Participatory and critical out-of-school learning for urban youth: building community through popular culture

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Abstract

This dissertation examines informal learning with hip hop culture in a participatory filmmaking project with thirteen youth, two producers, and two coordinators making a documentary about the role of hip hop in the lives of young Montreal hip hop artists.

This research is situated between the literature of out-of-school learning and hip hop based education and is theoretically informed by critical pedagogy and cultural studies. It explores the fluidity of hip hop identities of young adult hip hop artists. Of informal educators, it asks how youth participation and empowerment are constructed in youth media projects.

My methodology is informed by critical qualitative inquiry and in this research I develop a framework of critical insider research. I worked as a participant-observer over four months in pre-production sessions, following the four months I conducted semi-structured interviews with eight participants. I analysed the data for common stories of hip hop identities as told by participants and as well patterns of participation as constructed by the educators and participants.

My analysis has implications for informal education and hip hop based education. For informal education it suggests that participation and empowerment are fluid, non-linear and can move in contradictory ways depending how participation is negotiated by participants. For hip hop based education it suggests that youth bring together education, learning, and hip hop culture in meaningful ways through communities of hip hop artists.
RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse traite de l’apprentissage informel par la culture hip hop, grâce à la participation à un projet de réalisation de film réunissant 13 jeunes, 2 réalisateurs et 2 coordonnateurs : un documentaire sur le rôle du hip hop dans la vie des jeunes artistes hip hop de Montréal.

Cette recherche est au carrefour entre la littérature sur l’apprentissage hors système scolaire et l’éducation reposant sur le hip hop. Du point de vue théorique, elle repose sur la pédagogie critique et les études culturelles. Elle explore la souplesse des identités hip hop des artistes entrant dans l’âge adulte. Du côté des éducateurs informels, elle pose la question des modalités de participation des jeunes et de leur prise de contrôle dans les projets médiatiques qui leur sont destinés.

Ma méthodologie repose sur des enquêtes qualitatives critiques et je développe dans cette recherche un canevas de recherche participative critique. J’ai travaillé pendant plus de quatre mois comme observatrice-participante lors des sessions de pré-production, puis j’ai réalisé des entrevues semi-dirigées avec huit des participants. J’ai analysé les données des histoires d’identités hip hop telles qu’elles étaient formulées par les participants, ainsi que les structures de participation telles qu’elles étaient construites à la fois par les éducateurs et par les participants.

Les résultats de mon analyse portent sur l’éducation informelle et sur l’éducation fondée sur le hip hop. Du point de vue de l’éducation informelle, l’analyse indique que la participation et la prise de pouvoir sont fluides, non linéaires et peuvent aller dans des directions contradictoires en fonction des conditions de participation de chacun. Du point de vue de l’éducation fondée sur le hip hop, elle indique que les jeunes mêlent éducation, apprentissage et culture hip hop de manière très signifiante, par l’intermédiaire des communautés d’artistes hip hop.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I examine the pedagogical possibilities, limitations, challenges, and achievements of a community based youth media project, which I refer to as Chronicle Creations\. Beginning in late 2007 Chronicle Creations set out to create a participatory documentary with a team of hip hop youth artists in all four elements – b-boying, graffiti, MCing, and DJing (Chang, 2005). Funded by the National Film Board of Canada\(^2\) in 2008 Chronicle Creations began the participatory filmmaking process of creating a documentary about the role of hip hop culture in the lives of 13 youth and in the lives of Montreal youth more broadly. The filmmakers set out with the goal of making a broadcast quality documentary with the hopes of securing a contract with a television network for distribution. I worked with the two producers, two youth coordinators, and 13 participants as a participant-observer in their participatory filmmaking framework over four months in their pre-production working sessions.

My research is based upon my time working with the core team of 13 youth, as well as other hip hop youth artists whose commitment to the documentary ended at various points. Within the core group the age range was 18-23 years old, with two females and eleven males. As each participant was an active artist in at least one of the four elements of hip hop, hip hop culture unified the 13 main participants who came from a variety of ethnic, linguistic and, transnational backgrounds. I describe the participants more fully in chapter 4 and Appendix A presents each of them and their corresponding backgrounds in chart form. This

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1 All names of persons, organizations, and projects have been changed in this dissertation.
2 NFB funding ceased in 2009.
ethnography of hip hop in an out of school setting builds upon existing research on hip hop pedagogies.

My dissertation examines out-of-school learning and the educational engagement of young people through their popular and creative interests and talents specifically in hip hop culture. At the heart of this dissertation is an exploration of a generation of young adults active in hip hop culture who are diasporic, multiethnic, multilingual, and challenge the dominant narrative of hip hop culture and the urban experience as one that is solely occupied by young black English speaking males. My research also works to deconstruct the ‘success story’ narrative of out-of-school learning in order to bring to the forefront the complexities of power, participation, curriculum and learning in an out-of-school environment. I am in dialogue with the informal education research that has thus far focussed in large part on literacy (Hull, 2001, 2002; Mahiri, 2004), to a lesser extent youth media projects (Fleetwood, 2005; Kim, 2003, 2007; Soep, 2005) and the general field of community based organizations (Mahiri, 1998). Also related is research on hip hop used in educational settings (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Hill, 2009; Low, forthcoming; Morrell, 2002, 2005; Pardue, 2004; Parmar, 2009; Williams, 2009). However the participants in Chronicle Creations differ from Hill (2009), Low (forthcoming) and Williams’ (2009) respective students because of the vested interests that all but one had as producers of hip hop culture through their investment in the elements of DJing, MCing, breakdancing, and graffiti writing3. Further, their investment goes beyond a hobby-like status as they all strive to find a financially viable way to make a living either off or by

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3 Everson, the one participant who was not a cultural producer of hip hop, was not formally interviewed or selected by the producers to participate in the documentary. He came the first day as a friend of Emanuel who had been through the selection process.
incorporating the skills and experiences honed from their years devoted to hip hop cultural production.

This dissertation extends these growing fields of research by incorporating strands of research on (a) hip hop and education, (b) critical pedagogy perspectives on power, participation, and curriculum, and (c) a cultural studies framework of analysis. The questions that guide this research are:

1. What do educators who frame learning within hip hop culture need to know about the role of hip hop culture and experiences for the identity construction of some young adults?
2. How can out of school learning function as an alternative site of identity construction for urban youth? How can hip hop culture function as an alternative site of identity construction for urban youth? How do these alternative sites of identity construction affect the learning experiences of urban youth?
3. How is participation constructed in a participatory filmmaking project? How does this participation relate to processes of empowerment for the participants?
4. How is the identity construction of hip hop artists different from the identity construction of those who primarily consume hip hop culture? How can educators address the concerns and needs that arise in the identity construction of young hip hop artists?

Researching Identity and Culture

There is much debate on how best to write about and research identity in meaningful ways. Cote (2006) argues for an end to phrases such as ‘having an identity’, as Cote notes that identity is not something one can possess, or lose for that matter. Cote goes on to call for more careful use of the word identity by researchers, as he remarks that many times the word ‘community’ or ‘affiliation’
can more accurately capture the researcher’s intention. Similarly Sfard and Prusak (2005) draw attention to how identity is conceived as a static externalized object in a review of educational discourse on identity\textsuperscript{4}. Here they point out the dangers in fetishizing identity in educational research:

…[current educational discourse on identity] seem to be saying that there is a thing beyond one’s actions that stays the same when the actions occur, and also that there is a thing beyond discourse that remains unchanged, whoever is talking about it. Such an essentialist vision of identity is as untenable as it is harmful. It is untenable because it leaves us without a clue as to where we are supposed to look for this elusive ‘essence’ that remains the same throughout person’s actions. It is potentially harmful because the reified version of one’s former actions that comes in the forms of nouns or adjectives describing this person’s ‘identity’ acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy (p.16).

It is easy to fall victim to the type of use of identity that Sfard and Prusak remark upon, and to write about this participant’s ‘hip hop identity’ in relation to their ‘school identity’ for example. However, while that type of writing about identity can be helpful in drawing attention to particular sets of behaviours and ways of thinking that are enacted in a hip hop setting versus a school setting, that type of writing also conveys a sense of separation of identity that betrays the ways in which we are always negotiating multiple identities at a given time. DeMeulenaere’s (2009) work on the fluidity of identity for black students shows how identity construction entails ever changing processes of silencing,

\textsuperscript{4} Sfard and Prusak (2005) do not set out the parameters of their review; however the literature reviewed begins chronologically in the 1990s.
highlighting, nurturing, and negotiating parts of our selves. His longitudinal work with black students depicts how young people do not put on an academic identity hat and then exchange it for another identity hat, but rather how young people are engaged in the act of negotiating how to juggle the multiple hats in different contexts. In this research I focus specifically on how participants are constructing their identities in relation to hip hop culture, but this focus does not leave me unaware of how they are constructing their identities to other cultures, communities, and affiliations. Indeed it is the intent of this research to tease out how the construction of identity in relation to hip hop culture interacts with how participants are constructing their identities as women, students, fathers, artists, immigrants, and black youth.

Attempts to define identity often incorporate a relationship between the individual and others such as Gee’s (2001) description of identity as being “recognized as a certain kind of person” (p.99), or Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) description of identity as “…the social positioning of self and other” (p.586). In these two definitions we see how identity construction or identity-making is not something that can be done on one’s own. In this way, the concept of identity is intertwined with culture. Geertz (1973) remarks that culture can be understood as “webs of significance” and that these webs are always “public” (pp.9-10). He writes that although culture is related to ideas, “it does not exist in someone’s head” (Geertz, 1973, p.10). Thus as identity is constructed, culture is necessarily lived. In this research I understand hip hop as a culture, which I describe more fully in chapter 4, and examine the ways that participants live their hip hop culture. Most prominently they embody hip hop culture by their cultural production, but they also embody hip hop culture in the ways they choose to make meaning of the
world outside of their role as cultural producers. While examining how participants are constructing their identities in relation to hip hop culture, I ask what does it mean for them to live, identify with, and be a part of hip hop culture?

As Sfard and Prusak (2005) put it, identity-making is a “communicational practice” that involves negotiating with the world how we come to recognize ourselves and be recognized by others. They go on to call for a narrative definition and operationalization of identity that focuses on stories:

In concert with the vision of identifying as a discursive activity, we suggest that identities may be defined as collections of stories about persons or, more specifically, as those narratives about individuals that are reifying, endorsable, and significant...As stories, identities are human-made and not God-given, they have authors and recipients, they are collectively shaped even if individually told, and they can change according to the authors’ and recipients’ perceptions and needs. As discursive constructs, they are also reasonably accessible and investigable (pp.16-17)

In many ways I adopt this narrative approach to identity by searching for stories in the data that spoke to the ways that participants were constructing their identities in relation to hip hop culture. Most significantly, I highlight how participants’ constructions of identity with hip hop are often working within the confines of dominant narrative constructions of hip hop culture such as the ho, the sister, or the gangster. As well the many ways participants are cultural producers is deeply tied to the stories they tell about their lives with hip hop culture. By cultural production, I refer to the creation of hip hop cultural products namely songs, dances, pieces of graffiti, and music. The participants’ roles as cultural producers allow them to tell hip hop stories that differentiate them from those who only
consume hip hop culture. Their cultural production gives them access to a community of fellow cultural producers/artists in the Montreal hip hop community who are deeply invested in the development and continued dynamism of hip hop culture.

Constructing Identities in Hip hop

When a participant says “I brush my teeth hip hop”, what story is he or she trying to tell us about him or herself. I argue that while there are multiple ways to negotiate identity in hip hop, the youth in my study associated with hip hop culture affirm their positioning in hip hop culture by addressing core elements of (a) their alignment with hip hop culture through hip hop cultural production, and (b) their alignment with the dominant narrative of oppression in hip hop through their own racial, class, gender, or immigrant experiences (Osumare, 2005).

Tied to what they highlight through their stories is what they silence. Wexler (1992) writes: “Educators, like new sociologists, have concentrated on cognitive skills, curriculum or ‘knowledge’, to the neglect of identity” (p.156). I identify two primary reasons that educators and education researchers should be concerned with stories of constructing identities with hip hop such as shared by the participants in this research. Firstly, the dominant stories of identity in hip hop reproduce potentially harmful narratives that may restrict how students imagine themselves to be. For example in respect to gender, Rose (2008) identifies the ‘bitch’ and the ‘ho’ as the most available tropes in hip hop culture for young women and contends that women associated with hip hop culture continue to reproduce this dichotomy. Secondly, a shared theme within the stories of identity in hip hop is that institutions such as schools and universities are irrelevant and unpractical for youth and that street culture offers alternative ways to pursue
financial success, I examine this further in chapter 6 (Au, 2005). This antagonistic position between educational institutions and hip hop culture is problematic both for educators and students. We can make available more constructions of identity in hip hop when more types of hip hop stories are told within the hip hop community, such as stories that embrace education and stories that work against dominant gender constructions.

For educators who do not question the construction of this dichotomy between education and hip hop culture, they might project lower learning expectations on students who are associated with hip hop culture and assume that these students are not interested in pursuing learning or educational attainment. For students it is dangerous territory as they are limiting the possible stories they dream for their futures such as going to university, achieving a degree, or being an engaged student in their present classrooms.

*Hip hop community programs as a place for examining hip hop identities*

In much of the literature, hip hop is depicted as something occurring outside of school; something that takes place on the ‘bloc,’ in the ‘street,’ in ‘da hood’ …and in distinctive social spaces set aside for ‘play’ (Kelley, 1998, p.196)…the hip hop aesthetic in the world of education, whether it be fashion or a ‘cypher,’ is often associated with the realm of ‘leisure’ and anti-intellectualism (Akom, 2009, p.53).

Hip hop community programs combat the type of anti-intellectualism associated with youth and hip hop that Akom (2009) refers to above. Many urban youth affiliate with popular cultures such as hip hop, punk, or emo to name a few, and in some cases popular culture affiliations may be the foremost form of self perception. As well, hip hop culture is a framework that informs how youth
interpret, represent, and negotiate their ethnicity and gender. Hip hop is more than just music or fashion as it is embedded within identity formation for some youth “by which youth and young adults conceive of themselves, others, and the world around them” (Petchauer, 2009, p.947). In this way youth, such as the participants in my research, embody a variety of hip hop narratives in their everyday lives, even in activities that are not directly related to their consumption or production of hip hop culture. Thus, unpacking the multiple ways youth construct identities in hip hop would be helpful for those educators, both informal and formal, who work with students steeped in hip hop culture. Hip hop community programs serve as important places in which to critically analyse identity construction with hip hop in an educational setting. Educators working with hip hop culture and youth associated with hip hop culture can initiate the process of analysing and reframing the stories that young people tell about their identities in relation to hip hop.

As well such an understanding is valuable for educators working with youth affiliated with any other popular culture because it is an exercise in understanding our students through a lens other than the traditional ones of race, gender, and sexuality. A lens of popular cultural affiliation allows another dimension of interpretation and representation of issues of race, gender, and sexuality.

Hip hop Community Programs

Hip hop community programs present youth with the opportunity to learn with a hip hop focus so that their positioning in hip hop culture can work compatibly with goals of learning and success. These programs are unique because they invite diverse groups of urban youth to come together based on their “shared
repertoire” (Wenger, 1998) of hip hop cultural knowledge. For instance, Hip hop Sans le Pop in Montreal offers a workshop series on hip hop that takes four modules into schools to examine hip hop culture through critical historiography and semiotics, focusing on visual representations of hip hop culture and the role of women in hip hop culture.

