that narration thug who has the smarts and raps about the intellectual stuff. Whereas Jay Z has a lot of slick rhyming…like he’s real slick. He’s real street, he gets to the point. Like Nas, he’ll go around you another way, but Jay Z will just punch you in the face.

Q: How has hip-hop inspired you?
A: (Looking up) How has it inspired me? Uh…really it just like…it makes me like not afraid to express how I feel about certain things like political views, race, or nature issues, ya know? I just feel like freedom of speech like literally. You don’t really have restrictions. Yeah.

Q: Well, how has hip-hop influenced you in an academic environment?

A: Uh…well I do pretty good in writing. I’m a beast in creative writing. I do pretty well with Reading Comprehension – especially the poems on standardized tests. That’s the best thing I do or whatever…break things down or whatever.

Q: Yeah…your love for hip-hop…your love for lyrics and rhymes and creative writing…your love for hip-hop music…you think that has helped you obviously read better and write better and not just creatively –

A: Yeah…like writing essays. When I took the GEE, that’s the highest part I scored on was the writing section.

Q: Yeah, that’s good and something to be proud of. Well…what are the positives of hip-hop?

A: Uh, the positives of hip-hop? (long pause) I would say trend-setting.

Q: It sets trends?

A: Sets trends.

Q: And what does that do?

A: I mean, it gives you a look. You don’t have one (pointing at me…we both laugh). I mean…it does a lot of good. I can’t think of nothin’ off the top of my head, but –

Q: Well you mentioned wardrobe. Do you feel like that has brought a social unity via hip-hop…you have people dressing differently and in different styles of urban clothes…hip-hop is not just music I guess, it’s –

A: Oh! I know…hip-hop brings a lot of cultural diversity. Hip-hop creates that melting pot because it’s not just blacks that listen to hip-hop…you got whites, you got Asians…you got all kinds of people listening to hip-hop. All these people blastin’ it. Everyone can relate to it…you got all these races and creeds coming together like a melting pot…like one big dish.

Q: Interesting…so you feel it’s eradicating some of our problems?

A: Yeah…all of the racism and all that.

Q: Well, I have to ask you now…what are the negatives?

A: I mean…some of the stuff – not all hip-hop is bad, but some of it’s bad.
Q: What’s bad about it?

A: I mean…you know you got your hip-hop in a negative connotation, but it still has a positive message behind it…but you got some hip-hop that’s negative…that’s like go out and kill this person and get away with it. We got some negative people out there. I would say most of the underground rappers…that’s not highly publicized …they’re negative. We got some underground people who are negative.

Q: Why do you think that is?

A: Their image. It’s image. They wanna protect it.

Q: I understand that. What’s a song that you have heard that you think you could teach to a classroom full of students? What’s a song that you think…if I was a teacher and told my class that we’re gonna close our books and read lyrics and listen to music, what could you supply to me that would supplement creative writing, poetry…whatever. What artist and song would you use and why?

A: Um…I would, if I was teaching a class, let them listen to Nas “Nigga, not the Slave or the Master”.

Q: Why?

A: Because…that song is like…you know that everyone has a negative connotation of the N word ya know? Well the song is about letting people know that (blacks) are more than you think. We were educated before we were slaves and before we got to go to high schools. There are successful black people. I would let them listen to that. If I’d do anything…I mean, there’s a lot of people I could use, but Nas…his music and his lyrics teach. I think we could all just learn from him.

Q: What can you learn from Nas?

A: He’s tellin’ people not to make the same mistakes he has. He’s teaching. There’s good outcomes and bad outcomes. As a matter of fact I am listening to him now. He has a song called “Rule” where he…(Larry goes on to rap one of the lyrics). You don’t think like Nas…I mean he gets it.

Q: Do you feel hip-hop could parallel a language arts assignment?

A: Um…oh, this is perfect (smiles). I think we were reading Beowulf…or no, it was Macbeth. And I compared Macbeth to something Jay Z did and it made me understand what Macbeth really was. I don’t know the song, but I was listening to this Jay Z song…I was listening to it or whatever and so I like one day brought it up in class or whatever and I was like, “Hmm.” This is exactly what Macbeth is doing. It was all about power. So, I saw that in the story.
Q: What do you say to the nay-sayers of hip-hop in the classroom?

A: Give it a chance. I mean...why not? You’re way is old...let’s try something new.

Q: Do you think kids would stay in school just for this one class?

A: Yeah. Yeah...we need to try a new way. I don’t get Shakespeare...I mean, I get why I have to learn him, but he’s not speaking to a lot of us. Hip-hop, though...hip-hop is what we love and it speaks to us. So...why not?

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**Brianna**

Q: What is hip-hop? What do you consider hip-hop?

A: (Thinking) Honestly I do not know. Um...it’s a rhythm to life I guess.

Q: Interesting...why do you say that it is a rhythm to life?

A: Because hip-hop is more than just music...it’s a combination of words and words are a product of one’s mind. So, it’s a big...it’s a huge category. I couldn’t put it into one thing...so it’s a definition of life.

