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Interrogating your positionality and leveraging hip hop to decolonize education

ABSTRACT

Scholars have advocated for the use of hip-hop-based education to facilitate authentic learning experiences for students. As a result, more educators find themselves grappling with incorporating hip hop culture in their classrooms. While we support the inclusion of hip hop in educational spaces, we argue that all educators must interrogate their positionality related to race and hip hop culture to ensure that they are not replicating the social injustices hip hop – and subsequently, hip hop education – was created to counter within their classrooms and pedagogies. Through the lens of critical whiteness studies and conceptualizations of decolonizing methodologies, this article uses Milner's framework for researcher positionality to provide a framework for educators to interrogate their positionality in hip hop education. This interrogation of positionality, by all educators regardless of race, is essential when engaging in hip-hop-based education to ensure that the oppressive structures hip hop, and hip-hop-based education, seek to dismantle are not replicated.

KEYWORDS

educator positionality
hip-hop-based education
hip hop education
whiteness
critical whiteness studies
decolonization

Historically, across education systems within the United States and across the globe, traditional teaching strategies and school curriculum practices have been anchored in western views and Eurocentric frameworks that position whiteness as the centre of legitimate knowledge, and as a result, other knowledge as peripheral and insignificant (Duncan 2012; King 2014; Lynch 2018). This is a direct result of European colonialism.

> Colonialism is the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically. It was a response to the economic needs of industrial capitalist Europe who desire colonies in order to have access to raw materials of the colonies, to have markets for sale of manufactured goods of the home country, and field for the investment of surplus capital.
>
> (Nwanosike and Onyije 2011: 41)

Although historians have different perspectives on exactly which countries were colonized by Europe, there is a consensus that a vast majority of countries across the globe were colonized except for Liberia, Ethiopia, Japan, Korea and Saudi Arabia (Fischer 2015). The remaining countries across the globe have suffered from the negative impacts of European colonialism, which continue and persist in the present day. 'Colonialism is a system of rules which assumes the right of one people to impose their will upon another' (Nwanosike and Onyije 2011: 42). For colonialism to be successful, one group of people must impose dominance and dependency over another group. Through this imposition, colonial settlers steal land, displace Indigenous inhabitants and restructure the space to resemble the homes colonial settlers left behind (Veracini 2017). Colonialism requires the colonizing group to gain political control over another country, historically involving war, capture and murdering of Indigenous leaders and populations. As a result, the colonizing group imports their culture, values, politics and beliefs onto the colonized group (Nwanosike and Onyije 2011). In our current context, it cannot be ignored that colonial mindsets have largely perpetuated and even founded contemporary education systems globally (Nwanosike and Onyije 2011). Therefore, we must consider how colonial mindsets and norms continue to exist in our educational structures.

Namely, we must consider Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's reflection in *Decolonizing the Mind* and interrogate how our existing systems continue to perpetuate colonial ideologies that seek to 'annihilate a people of belief in their names, in their language, environment, the heritage of struggle, unity, capacities and ultimately in themselves', often referred to as internal colonialism (Nwanosike and Onyije 2011: 45). Pinderhughes (2011) discusses internal colonialism as a result of direct colonialism, which continuously supports the oppression of historically marginalized groups and populations. Pinderhughes defines internal colonialism as

> [A] geographically-based pattern of subordination of a differentiated population, located within the dominant power or country. This subordination by a dominant power has the outcome of systematic group inequality expressed in the policies and practices of a variety of societal institutions, including systems of education, public safety (police, courts, and prisons), health, employment, cultural production, and finance.
>
> (2011: 236)

The outcome of internal colonialism contributes to the systemic inequalities and oppression of colonized groups long after direct colonialism has concluded, hence creating social and economic disparities that impact colonized groups. For example, in the United States, African American populations continue to be negatively impacted by the effects of internal colonialism in the form of social oppression, such as residential segregation (Bullard 2007; Bonilla-Silva 2001), imprisonment (Bullard 2007; Edelman 2007) and health disparities (Hacker 2010) to name a few. These disparities are not unique to African Americans in the United States, however, other groups who faced and experienced direct colonization have been impacted by internal colonialism. For example, the Maori people of New Zealand experience health disparities (Ellison-Loschmann and Pearce 2006; Palmer et al. 2019), similar to Black South Africans (Bredenkamp et al. 2021), who additionally experience income and economic inequities (Simkins 2011).

Colonialism and its aftermath has impacted systems of education worldwide, which continue to exist today. Scholars have engaged in research within educational settings focused on the meaning, actualization and challenges of decolonizing education, curriculum, pedagogy and content disciplines (Fellner 2018; Garcia-Olp 2022; Shahjahan et al. 2022). Researchers have also considered leveraging cultures created by colonized groups as an approach to decolonizing educational settings. For example, Emdin posits hip hop as a culture that was created by historically marginalized groups who experience negative effects of internal colonialism within the United States, which serves as a response to 'the denial of their voices in vivid, visceral, and transgressive ways' (2016: 12). Education is widely accepted as an opportunity for social development, but for education systems to truly support the needs of a society, the educational goals must be tailored to the needs of the society, as opposed to the colonizers. Unfortunately, the reality is that historically colonizers use force to suppress Indigenous educational systems and ways of understanding while promoting their foreign and Eurocentric educational system that is geared towards the colonizers' social and economic goals (Nwanosike and Onyije 2011). The perpetuation of colonizers' social and economic goals is a process of subordination for the Indigenous (Peterson 1971). The result of colonized education systems leaves those who are colonized with a 'lack of identity and a limited sense of their past resulting in Indigenous history and customs once practiced and observed slowly slipping away' (Nwanosike and Onyije 2011: 45).