Being affiliated with hip hop culture is not always the only motivation for participating in hip hop community programs. The regional coordinator for a Toronto program using hip hop to promote literacy shared that less than half of the 80 students participating in the program were hip hop followers (Sackeyfio, personal communication, May 11 2009). Volunteers in this Toronto hip hop literacy program are largely not hip hop engaged but are excited to participate in a program where the students are motivated to learn after school. A growing number of organizations such as Hip hop Sans Le Pop explicitly frame their learning goals in the context of hip hop culture in an effort to reach urban youth. Most programs focus on the lyrical dimension of hip hop such as W.O.R.D (Montreal), Lyrical Minded (Brooklyn, New York), and Literacy Through Hip hop (Toronto). Programs highlighting other elements of hip hop such as graffiti, DJing, and breakdancing do exist but their numbers pale in comparison to those with a writing focus. This perhaps can be explained by two factors: first the technical skills, equipment, and practice time needed to fully understand the elements of graffiti, breakdancing, and DJing may be prohibitive for community programming whereas a pen and paper are all that are needed to write lyrics, and second, the written and speech aspect of rapping are more readily understood as literacy skills valued in the formal learning environment of school.
Other programs focus on a broader look at hip hop such as the YMCA of Greater Toronto Area’s “What is hip hop” which looks at the history of hip hop culture but also infuses a technical skills angle as participants learn to: “Use digital video and cameras, graphic/print design software, web page building tools and more and express “What is Hip hop?” to you”. At the higher education level, New York University’s Centre for Multicultural Education and Program’s launched the Hip hop and Pedagogy Initiative in 2007. Pardue’s (2004) extensive ethnographic work in Brazil reveals a network of hip hop educational organizations in Sao Paulo such as ABC Rap, Movimento Hip hop Organizado (Organized Hip hop Movement), Projeto Rappers (Rappers Project), and the magazine Pode Cre as state funded hip hop programs which he connects to the naming of Paulo Freire to Minister of Education following the election of a Labour Party leader. This brief look at programs here is by no means comprehensive and the growing number of similar organizations in the United States in particular is phenomenal\(^5\).

But what does the growing presence of hip hop in informal education signify? Why hip hop in lieu of other youth popular cultures such as punk, skateboard culture, rock culture? Is hip hop a new trick in the toolbag of community educators? Or does the presence of hip hop signify an emerging situated practise in the informal education urban landscape? Has the framework of hip hop changed the traditional learning goals of informal learning? Who are these community educators using hip hop? Does the framework of hip hop present new challenges to youth educators? These are some of the questions that motivated me in my research with Chronicle Creations.

\(^5\) Tricia Rose in her most recent work (2008) provides a brief appendix of hip hop centred organizations for youth in the United States.
Becoming a Researcher of Hip hop

The Chronicle Creations project surely would have appealed to me as a youth growing up in Toronto. I am a product of countless after-school programs, youth groups, and community centres. I cannot recall a time when my formal schooling was not coupled by some informal learning activity whether it be through an after school club at my high school or a volunteer opportunity at the local recreation centre up the street. I use the term ‘schooling’ purposefully to distinguish my experience from what I would call an education (Kinchele, 2000; Parmar, 2009). I always found school easy to navigate academically, but I would not say that I was engaged in my schooling in any meaningful way besides getting a good grade for my mother. I breezed through in terms of grades and gave the answers teachers wanted when called upon. My ability to successfully negotiate the formal school system allowed me to amass a specific type of cultural capital that I did not inherit, but would serve me well in higher education (Bourdieu, 1986; Giroux, 1983). It also allowed my boredom with formal schooling to slip under the radar of authority figures as skipping school went unnoticed by teachers, administration, and my mother.

Raised by my single mother, who worked two jobs to support us, I quickly became an expert at finding ways to delay the return to an empty apartment. The rest of my extended family lived in a suburb of Toronto and most of my friends did not enjoy my flexible schedule after school as they had a parent or caregiver waiting at home. Much like the school experiences of Parmar (2009) and Hill (2009), I went to a school whose demographics did not reflect the demographics of the area I lived in because my mother chose to send me to the ‘good’ school filled with middle class children of European immigrants that was further away than the
school close by with students of lower economic immigrant families from the Caribbean, East Africa, Asia, South America and the Pacific Islands. Always going between my home neighbourhood and my school setting left me with not enough time in either place to really fit in, as Hill (2009) describes his experience: “I felt like I was too White for the Black people and too Black for the White people” (p.xvi). I felt like I was too lower class Filipino for the middle class white folk and too middle class white for my lower class Filipino family and my lower class immigrant neighbourhood friends.

Adding to my confusion over what ‘I was supposed to be like’ were my summer long stays at my cousins’ houses and apartments outside the city in a heavily Filipino suburb where hip hop culture ruled. With my family and in my neighbourhood, hip hop was the language and culture of choice. Surrounded by older cousins who were DJs and neighbours who practiced their breakin’ moves while others would spit rhymes we learned off the radio, I received a first class education in hip hop street culture that was far removed from my white European-Canadian classmates’ taste for Nirvana and Pearl Jam. There were a small group of other non-white students in my high school and while they saw me as ‘one of them’, the fact that I was good at school made me just different enough that we were not joined at the hip. Today I recognize how I was one of the few people in high school who was just as comfortable hanging out with the Filipino and South American kids breakin’ in the corridor, as I was sitting in the principal’s office as the school president. It seemed I knew and could relate to a bit of everyone, whereas no one really knew me. In this way, adolescence was an exercise in negotiating how to construct an identity in relation to hip hop culture that was
apathetic towards school while constructing an identity that valued formal education.

As a Filipina-Canadian mine was and is not the image displayed in the marketed North American hip hop culture nor is it an identity readily explored by the many articles and book treatments on identity construction in hip hop and urban students with exception to studies done in the heavily Filipino populated Bay Area in San Francisco (Alsaybar, 1999; Devitt, 2008; Wang, 2004). Although my face is not the one that comes to mind when thinking of the American hip hop generation specifically, I wager my experience growing up in a single-mother immigrant family, living in a lower income bracket, and working from a young age is close to the urban Canadian hip hop narrative. Increasingly hip hop scholars are making sense of this mismatch between a projected black American audience and an actual collage of a North American immigrant audience (Bond, 2009; Maira, 2002; Perillo, 2009; Slusser, 2009; Viola, 2006). As Dimitriadis (2008) notes “…it is impossible to discuss ‘the urban’ today without discussing the ways in which ‘global cities’ are increasingly interconnected, often in unpredictable ways”(p.12). Indeed, of the final group of thirteen participants in Chronicle Production’s team, eleven were second or first generation immigrants and the concept of transnational identity frequently came up as a shared narrative among group members, myself included. Two of the most prominent Canadian hip hop exports, K’naan and Kardinal Offishall, have performance identities constructed around their refugee and immigrant narrative respectively. Thus when I first heard hip hop music I believed it was speaking to me even if its mainstream incarnations did not look like me.
Growing up in Toronto my image of hip hop was informed by more than the American black aesthetic that dominated videos and album covers. My image of hip hop was a blend of black youth, Filipino and South American breakdancers from my high school, my cousin’s mostly Filipino DJ crews, and the Eastern European graf writers that hung out in the back of our highschool. Today questioning why I was drawn to hip hop culture I can recall a sense of its ubiquity in the city: in the clothes I wore, the words we used, and the lyrics we memorized. Even when surrounded by many white friends whose cultural affiliations varied from rock to punk to goth, I never ventured far from hip hop culture. On this point of youth cultural affiliation, Osumare’s (2005) ‘connective marginalities’ contends that hip hop’s global attraction is based upon its connection to marginality through either youth, historical oppression, class or culture. This connection to a narrative of marginality kept and continues to keep me tied to the community of hip hop. While I concur that ‘connective marginalities’ draws diverse youth to hip hop culture, it is also worth reminding that hip hop is also the dominant expression of ‘cool’ in urban settings which may contribute to one’s initial attraction to the culture. As one Chronicle Productions participant, Ivan, described upon arriving in his Montreal school as a refugee from Russia, when he saw the Filipino kids in the baggy pants and the big t-shirts he decided “this is what I want to do.” I had felt the same way when I was with my cousins and neighbourhood friends, for hip hop was where I wanted to be and it was what I wanted to do.

Filling Time and Finding Spaces

Hanging out in the streets or loitering in the corridors of my highschool after school were not strong temptations for me as I came to notice that these spaces were dominated by males (Blackman, 1998; Massey, 1994). The lack of
public spaces for young females is an important dimension to consider in community programming and could benefit from the feminist critiques of earlier subculture studies and their silencing of young females (McRobbie, 1990). I remember clearly one large group of males playing basketball after school and another one breakdancing until they were kicked out by school administration. My sole female presence seemed either unwelcome or dreadfully misinterpreted as romantic or sexual interest. Thus, since I could not find a place of leisure where I felt comfortable, I turned to activities that had adults supervising or mentoring my time.

At times they had nothing to do with my own interests - I once stayed hours to help paint a banner for a school club I was not even involved in. At times my participation was a matter of convenience - for a period of time I volunteered at the hospital my mom worked at so I could come home with her when she was done work. The first and second year of high school my math teacher noticed my sporadic attendance and asked me to help keep stats for the basketball team he coached after our class; this turned out to be his attempt to keep me from wandering off school grounds. I saw my participation in these informal environments as just something to do; I was not trying to supplement a resume. I had nothing else to do and no one else to do it with. Over time my responsibilities grew within these informal contexts. This is not uncommon as some research on community organizations show an eventual progression of responsibilities and leadership capabilities for urban youth (Dimitriadis, 2003; McLaughlin, Irby, &

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6 McRobbie (1990) critiqued the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies’ focus on studies that foregrounded males while making little reference to female agency within subcultures, such as her critique of Willis’ (1981) ‘lads’ whose remarks about females tended to be strictly sexualizing. Similarly when I reflect upon high school leisure time I felt as though public spaces of free time were dominated by groups of males who at times constructed public space after school such that females were primarily regarded as sexual objects.
Langman, 1994). For example, a casual volunteer position at the recreation centre up the street from our apartment turned into my first job offer working with Toronto Parks and Recreation. I was not trying to be a leader and never saw myself as one until one day an adult told me I was one.

Eventually my informal involvements re-situated me in my school community as a leader and I was nominated for a prestigious national post-secondary scholarship. At the scholarship interviews I was surrounded by students from all across the country and felt like I had absolutely nothing in common with them. Over time I had become adept at assessing when it was ‘safe’ to be my hip hop self and when it was time to be the girl who was good at school; sadly at the time I could never find a way to do both. Walking into the posh interviews, I sensed that there would be no appreciation for an urban hip hop mentality here. I had achieved almost identical academic successes as my peers, but they dripped with a confidence in their abilities and pedigree that I did not. The bulk attended private school, lived in high income neighbourhoods, and had financial and social access to opportunities I had never even heard of. I met peers who went to a school on a boat that travelled around the world, and listened to the other candidates speak of their parents shuttling them back and forth between activities and paying for extensive overseas opportunities in the summer. I felt like a fish out of water pretending to be something I clearly was not. Later, I would read Dubois’ words on ‘double consciousness’ and recall the feelings of confusion and inadequacy during the interviews (DuBois, 1903). I remember thinking it unfair that I should be measured up against these peers of mine because there was so much to my story that could not be told in a resume. Where would I put on a resume that I had to do the laundry, clean, cook for myself, have a part-time job to supplement the
household income, and on top of that find time to be ‘involved’? This experience greatly contributed to my own politicization in relation to education. Although I did not have the language to express my frustration, I was witnessing that class, race, and gender coincided to colour pathways to success and achievement.

My stomach was in knots the weekend they called to distribute the results. The good news came and I have no doubt that that opportunity changed my life – it opened doors for me that I did not even know existed. I travelled with a summer stipend, studying and volunteering around the world. I studied without worry for tuition or accommodations and I had access to an impressive network of mentors available for us to draw on as references and advisors when needed. This rich undergraduate experience helped motivate and prepare me to do an MA and PhD. Just as valuable as the scholarship, however were the free community and informal projects that I participated in that gave me the skills and confidence needed to hold my own among a crowd of socially and financially privileged peers. Now as the subject of my dissertation is young adults exploring the role of hip hop culture in their lives, I feel as though I have come full circle from the divided girl who could not figure out how to bring together her love for rhymes with her love for books and school.

From Youth to Youth Leader to Youth Researcher

My story is in many ways shared by the countless urban youth who are looking for something to do, a safe place to be, a place to feel at home outside of home. My debt to these organizations, leaders, and educators is one part of what motivates my passion for researching informal urban learning systems. Looking back, the biggest impact that those extra-curricular organizations made on me was that they moved me to identify myself in an alternative way, as a leader. Looking
back I can see that it was not only an alternative way to understand myself, but it was also a membership in a community of a practice of youth leaders (Wenger, 1998). I became an engaged learner, I became a leader, and I became motivated to succeed for reasons other than satisfying externally induced pressures from family. Gone were the days of my overwhelming sense of inadequacy that plagued me during those interviews so long ago. As I began to identify myself as a leader, a discourse of leadership and success opened up to me (Hull & Greene, 2006). Community organizations and informal projects eased me onto a different trajectory than I had been travelling on prior. My experience is one narrative within the literature that demonstrates how informal learning contexts can be beneficial across a wide range of youth experiences in an urban setting (McLaughlin, Irby & Langman, 1994; Mahiri, 1998).

As much as my academic accomplishments allowed me to inhabit a ‘student leader’ mentality, the available positions, or stories, of academic success were not aligned with those of hip hop culture. Not much older than many of the youth participants in the documentary, I see myself as part of the hip hop generation defined by Kitwana as being born between 1965 and 1984 (Kitwana, 2003). As participant Emanuel says: “Yeah, like but I was born into hip hop. It’s ridiculous to me think that hip hop was created because I’m like my whole life it was there”. As with Emanuel, hip hop is a constant in my life. It is an aspect of my everyday reality that is taken for granted until I am in the presence of those who do not call hip hop home. I am not a lyricist, a graf writer, a DJ, or a B-girl despite my amateur attempts. However I see myself contributing as a thinker, writer, researcher, and theorist of hip hop culture. Often hip hop writing is conflated strictly with music journalism, yet hip hop is more than just music (Chang, 2007;
Dyson, 2004; Rose 2008). As more and more educators note that hip hop is the dominant culture of urban students (Giroux, 1996; McLaren, 2000), there is a growing number of academics and researchers who have emerged to examine hip hop culture from within an insiders perspective (Parmar, 2009; Dimitriadis, 2003, 2005; Morrell and Duncan-Andrade, 2008). This growing body of research has also benefited from those who theorize hip hop but do not affiliate with hip hop culture (Low, 2008; Pardue, 2004).