Q: Ok. Tell me this – what are your earliest memories of hip-hop? Think back as far as you can.

A: I can’t go any farther than elementary school...but we would sing “Waterfalls” by TLC. I can’t really go any farther than that.

Q: That’s okay...that’s a while back. What sticks out about that song?

A: Well, even though we didn’t really know all the words, we were brought together by this song and I think hip-hop, in a sense, brings people together, so that’s why we were close because that was our song.

Q: Who were some of the first hip-hop artists, as you grew of age, that you begin to like? Obviously, you’ve already mentioned TLC. Who were some of the other ones as you got older?

A: Um...50 Cent...I dunno why he’s coming to my mind, but he had that song “It’s your birthday” (laughs loudly)...but that song was so catchy. I’m not really a fan...I mean I am in a sense...Oh Lord...well...I don’t wanna speak baldy about him or anything, but he doesn’t really seem versatile. Something about him just doesn’t really sit right, but anyway...it just kinda took my appreciation away from him

Q: Anyone else you can group into that category?
A: I remember Eminem. I remember the song “Forgot about Dre” (laughs)...even though I didn’t know the words but it had me mumbling because the music and flow was so tight. But I was very much into rock and punk when I was in middle school.

Q: How has hip-hop inspired you?

A: Um…for one….uh, speaking for myself, it’s like an escape. You know, you… um… it takes you to a whole other place. I feel much better in the morning getting on the bus and listening to music, as opposed to just getting on the bus and listening to the wheels. It’s up to you…it’s like your mind is working with whatever song you’re listening to. Listening to music…um…the notes – the certain notes that correspond with your heart – they can start a day. If I listen to something hardcore, I will feel like I can fight (laughs). If I listen to something kinda sad, it can bring tears and I will think back to something sad in my life. So…you kinda…you feel a certain way before you listen to the song, but when you listen to that song, it sort of sets your mood.

Q: Cool. Kind of like the whole rhythm answer, huh?

A: Exactly…yeah.

Q: Okay, so what are the positives of hip-hop?

A: Um…that you can get a positive message out. There are a lot of songs in hip-hop that tell you to not give up. They could easily make a song that says to give up.

Q: So, are there some great inspirational artists out there?

A: Yep…many of the artists rap about their own lives like…TI is supposed to be going to jail really soon. So, even though he made a wrong decision, he is doing what he can…he made this song with Justin Timberlake called “Dead and Gone” and even my mama likes it. Anyway, he is doing what he can to help teens stay out of jail and he’s doing a show on MTV to help kids…each day he’s helping a kid get on his feet and taking them places and helping their dreams come true. I think he is hip-hop. He took something negative and made it positive.

Q: Okay…so what are the negatives of hip-hop?

A: It’s like the way you look at things…like TI still did something bad and even though he’s doing positive, he still did something bad. It’s still a negative.

Q: Are there any other negatives?

A: A lot of people…they’re stuck on hip-hop. They can’t seem to get outta hip-hop and try to listen to something new. A lot of students, over time…it’s a stereotypical thing that one color is associated with rap. And I think that’s closed-minded. So….yeah…

Q: So, what is a song that you have learned something from?
A: Um…Lauryn Hill again. Um….(thinks for a good while)

Q: What’s a song by Hill that you have learned from?

A: Um…it would have to be um…I can’t think of anything. Lauryn Hill…um…she has a lot of words that are very poetic. She has a lot of…what is the word called? A lot of…not analogies…but a lot of visions. Um…just like for instance in one song…a lot of times…a lot of songs…are just so poetic. Like…I just love when there’s this huge crash between the singer and the instruments and how it just all goes together. So..I cannot think of a particular song…but…I don’t know. She just tells a story so wonderfully…and…can I say something else?

Q: Sure, go ahead.

A: Her stories can’t be replaced…like sometimes you can forget songs and their messages. With hers, you can’t.

Q: How do you feel that hip-hop could parallel a language arts assignment or a creative writing assignment?

A: Well, hip-hop is English. Language Arts…whenever writing…you know, you can get the history through certain rappers. Rappers…you might hear Kanye (West) rapping with Ebonics, but he can also teach you through his words. Um…story-telling is very important. Kanye…I always liked him…look at him and Wayne (Lil Wayne)…Wayne uses a Dr. Seuss style where he mixes up and plays on words. Kanye…went on some show and he just read a poem and I didn’t not have an appreciation for him until then. To actually hear him read on stage…oh my God, I just never knew how poetic he was. People listening to music…music can comfort you like in Kanye. I think that the poetry of his and others’ songs are worth reading and are stories chock full of stuff. You know what I mean?

Q: I do. That’s great. Ok…by the year 2040, it is expected that the minorities – blacks and Hispanics – will be the majority in every public school in America. Do you feel that this is a call for something different, like hip-hop, to be implemented in the classroom? Can this open doors for hip-hop in the classroom? Think about the majority of the stories and poems you read…most of them are from a Eurocentric culture. Do you think hip-hop could supplement and help it?