The effects of internal colonialism continue to exist within society, but particularly within education systems today. For example, in the United States, the curriculum presented has historically been Eurocentric in nature and lacks acknowledgement of accomplishments and contributions by minoritized groups (Duncan 2012; King 2014). This approach to teaching has detrimental effects on students' academic self-efficacy and emotional attachment to the curriculum (Duncan 2012; Zwick and Green 2007). Further, the result of teaching a mainly Eurocentric curriculum to racially and culturally diverse groups contributes to gaps in achievement between Black and white students in the United States and is exacerbated by economic and racial inequality (Hung et al. 2020).

These inequities as a result of internal colonialism across education systems led Emdin (2016) to publish his book *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood… and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education* to provide pedagogical exemplars to leverage students' realities in the classroom.

Through his book, Emdin seeks to 'improve the teaching of white teachers who are already teaching in these schools […] to challenge the "white folks' pedagogy" that is being practiced by teachers of all racial and ethnic backgrounds' (2016: ix). The long-lasting effects of colonialism impact all people within a society. For example, the United States and its institutions were founded during its colonial conquest of North America. As a result, the nation's institutions have been indoctrinated with colonial ideals and values, which continue to exist today across various facets of society, such as education systems, law, government and justice systems, and societal norms – to name a few. The widespread indoctrination of colonialism is pervasive and is ultimately ingrained in most members of society. If we are to create shifts within our society and education system that are critical of colonialism and its effects, we must critically examine systems, structure and ourselves. It is imperative that all educators – not just white people – examine their positionality in relationship to their students, school context and pedagogy. We build on Duarte's definition of positionality, which states that individuals must 'identify their own degrees of privilege through factors of race, class, educational attainment, income, ability, gender, and citizenship' to adequately analyse their position and word towards justice (2017: 135). Therefore, everyone is responsible for interrogating their positionality because 'all parts of our identities are shaped by socially constructed positions and memberships to which we belong' and are 'embedded in our society as a system' (Misawa 2010: 26). This article acknowledges hip hop as a culture that can be leveraged within educational settings to support the decolonizing of education. Further, this article provides a framework for educators to examine their positionality when engaging in hip-hop-based education (HHBE) and practices. This interrogation of positionality, by all educators, regardless of race, is essential when engaging in HHBE because hip hop is a culture that was created to respond to the effects of colonialism.

HIP HOP AS DECOLONIZING

Hip hop is a culture that was created organically by Black, Latinx and immigrant communities in the Bronx during a socio-economic crisis during the 1970s. The birth of hip hop was a response to the social inequities – which we argue are internal colonialism – that Black and immigrant communities faced while living in urban centres. Hip hop has become the most consumed genre of music in the world. However, many consumers of hip hop music fail to recognize the rich history behind the birth of an innovative and progressive culture (Chang 2007). In the 1960s, the Bronx began to deteriorate as a response to increased challenges, including a steady rise in crime, a struggling economy, budget cuts to key social services such as the fire and police departments – internal colonialism (Gonzalez 2004). Poverty was an underlying issue affecting many New Yorkers, but while the entire city experienced an increase in crime and poverty, the Bronx was hit the hardest. In the 1970s, the elders of the Bronx community recall a time when gang violence over turf reached its peak and poverty was catastrophic (Chang 2007). Gang violence between various crews became problematic, which encouraged the New York Police Department (NYPD) to launch efforts to penetrate local gangs that ultimately failed (Chang 2007). The increased crime rate encouraged many community members to relocate, especially those who were affluent and had access to the resources to relocate, which caused a significant change in

the community as many homes, buildings and commercial property became vacant (Gonzalez 2004).

In the midst of this social and economic crisis that plagued the Bronx, hip hop was created as a social and therapeutic outlet (Emdin et al. 2016) by and for Black and Latino youth, many of whom were either immigrants or first-generation Americans, in response to the effects of internal colonialism in the Bronx (Chang 2007; Rose 1994). Cindy Campbell, the mother of hip hop, and Clive Campbell, better known as DJ Kool Herc, the father of hip hop, hosted a back-to-school party to generate income. Young people and adults from the community all attended this party where DJ Kool Herc served as the DJ. Block parties similar to the one hosted by DJ Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, and the Ghetto Brothers (former street gang) created a space for young people in the Bronx to celebrate their culture and identities (Chang 2007). The power of music and camaraderie united Bronx youth, and 'for the youth, the block party was the space of possibility' and decolonization (Chang 2007: 65).