Defining the Informal

The image of formal education is familiar: there are classrooms, desks, and a teacher in the front with students in lined desks. A commonly critiqued element of formal schooling is the division of students where learners are put into grades based on their age, progressing in a hierarchical order through the system. Shirley Brice Heath (2002), noted scholar on community and out-of-school learning, refers to the division of students as “arbitrary limits imposed by age, gender, race, class, and geography” (p.vii). Illich (1970) echoes Heath decades before in *Deschooling Society*, where he argues that schools are based on, “…three unquestioned premises. Children belong in school. Children learn in school. Children can be taught only in school” (p.25). Illich touches on another critique of formal schooling, that the student division by age is not only arbitrary, but also the division of learning subject. He instead argues for ‘learning webs’ where learners would be brought together by the commonality of the subjects they seek to explore rather than their age. The concept of a ‘learning web’ is similar to the type of organic learning and matching of interests that is occurring in Chronicle Creation’s documentary process.
But what does the ‘informal’ in informal education specifically refer to? Is it the relationship between the teacher and learner? Is it the type of discourse employed? Is it the actual learning setting? It could be all of the above and generally we can think of informal education as learning and teaching that takes place separate from formal institutions of certification and curricula, or it could also be education that somehow queers those formal notions of education. Indeed the presence or absence of curricula comes up often as a defining factor in informal education. Livingstone’s (2007) definition exemplifies this criterion: “Informal learning is any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge, or skill that occurs without the presence of externally imposed curriculum criteria” (p.206).

Smith (1988) identifies seven common characteristics of informal learning: (a) learning takes place in a variety of settings, (b) process is purposeful to seek knowledge, skills and/or attitude, but goals are not always specified, (c) time line is variable, (d) participation is voluntary and self-generated, (e) dialogical, mutual respect, (f) “active appreciation and engagement” with the lives/cultures of the participants, and finally (g) might use experiential patterns of learning. (pp. 131-2). Another common characteristic of informal learning is that is most often theorized as being done with youth and adults, often blurring the age categories such as we will see in chapter 4 (Jeffs, 2001). I would add (h) transient nature of programming and funding. The ephemeral nature of funding and programming in informal education makes it frustrating for both educators and learners who thrive in an informal setting and want to reproduce the successes they have had in the past. The summer of 2009 finds the Chronicle Creations team with an offer from a television station to produce their documentary, but with the caveat that Chronicle must raise
additional funds. As well, given the transient voluntary nature of the participant
learners, it is hard to produce the type of quantitative evaluations that might curry
favour with potential funding agencies.

**Being Critical of Informal Learning**

Related to my work is recent research by Kim (2003, 2007) that critically
examines the policy landscape of youth media projects such as the hip hop
documentary central in my study. Kim (2007) questions our assumptions of
community based learning as inherent spaces of freedom and expression:
“Community centres do not, by any means, represent a ‘neutral’ space. These
centres are not benign by nature of being ‘community-based’” (p.32). Earlier Kim
(2003) writes

> It would be naïve to presume that a by and for youth approach to
> educational media will necessarily be a non-oppressive learning experience
> simply because the process is led by youth rather than by older designers.
> However, youth can develop greater critical media literacy by learning
> about the processes involved in the creation of media (p.31).

Similarly Jeffs (2001) cautions against informal education’s
romanticization:

> There is a great deal of sanctimonious humbug about the inherently
> liberatory and radical nature of informal education. It is not, and never has
> been, axiomatically either. It can be, and sadly often is, as narrow,
> controlling and devoid of serious intellectual challenge as the worst
> examples of formal schooling. However, because it engages with learners
> through dialogue, it does have the capacity to allow individuals and groups
> to engage in a democratic discourse: to offer all the opportunity to identify
the knowledge they value and to negotiate their own learning pathway (p.46).

Jeffs’ and Kim’s cautionary words are a useful reminder that there is nothing inherent about a method. This assumed critical nature in informal learning has been examined in youth video programs similar to the one in my research as a result of the assumed authenticity of voice and representation of youth participants (Fleetwood, 2005; Low, 2008; Soep, 2005). Whereas much of the literature on informal education focuses on a success story narrative (McLaughlin, Irby & Langman, 1994) depicting the struggles of the youth leader (or ‘wizard’ as McLaughlin et al. term) and the positive outcomes for urban youth participants (or ‘hopefuls’ as McLaughlin et al. term) in community based educational settings, I depart from the success story/saviour narrative as a starting point and begin from a critical perspective that addresses issues of participation, power, and curriculum. As Brushwood-Rose (2009) comments, “Indeed, it seems that our ‘rescue fantasies’ about education as a site or means of salvation for youth, and teachers as their saviours, has largely survived critiques by moving from sites of formal schooling to spaces of informal community-based learning”. Getting stuck in a success story narrative, or fantasy as Brushwood-Rose proposes, fictionalizes the informal urban education experience by constructing a singular version of the story to be told. I adopt a critical approach of inquiry not to diminish the structures of informal learning spaces but to reinforce and respect the integral part they play in countless urban youths’ lives worldwide. As Gustavson (2007) notes “Schools no longer, and perhaps never did, occupy a monolithic position, separate from the rest of youth’s learning lives” (p.8). By taking a critical approach of analysis to community based youth programming, I am recognizing their worth beyond giving
youth ‘something to do’ and recognizing that they are truly pedagogical spaces where valuable learning and teaching takes place. I am sure that there is a way to do justice to the work of these youth leaders while also critiquing roles of race, power, class, language, and education.

Building Bridges with Formal Learning

Hull and Schultz’s (2001) comprehensive review on recent literature on out-of-school literacies identifies three major theoretical strands that provide the foundation for out of school literacies: (a) ethnographies of communication such as Heath’s (1983) *Way with Words*, (b) Activity theory and a Vygotskian psychological perspective on language, and (c) the New Literacy Studies (p.576). What is constant in each of the three strands that Hull and Schultz identify is that each strand works to uncover the relationship between learning outside of school with learning inside of school. These three strands, though different in their conceptualizations, all adhere to the belief that learning is not bound by its social context. Heath’s (1983) *Way With Words* study found that what black kids learnt and did not learn at home was related to what they did and did not learn and did and did not get evaluated upon in school. Vygotsky’s (1978) understanding of the knowledge a child brings to the school supports Heath’s findings: “That children’s learning begins long before they attend school is the starting point of this discussion. Any learning a child encounters in school always has a previous history” (p.84). Thus, these approaches work toward building bridges between what in and out of school learning.

Educators working with hip hop culture in the community can learn much from those working within the school context (Akom, 2009; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Hill, 2009; Low, forthcoming; Williams, 2009). Duncan-Andrade
& Morrell (2008) see their own work with hip hop in education as looking to hip hop as a ‘fund of knowledge’ as conceived by Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2000). Hip hop is also often referenced as a vehicle, a tool for political mobilization, or a means of expression for youth engagement (Dimidriadis, 2001, 2005, 2008; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Hoechsmann & Low, 2008; Pardue, 2004; Sackeyfio, 2006). The youth that come to these programs already have a common language and set of meanings that help them communicate with each other, sometimes to the confusion or detriment of the youth worker who has to learn from the youth. Hip hop is a “pedagogical site” where we not only learn from hip hop in a purely consumptive manner, but also speak back to hip hop through cultural production and critical thinking (Silbermann-Keller, Bikerman, Giroux, & Burbules, 2008). One of the goals of my research is to critically analyse the pedagogical network of community based learning in light of the emergence of hip hop centred programs.

The Emergence of Hip hop in Informal Learning

As seen in the beginning of this chapter hip hop community programs are prevalent in urban North American centres and are increasingly garnering attention from urban education researchers. However, the presence of hip hop community programming is recent given the culture’s emergence in the late 1970s. Looking back to the largest scale study of American informal networks, McLaughlin and Heath’s work stemming from their Spencer Foundation Grant to look at the role of ‘neighbourhood-based organizations for youth’ in three urban American centres did not mention hip hop culture save for a reference to one film (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993; McLaughlin, Irby & Langman, 1994, 2000). While McLaughlin was concerned primarily with the connection between policy and
neighbourhood organizations, Heath’s focus was language practices. In their edited book *Identity and Inner-City Youth: Beyond Ethnicity and Gender*, Heath and McLaughlin (1993) are aware that youths’ identity is not wholly constructed around their cultural heritage and gender. Yet Heath and McLaughlin do not make forays into popular cultures such as hip hop as a possible tool of analysis for youth identity construction. While they footnote a documentary entitled *Reaching the Hip hop Generation* by Motivational Educational Entertainment (1992), Heath and McLaughlin do not discuss hip hop in their analysis of youth and neighbourhood organizations. Perhaps this lack of reference to hip hop can be attributed to the lack of specifically hip hop focussed programming in the early 1990s, whereas today hip hop programs fill the landscape of urban community programming.

Mahiri (1998, 2004) has since built upon Heath and McLaughlin’s research while maintaining the focus on out of school learning environments: “As it becomes increasingly clear that schools, particularly in the inner cities, are often unable to adequately engage and prepare many youth for the demands and challenges of the outside world, more attention is being given to the nature of after-school activities for youth” (p.22, 1998). Mahiri’s more recent (2004) edited collection *What They Don’t Learn in Schools* gives primacy to literacy by using New Literacy Studies as the primary theoretical framework for examining the collected chapters on out of school learning. Mahiri and his respective contributors focus on content and results of out of school programming. This trend in focus on New Literacy Studies and informal education can also be found in work by Hull and Schultz (2001, 2002), who do not specifically focus on the urban youth experience but explore a wider range of informal programs ranging in age to include children, and focusing on dimensions such as bilingualism.
My research extends Mahiri’s contribution by questioning issues of participation, power, and curriculum in community programs. While Heath and McLaughlin (1993) asked “What do effective youth organizations offer inner-city youngsters that schools do not?” (p.5), and Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2004) “argue for a broader definition of school-based literacy that encompasses cultural values, self-awareness, and the development of critical consciousness”, I continue to push the field of hip hop and education further by asking us to look at how these hip hop community programs transform, perpetuate, or irritate the constructed relations of power within urban education.

*Hip hop pedagogy as a place of possibility.*

Hip hop centred programs have the possibility of being a place where youth can be pushed to question, critique, and explore the cultural forms of hip hop that many are used to consuming and not producing. Conversely, hip hop centred programs can also be places where youth uncritically reproduce the dominant constructed narratives of hip hop culture such as the violent young male, the hyper sexualized young woman, or the disengaged gangsta tough youth. As Akom, Cammarota, and Ginwright (2008) caution, putting a camera in the hands of urban youth does not guarantee that empowerment, critical consciousness-raising, or any social justice work will occur. Telling youth stories is a recurring theme in hip hop themed educational programs where the youth in essence tell their side of hip hop and tell how they live hip hop. By questioning, critiquing, and exploring a culture that youth are already heavily invested in, we open up the possibility for fostering a new ‘discoursal identity’ that Hull and Greene (2006) maintain consists of: “the stories we learn to tell ourselves about the selves we were, are, want to become, and imagine it possible to be” (p.84). Drawing on a
community of practice framework (Wenger, 1998; Hughes, Jewson & Unwin, 2007), Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) state they are “interested in what the students were becoming” (p.19). My own experience coming through a network of informal learning communities speaks to the ability of programs to transform myself from a student to leader, from an unengaged youth to a voracious learner⁷.

However as educators we can work towards way of celebrating those types of success narratives in informal education while still being cognizant of the ways that spaces of informal education can perpetuate debilitating constructions of gender, class, sexuality, and race to name a few.

It would be presumptuous of me to assume that I could offer here a recipe for community educators wanting to use hip hop culture or for that matter any other popular culture. What I offer is a studied look into one community program using hip hop as a framework. I draw attention to the particular challenges and advantages of using hip hop in an informal learning context, and also how this program shares many of the same challenges that other community media projects face. Also, I supplement my research involvement with Chronicle Creations with observations from interviews with various community educators in Toronto and Montreal who are using hip hop in their learning environments. Finally my multiple perspectives as a youth, youth leader, and youth researcher engaged with hip hop culture also lends a needed perspective to the existing literature.

⁷ However Petchauer (2009) reminds that hip hop researchers have a tendency to conflate improved academic achievement with student engagement in the learning process. In this dissertation I make clear that I am not making a case for any improvement in the participants’ academic processes through marks. I believe that while Petchauer’s comment is timely and correct, educators need more time and more research on how hip hop operates in a learning environment before we begin to measure the real academic affect of hip hop pedagogies.
Planning New Routes/Planting New Roots

This dissertation moves the existing literature in Critical Hip hop Pedagogy and hip hop based community programs in at least four significant ways. Firstly, these 13 participants represent a look at hip hop culture from a Canadian perspective. While there have been Canadian studies with hip hop youth and artists, they either focus explicitly on sociolinguistic practices (Forman, 2001; Ibrahim, 1999, 2004; Sarkar & Allen, 2007; Sarkar & Winer, 2006), or the participants’ identity construction in relation to hip hop is not central to the study (Yon, 2000). Ethnographic studies conducted in Canada are needed to illustrate the complex ways in which Canadian youth negotiate and manipulate American pop cultural forms such as hip hop. Hollands (2001) argues that Canadian youth have not been treated as complex actors in cultural production, but rather as imitators of their Southern neighbours:

Canadian youth have been viewed by Brake (1985) as: 1) being simply passive in their acceptance of American ‘mass culture’ and 2) possessing no popular cultural traditions themselves…It is more likely that Canadian youth (already a differentiated group as we have seen), have both selectively appropriated and refused elements of American popular culture. And that their identities and cultures are the products of a mixture of class, ethnic, gender and regional factors, and how they create not only their own indigenous culture, but how this is combined with the active consumption of global products (p.117).

Besides presenting more complex representations of Canadian youth and young adults, Canadian literature in critical hip hop pedagogy is timely especially to the Toronto context of schooling given the recent debates for black-focused
schooling in Toronto and the subsequent Toronto District School Board’s approval for a school to be opened in September 2009. There is a definite sense of urgency behind the debate with findings from a 1995 Royal Commission that 40 per cent of Grade 9 black students in the Greater Toronto Area were dropping out, coupled with statistics from the Toronto District School Board that 40 per cent of Caribbean-born students drop out, and 32 per cent from East Africa (Brown & Popplewell, 2008). Sackeyfio (2006) acknowledges the role that hip hop pedagogy could plan in Toronto’s black-focused school: “In contrast with hip hop’s placement on the periphery of schooling processes in mainstream schools, black-focused schools are in a better position to incorporate hip hop and its associated racial and cultural identities in the learning process” (p.153).

Secondly, this dissertation focuses on young adults who are not only consumers, but producers of hip hop culture and thus are uniquely situated in the literature as there has yet to be a study that works exclusively with young artists. Petchauer’s (2009) comprehensive review of the field of hip hop pedagogy literature makes a case for research into the lives of those who are actively producing hip hop culture:

Despite the valuable and creative contributions, they are often limited to researchers’ explanations of how hip hop might function in the lives of those who create it in local contexts. This limitation is because of the production of scholarly works separate from the lived experiences of people who identify with and create hip hop. Scholarly works are separate when they focus on products such as rap songs more than the groups,

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8 Williams’ (2009) Critical Cultural Cypher work did have at least one cultural producer in the group, Mia who was an emcee.
processes, and contexts that create them. Studies such as these often lack empirical substantiation that these texts contain the same meanings in the hermeneutical estimation of actors in local spaces. Thus, these approaches seldom capture the grounded and local meanings that cultural expressions, metaphors, rituals, and readings hold for groups and the complex processes through which they co-construct meaning in and beyond educational settings (p.950).