A: I honestly do not know. A lot of our books speak of British literature…through the eyes of a white man. This is why African-American history is separate….but um…the only reason I say that I don’t know…I mean, it makes sense that it probably would…but I see so many setbacks before we get to that point. I think it could be an elective…um…how honest are we allowed to be?

Q: As honest as you want…
A: Well, I think people who are higher than us…like the school board…I think they’re going to have a lot to say in that. I just don’t know if they’ll ever get it. I think that’s silly. I think you’re going to save a lot of lives if you can just get kids interested in school because so many of them aren’t. We need to keep a lot of the same stuff…but…yeah…I think hip-hop could teach us cultural diversity, so people and kids can collaborate.

Q: So, bottom line…a hip-hop class or using hip-hop would keep students in school?

A: Absolutely…without a doubt. I think it would help us all see one color…or there’s no color. Yeah.

Q: Last question…what do you say to the naysayers of hip-hop and its use in the classroom?

A: I just think people need to realize that we need something new…all the other questions that you asked me…I would use all of that. And I would hand it to them on a platter. The real world is hip-hop…the real world is what we gotta live through. Hip-hop is life and it’s every subject you take in school rolled into one. And I would be so stern to the fullest (laughs).
Appendix B

IRB Form

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, all LSU research/projects using living humans as subjects, or samples or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This form helps determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

- Applicant: Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-E, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at http://www.lsu.edu/irb/screeningmembers.shtml

- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
  (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of parts B thru E.
  (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1 & 2)
  (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
  - If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
  - The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information).
  (D) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB.
  - Training link (http://php.nhrtraining.com/users/login.php)

1) Principal Investigator: Cord McKeithen
   Dept: Education
   Ph: 225-317-0583
   E-mail: bmckeith@lsu.edu

2) Co-Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each
   - Dr. Jacqueline Bach, Assistant Professor of Education, 225-578-6869, jbach@lsu.edu
   - Dr. Jaimie Weintraub, Assistant Professor of English, 225-578-7899

3) Project Title: Let it be Heard: Hip-hop in the Secondary Language Arts Classroom

4) LSU Proposal? (yes or no) No
   - If Yes, LSU Proposal Number:
     - This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant
     - More IRB Applications will be filed later
   - Subject pool (e.g. Psychology Students, Senior ELA students, McKinley HS)
     - Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children < 18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.
   - PI Signature: [Signature]
     - Date: 2/3/09 (no per signatures)
     - "I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changed, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time, consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted

Reviewed:

Approved:

Rejected:

Signed:

Endorsement:

Date:

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Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included for publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

Study Exempted By:
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman
Institutional Review Board
Louisiana State University
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
225-578-6692 | www.lsu.edu/irb
Exemption Expires: 5/5/2019
Appendix B (part II)

Sample Survey

Directions: Please read over each question and fill in with any information you feel relevant. Please read each question carefully and give your honest opinion. You do not include your name.

1. Please list up to and no more than three of your favorite hip-hop artists in the lines provided. Next to each artist, please put a dash/hyphen and indicate what you love the most about the artist(s)’ work.

   #1
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

   #2
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

   #3
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

2. How big of a part is hip-hop in your life? In other words, how much of a role does it play in your every day?
   a. It’s extremely important to me – as much as anything
   b. It’s important to me – not the most important thing to me
   c. It’s somewhat important – not something I need every day though
   d. It’s not that important – I use it very little in my life
   e. It’s not important at all – I have no use for it in my life

3. What are some connections you might make with hip-hop and education/Language Arts? Please be specific and give examples, if possible (use the lines below to answer).

   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

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4. If you were a teacher, what is a hip-hop song you might play for your class, in hopes that they learn from it and receive some sort of inspiration, guidance, motivation, education, etc.? Please list the song and the artist/group (use the line below to answer).

5. On a scale of 1-10, how educational do you feel that the hip-hop you listen to is educational? _________

6. How important do you feel gender (male/female) is in hip-hop? Please use the lines below to answer.

7. How important do you feel race is in hip-hop? Please use the lines below.

8. Please list three things that might give hip-hop a bad name and prevent it from being used in an educational setting because of them:

#1________________________________________

#2________________________________________

#3________________________________________

9. Yes or No (circle one) – Would you feel excited about being able to take a class about hip-hop or learning about it in your English/Language Arts classes?

10. Yes or No (Circle one) – Does hip-hop, in your opinion, have a place in the classroom?
Vita

Cord McKeithen was born and raised in Monroe, Louisiana. After graduating high school, he attended Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge where he went on to receive his Bachelor of Arts in December of 2001. It was not until 2004 when McKeithen realized that he wanted to teach youth, with his main aspirations being to help his students become better readers, writers, and thinkers. He has taught four years at the secondary level in Shreveport, Louisiana; teaching language arts, reading, social studies, and creative writing. In August of 2008, he moved back to Baton Rouge and began the master’s program at Louisiana State University in hopes of bettering himself as an educator. McKeithen currently resides in Baton Rouge and after receiving his master’s degree in English education, hopes to pursue his doctorate and teach at the university level. Meanwhile, he is hopeful in getting back in the secondary classroom in the fall of 2010.