Since its beginning, hip hop culture continues to be used as a tool to promote social justice and advocate for the needs of historically colonized communities (Adjapong 2017). Hip hop centres the community and provides opportunities for young people, adults and elders to gather, dance and ultimately enjoy life regardless of the harsh systemic social and economic challenges faced by people in the Bronx. Hip hop did not stop in the Bronx, NY, but since its inception has spread throughout the United States and has transcended borders all across the world. Hip hop exists in all corners of the world because it speaks to groups who have and continue to experience oppression. Hip hop is anchored in activism and provides a language to counter oppression by highlighting the beauty and nuances of historically marginalized and colonized groups.

Hip hop and education

Hip hop continues to be innovated by Black and Brown youth, particularly within urban centres and has also proven to have effective applications within educational spaces. While many scholars and practitioners have used and researched hip hop frameworks and practices to advance cultural responsiveness within schools, it is imperative to create opportunities to critique hip-hop-based scholarship to ensure that we are not replicating similar systems and structures that hip hop was created to counter and to educate ourselves of the origins of hip hop culture.

Much research that has been published in the field of HHBE centres on how educators can incorporate hip hop culture across school-based curricula. Hill (2009) defines HHBE as a term that refers to educational research that uses the elements and sensibilities of hip hop culture to inform formal and non-formal educational spaces. While HHBE is still considered an emerging field within educational research, scholars have and continue to interrogate how hip hop can be used and incorporated across all educational spaces. Petchauer's (2009) review of hip hop education research gathered that hip-hop-based curricular approaches, addressing a variety of academic outcomes, have been present in educational literature since the early 2000s. Many scholars have demonstrated the ability of hip hop in educational spaces to increase engagement (Emdin et al. 2016; Emdin and Lee 2012) and curricular relevance (Irizarry 2009; Petchauer 2011; Stovall 2006) for students engaged in hip hop culture. For example, Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) discuss using hip

hop to promote youth literacy in an English classroom. In their study, students developed written and oral debate skills, learned how to critique hip hop songs and poems critically and created and presented formal presentations based on their critiques. This study provides insight on how hip hop can be incorporated into teaching and how an educator interacts with students in a science classroom. Scholars have advocated for the analysis of hip hop texts in classrooms to support students in developing critical literacies (Morrell and Duncan-Andrade 2002; Morrell 2004). Further scholars have advocated for the use of hip hop as a culturally responsive counselling service in schools and other mental health settings (Levy et al. 2018; Washington 2018).

The overall argument for the use of hip-hop-based approaches is mostly the same – to address concerns regarding the lack of culturally responsive approaches to teaching and learning to support students academically, to encourage students to critically interrogate systems and structures that directly impact them as well as to encourage the decolonization of education systems (Adjapong 2017; Emdin 2016; Petchauer 2009).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We leverage decolonizing methodologies as conceptualized by Smith (1999) and critical whiteness studies frameworks (Matias et al. 2014) to make meaning of the positionality of educators and scholars who engage in HHBE. We acknowledge and pay reference to Indigenous populations but, similar to Emdin (2016), draw parallels between Indigenous populations and the hip hop generation, especially youth who identify as hip hop. Despite the explicit connection that Indigenous populations have to specific territories and natural surroundings, there are connections that can be made between Indigenous populations and youth who identify as hip hop. More obvious connections revolve around how urban youth, similar to Indigenous populations, are traditionally known to construct knowledge differently (Moje et al. 2004). They follow and identify as part of a different culture (hip hop) than the dominant groups, they communicate with one another differently than dominant groups and they follow a different set of beliefs than the dominant group. Most importantly, in recognizing youth who identify as hip hop, we must consider how they have also suffered from oppression and been marginalized as a result of decisions made by the dominant group through colonialism.

Smith posits that proving the validity of Indigenous knowledge, including 'that Indigenous peoples have ways of viewing the world which are unique', is not the only challenge Indigenous populations face but also proving the authenticity and control over those forms of knowledge (1999: 104). These are similar challenges found in youth who identify as hip hop, who often have different experiences than the dominant group due to the differences in lived realities and beliefs, which encourage them to construct knowledge and view the world differently. Because we know that youth who identify as hip hop construct knowledge and view the world differently, there has been a push for educators to use decolonizing pedagogies and practices (Brown 2003). Youth who identify as hip hop align with the five creative elements of hip hop sensibilities, which guide their experiences and the unique ways in which they view the world and the way they construct knowledge. Smith also highlights that Indigenous populations 'often have their own language or code' (Smith 1999: 127). Youth who identify as hip hop also often communicate and engage with

one another using alternative colloquialism, commonly known as slang, when engaging their peers.

We also recognize the parallels between colonialism and whiteness in this research. Historically, European colonialism spreads white, European norms and values for the social and economic benefit of white Europeans. Similarly, internal colonialism contemporarily largely benefits white populations across the globe. Therefore, we draw on critical whiteness studies to highlight these parallels. For the purpose of this research, we conceptualize whiteness as historically and socially constructed based on oppression, power and colonialism (Du Bois [1920] 2005; Leonardo 2002). We acknowledge that white people are subjects of whiteness 'because it benefits and privileges them' (Leonardo 2002: 32). However, whiteness is 'not as simply a category of identity, but as a position of power formed and protected through colonialism, slavery, segregation, and oppression' (Nichols 2010: 4). While whiteness can be seen as particularly abrasive or accusatory, it is important to note that it is not synonymous with white people (Leonardo 2002). Instead, we position whiteness as an ideology that has permeated facets of our society through colonialism, including education. Whiteness is so pervasive in, in fact, that even teachers of colour can perpetuate whiteness. Therefore, it is all educators' responsibility to recognize and dismantle whiteness and colonialism in their practice.