Thus this dissertation is not focusing on any specific texts in hip hop and instead focuses on the lived experiences of participants as cultural producers. In this way I hope to add to the available critical hip hop pedagogy literature by providing insight into the processes that draw the participants to hip hop and continue to motivate them to produce art in this cultural framework. As well I examine how their cultural production relates to their identity construction as members of the hip hop community.

Thirdly, this dissertation explores the informal learning practices of young adults, an age group that is underrepresented in the literature concerning community learning practices. While much attention is paid to the informal learning practices of young people in school, we see little research on those who are post-secondary but not continuing their formal education. Livingstone (1999) states how those who are unemployed or underemployed and out of school are attracted to community programs where informal learning occurs:

The very limited amount of prior research on the learning practices of economically disadvantaged adults with low formal educational attainments suggests that the vast majority do a significant amount of informal learning. Studies of economically disadvantaged urban adults,
high school dropouts, functional illiterates and the unemployed have all found similar patterns (p.126).

What young adults do with their time if they are not in school or working full-time should be of special interest to educators and educational researchers; research into their learning practices would shed light on ways for educators to reach this group of learners who risk falling through the cracks given their relationship to formal networks of school and employment. Livingstone (1999) describes why programs such as Chronicle Creations’ documentary are attractive to young adults:

Rewarding work is now so important for most peoples’ identities that when they don’t have it for protracted periods, they do become depressed and less creative. Whatever the long-term future changes in work-identity relations, this is the reality that we must deal with for the foreseeable future…For a sense of self-esteem, continuity and competence, we still need to do work that is widely recognized by those around us (p.235).

Livingstone’s words speak to the need for more community programs that target those who are post-secondary studies but underemployed; this is the demographic that most of the participants occupy. Many participants embodied the ‘need to do work that is recognized’ and shared in interviews how the documentary makes them feel like someone is listening, that they matter even though they are not in school and do not have a financially viable career path set.

Lastly, Chronicle Creation set out to create a marketable commercial documentary from the beginning and in that way this research is unique as the research on community media programs rarely set out with this goal in mind. In
most cases of community media production there is a premiere among a local audience and perhaps an entry into the film festival circuit (Fleetwood, 2005). The aim for a wider release than a local audience influences the production process in many complicated ways for the participants and the staff together; this type of process has yet to be documented in the research on community media projects.

Outline of Chapters

This introductory chapter set out the parameters of my research in hip hop education and out of school learning within the context of Chronicle Creations. I position my dissertation within the larger fields of hip hop education and out of school learning and examine how my research contributes to the growth of both fields. Here we briefly overviewed who the participants are, while a more in-depth portrait of the group will be given in chapter 4. As well in this introduction I reveal my own affinity with hip hop culture and informal learning settings, a relationship I explore further in chapter 3.

Chapter 2 positions my work theoretically within the discourses of critical pedagogy and cultural studies. I revisit a critical literature review of hip hop in education and out-of school learning within the context of my interdisciplinary theoretical framework.

Chapter 3 untangles the process of critical insider research which provided the qualitative framework for my research collaboration. Here I work through the positioning of insider knowledge and status within youth research and unpack the challenges that face critical insider researchers as they struggle to ‘work the hyphen’ with their research participants.

Chapter 4 focuses on how the participants construct what they deem to be ‘authentic’ identities in hip hop. I begin by examining the processes which first
pulled and pushed the participants towards hip hop, then I uncover how their relationship with hip hop evolves over time to incorporate an ideological interpretation of hip hop. Within my discussion of authenticity I address issues of class, race, level of involvement in the community, and style.

Chapter 5 examines the participatory framework of Chronicle Creations from a critical perspective. I reflect on how this participatory framework was either refused, embraced, or negotiated by the youth coordinators, the participants and the producers. Attached to my discussion of participation is a reflection on individual and collective empowerment. I look at the case of Jessica as an example of where individual empowerment as a woman in the documentary failed to come to fruition, but how she experienced collective empowerment in her collaborations with other participants.

Chapter 6 focuses on learning, schooling, and education. I first map out participants’ attitudes towards formal schooling and to learning in general. Then I provide examples of how learning was constructed by the staff and the participants in the documentary. Within this chapter I attempt to address the various learner identities present in the documentary.

In chapter 7 I conclude by discussing the implications of this study for educators, policymakers, and learners. I also explore further avenues of research.
CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH LANDSCAPE

In this chapter I provide theoretical foundations for my analysis and methodology. The theoretical foundations of critical pedagogy and cultural studies weave throughout my research, and the contextual framework here sets the boundaries for this paper. The chapter maps out a theoretical blending of critical pedagogy with cultural studies and concludes by positioning hip hop pedagogies and hip hop studies between the two.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy’s roots run deep in critical theory from the Frankfurt School and in Freire’s revolutionary pedagogy from Brazil. These theories and others coalesced with events and social movements to create an environment in the 1960s and 1970s America from which critical pedagogy emerged. Darder, Baltodano, and Torres (2003) describe its inception:

Critical pedagogy loosely evolved out of a yearning to give some shape and coherence to the theoretical landscape of radical principles, beliefs, and practices that contributed to an emancipatory ideal of democratic schooling in the United States in the twentieth century. In many ways, it constituted a significant attempt to bring an array of divergent views and perspectives to the table… (p.2).

I emphasize ‘loosely evolved’ because there was no original moment where critical pedagogy came into being, no original document written that marked its inception (although Giroux’s [1983] Theory and Resistance is often seen as the first ‘textbook’ using the term critical pedagogy). Weiler (1994) displays the variety of theorists involved in critical pedagogy as she credits Freire,
John Dewey, DuBois, Bowles and Gintis, Kozol, Bourdieu, and Bernstein as contributors to the foundations of critical pedagogy. She goes on to cite ethnographic accounts of student culture such as Willis’ (1981) *Learning to Labor* as instrumental in providing detailed descriptions and analyses of school culture. My own work follows in this ethnography of student culture tradition which has been taken up by other critical pedagogues who work with hip hop identified youth (Dimitriadis, 2003, 2005).

Kincheloe (2005) states that the building block for critical pedagogy is “the belief that education is inherently political” (p.8). When we understand education as political, we move away from understanding education as a benign process of transferring knowledge from teacher to student and we work towards understanding education as a complex system that affects both the individual student and society at large. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) go further to say that critical pedagogy is “the antithesis to the banking model” as conceived by Freire. Education suffers from “academicentricity” where it tends to only validate and recognize that which is created within the walls of our classrooms and the pages of our textbooks (Kincheloe, 2000, p.292). Critical pedagogy fights this ‘academicentricity’ by acknowledging the multiplicities of forms through which our students interact with their social context as a way to make meaning, such as through hip hop culture.

The “intersection of the macrosocial with the microindividual” is central to critical pedagogy in that it brings systems of education (formal and informal) into play with systems of class, globalization, identity, and politics (Kincheloe, 2007, p.20). It rejects the notion that education is a simplistic meritocracy where ability dictates success and instead recognizes that there are external structures that
mediate students’ successes, failures, and educational paths. In addition to recognizing education as political, critical pedagogy recognizes students as having agency and the ability to work against the reproductive nature of education. This belief in student empowerment and agency is key, as without it critical pedagogy would be stuck within a theory of reproduction as seen in Willis’ analysis of the lads (1981). Here Freire’s (1970) notion of ‘reading the world and the word’ take meaning as critical pedagogy celebrates students’ and educators ability to name the world and affect change.

Finding Common Ground

Despite critical pedagogy’s heterogeneous nature, Darder, et al. (2003) note that “it is precisely this distinguishing factor that constitutes its critical nature, and therefore its most emancipatory and democratic function” (p.10). Thus educators working from a variety of backgrounds and settings find common ground in critical pedagogy commitment to “unwavering liberation of oppressed populations” (Darder et al., 2003, p.10). Grande (2004) writes how critical pedagogy has become a sort of umbrella housing approaches to education that in general work towards social justice. She acknowledges the variety within critical pedagogy but holds fast that there are “unifying principles and salient features that constitute the heart of the discipline” (p.21). Even as Kincheloe (2005) sets out to provide some loose guidelines for the field of study he cautions that “many will agree with it and sing its praises, while others will be disappointed – and even offended – by what was included and what was left out” (p.6). Here I will highlight five aspects of critical pedagogy that I draw upon within my research with Chronicle Creations:
1. Critical pedagogues are concerned with theory and how theory informs our praxis as educators. The idea that theory is just as important for social change as action can be traced back to the Frankfurt School’s framework for Critical Theory. Jay (1973) recounts how the Frankfurt School was adamant to not fetishize knowledge as something apart from social action and worked against the characterization of theoretical knowledge as abstract (pp.81-85). In my own work I strive to allow theory to inform my research practice with the participants and staff at Chronicle Creations throughout. In order to situate the processes taking place in Chronicle Creation in structural discourses of race, gender, and class, I tried to move between the macro and micro in my understanding of the interactions taking place during the filmmaking process. For example when conflict between the youth coordinators and staff escalated to the point of resignation for Edwin, one of the youth coordinators, I did not shy away from interrogating how structures of race and class shaped the altercation.

2. Critical pedagogues recognize that education is largely based upon a Eurocentric worldview of culture and knowledge and seek to disrupt this pattern. A hip hop based pedagogy as embodied in Hill (2009) or in Chronicle’s approach to the documentary de-centres this Eurocentric worldview and instead privileges black cultural knowledge and hip hop culture specifically. Students are encouraged, or more precisely demanded, to draw upon their ‘funds of knowledge’ (Gonzalez et al., 2004). In the case of Chronicle Creation this allows the educators to be researchers of the participants. Thus by disrupting the pattern of Eurocentricity within education, hip hop based education also opens up the possibility for disrupting the structures of power that inhabit our classrooms.
3. Critical pedagogues recognize the complexity of identity construction and culture. Within the participants’ stories, we come to see how their identities are in constant flux and that there does not exist one identity in hip hop culture or urban culture. Critical pedagogy sees culture as a contested terrain where struggles over meaning and identity are ongoing (Giroux, 1992; McLaren, 2003). Since a cycle of self-reflection is also key to critical pedagogy, it follows that my identity construction as researcher, hip hopper, and urban woman also is in constant motion as certain aspects of my identity construction come to the forefront at times and at others drift in the background. I attempt to draw out these complexities in the writing up of my research so as to not re-create “flat caricatures” of urban youth (Fine, 1994, p.79).

4. Critical pedagogy acknowledges that education is a lifelong process that is not bound by the halls of formal education. Perhaps most importantly to this study is how critical pedagogy recognizes the importance of informal education in popular culture and in community based settings. Silberman et al. (2008) describe the entanglement of popular culture and education: “…it is not possible to study the one without awakening the echo or traces of the other” (p.2). Critical pedagogues working with popular culture bring the same type of political awareness and objective of social action into their analyses of popular culture and are often informed by cultural studies, which I will explore more thoroughly in the following section.

There are many other bulleted lists of the tenets of critical pedagogy (Darder et al., 2003; Kincheloe, 2005; McLaren, 1998; Wink, 2005), and so the aspects I have highlighted are complemented by others that also inform my research practice. This lack of perceived “static boundaries” of critical pedagogy at
times contributes to confusion over what constitutes critical pedagogy (Weiler, 1994). Today McLaren speaks of the “runny yolk of critical pedagogy” and urges that not all educational theorists who are critical (or liberal for that matter) immediately be included into the ‘yolk of critical pedagogy’. McLaren calls for a renewed recognition for the type of critical pedagogy he works within which is anti-capitalist and pro-socialist (Weiner, 2007, p.64). McLaren (2003) expands upon this frustration:

The conceptual net known as critical pedagogy has been cast so wide and at times so cavalierly that it has come to be associated with anything dragged up out of the troubled and infested waters of educational practice, from classroom furniture organized in a ‘dialogue friendly’ circle to ‘feel-good’ curricula designed to increase students’ self-image (pp.166-167).

At times it could seem as though any pedagogy informed by multicultural, democratic, learner-centred, human rights based, feminist, anti-racist, anti-homophobic, media literacy activism, Freirean – is also quid pro quo a critical pedagogy. It is enough to make one wonder if there are only two types of educators: critical pedagogues and the rest. Wink’s (2005) guide to critical pedagogy offers a distinction: “Good constructive pedagogy often stays inside the classroom, critical pedagogy starts in the classroom but goes out into the community to make life a little better” (p.74). While a simplification of critical pedagogy, Wink’s statement is useful in that it makes clear that critical pedagogy must go beyond the classroom. However Kumashiro (2000) cautions on the limitations of critical pedagogy to generate social change: “…awareness does not necessarily lead to action and transformation. A student may learn all the knowledge and skills needed (theoretically) to engage in subversive political
action but may not choose to act any differently than before” (p.38). Inherent in Kumashiro’s critique is a problematization of empowerment which I discuss further in chapter 5. While critical pedagogy strives to empower students, it must also work to understand how educators construct empowerment (Gore, 1990, 2003). Kumashiro’s critique assesses critical pedagogy as a ‘magic bullet’ for marginalized students which it is not and can never be. Critical pedagogy strives towards student empowerment and liberation, but it sees education as possibility, not as predetermined either for liberation or for oppression. As critical pedagogues we neither believe that “hope does not consist of crossing one’s arms and waiting” nor that there are predetermined outcomes of a critically informed pedagogy (Freire, 1970, p.92).

Cultural Studies

Cultural studies is a mammoth field encompassing a variety of perspectives and theories, and I draw upon a limited range of cultural studies theorists to inform my reading of critical pedagogy. This incorporation of critical pedagogy and cultural studies is common for educational researchers working with hip hop culture or popular culture in general (Hill, 2009; Low & Hoechsmann, 2008). As mentioned earlier, critical pedagogy is no stranger to cultural studies. Between these discourses it is most often critical pedagogues reaching out to cultural studies (Buckingham, 1998; Dimitriadis, 2005; Giroux, 1996, 1997; Hill, 2009; Hoechsmann & Low, 2008; hooks, 1992; Peter, 1986; Peters & Lankshear, 1996, Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004; Steinberg & Macedo, 2007). Giroux, seen by Low and Hoechsmann (2008) as the ‘go-to guy’ for cultural studies within critical pedagogy, identifies “disciplinary barriers and institutional borders” as the reasons
why more cross-fertilization has not taken place between the two discourses (Giroux, 2001, p.7).

Immediately one notices how both critical pedagogy and cultural studies have always been and continue to be contested sites of struggle over their meanings and boundaries. Hoechsmann and Low (2008) define cultural studies as “an interdisciplinary approach to reading the artifacts and practices of the present as an historian would read those of the past” (p.22) and they go onto describe how cultural studies would function as a research method: “cultural studies mobilizes close reading strategies from literary studies, linguistics, and semiotics as well as ethnographic modes of inquiry” (p.25). From this definition we glean that cultural studies calls for close readings and interdisciplinary informed perspectives on the artifacts students are manipulating today. Grossberg (1997) offers six central characteristics of cultural studies which are similar to those of critical pedagogy; he insists that cultural studies, (a) does not give into relativism; (b) is fiercely interdisciplinary and understands that its questions will necessarily lead in and out of boundaries of theories; (c) is rigorously self-reflective about its own practices; (d) is real and as such is driven by political goals not purely theoretical concerns; (e) is simultaneously committed to the need for theory to contextualize those political goals; and (f) is ultimately contextual as it realizes that “context is everything” (p.7). Of these six characteristics, cultural studies’ struggle to remain politically relevant has challenged theorists within this interdisciplinary field. In his recent essay “Does cultural studies have futures? Should it?” Grossberg (2006) poses an almost threatening ultimatum to cultural studies’ practitioners: get back to making our intellectual work relevant or get out. Grossberg argues for the need for more cultural studies, but he argues for it to be done properly, that is to return to
the primacy of what critical pedagogue’s might call praxis and move away from purely theoretical readings and textual analysis.