Authors' positionality statement

The necessity for this research derives from the nexus of the authors' lived experiences – as teacher educators, researchers and members of the hip hop generation – and our shared critical understandings of race and hip hop culture as they are positioned in education today. The authors of this article have multiple and varied positions, roles and identities that are inextricably related to hip-hop-based research, specifically as it relates to utilizing hip hop as pedagogy. Both authors have experience as practitioners and researchers in inner-city schools. One author identifies as a Black male teacher educator, a product of inner-city schooling and with years of urban middle school science teaching experience. This author developed a framework for hip hop pedagogy (Adjapong 2017), which is derived from his personal experience as a member of the hip hop generation and research focused on developing innovative teaching strategies that utilize urban youth culture. The co-author identifies as a Black woman teacher educator who has years of social studies teaching experience in a mid-size urban school district, with a predominantly Black student body (Milner 2012). The co-author engaged in the implementation of hip hop pedagogy throughout her teaching experience, which was influenced by her lived experience with/in hip hop, and she continues to research the intersection of race and hip hop pedagogy. Through our lenses, we approach this work through a critical interrogation of HHBE that not only accounts for students' nuanced participation with/in hip hop but also privileges the rich Black historical traditions that hip hop is rooted in.

TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR HIP HOP EDUCATOR AND RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

We find it imperative to provide educators and researchers with practical steps to support them in interrogating their positionality as it relates to hip hop culture and colonialism as they engage in HHBE. We particularly focus on educators and researchers because their work exists in proximity to students,

and they must consider the ways students engage and participate in hip hop. Further, educators and researchers hold an immense amount of power and have the ability to influence classroom settings and the field of education as a whole.

The innovation and new trends of hip hop culture are created within Black communities, regardless of where they are acknowledged within mainstream media. Therefore, we argue that in order for educators to engage in authentic and effective hip hop and education research and/or praxis, there must be an interrogation of positionality (including racial identity), and how this positionality relates to and interacts with institutions, systems and the hip hop populations the individual is engaged with. As a result, we believe that hip hop educators and researchers must interrogate their positionality in relation to hip hop populations as it relates to their teaching, learning and research context while centring on Black voices, experiences and realities. To support hip hop educators and researchers in understanding how to interrogate their positionality as it relates to hip hop populations, we draw from Milner's (2007) Framework of Researcher Racial and Cultural Position. Milner's (2007) framework provides a platform for educators and researchers to process racial and cultural awareness, consciousness and positionality and includes the following tenets: 'Researching the Self', 'Researching the Self in Relation to Others', 'Engaged Reflection and Representation' and 'Shifting from Self to System'.

'Researching the Self'

In Milner's articulation of 'Researching the Self', he encourages 'researchers […] to pose racially and culturally grounded questions about themselves' with the goal of bringing about 'awareness and consciousness' to the unknown and unanticipated issues around perspectives as it relates to research (2007: 395). Milner's (2007) framework assumes that it may be difficult for researchers to engage in the level of critical reflection necessary to interrogate race and culture as it relates to their research. Similarly, we recognize that hip hop educators and researchers might identify as outsiders of hip hop culture and therefore must engage in a critical reflection of themselves, which must include a reflection of their ideologies, beliefs and practices in relation to the hip hop population they are engaged with as well as the Black communities that create hip hop.

We argue that all educators and scholars, even those who identify as hip hop insiders, should engage in 'Researching the Self' prior to participating in hip hop education, research or praxis. This allows and encourages increased opportunities for educators and scholars to engage in critical self-reflection as it relates to hip hop education research and practice. Further, we contend that hip hop educators should engage their students in discussions about their practice of 'Researching the Self' as a way to encourage dialogue and rapport between educators and students. Similarly, we encourage hip hop researchers to express this reflection within research positionality statements within written research.

'Researching the Self in Relation to Others'

Alongside a reflection of self, Milner asserts that one must examine the 'multiple roles, identities, and positions that researchers and research participants bring to the research process' through the second tenet of the Framework of Researcher Racial and Cultural Position, 'Researching the Self in Relation to

Others' (2007: 395). Milner (2007) contends that a critical part of researching the self in relation to others is the cultivation of cultural knowledge of the communities engaged in the research process. Similarly, we argue that all educators and scholars engaging in HHBE, research or praxis must examine themselves in relation to the hip hop populations they are working with. Further, we contend that this examination must centre on the Black communities that created hip hop. Here are some possible reflection questions:

We argue that all educators and scholars, regardless of insider or outsider status to hip hop, must engage in this research of self in relation to others each time they engage with a hip hop population due to the nuanced ways that hip hop populations engage in hip hop. To effectively do this, educators and scholars must have an understanding of the historical roots of hip hop, and how the hip hop population they are working with interacts with and contributes to this history to mitigate the misappropriation of hip hop culture. Further, a key component to the success of this reflection is dialogue around the above questions with the hip hop population you are engaging with.

'Engaged Reflection and Representation'

In continuing this sentiment of dialogue with participants, the third tenet of Milner's framework – 'Engaged Reflection and Representation' – explores how researchers and participants can 'engage in reflection together to think through what is happening in a particular research community, with race and culture placed at the core' (2007: 396). Through this tenet, the voices and perspectives of the participants are acknowledged and represented in the research and praxis, even if they counter the perspectives of the researcher (Milner 2007). Milner (2007) argues that this representation of participants' voices and perspectives is essential to avoid silencing and marginalization of communities of colour in the research process. Similarly, we argue that hip hop educators and researchers must acknowledge and represent the voices and perspectives of the hip hop populations they are engaged with, regardless of their alignment to the perspectives of the educator or researcher. Educators and researchers must include students' perspectives and articulation of hip hop within the research or praxis. This involves talking to students to gain an authentic insight into how students articulate, make meaning, experience and participate in hip hop.

Researchers should discuss findings with the hip hop populations engaged in the research, and teachers should discuss pedagogical and curricular implementations of hip hop with students after the learning experience to understand what went well and what should be modified in the future. We offer our conceptualization of whiteness studies to guide our understanding of the positionality of educators and scholars who engage in HHBE. Critical whiteness studies focuses on using interdisciplinary approaches to conceptualize ideas of whiteness (Matias et al. 2014). There are three prevalent themes from critical whiteness studies that we draw upon in this work: problematizing the normality of hegemonic whiteness (Matias et al. 2014), a lack of acknowledgement of whiteness as a perpetuating mechanism of racism (Allen 2001; Leonardo 2009; Matias et al. 2014) and silence as a demonstration of white privilege (Mazzei 2004, 2008, 2011).

Through the problematization of the normality of hegemonic whiteness, critical whiteness studies questions why whites often fail to acknowledge the role they play in perpetuating ideas of whiteness, especially as they continue

to benefit from systems that actively perpetuate white norms (Matias et al. 2014; Lipsitz 2006; Thandeka 2009). In this work, we draw upon this understanding to question the role of white educators and researchers in hip hop pedagogy and the way whiteness is exerted, albeit sometimes unintentionally, through white educators and researchers' engagement with hip hop pedagogy. Additionally, through critical whiteness studies' assertion that a lack of acknowledgement of whiteness perpetuates racism, we consider how the failure to interrogate educator and researcher positionalities further normalizes the misappropriations of hip hop and Black culture more broadly. Finally, we draw on the understanding that silence is a demonstration of white privilege, which asserts that whiteness as a system is maintained and perpetuated through colourblind discourse, a lack of self-reflection and interrogation of positionality, and the ways in which individuals are responsible for systems of oppression (Allen 2001; Leonardo 2009; Matias et al. 2014). This framing through critical whiteness studies is essential given the history of dominant groups misappropriating cultures created by historically marginalized and oppressed groups, which leads us to intentionally highlight teachers who identify as white and who engage in HHBE (Blair 2004). It is through this understanding of critical whiteness studies that we will critically reflect on ways that educators and researchers engage in hip hop pedagogy and offer strategies for interrogating positionality.

'Shifting from Self to System'

Finally, Milner asserts that researchers must 'contextualize and ground their personal or individualistic, new and expanded consciousness to take into consideration historical, political, social, economic, racial, and cultural realities on a broader scale' through the conceptualization of the fourth tenet, 'Shifting from Self to System' (2007: 397). Through this tenet, Milner encourages researchers to question how 'history and politics shape their racialized and cultural systems of knowing and those of the research participants' (2007: 397). Similarly, we contend that hip hop educators and researchers must position themselves and their participants within the broader social, historical and political contexts that hip hop culture, education, pedagogy and research reside. This positioning is imperative to avoid the perpetuation of injustice, inequity and oppression that hip hop seeks to dismantle.

REFLECTIONS FROM HIP HOP EDUCATORS ON RESEARCH POSITIONALITY

Reflections from Edmund Adjapong

In my work as a hip hop education scholar-practitioner, I have had to engage in deep reflection and *researching of self* to understand my positionality and identity better as it relates to hip hop culture. To many, hip hop is simply a genre of music. To me, hip hop is a lifestyle. As a young man of colour growing up in New York City, arguably one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world, hip hop has and still plays a significant role in my life, including my education. I was 7 years old when I memorized my first rap song, 'It's All About the Benjamins' by Puff Daddy (now known as Diddy). As a 7-year-old elementary school student, Puff Daddy's song made me realize how empowering hip hop was. I noticed how successful hip hop artists were, and I wanted to emulate that success. At a young age, hip hop artists' flashy chains and

luxurious cars caught my attention. But moreover, it was the drive and ambition that these hip hop artists possessed that spoke to me. Their drive to defy all odds, including the oppressive social and systemic constructs, to reach worldwide stardom spoke to me. As an adolescent, hip hop culture gave me a sense of empowerment and made me believe that I can be successful by being hip hop and identifying with its culture. Hip hop was the only representation of Black success that I experienced in my youth, and during a moment of my childhood, it was the only path I thought could get me what I felt was a success. When I became an educator, I taught in the same community where I was raised and first experienced hip hop and realized that most of my students shared similar experiences to that of my childhood.