Hall’s (1989) contextualization of the inception of cultural studies in the 1950s outlines how within cultural studies the two paradigms of culturalists and structuralists emerge as sometimes competing, but mostly complementary, approaches to cultural studies. Indeed it is more accurate to say that culturalists and structuralists exist on a sliding scale rather than as mutually exclusive opposites. Culturalists tend to privilege lived experience of culture and understand culture as existing between all social practices and at times can be bogged down in the particulars or details of intense ethnographic inquiry while failing to provide contextualization. Thus culturalists emphasize the importance of the experience at the cost of recognizing the importance of how experiences are shaped by ideological structures. On the other hand structuralists decentre the type of lived experience that culturalists prize and instead focus on the whole, bringing in a macro-perspective to understand micro-events. We can look to the evolution of McLaren’s (1998) *Life in Schools* as an example of the interplay between a culturalist and structuralist construction of an ethnography. McLaren’s original account of his time working in a Jane-Finch school was received in an entirely different manner than he expected as a result of publishing solely his journal with no theoretical contextualisation. As cited in Kincheloe (2003) McLaren reveals that: “By failing to set my classroom journal within a critical theoretical context…I could not reveal how power and knowledge work in the interests of certain groups over others” (p.217). Without McLaren’s own analysis the text was taken in a different unforeseen direction which was interpreted by the Jane-Finch community as spectacularizing and one-dimensionalizing their community as one
of violence, poverty, and apathy. Yet it was with McLaren’s subsequent editions of *Life in Schools* (2005) with a theoretical context and analysis that conveyed the complexities of power, racism, and violence that McLaren originally intended on uncovering with his account of his time spent teaching in Jane-Finch. Thus as evidenced by *Life in School’s Journey*, critical pedagogy’s simultaneous concern for the micro-individual and macro-society anticipate Hall’s (1989) final thoughts on culturalists/structuralists:

> Though neither structuralism nor culturalism will do, as self-sufficient paradigms of study, they have a centrality to the field that all the other contenders lack because, between them (in their divergences as well as their convergences) they address what must be the core problem of Cultural Studies. They constantly return us to the terrain marked out by those strongly coupled but not mutually exclusive concepts culture /ideology” (p.72).

We hear echoes of Hall in McLaren’s (2003) words on theory and the individual in critical pedagogy: “Neither the individual nor society is given priority in analysis; the two are inextricably interwoven” (p.69). Thus again in cultural studies we see the familiar going back and forth from the micro to the macro, a constant stepping back and stepping towards the texts that students are drawn towards in their daily cultural lives.

However for those in the field of education, it is tempting to overlook the importance of ideological inquiry when working with popular culture texts. For this reason, it is important to make some sort of distinction between studying or using popular culture and doing cultural studies. It is more and more common for teachers to use popular culture texts such as television shows and hip hop song
lyrics in their classrooms. Toni Blackman, the Ambassador of Hip hop in the United States Department of State since 2001, globally champions hip hop as an unexploited resource for teachers: “Hip hop is a very powerful educational tool; it's very exciting. Teaching has to change. When teachers have to compete with technology and media for students' attention, you have to get your game tight if you want to succeed.” (Hellweg, 2005) I suggest that the use of hip hop in the classroom and in research should aim at more than to keep our teachers’ games ‘tight’. Hip hop in the classroom and in research cannot be merely another addition to the teacher’s or researcher’s bag of tricks to attract attention during times of academic disinterest. We do not engage in critical pedagogy or cultural studies if we use Tupac’s song Keep Ya Head Up to illustrate literary concepts such as alliteration, rhyme, and theme but then fail to examine such concepts as what socioeconomic pressures inspired Tupac’s powerful perspective on single mothers or how he engages in contradictory behaviour in other songs and in his videos. Morris (1997) makes plain the distinction of using popular culture texts and doing cultural studies:

I don’t deny that this [using popular culture texts in the classroom] is happening; I don’t think it’s a bad thing; and I certainly do not say that English professors can’t do cultural studies. I would say that when and if they turn Madonna or a shopping mall or a TV talk show into an ersatz literary text, they may be doing something interesting but it isn’t cultural studies… A literary reading of a shopping mall that does not seriously engage with questions that arise in history, sociology and economics remains – however productive a transformation of ‘the’ canon of English it may enable – a literary reading, not cultural studies (pp.41-42).
Ambassador Blackman is correct; “teaching has to change”. But it has to move from using popular cultural texts as props as outlined by Morris, as these texts are the meaning-makers for our youth today and should be rigorously explored, as Morris calls for, along lines of history, sociology, and economics. In this way cultural studies aligns with the political dimension of critical pedagogy in that it is not interested in popular culture for popular culture’s sake, rather it recognizes that very real tensions of class, sexuality, race, nationality, gender, and political are played out on terrain of popular culture and media at large.

Subculture Studies

The branch of cultural studies most committed to understanding youth has proven to be subculture studies; thus I draw upon the work generated and stemming from the Birmingham Contemporary Centre for Cultural Studies (CCCS). Most subculturalists rarely address hip hop youth⁹ and hip hop scholars tend to position their work in black cultural studies (Rose 1994a, 1994b) rather than aligned with subculture theory - Mitchell (1998) and Bennett (2001) being exceptions. Campbell (2004) cites the “epistemological problem of subculture” such as its “unfortunate fetishization of authenticity and resistance” (pp.498-499) as reasons that hip hop should not be explored as a subculture, however Campbell’s reasoning seems to be a critique of subculture in general; I argue that the incorporation of hip hop into the subculture debate could help work against the ‘fetishization of authenticity and resistance’ she speaks of. Bennett’s (2000) critique of the term subculture provides fuel to the hip hop as culture or subculture debate: “the term subculture imposes a hermeneutic sphere and a series of relations

⁹ Graffiti being the exception. However even then, Macdonald’s work (2001), which seen as a ‘subculture study’ makes little reference to hip hop, while Rahn’s work (2002) makes many reference to hip hop culture but is situated in critical urban education/ethnography rather than subculture studies.
and interactions which cannot, in reality, be so neatly closed off and categorised as belonging to a distinctive and apparently self-perpetuating form of cultural life” (p. 25). Arguably, for many urban youth hip hop does exist as a ‘self-perpetuating form of cultural life’ with its own tropes, narratives, and ideologies. Yon’s description of ‘elusive culture’ speaks to how I understand hip hop as a culture:

… an attempt to gesture toward a more open and pervasive view of culture, which is not only a product or a set of attributes that can be claimed and neatly recorded, but more significantly, a process that is ongoing. Individuals participate in the process of culture, not just in webs of tradition, but, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, also in surprising movements and ways that may exceed the culturally given or expected” (p.5).

While the CCCS and its contemporaries focus on subculture, subculture studies forged and continues to forge many important paths for hip hop studies as we know it today. Some of the more relevant contributions of subculture studies to this project are style as a form of resistance (Hebdige, 1979), youth subculture as oppositional to education (Willis, 1981), and the workings of racial and class authenticity within subculture (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts, 1976; Hall & Jefferson, 1993; Jones, 1988). Moreover the feminist critiques of subculture theory (McRobbie & Garber, 2005) provide openings through which to discuss the problematic location of women within hip hop culture. Merging work on black cultural studies with feminist critiques of subculture studies allows us to better place the simultaneously privileged and oppressed role that black women occupy in hip hop.
Urban ethnography’s contribution to subculture studies.

It remains that the most comprehensive source of ethnographic literature on urban youth can be found in the roots of subculture theory in the detailed urban ethnographies of the Chicago School. Dimitriadis (2008) provides a useful review of how these early Chicago School urban ethnographies and those of the CCCS set the foundation for critical ethnographic studies of urban youth today. The Chicago School refers to the body of work coming from the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago from early twentieth century to the mid 1960s (Gelder, 2005). The Chicago School is not a coherent, unified body of work, but certain texts and ethnographies were eventually drawn into the mythical canon of subcultures studies while other writings were incorporated into deviancy studies and criminology (Williams, 2007). The Chicago School did not set out to explicitly address questions of subculture as they were consumed with the city of Chicago which was home to huge numbers of immigrants and the second largest American city. The School provided some of the first urban ethnographies such as Cressey’s (1932) *The Taxi-Dance Hall* which was one of the few urban ethnographic accounts that centred on women. It is from this landscape of ethnographies that we were introduced to the dynamics of researching urban communities; although Dimitriadis (2008) notes that many of these ethnographic accounts were by white men researching black men. It is also from these urban ethnographies that researchers began to interact with street cultures in studies such as Liebow’s (1967) *Tally’s Corner* and Whyte’s (1943) *Street Corner Society*. Dimitriadis points out that while these accounts broke the ground for urban research, laid the foundation for some of the essentializing notions that persist today about street cultures: “even as they discussed key fractures in black
communities, these studies helped to calcify the notion that ghetto communities were dangerous, racially homogeneous places” (p.38).

Participant-observation was the primary methodology for ethnographies coming from the Chicago School and it set the tone for the ethnography-rich nature of the field of subcultural studies that continued with such CCCS studies as Hebdige (1979) and Willis’ (1981) work. The CCCS ethnographies looked for a relationship between youth cultural styles and an ideology of resistance. They continued the ethnographic method employed by the Chicago School to produce studies that invigorated the field of youth studies and inspired the current generation of insider subculturalists. Hall and Jefferson’s (1976) *Resistance Through Rituals* emerged as the seminal edited collection from the CCCS in post-WWII Britain and set out to deconstruct the meaning behind the styles and language (to some extent) adopted and created by British youth. Their class based approach relied heavily on Marx and typified subcultures as being resistant or in opposition to a singular dominant culture:

The dominant culture represents itself as *the* culture. It tries to define and contain all other cultures within its inclusive range. *Its* views of the world, unless challenged, will stand as the most natural, all-embracing, universal culture. Other cultural configurations will not only be subordinate to this dominant order: they will enter into struggle with it, seek to modify, negotiate, resist or even overthrow its reign – its *hegemony* (Clarke et al., 1976, p.12).

We can draw comparisons between Clarke et al.’s construction of youth culture in opposition to a dominant culture with the theoretical framework of Critical Hip hop Pedagogy which I discuss at the end of this chapter.
While many of the participants in the CCCS ethnographies are of school age, school is usually nothing more than a backdrop or figurehead to motivate participants’ resistance and never seen as vehicle for positive change or development or as a worthwhile goal. Thus education is often identified as a problem but it is rare that any solutions are ever given on how to bring together subculture and school culture in a beneficial way (Brake, 1980). Critical pedagogy’s engagement with subculture could help bring subculture and youth studies out of this ‘observation and critique’ mode and into one where change can be affected either in curriculum, teaching or learning styles. Rahn’s (2000) work with graffiti writers and curriculum is a great example of the bringing together of subculture and education. Subculture studies brings an in-depth analysis of individual and social identity which is invaluable to educational researchers whether working within an educational institution or a community arts-based program.

**Hip hop Based Education and Hip hop Studies**

In the introductory chapter I contextualized hip hop literature within the discourse of out of school learning. Here I provide a snapshot of how those working with hip hop communities frequently draw on a framework of critical pedagogy and cultural studies. Critical pedagogy works against an exoticized or romanticized incorporation of hip hop into education, as it is not satisfied with a mere incorporation of hip hop but rather a critical analysis of hip hop in the students’ worlds. The literature on hip hop can be divided between what Hill (2009) categorizes as Hip hop Studies and Hip hop Based Education (HHBE). Hip hop studies encompasses literature, narratives, and research which explore, critique, and provide historiography for hip hop culture. The literature of HHBE is
couched within Hip hop studies and focuses on the pedagogical practices and possibilities of hip hop and hip hop educational programs. HHBE is commonly informed by a critical pedagogy and cultural studies perspective. Petchauer (2009) identifies three ways that hip hop has proved relevant to the field of education: (a) hip hop used as a pedagogical device, “often in the name of culturally responsive teaching and critical pedagogy, to empower marginalized groups”; (b) hip hop as embedded within identity formation for some youth as it is a means “by which youth and young adults conceive of themselves, others, and the world around them”; and, (c) hip hop’s presence in higher education through offered courses and increased hip hop based research studies (pp.947-949).

Those who work within HHBE draw heavily upon hip hop studies which has a wide ranging focus including the historiography of hip hop (Chang, 2005), the aesthetics of hip hop (Chang, 2007; Krims, 2000; Rose, 1994b), the positioning of women in hip hop (Gaunt, 2006; Pough, 2004; Sharpley-Whiting, 2007) and the social and political context of hip hop (Asante, 2008; Collins, 2006; Kitwana, 2003, 2006; Perry, 2004; Rose, 2008). There is also a growing body of literature on the globalization of hip hop (Condry, 2006; Cooke & Lawrence, 2005) and the influence of non-black groups in hip hop (Flores, 2000; Tiongson, Valencia Gutierrez, & Gutierrez, 2006). These writings on globalization and non-black groups in hip hop work to complicate the canon of hip hop studies which has remained focused on the experience of black youth in the United States.

**HHBE and Student Identities**

Foundational to HHBE is a focus on student identity in relation to hip hop culture. This focus holds fast whether or not the study is set in schools or outside of schools, and there are those studies that focus exclusively on identity and hip
hop culture with only minimal interrogation of pedagogical practices. Here I briefly discuss HHBE research on hip hop youth and immigrant students negotiating the construction of identity in relation to hip hop. Studies on the linguistic practices of hip hop identified youth have been integral in creating a clearer picture of how students’ ways of negotiating identity within hip hop interacts with school expectations as mediated by language. Alim’s (2007) work in the States with students employing what he terms Hip hop Nation Language (HHNL), illustrates how students using HHNL are at a greater risk of discrimination when in official settings such as the school. Alim’s sociolinguistic work is in dialogue with others (Pennycook, 2007; Richardson, 2006; Sarkar & Allen, 2007; Sarker & Winer, 2006; Smitherman, 2000) who examine the richness of HHNL and the sociocultural positioning of its meanings and identities attached to its widespread global use. The connection between HHNL, an identity constructed within hip hop culture, and power imbalances in official settings is an area that deserves special attention from educators of hip hop youth. For instance, during one of the weekly sessions in the Chronicle Creations project, a discussion about the lack of employment opportunities began spontaneously, and one frequent comment was how the participants had to dress differently and talk differently from their usual linguistic practices to garner respect outside of the hip hop community. A participant, Ivan, was amused when he came to the university library to meet me for an interview and listened on in me asking a group of undergraduate students to vacate the room I had reserved for our interview. Ivan commented that it was cool I knew how to speak to them “properly” because that’s how you get what you want and he also laughed because if he had to tell them to leave he would have said it in “a hip hop way” but that probably would have got
him in trouble by his own estimation. Ivan’s dichotomy between speaking “properly” and speaking “hip hop” echoes Alim’s (2006) argument that HHNL faces a constant struggle of ‘linguistic supremacy’ in relation to Standard English which he reminds: “there is nothing standard about standard English” (p.59). This situation speaks to two of the tenets that Alim (2006) sees as integral to the HHNL:

Hip hop Nation Language is central to the identity and the act of envisioning an entity known as the Hip hop Nation… the fundamental aspect of the Hip hop Nation Language – and perhaps the most astonishing to some – is that it is central to the lifeworlds of the members of the Hip hop Nation and suitable and functional for all of their communicative needs…(pp.71-72).