As an educator, I did not initially utilize hip hop within my practice. As a newly minted teacher, I focused on providing the best learning experiences for my students, which at the time I thought was teaching a curriculum that did not resonate with students. During my first year of teaching, I realized that students were not engaged in the content or in my traditional/Eurocentric teaching approaches. I recognized this as a challenge and later considered hip hop as a possible solution.

When I decided to identify ways to leverage hip hop within my instruction, I realized quickly that I had to 'Research the Self in Relation to Others' (my students). My students had an affinity for hip hop music and culture similar to mine, but I realized quickly that our experiences with hip hop were different, mainly because we were a part of different generations. Simply because my students had a relationship with hip hop does not mean that their relationship would be the same as mine. I realized that in order to be effective in using hip hop as an educational tool, I would have to understand how my students identified and engaged with hip hop culture. In addition, I had to interrogate myself and my own beliefs about hip hop. As someone who has always been deeply entrenched with hip hop culture, I have always considered the challenges within hip hop culture. Even with an understanding that hip hop as a culture is anchored in social justice also, I also recognize it also, at times, contributes to the oppression of particular groups, including Black women and the LGBTQIA community. Growing up in the same community where I developed my hip hop identity helped me understanding my students, but when 'Researching the Self in Relation to Others', I had to make sure that I created space for my students' unique experiences and perspectives even if they did not align with my own. I realized that just because we are from the same community did not mean we all had the same experiences.

This led me to survey students using open-ended questions with the goal of encouraging students to reflect on their hip hop identity or to provide the space for students to demonstrate their disdain for hip hop if they had any. In addition to surveys, facilitated cogenerative dialogues (Emdin 2016), which is a form of structured discourse in which teachers and students engage in a collaborative effort to develop a deeper understanding of the other experiences and how to best support students and in turn improve the classroom. The data collected from surveys and cogenerative dialogues allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of my students and their perspectives as it relates to hip hop culture, which supported me in planning and designing a curriculum that incorporated creative elements that students explained they engaged with within their community settings. Cogenerative dialogues are a function of hip hop pedagogy where 'simple conversations between the teacher and

their students' occur 'with a goal of cocreating/generating plans of action for improving the classroom' (Emdin 2016: 65).

Once I recognized that my students have different perspectives of hip hop based on their lived experiences, I began a process of 'Engaged Reflection and Representation'. Through my data collection of my students' perspectives of hip hop, I learned more about how they engaged with the culture. I learned that many students listen to hip hop music at home while completing homework or other academic tasks as a way to drown out the city noise made by ambulances, buses, trains, etc. I also learned that students preferred particular New York City artists, compared to others (Cardi B is a Bronx favourite). Additionally, students listened to particular artists when trying to encourage or respond to a particular mood. After learning about my students' perspectives as they relate to hip hop I worked on identifying ways that I could include my students' perspectives of hip hop into my teaching. This led me to develop a framework for hip hop pedagogy (Adjapong 2017), which is anchored in my students' perspectives and engagement with hip hop culture.

Finally, through my research and interrogation of hip hop as an approach to teaching and learning, I learned that my students developed a deep understanding of science content through hip hop pedagogical approaches, and students identify as scientists as a result of engaging with hip hop pedagogical approaches, through implementing these approaches students were able to provide insightful critiques of traditional classroom spaces.

Through my practice and research on incorporating hip hop into academic spaces, I have always known that 'Shifting from Self to System' was necessary. Students who were taught utilizing a hip hop pedagogy developed agency and became more critical of the classroom and the world around them. Students would often ask why other teachers have not taken up hip hop in their classrooms, or why the entire school community, including administrators, would not create shifts to leverage the power of hip hop. These critiques created opportunities for me as a teacher to share with students some of the realities, challenges and constraints that exist within school systems, but if they wanted to engage with hip hop in other spaces of the school, they can find ways to share their perspectives with administrators and other teachers.

Students were also taught middle school science through a critical lens where they were able to identify challenges and brainstorm plausible solutions. Students' positive experience of engaging in hip hop in relation to science content in the middle school science classroom led them to want to encourage more positive experiences in other spaces within the school. As a teacher and teacher educator, my goal has always been to support teachers in developing hip hop understandings and lenses that can be leveraged within their classrooms. This would require a 'Shifting from Self to System'. It would also require other teachers to believe and understand the power of hip hop, rather than believe in colonial ideals and values that negative impact Black students and students of colour.

Reflections from Kelly Allen

I vividly remember the first time I heard hip hop music: I was on an elementary school field trip and a group of people were gathered outside the event venue playing hip hop music. Watching them engage in the music together spoke to me in a way I have never been spoken to before. I went home equipped with a few memorable lyrics and searched for the track on the internet. From there,

I regularly searched for new tracks to listen to and carefully compiled lists of tracks for the neighbour kid down the street to burn for me on CDs.

As a young Black girl adopted by a white family attending an all-white high school, I was drawn to stories in the music about the Black reality. Songs by 50 Cent, Lil Wayne, T.I., Jay-Z and Kanye West were regular staples on my burnt CD creations. I was captivated by lyrics about overcoming struggles and finding the beauty in yourself, even when others do not see it, as these narratives spoke deeply to me as I navigated life as a Black teenager who rarely felt as though they 'belonged' in the predominantly white world they were navigating through.

When I became a social studies teacher, I found that I was often drawn to hip hop music in my teaching. While I instinctively wanted to share the songs I loved with my students, I realized that I had to ask myself some critical questions if I wanted my students to derive meaning from the hip hop artefacts that supported my teaching. For me, this centring of 'Researching the Self' began with the questions: what do I believe about hip hop culture? How do I negotiate my beliefs about hip hop culture in my teaching? The answer to this lay in how I originally interacted with hip hop: I was drawn to the storytelling qualities of hip hop that spoke to my realities.

However, in my teaching my realities were not the centre of instruction. Instead, my focus had to be shifted from a centring on my realities, to the realities of my students and the goals of my course content. Instead of bringing in a song because it soothed a part of my inner-child, I centred a song in my teaching because of the way it spoke to the lived experiences of my students and made connections to the content standard I was teaching. Despite this shift in what narratives were centred, I remained authentic to my hip hop roots in centring narratives about the realities of the Black experience.

A key part in effectively shifting my gaze from my own reality to my students' realities was my activation of 'Researching the Self in Relation to Others'. Specifically, I found it essential to ask myself: what beliefs do the hip hop populations that I am working with have about hip hop, and how are these beliefs shaped by their racialized and cultural lived experiences? I worked in an alternative high school with a nearly 100 per cent Black student population. My students enjoyed much of the same hip hop music as me, which made it natural to include some of our favourite shared songs into the learning experience.

However, a number of my students had life experiences that I have never experienced myself. For example, my students and I enjoyed music by the rap artist Meek Mill. Meek Mill has been very open about his unjust treatment by the criminal justice system, specifically around probation and parole, and has been a vocal advocate for criminal justice reform in the wake of his release from prison. The way Meek Mill discusses his experiences with the criminal justice system is evocative and fits seamlessly into the instruction in my government class. While I can empathize with Meek Mill and acknowledge that the injustices he faced throughout his time in the criminal justice system are unwarranted, I have never experienced that myself. Some of my students, on the other hand, have first-hand experiences with exactly the type of treatment Meek Mill describes in his music. As an educator, I have to acknowledge that while me and my students may both enjoy Meek Mill's music, the level and type of emotion that is evoked may differ based on our life experiences. It is my responsibility to ensure that students have the space to process and express those emotions throughout the learning process. An inclusion of

Meek Mill's work without acknowledging the differences students may have in processing the lyrics of his songs and the imagery of his music videos would not be conducive to students' learning. Further, there is the potential to appear as if I care more about connecting the music to course content than I care about students' emotions. Therefore, while it is important to connect the hip hop artefact to course content that cannot come at the expense of neglecting student emotions that arise in the learning process.

In acknowledging that my students have different orientations to hip hop based on their lived experiences, I began a process of 'Engaged Reflection and Representation'. Specifically, I asked: how can I authentically incorporate students' understandings and relationships to hip hop in my classroom? For me, this occurred through cogens where I engaged in conversations with students with the goal of generating a plan of action improving the classroom space and/or pedagogy. Central to the success of cogens is the 'belief that everyone who will participate brings tremendous value to the dialogue because each has a unique perspective and vantage point' (Emdin 2016: 66).

With my students' knowledge and lived experiences as the foundation, I regularly invite my students to engage in cogens with me throughout the year. The purpose of the cogens is to get an understanding of what my students wanted to learn and how they wanted to learn it. Through deep conversation, active listening on my part and respecting my students as experts on their own lived experiences and understandings (Adjapong 2017), I merged my understanding of curriculum design with the information my students were divulging to me in the cogens. Specifically, we would gather at the start of each new unit to discuss the topics students wanted to learn. Through these discussions, I would ask students questions like 'where do we see this idea appearing in our lives?' and 'who do you know is experiencing this or talking about this right now?' Often, the answers students provide reference hip hop artists' experiences and activism, or a hip hop artefact. I then include the hip hop artefacts that students bring up in the cogens in my teaching and will regularly ask students to work with me as a co-teacher for lessons that utilize a hip hop artefact they brought to my attention. As a co-teacher, the students take responsibility for facilitating discussion around the hip hop artefact and fielding questions about the artefact for their peers.

The activation of hip hop pedagogy in my practice – and my engagement in 'Researching the Self', 'Researching the Self in Relation to Others' and 'Engaged Reflection and Representation' – ultimately aims to get students to think about and interrogate the systems and structures that they are influenced by and operate within. To effectively achieve this, a 'Shifting from Self to System' is necessary. Specifically the majority of my instruction is driven by the question: how can I draw connections between curricular content and hip hop praxis to interrogate institutional systems and structures that oppress specific groups? Focusing on this question throughout my curriculum development keeps me focused on producing meaningful and relevant instruction for my students. Additionally, the regular cogens guide this. For example, in the cogens in my government class students mentioned that they were interested in learning more about probation and parole. Seeing that this was a tangible and relevant system that we could examine and interrogate, I began to ask my regular follow up questions: 'Where do we see this idea appearing in our lives?' and '[w]ho do you know is experiencing this or talking about this right now?' While many students brought up personal experiences about themselves or family members navigating the probation and parole system, many often noted the experiences of rappers Meek Mill and Tee Grizzley.