Here Alim makes a point that is plain for the participants: they do not see the way they talk as just suitable for talking about hip hop, they perceive their language, HHNL, as one that functions in all situations. Given that HHNL is an embodiment of a constructions of identity in hip hop, when hip hop members such as the participants have to code-switch into Standard English they are engaging in language practices that conflict, and some times negate, their own ways of constructing their identity as a contributing and proud member of the hip hop nation. How education and the world after education marginalizes hip hop learners through policing language is central to the struggles shared by the participants in their daily hip hop lives.

Ibrahim’s (1999, 2004) and Forman’s (2005) work with immigrant and refugee students in Canada build on Alim’s work by highlighting the complexity of identification for immigrant students. This Canadian focus situates a black
Canadian immigrant identity against the hegemonic presence of black as it is reproduced in mainstream American media and hip hop media specifically. I spoke briefly of this Canadian immigrant “translated blackness” (Kelly, 2005) in chapter 1. A discussion of blackness in North America has implications for non-black students as well. Yon’s (2000) ethnographic work in an inner city Toronto high school displays the fluidity and contradictions of identity construction, many times in relation to constructions of blackness. One of Yon’s participant who grew up in Jamaica and then was moved to Toronto in his teens shares his thoughts on some of his black peers who are African immigrants:

I don’t really consider them Black either. Seriously. I see a lot of them can speak Italian. They can speak a lot of languages. They’re, like, dark on the outside but I guess we’re all distinguishable….For me, I see Black as being Jamaican…I guess it depends where they’re from that I will consider them Black (p.87).

Here we see the importance of language in not only how identity is constructed by oneself but also how identity is perceived by others. Similar to Trevor’s struggle with the boundaries of blackness, Yon shows how his participant Nina is frustrated as she is constantly being “read as black” although she sees herself as Spanish from Dominica (p.70). Many of the participants in Chronicle Creations are well situated within Yon’s contribution to the complexity of identity construction for diasporic students. Participants who immigrated to Montreal in their teens were familiar with hip hop from American imports into their home country and saw it as a vehicle through which to assert their kinship with an urban Canadian community. Forman (2005) makes a case that Somali youth arriving in
Canada are predisposed to what being black means in North America as a result of their exposure:

Somali youths quickly recognize that hip hop establishes many of the norms and values currently defining ‘authentic’ black identity among youths, and, moreover, they rapidly determine that these informal (that is, non-institutionally grounded) articulations of blackness are organized alternatively and often in radical opposition to the formally structured discourses of race and nation as they are communicated in the schools (p.16).

In chapter 6 I pick up on the important assertion Forman makes about youth and their positioning of hip hop in relation to formal education. Whether or not this multicultural and transnational environment is specifically emblematic of the Canadian hip hop community is interesting especially considering some recent debates on the ‘multicultural-ness’ of hip hop occurring in the States (Rose, 2008). While Yon’s work is not commonly included in HHBE literature, the richness of his data on youth identity construction in relation to race, language, and gender benefits any study concerned with issues of blackness, identity, and hip hop.

*Critical Hip hop Pedagogies*

HHBE encompasses research on education both inside and outside formal education as hip hop based programs can often be found in community learning centres. Petchauer (2009) presents the most comprehensive review of Hip hop Based Education to date. Much of the work in HHBE within schools draws upon critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework. Some such as Akom (2009) and Williams (2007) specifically build upon Freire’s work in their hip hop pedagogies. But how would we define a critical hip hop pedagogy? Hill (2009) provides the
following description of hip hop pedagogies: “[they] reflect the various ways that hip hop culture authorizes particular values, truth claims, and subject positions while implicitly or explicitly contesting others” (p.120). Akom’s (2009) description of critical hip hop pedagogy bears resemblance to critical pedagogy at large:

1) The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of oppression; 2) Challenging traditional paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; 3) The centrality of experiential knowledge of students of color; 4) The commitment to social justice; and finally 5) A transdisciplinary approach (p.52).

Akom noticeably privileges race over other identity affiliations such as class, gender, or sexuality which is emblematic of his focus on Critical Race Theory. Multiliteracy is also an essential component of a critical hip hop pedagogy as hip hop uses a variety of texts – clothing, lyrics, graffiti, dance – to create meaning for youth. Parmar’s (2009) work with KRS-One’s lyrics and teachings exemplifies the pedagogical purpose and impact of hip hop texts. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2008) and Hill (2009) both use hip hop lyrics as text within school curricula similar to Parmar’s treatment of KRS-One. Indeed educators and educational researchers often focus on the written texts of hip hop as a subject of analysis. As mentioned in chapter 1, this dissertation adds to HHBE by supplementing the plentiful landscape of research on the texts of hip hop with a study on the “grounded and lived experiences” of those who are producing those hip hop texts (Petchauer, 2009).
However, hip hop pedagogies do more than substitute canonical Eurocentric texts with a new canon of socially conscious hip hop texts. Performance or cultural production is sometimes evoked within critical hip hop pedagogies. Low’s (forthcoming) work with a local slam poet and high school English teacher puts at centre the notion that students are cultural producers, not only receptacles of hip hop culture. Hip hop culture seems to be a hot bed of cultural production for youth with its many aesthetic vehicles of expression. Two of Gustavson’s (2007) participants in his in-depth ethnography of three students who are “learning on their own terms” are creating within a hip hop framework, with one being a turntablist and the other student steeped in graffiti writing. Gustavson (2007) demonstrates how his participants are learning through their communities of practice in hip hop and are developing alternative and ‘unsanctioned’ literacy practices through their cultural production in those hip hop communities. Although performance is not always embodied within critical hip hop pedagogy, it is a powerful tool for educators engaging hip hop as it encourages and values students’ contribution to hip hop culture. My own reading of Critical Hip hop Pedagogy asks educators and researchers to bring the cultural production dimension of hip hop, as opposed to just lyric analysis, back to the forefront as it is an existing powerful tool where praxis is embodied. This call to researching and teaching cultural production in hip hop can be more demanding given that it asks different tools than needed to do a textual analysis on a song; however I believe that within the realm of hip hop cultural production resides real pedagogical

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10 Turntablism is most closely related to the element of djing, but it is distinct in that turntablists make music using scratching techniques, while djs use scratching techniques to provide a musical background for the emcee or the breakdancers.
possibilities where reflection and action are combined in thoughtful ways which is in line with the social action component of critical pedagogy.

Thus taken from a range of researchers in HHBE, critical hip hop pedagogy can have many faces but there is a distinguishable set of practices between them. Drawing on the previous authors, I would define critical hip hop pedagogy as:

1. Rooted in hip hop culture while recognizing that its histories and ideologies are socially produced and at times must be challenged and re-worked.
2. Socially conscious of how hegemony operates within society, while paying particular attention to how hegemony and power operate within hip hop culture to marginalize populations it seeks to liberate.
3. Responsive to marginalization whether it be through structures of gender, class, race, religion, sexuality, or ability.
4. Culturally productive by encouraging learners to be producers of their own hip hop culture.
5. Inclusive of multiliteracies across forms of media, technology, and culture.
6. Cognizant of the complex ways that the researcher’s positioning affects research within the CHHP community.

My framework for CHHP bears similarity to Akom’s (2009) offering, but differs by explicitly expanding the sphere of inquiry from race to include other manifestations of difference and by its focus on performance and production which I identify as a possible means of praxis for hip hop youth and young adults.

This chapter set out the theoretical framework for my research with Chronicle Creations between the fields of critical pedagogy and cultural studies. I examined how both theories provide a language to deconstruct the processes of learning, production, and reproduction that occur within the participants’
engagement with the participatory filmmaking process and within the participants’
engagement with hip hop culture. I concluded this chapter with a look at the field
of Critical Hip hop Pedagogy and laid out my conceptual framework for what a
Critical Hip hop Pedagogy can strive to be. I drew upon existing frameworks and
added dimensions such as cultural production and research positioning which
became evident to me through my work with Chronicle. In the next chapter I focus
on the methodology of my research and address my positioning as an insider
within the urban hip hop community.
Collaborating with Chronicle Creations

In January 2008 I began a structured research collaboration with Montreal community production company Chronicle Creations, who on their website state they are committed to “helping youth make positive choices in their lives and to encourage, through writing and video, free and creative expression, respect and tolerance”. Chronicle is a youth media project organization whose past participatory media projects with youth include one which uses a mix of autobiography, documentary, and fiction in relation to “racism, gang violence, drugs, school and family issues” and another which tells the story of youth who have left school and chosen to return. Breaks and Beats, the title of the documentary at the centre of my research, represents a departure from Chronicle’s earlier work as it emphasizes both the participatory process and strives to create a professional product of television production quality. Chronicle attempts to blend a focus on participatory process with a focus on message throughout the documentary (Kim, 2007). The participants of Breaks and Beats were invited to take control of the documentary process by choosing their own focus for the documentary, deciding who and what to film in Montreal, and being in the documentary themselves as interviewers and as subjects.

From the beginning of the project the producers from Chronicle Creations were clear and adamant that this was not to be another youth video production that would not see a larger audience besides interested community partners. Fleetwood (2004) laments how typically youth media projects “… lack [of] attention and resources that are put into circulation and distribution complicates the fetishization
of the product, that is, the video within the collaborative process of youth-adult art making. Once the product has been realized, it both gains and loses value” (p.171). The producers consciously worked against this type of ‘fetishization’ of the documentary and made clear to the youth throughout the process that the goal was to bring the documentary to the small screen.

Chronicle primarily features the hip hop urban community, and thus uses rap, spoken word, or graffiti backdrops to convey this constant immersion in hip hop culture for Montreal youth. Their website speaks in terms of an ‘at-risk’ framework when referring to youth and frequently engages in a familiar inner city discourse that prominently displays a hip hop affiliation in many of their projects. The following excerpt is taken from their link to the hip hop documentary project that is the focus of this dissertation:

Set in the multi-cultural inner city of Montreal, we will tell you the stories of artists who have positive and uplifting messages and who understand Hip hop to be a source of expression for today’s youth. This documentary is about street-level storytelling, engaging both its teenage and adult audience with the inspiring narratives. Breaks and Beats Montreal gives sound and vision to the voice of people often misrepresented or left out of the media. Their stories are powerful tales of survival, using their creative talents and their words to overcome challenges that might have otherwise lead them down a path of violence.

_The Staff_

Marissa, the producer and founder of Chronicle Creations, has over a decade of social work in youth community settings in Montreal and encouraged my full participation in an effort to learn more about how Chronicle can improve
their work with urban youth. Integral to my acceptance as a participant-researcher within the documentary process was my approval by the documentary’s two producers and two youth coordinators. The team of producers and youth coordinators were hesitant to allow academic research collaboration with myself and my supervisor. The source of this hesitancy was never explicitly addressed by the staff; however it was apparent to me that it extended to the group of youth participants itself. I expand on how I worked to become part of the group later in chapter 3. The other producer was Pierre Michel who was responsible for the technical side of production. He is a Francophone from Marseilles with no ties to the hip hop community and culture, but strongly identified with an urban street experience. Pierre Michel’s presence was valued most for his technical input, so that for instance a typical question Pierre would pose is ‘would this concept work on camera?’ Unlike the wizards in McLaughlin et al.’s (1994) study or the critical hip hop educators who brought hip hop into the classroom and lecture hall (Akom, 2009; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Hill, 2009; Irizarry, 2009; Williams, 2009), neither producer claimed a hip hop affiliation nor identity; a familiar utterance was ‘we are learning from you’.

While both producers had no hip hop knowledge, both youth coordinators were black Montrealers who grew up with hip hop culture. Edwin and Roman were positioned as insiders in the urban community in Montreal who live and breathe hip hop culture, but neither worked as cultural producers of hip hop. Both coordinators worked at least once within media projects with either Marissa in one of her other community projects or with Chronicle Creations specifically. The responsibilities of Roman and Edwin extended from assisting the producers in the conceptual development of the documentary to working and acting as primary
contact for the youth. As well, their ability to interpersonally connect to the hip hop identified participants was highly valued by the producers and the participants. Many of the participants shared with me in interviews how they immediately felt a connection with Roman and Edwin and that this encouraged them to continue participating in the documentary. Thus the technical knowledge of producing the documentary such as camerawork, setting up microphones, and deciding how to best frame each shot, predominantly lay in the hands of the producers while the youth leaders were for the most part tasked with the interpersonal dimension of the project.

Having a staff member not only be able to make references to community happenings and draw upon community knowledge, but also to make the appropriate hip hop cultural references is extremely helpful in building and sustaining a connection to youth participants. The type of insider knowledge demonstrated by Roman and Edwin is highly valued in community based projects and in most cases is equally if not more essential to the success of community projects than the focus or objective of the process. However, Roman and Edwin’s role in the production of the documentary was less defined than that of the producers and the participants. Ultimately this lack of clarity led to conflict and confusion over who would do what in the documentary, between the producers and Roman and Edwin. Similar to the classroom, power is concentrated in specific roles in community projects in ways that can reproduce or challenge dominant structures of power.

_Pre-production Sessions_

Starting with a group of twenty and eventually coming down to thirteen participants, Chronicle Creations met regularly between January and April 2008 in
weekly workshop sessions where we brainstormed, researched, and finally created the foundation for the documentary. The format of the sessions went back and forth between (a) the staff addressing the group as a whole to transfer information, (b) the entire group having debates led by the youth coordinators, (c) small group conversations divided up by hip hop element (breaking, emceeing, graf-writing, and DJing). There was a total of 13 weekly pre-production sessions beginning in January 2008. At the first session over 20 people showed up, some who had been interviewed and selected by the staff in December 2007 and some who had come with a friend who had undergone the interview process. The sessions fluctuated between 18 and 13 participants, and eventually 13 participants made up what came to be the core of the sessions with one dropping out almost at the end of the sessions because of work related reasons. Each three hour session had a theme that the staff had generated, for example women and hip hop. A complete listing of the themes by week is provided in Appendix B. Within each session a mix of writing activities, group work, brainstorming, storyboarding, and debating took place. There was one week where a guest speaker was brought in from CBC Radio to speak on interview techniques, but aside from that there were no external participants in the session. The participants often sidetracked the staff’s plan for the session with lengthy debates on hip hop issues such as ‘who is the best emcee’. The sessions took place in the same room each week in a downtown Montreal community centre on a Wednesday night between six to nine. Many participants came straight from work and ate dinner during the sessions from the food Chronicle Creations provided. The room was set up with long tables formed in a rectangle around which the participants and I sat, while the staff either sat in the middle of the rectangle or stood at the front of the room. The environment was
bilingual as Pierre Michel is Francophone and there were three Francophone participants. Of the three Francophone participants one was fairly comfortably speaking in English while the other two strongly preferred communicating in French and never spoke in English in the larger group. From the Anglophone participants, the range of comfort with French differed. Marissa frequently prompted for English speakers to translate to French after their comment. This was often met by frustration – by the Francophone and Anglophone youth alike – because everyone in the room understood English.