Table 1: Reflection questions to interrogate positionality as it relates to hip-hop-based education.

'Researching the Self'	• What is my understanding of hip hop history as it relates to my research or school context? • What is my experience with hip hop culture? How do these experiences inform my teaching and research? • In what ways does my racial and cultural background influence the way I engage with hip hop culture? • What do I believe about hip hop culture? How do I negotiate my beliefs about hip hop culture in my teaching and research? How do I know? • How do I negotiate and balance my racial and cultural selves as it relates to hip hop and in my research? How do I know? • What racialized and cultural experiences have shaped my research decisions, practices, approaches, epistemologies and agendas?
'Researching the Self in Relation to Others'	• What cultural and historical connections does the hip hop population I am working with having to hip hop? How do these connections influence the way the hip hop populations interact with me, my teaching and my research? • What beliefs do the hip hop populations that I am working with have about hip hop, and how are these beliefs shaped by their racialized and cultural lived experiences? • How do I negotiate and balance my own beliefs and interests around hip hop with those of hip hop populations I am engaged with, even if they are inconsistent with or diverge from mine?
'Engaged Reflection and Representation'	• Educators and researchers should ask students: o How do you engage in hip hop culture (MC, breaking, graffiti, DJ, knowledge of self)? How do you envision these aspects of hip hop culture interacting with our classroom community? • Educators and researchers should ask themselves: o How can you authentically incorporate students' understandings and relationships to hip hop in your classroom/research? o What would it look like to authentically incorporate students' understandings and relationships to hip hop in your classroom/research?
'Shifting from Self to System'	• What is the contextual nature of hip hop in this study/praxis? What does hip hop mean to the hip hop populations involved in this work? • What is known historically, socially, culturally and racially about the hip hop populations involved in this work? • What barriers and structures – particularly ones that are systemic, institutionalized or localized – influence the experiences that the hip hop population I am working with has with hip hop? • How can I draw connections between curricular content and hip hop praxis to interrogate institutional systems and structures that oppress specific groups? o How can I leverage hip hop research/praxis to interrogate institutional systems and structures that oppress specific groups?

Therefore, through the cogenerative dialogue I not only obtained a system to interrogate but also was informed of hip hop artists that were currently having experiences in this system that my students related to. From there, I began to examine both Meek Mill and Tee Grizzley's music and experiences with the probation and parole system and scaffolded their experiences into the existing

curriculum my district had on the criminal justice system. By keeping my students' voices and interests at the centre, I was able to identify systems that they felt needed to be interrogated while incorporating hip hop artefacts that were relevant and meaningful to not only my students but the learning experience.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The consequences of colonialism have created systemic inequities that contribute to the systemic oppression of systemically marginalized and Indigenous populations across the world. The systemic inequities derived from colonialism created social and economic disparities and have particularly impacted education and the types of knowledge privileged within education systems. As hip hop educators and researchers, we promote the centring of hip hop in pedagogy and educational research and argue that hip hop can be used as an approach to teaching and learning to decolonize schools, pedagogy and curriculum.

In noting that hip hop was created as a social outlet by and for Black and Latino youth in response to the effects of internal colonialism in the Bronx, we contend that leveraging hip hop to counter the effects of colonialism within educational spaces is one way to address the detrimental effects of colonialism within education. While many scholars and educators are leveraging hip hop as a tool to educate, it is imperative that we create opportunities to challenge our own perspectives and positionality, which undoubtedly have been influenced by colonial ideals and values. Through our engagement in the field, we have recognized that educators and scholars who attempt to leverage hip hop within education engage in and promote practices that do not align with the critical conceptualization of HHBE, but rather support and align to colonial ideals and values (Hill and Petchauer 2013). As a result, we have found that a lack of interrogation of whiteness and positionality while engaging in HHBE and research can contribute to a replication of the same systemic inequities that the field and study of hip hop education are working towards eradicating. In addition, most educators and researchers who engage in HHBE superficially leverage hip hop to maintain the status quo as opposed to creating educational spaces where students are able to critique hip hop culture as well as systems and structures that contribute to the collective oppression of historically marginalized groups (Evans et al. 2020).

Consequently, these reasons have led us to create a framework that provides actionable steps for all educators to interrogate their positionality as it relates to hip hop culture when engaging in HHBE. The goal is that educators and researchers have a sustained opportunity to interrogate their positionality as it relates to hip hop culture, which was created by Black and Brown youth. A lack of interrogation of positionality while engaging in HHBE and research can contribute to a replication of the same systemic inequities that the field and study of hip hop education are working towards eradicating. As a result, not interrogating your positionality as it relates to hip hop culture is accepting a default to the status quo of society and the institution of education, which is a position of colonialism. Merely incorporating hip hop within educational spaces does not inherently contribute to decentring whiteness, and research demonstrates more intentional and explicit work is needed to dismantle the centring of whiteness in educational spaces (Kruse 2020).

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