Each weekly session I made complete audio recordings varying in range from three hours to three and a half hours. I did not stay with one smaller group throughout the course of the sessions, instead I joined a different group each time attempting to give each group equal ‘air time’. During the sessions I took an event log where I marked down the time of conversations I thought would be relevant to my study to ease my finding them later. As well I participated throughout the sessions both in the larger group conversations as well as the smaller group conversations. At times the level of my participation impeded my ability to take rigorous event logs the more I became involved in a conversation.

When the sessions were officially over, I stopped recording. However many participants noted that the most interesting and engaging conversations happened informally between the participants after sessions, conversations sometimes lasting half an hour to an hour in length. The producers were rarely part of these informal gatherings while the youth coordinators were often at the centre of the debates. I myself participated occasionally, but not always. In between weekly sessions, the group remained cohesive through constant emails from Marissa and phone calls from Roman. Each week there was an assignment for the
next week such as ‘research five people in your element in Montreal you would like to interview and map out a possible interview with them’. As well later on in the weekly sessions, groups began to meet on their own to approach members of the hip hop community they wanted to interview and also for some primary filming sessions with the staff. In these ways, although I limit my data to three hour sessions, my reflections, and the interviews, the participants’ involvement in the participatory filmmaking process extended far beyond the three hours spent in the community centre’s room.

*Bringing Breaks and Beats to the Screen*

In the summer of 2008 three participants were added to the team by the producers because of an increasing need for Francophone representation. This need directly related to the challenge of making the documentary marketable to Francophone television stations. After the weekly sessions ended, I continued my correspondence with the group with varying degrees of success. Five of the participants continue to email me back and forth responding to questions and carrying on debates we had in the sessions. Marissa became my primary point of contact mostly because she responded more frequently than the participants. The participants continue to work with Chronicle in the pre-production stages, and as of the summer of 2009 they have received an offer from a television network to produce the show tied to the condition that Chronicle can raise additional funds for the project.

Throughout the weekly sessions I undertook three main sources of data collection: (a) audio recordings of the three hour long sessions while creating a listening guide simultaneously to help for future retrieval of important conversations, (b) collecting any print data that the producers gave out to the
students, and (c) field notes and journal reflections written immediately after each session outlining my main frustrations, excitements, and general thoughts on the three hours prior. After the weekly sessions ended I added four more sources of data: (d) one on one interview transcripts with eight of the youth who were able to meet with me for a semi-structured interview during the summer of 2008, (e) notes taken from various film shoots I attended with the producers and youth such as a breakdance competition and an after school hip hop literacy program, (f) email correspondence with the youth and producers where I continued conversations that had begun in interviews, and lastly (g) bi-monthly meetings with the producer to keep current with the status of the documentary. All sources of data collection were shared with the producers, and all interview transcripts were shared with the youth.

Searching for Themes

Following the weekly sessions and interviews, I analysed the transcripts of interviews, workshops, and performances using NVIVO 8 software to aid in organizing and coding the hours of transcripts and audio recordings. I also draw on email communications from participants and staff. The final source of data is my own reflections and notes from meetings with the producers from the time when the sessions stopped.

I began the coding process without predetermined codes and looked for emerging and recurring themes that came up in the weekly sessions and in the individual interviews. While I was open to seeing what themes emerged most frequently I did know that I was searching for talk around education and learning which eventually became a coding group. The five coding themes that emerged — authenticity, education, gender, the learning process, and the participatory process
- with were the ones with the most substantial amount of entries. I interpreted ‘substantial’ as a coding theme that was mentioned in three or more weekly sessions and with more than ten entries under the coding theme. Three of these themes – authenticity, education, and gender – emerged clearly for me as the participants spoke candidly and directly about issues of authenticity, education, and gender. A second reason they emerged clearly from the data was that there weekly sessions organized around each, see Appendix B for a list of weekly themes generated by Marissa. The other two coded themes – the learning process and the participatory process – did not emerge from the data in the same way as the other three mentioned above. This was because the themes of ‘learning’ and ‘participation’ were not themes that participants directly spoke of in the weekly sessions and interviews; rather they were themes that participants spoke ‘around’. For example the coding theme of ‘participation’ was not one that I initially had in mind when I approached the data. However while reading over the transcripts of the weekly sessions I saw a set of ‘talk’ developing around how the participants were reacting to the educators’ approach to participation in the filmmaking experience. The coding theme of ‘learning’ was one that emerged from talk around how participants were teaching each other about hip hop and how they shared how they each grew into their own set of hip hop knowledge surrounding their art.

I first approached the data by reading my weekly reflections to remind myself of the happenings of each week’s meetings. These reflections were valuable because the listening guide only referenced points of conversation and did not speak to the larger process that was evolving over the three weeks. On the other hand my reflections conveyed a sense of process and journey as they showcased my feelings towards our progress as a group towards creating a viable
product. After reading my reflections, I read the corresponding listening guide and took note of conversations and debate that sparked the most interest by the participants such as the debate on women in hip hop which I examine in chapter 5. I also began to take note of recurring conversations throughout the weeks, such as the conversations surrounding authenticity which I discuss in chapter 4. I knew that I wanted to glean data about the participatory process and this I gathered from the listening guides as well as I noted each week how the staff and coordinators navigated each session from introducing the weekly theme to setting out the week’s activities to concluding with the week’s homework.

The interviews I originally intended to both provide an in-depth portrait of each participant and to get participants’ feedback on the participatory process. I transcribed the interviews in their entirety and sent the interview transcripts to participants for confirmation and clarification. I heard back from five of the eight interviewed participants and only one asked to modify the transcript because he thought the ‘ums’ and ‘likes’ made him sound unprofessional. Most of the biographical information from the participants is taken from the interviews and is featured in chapter 4. The feedback portion was also meant to assist me in providing information for Marissa and the staff on how their participatory process structure was received and how it could be improved. Participants were candid about their feelings towards the participatory process even though they knew their words would be shared anonymously with Marissa. There was some conflict with Marissa as she thought she would have direct access to the interview transcripts or audio, however my confidentiality agreement with the participants forbade from doing so. The most I could do was to compile the feedback from the participants and share these with her stripped of names. However although I intended on using
the interviews for biographical data and data on participatory process, they emerged as a space where participants could counter-narrate the thoughts they expressed during the sessions. Participants also provided counter-narration to debates in the sessions that they did not respond to at the time. Thus I began to re-read the interviews not only for biography and participatory process, but also for the themes that had emerged from the weekly sessions, namely gender, education, learning, and authenticity.

When I had marked my listening guides and interviews for the time points that corresponded to the themes of authenticity, education and learning, participatory process, and gender, I began to transcribe the sections of the weekly sessions around those points. Since the interviews were already transcribed, I waited until I had selective transcriptions from the weekly sessions and then proceeded to code both sets of data for the themes mentioned above. Surrounding the themes of education and learning it emerged that participants were talking about many different ideas. Some of the time they were speaking of the institutional construction of education such as schools and universities, some of the time they were speaking of educational processes within hip hop culture such as learning how to do graffiti, and some of the time they were reacting to the learning process of the documentary. Consequently I separated education and learning as two distinct themes.

Once I had my five themes coded in NVIVO 8, I took each coding category separately and looked for sub-groups within each theme. For example I found when participants spoke of authenticity they sometimes spoke exclusively through class and other times exclusively in relation to what is authentic in each element of graffiti, dance, MCing, or DJing. With the sub-groups within each code I created
coding trees within NVIVO so that I could easily access specific statements within each code. In the end I had the following codes and their accompanying sub-set of codes: (a) authenticity – in relation to class, their respective hip hop artistic elements, style, and race; (b) education – in relation to their attitudes towards attainment and to how they perceived hip hop as an educational community; (c) participatory process – in relation to the staff’s motivation and execution of participation and how the participants responded; (d) gender – in relation to gender roles assigned in hip hop culture both male and female and how gender roles were negotiated in the process; (e) learning – in relation to participants’ resistance towards learning and pedagogical strategies of the animators. I use the codes as frameworks for chapter 4 where I explore authenticity, chapter 5 where I explore the participatory process, and chapter 6 where I explore education and learning. The theme of gender is treated in both chapters 4 and 5.

The Insider and Outsider Dance

Marissa, Pierre Michel, Roman, and Edwin were hesitant or cautious to accept a researcher within their carefully constructed environment of what began as twenty participants from around Montreal. I understood their apprehension to be linked to concerns of how well I would fit with the youth participants, my willingness to participate fully in the documentary making, and my willingness to share data with the leaders when requested. As such, I felt very much on trial for the first few encounters and frequently displayed my youth and hip hop credentials to gain access to the group and the leaders.

In many ways my own life history was an ameliorating force in my research relationship with the youth and staff at Chronicle Creations. As Gustavson (2007) shares his own experiences researching urban hip hop youth,
“An adult researcher can be a ‘double outsider’ in terms of age and lack of understanding particular ways of being youth” (p.163). Unlike Gustavson, I was aligned with the participants in two significant ways: first I was not far removed from the participants’ ages and second I was familiar with their ‘ways of being youth’ as their youth was constructed around hip hop culture as is mine own. Consequently the research process became an exercise in critical insider research where I actively drew upon my own experiences and knowledge to construct a unique research relationship with the youth and staff. My style of dress, speech, knowledge of hip hop culture, connection to the local hip hop scene, and my shared experiences as a lower class second generation immigrant from a single parent family, all served to concretize my insider status among the youth. I constantly offered any help that I could to the documentary in multiple ways. Specifically I contacted Montreal hip hop artists I had previously worked with, provided ongoing feedback to the producers, and offered my own knowledge and perspectives on hip hop culture. In some cases I took on a more active role such as in my involvement with the DJ group. The group had two members whose knowledge of DJing was more based on the technical skills involved in production rather than knowledge of the history and current landscape of hip hop DJs. Though not an expert, I was considerably more familiar with this aspect of DJ culture, history, and knowledge than the two members and worked with them as often as I could towards the end of the documentary.

Insider research is often employed by new scholars researching youth music and style-based cultures (Bennett, 2002, 2003; Hodkinson, 2005). An

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11 Shildrick and Macdonald (2006) point to the surge of insider subculture research as a contributing factor to the homogeneity of middle to upper-middle class subculture literature and lack of growth in research on lower income or working class youth cultures.
insider is someone who shares some common culture or experience with their participants and can also be described as having “initial cultural proximity” or “initial subjective proximity” to their participants (Hodkinson, 2005). An insider can be someone that shares a similar ethnic or cultural background, however in my case it was a subcultural background in hip hop and as well my shared urban immigrant working class culture that connected me to the participants (McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman 1994). This insider approach to subculture is associated more with current subculture research and stands in contrast to the prolific research on youth and style based culture that came out of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) where studies were largely performed by outsiders such as Willis (1978) in Profane Culture: “Although by no means fully accepted I think I was a guy who was known to be ‘ok’, if a little grey and detached. A lot of the time I was simply unnoticed” (p.12). Going unnoticed as a “covert” insider was not an option in my involvement with Chronicle Creations as full participation was a mandate by the educators before they would consent to any observation (Hilbert, 1980). In this way my participant observation automatically fell in the spectrum of complete participant rather than complete observer in the typology of participant observation (Carspecken, 2004; Denzin, 1978; Spradley, 1982). The outsider researcher of youth culture continues past the work of the CCCS and often relies on going from “a bad outsider to a good insider” which usually involves an element of contributing skills, time, or resources to the participants or organization being researched (Dimitriadis, 2003; Pardue, 2005).

Within critical hip hop pedagogy there is a significant number of researchers working from a similar type of insider position as myself (Alim, 2007; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Hill, 2008; Parmar, 2009; Petchauer, 2009;
Viola, 2006). While some acknowledge how their insider position drew them to the field of critical hip hop pedagogy (Alim, 2007; Hill, 2008; Parmar, 2009) by providing biographical glimpses by means of an introduction and others not affiliated with hip hop culture address the insider/outsider dynamic in epilogues (Dimitriadis, 2003; Gustavson, 2007), there has been no close theoretical or methodological examination of insider research to date in hip hop studies. Here I situate the practice of insider research historically within qualitative urban research and attempt to map out what is at stake for the growing field of insider researchers in critical hip hop studies. I argue that given that the majority of critical hip hop studies are being done by insiders who have grown up in the hip hop generation and have similar urban experiences as our participants, the complex ways in which our insider positions affect our research, from entering the field to interpreting the data, need to be brought to the forefront of our methodologies instead of treating our insider positions as biographical annotations.

The Art of Being Noticed

On commencing the research, I was keen to enter a field, that is, to be a real academic with a clipboard, a firm notion of what I was about, and a self-confidence that would no doubt emanate from my newly acquired status (Hobbs, 1993, p.47).

Using Hobbs’ words, my transitioning of ‘entering a field’ with my ‘newly acquired status’ is at the heart of the issues concerning insider research with youth cultures. My newfound status as a researcher invigorated me as I entered the room of participants for the first time. As well, I felt confident in my insider knowledge

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12 Hodkinson (2005) offers the most comprehensive examination of insider research in the field of subculture studies as he examines his role as an insider in goth culture.
stemming from my hip hop background and my urban pedigree that in many ways paralleled the socio-economic and multicultural second generation immigrant experience of many of the participants. Walking into the room to meet the participants I was proud of these two hats I was wearing – on the one hand I was sure that they would see me as “one of them” and the other hand I was equally sure they would see me as “one of them who is now doing research”; for me the two were inseparable and equally visible.

However the participants initially only saw me as researcher and not as someone who could be an insider with similar inner city knowledge and hip hop background. In retrospect, it is clear how the participants came to see me as researcher first and peer second as from the beginning I was introduced as a doctoral student doing research at McGill University. Within the group of youth it was commonly commented throughout the filmmaking process that McGill University was associated with predominantly Anglophone upper class students. Two participants frequently expressed that they would have preferred if I ‘represented’ Concordia University which they associated with a multicultural lower or working class student body. As well I was given preferential treatment in that I was called on to address the group personally and this further firmed up my position as someone with more power in the group than the participants.

In week six, Marissa asked me to speak to the group on Internet research because she was dissatisfied with the quality of research they were producing. It was the only time I was asked to ‘teach’ the group and was set apart from the participants as a researcher. Although this only lasted 15 minutes, it was extremely uncomfortable as I had worked hard for the six weeks prior to fit into the group. But perhaps the most polarizing moment was during the first hours of week one
when I was called on to explain the consent forms. The explaining of the consent forms further evidenced that our relationship had institutional dimensions and that I was not - and could be - just ‘one of the youth’. An interviewer from Fine and Weis’ (1998) study The Unknown City relays a similar experience with the consent form: “The informed consent form forced us to confront and contend with the explicitly differential relationships between the respondents and ourselves; it became a crude tool – a conscience – to remind us of our accountability and position. Stripping us of our illusions of friendship and reciprocity…” (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000, pp.113-4). In many ways my status as a doctoral student attending what they perceived to be an affluent university erased, or at least conflicted with, my hip hop status in the eyes of the participants. This erasure or conflict is linked to many of the participants’ attitudes towards higher education attainment and their understanding of how they construct identity in hip hop; this will be explored in chapter 6.

Thus I actively fought against my construction as an outsider researcher and pulled my hip hop, immigrant, and lower socio-economic status to the forefront. This active construction of identity crystallized during an ice breaker activity on the first day of the documentary workshop. Twenty hip hop youth artists gathered in the community centre room along with the two youth coordinators and the two producers from Chronicle Creations. We crowded around an empty space, creating a circle standing shoulder to shoulder. Besides a few breakdancers who had heard of each other and some members of the same graffiti crew, none of the youth had met before. The ice breaking task was to perform an action while saying your name and repeat the actions and names of those who went before you.
As I stood there I realized quickly this was the time to break free of my outsider research hat and make room for my insider hip hop affiliation to be noticed. Shy was not an option and I felt with each passing moment that the youth became more suspicious of this outside researcher who was not mentioned to them during their interview to participate in this documentary. When my turn arrived I took a breath and went into an energetic chest pump and booty shake in the middle of the circle. In this moment I established myself as someone in the group who was not afraid of taking chances and made it clear that I was not going to blend into the background as a researcher.

*Theorizing Insider Knowledge and Status*

Bennett (2002, 2003) positions insider research as a recent phenomenon whose closest ties are to subculture research, while Hodkinson (2005) provides a broader historically situated discussion of insider research in fields besides subculture research. Significantly, Hodkinson draws our attention to Merton’s (1972) “Insider doctrine” which considers insider research primarily in the field of black studies. Merton’s work provides a more complex problematization of insider knowledge that could further inform Bennett’s attempts to critique insider research:

In its [insider knowledge’s] strong form, the claim is put forward as a matter of epistemological principle that particular groups in each moment of history have *monopolistic access* to particular kinds of knowledge. In the weaker, more empirical form, the claim holds that some groups have *privileged access*, with other groups also being able to acquire that knowledge for themselves but at greater risk and cost (p.11).
Merton follows by discussing the ‘strong form’ of insider knowledge in relation to black studies, that is only black historians can truly understand black history and so on down the list of academic disciplines. He arrives at the conclusion that when we adopt this strong form then we reach a paralysis across all disciplines where only women can understand women and so on. This ‘strong form’ of insider knowledge essentializes individuals based on one aspect of their identity and does not account for our multiplicities of identity. Fontana and Frey (2005) identify the mistake of female interviewers seeing themselves as insiders with their women interviewees, whereas in many cases the female interviewers were seen as outsiders because of their class or ethnicity and their insider gender was of no help to them at all. Similarly although I have insider status with the participants because of my hip hop knowledge, on many occasions I had to externalize my insider-ness because of my perceived outsider status as a woman (in a group largely of men) and as a person perceived of upper-middle class status which conflicts with the ‘from-the-ghetto’ mentality of hip hop. As Merton notes, “sociologically, there is nothing fixed about the boundaries separating Insiders from Outsiders. As situations involving different values arise, different statuses are activated and the lines of separation shift” (p.28).

Most significantly my status as a doctoral student led the participants to at times question the authenticity of my insider hip hop status. My experience runs directly contrary to Hodkinson’s (2005) insider research experience with Goth culture where he identifies his higher education status as compatible with values in Goth culture. This compatibility does not easily translate to hip hop culture. I pro-actively worked against this ‘non-hip hop’ positioning that I felt that was being ascribed upon me to shed any misconceptions associated with a researcher from
McGill as uptight, uncool, and not to be trusted. One of my personal objectives in the research process was to model the fluidity of identity and to create space for stories of constructing identity in hip hop that make room for higher education goals. While I strove to achieve that objective, I found myself at times trying to figure out which part of me was urban hip hop and which part of me was doctoral student. Hall in an interview with Chen (1996) speaks of a similar identity project in relation to his diasporic identity:

Having been prepared by the colonial education, I knew England from the inside. But I’m not and never will be ‘English’. I know both [Jamaica and England] places intimately, but I am not wholly of either place. And that’s exactly the diasporic experience, far away enough to experience the sense of exile and loss, close enough to understand the enigma of an always-postponed ‘arrival’ (p.490).

It is important to note that an absolute outsider or absolute insider does not exist as we simultaneously occupy insider and outsider roles. Hall’s statement about how he moves inside and outside of his Englishness and his Jamaican-ness bears similarity to how I simultaneously am part of an urban community and a doctoral student community.

*Interviewing as an Insider*

I was never either an absolute insider or outsider throughout the research process and new challenges to my construction of insider/outsider came with each stage of research. When the pre-production phase neared its end my participant-observer role slowly phased out in exchange for that of an interviewer. With this new role I was faced with a dilemma of deciding how I would approach the interview process. Given that my insider position was constructed both from my
interest in hip hop but also my involvement with the documentary, I was unsure if and how I should strive for a neutral interviewer stance. The interview, much like observation, is a method where traditionally neutrality is prized so as not to affect the behaviour, response, action of the participant (Creswell, 2008). Fontana and Frey (2005) argue that the prizing of neutrality in interviews is a positivist construct and that what they term ‘empathetic interviewing’ allows the researcher to explicitly take a stance within the interview. In this way “interviewing is not merely the neutral exchange of asking questions and getting answers” but rather it is a process that is “contextually bound and mutually created story – the interview” (p.696). For me this was a drastic departure from the neutral stance engrained in my research understanding and it definitely showed in the first interviews where I awkwardly shifted back and forth from the traditional neutral interviewer to just being myself and explicitly addressing my insider knowledge and experience.

In the end I committed to moving away from a neutral stance and to an empathetic interviewer as advocated by Fontana and Frey in an effort to maintain the relationship of equality and respect fostered between me and my co-participants in the documentary. It was also a different experience for the participants as the interviews took place in my office at the university and thus my status as a doctoral student was obvious. However by this time I had worked closely with the youth for almost six months and they approached my higher education status with curiosity instead of suspicion as in our first meeting. Each interview had an ease that would not have been there if I had stuck to a position of neutrality. I used the interviews to allow the participants focussed time to voice their stories of coming into hip hop, growing out of hip hop, and also how they experienced the pre-production sessions. Some times the interviews were full of
dramatic stories familiar to the urban youth narrative and some times the
interviews recounted mundane details of their lives. Yet as Fine et al. (2000) urge,
I strive to bring those mundane tellings into my analysis as much as I do the ‘great
stories’. By bringing the mundane into my re-telling of their lives and also into
how I construct my insider position, I work against creating people who are “flat
caricatures” based on stereotypes of urban hip hop youth (Fine, 1994).

Challenges to Insider Research

Youth culture theorists Hodkinson and Bennett have recently called for a
methodological critique of insider research. In Bennett’s (2002) words: “although
this approach is now commonly applied, particularly among younger researchers,
there is currently an absence of critical debate concerning the methodological
justification for the use of insider knowledge in this area of sociological research”
(p.452). I agree with Bennett that there is a common acceptance that insider
research benefits the researcher and participants, while its possible negative effects
are rarely addressed in a comprehensive manner. This uncritical acceptance of
insiderness is echoed in community youth programming as youth workers with
insider knowledge are often cited as the essential ingredient in successful youth
programming (Dimitriadis, 2003; McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994).

Gregory’s (2008) treatment of her insider status as a slam poet in her multi-
city research on slam poetry exemplifies the typical acknowledgement of insider
positionality: “My ‘insider’ status placed me in an enviable position in terms of
knowledge of and access to these scenes, yet it also inevitably raised a number of
concerns” (p.65). In the three accounts of Gregory’s work (2007a, 2007b, 2008)
she only briefly addresses a drawback to insider status: “It can be tough trying to
see aspects of your life as research data; sifting out what is noteworthy and
distinctive from amongst the familiar features of your world” (Gregory, 2007b). Moore (2003) writes of the benefits of her insider status researching club goers, “…my own youth became crucial, since I ‘don’t look like an academic researcher’ … aiding the processes of trust building” (p.152). Both Gregory (2007a, 2007b, 2008) and Moore (2003) assume that they are generally the ‘same’ as their participants. Merton (1972) explains how this simplified conception of insider knowledge can be problematic as it “assumes total coincidence between social position and individual perspectives…there is a tendency for, not a full determination of, socially patterned differences in the perspectives, preferences, and behaviour of people variously located in the social structure” (p.27). In neither Gregory nor Moore are we privy to the ways in which they fell out of the dominant constructs of their respective subcultures. For Gregory and Moore only their researcher status contributes to their ‘outsider-ness’, otherwise they characterize themselves as absolute insiders. Access is usually seen as a prime benefit from insider research, yet over time if insider research continues to grow in youth studies we may see a concentration of research in certain youth cultures while witnessing a decline in others that may be harder to access once a researcher has left a lower economic status. In my own research, the fact that I was not a producer of hip hop culture and the age difference of five to ten years between myself and the youth both contributed to ways in which I was different to the youth. Specifically the age difference came into play often as hip hop is a culture where specific moments or expressions of hip hop change frequently with time. Thus in many ways the participants saw me as ‘old school’ in my musical tastes and knowledge but as hip hop prizes its past, this old school status always led to increased credibility.
Varela (1999) refers to breakdowns in our microworlds and microidentities as the moments “that are the source of the autonomous and creative side of living cognition…it is during breakdowns that the concrete is born” (p.11). Thus by ignoring the complexity of their identity construction, insider researchers do injustice to their own fluidity of identity and the complexity of their own subcultures. Hip hop is a culture of contradictions and in a room of fifteen hip hop-identified youth, while there existed common themes, ideologies, histories, and experiences that bound us together, there were just as many themes, ideologies, histories, and experiences that tore us apart. When we move towards research that does justice to this type of cultural complexity we can be sure that we are moving away from the type of research that one-dimensionalizes youth as truants, violent kids, or apathetic teenagers.

Blurring the Hyphen

Fine’s (1994) conceptualization of ‘working the hyphen’ has become a useful tool for many urban youth qualitative researchers. Working the hyphen represents a move away from the positivist notion that objectivity can be achieved, and is desirable, for researchers. This stands in contrast to how positivist quantitative research works hard to steer clear of the Hawthorn Effect, which Carspecken (2004) defines as “The effect a researcher has on the events she wishes to study” (p.52). Instead when we work the hyphen we work to make explicit our role as researchers with our participants and to view the research process as simultaneously implicating the social processes we seek to study, rather than viewing the research process as a sanitizing endeavour that models laboratory type conditions. In Fine’s (1994) words:
By *working the hyphen*, I mean to suggest that researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations. I mean to invite researchers to see how these ‘relationships between’ get us ‘better data, limit what we feel free to say, expand our minds and constrict our mouths, engage us in intimacy and seduce us into complicity, make us quick to interpret and hesitant to write. Working the hyphen means creating occasions for researchers and informants to discuss what is, and is not, ‘happening between,’ within the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom, and with what consequence (p.72).

Thus the project of working the hyphen is in line with a critical approach to research as conceptualized by Kincheloe and McLaren (2005). I summarize Kincheloe and McLaren’s comprehensive contribution to the current objectives of critical research as follows: critical research incorporates a complex understanding of (a) power and ideology, (b) meaning as negotiated and relational, (c) capitalist systems, (d) language, (e) privilege, (f) a questioning of common sense, (g) the subversive and diverse ways that oppression operates, (h) multifacetedness of identity thus one can be oppressed economically but privileged racially, and finally (i) the recognition that traditional research is bound to the reproduction of marginalisation and oppression. Critical researchers who work the hyphen devote considerable time to situating themselves epistemologically before addressing methods of inquiry. As a researcher of urban youth who grew up as an urban youth, I ask ‘who am I to know these youth’, ‘who am I to write about these youth’, and ‘what effect will this research have on youth’? Research on youth has
largely framed youth as problematic or troubled (Bennett, 2002; Best, 2007; Cieslik, 2003; Hodkinson, 2005).

Working the hyphen is easier said than done as I have alluded to in the previous brief discussion of the consent form and how it serves to remind of the power differential that is inherent within the research relationship. For me working the hyphen as an insider researcher came to be more akin to ‘blurring the hyphen’ as I negotiated my multiple identities as hip hop follower, doctoral student, second generation immigrant, person from a lower income background, member of generation Y, and as a person on the verge of leaving a lower income background for a career in a professional field. I choose the word ‘blur’ because as an insider at times the fictional hyphen that separated myself from my participants was difficult to see. For example, within the team structure I was not positioned as a staff member and consequently was positioned as a participant as I sat with the participants, the staff addressed me as a participant, and I was expected to do the homework as the participants did. Aside from the time I was called upon to talk about tips on Internet research, I did not share in the staff’s power of directing the flow of weekly meetings or deciding upon the week’s themes. As well I shared many of the same hip hop cultural markers with the rest of the participants and other cultural references to such as use of FaceBook and MySpace which the producers often remarked that they were learning from us. The hyphen represents the threshold between the researcher and the participant. In insider research, the hyphen not only refers to the relationship between myself and the participant, but also between my two selves as a lower income urban hip hop youth and as an emerging professional as a doctoral student.
One source of data where this blurring became most manifest was in my personal reflections that I wrote after each session. In these reflections I expressed how the conversations of the day made me feel; at times I dwelled on one event that occurred during the session and others were more general reflections on the theme of the particular session. Many times my reflections were highly charged lengthy pieces of writing that expressed my frustration with my perception of the youths’ understanding of what it means to be hip hop. As I reviewed my reflections alongside the interviews and session transcripts it became clear that I was frustrated because they were not experiencing hip hop as I had, as I do. I had mistakenly assumed, much like Gregory and Moore, that there was a singular correct experience of hip hop culture. I had assumed that my insider knowledge was the best insider knowledge. Hill (2008) and Williams (2009) remark that they similarly thought they had the best hip hop knowledge as seen through careful choice of songs they used with their students. In Hill’s (2008) study, one of his students remarks that he is trying to teach them what he thinks is the best or ‘good’ hip hop by exposing them to certain songs and limiting the presence of others. In my case, I would often try to work against the participants’ prizing of style as a means of authenticity because I felt that participants’ over-valued the need for a specific hip hop look constructed from specific hip hop gear such as shoes, baseball caps, and t-shirts. In my reflections I was often frustrated by their fixation on style because I felt it limited and commercialized constructions of identity in hip hop. However with time I re-engaged with the data on style by trying to understand why the participants prized their aesthetic constructions so fiercely instead of dismissing their preoccupation as commercialization.
Limits of Insider-ness

Even if one possesses ‘strong insider knowledge’ through shared ethnic background, socio economic status, age, cultural background, and any other characteristics, the hyphen will continue to exist despite insider status. Throughout the research process there has been an explicit and implicit sense of partnership and mutual help with myself and the educators. This type of collaborative research or ‘barter’ research relationship is typical of research with out-of-school educational organizations (Pardue, 2004). Notably, this sense of collaboration became less manifest in my relationship with the youth, which speaks to the struggle of working through inherent structures of power in a learning environment. During the four month period, the educators often turned to me for suggestions on how the sessions were going. When I shared with Marissa that I wrote my thoughts on each weekly session, she requested to read them weekly. Initially I was conflicted as some of my weekly reflections showed my frustration with how the producers and coordinators were guiding the documentary process. This type of sustained collaboration has not come to fruition with the youth as we have fallen into a relationship where they share events with me or answer my questions but rarely interact on a deeper level. Thus although I am an insider in many ways in this project, my status as researcher continues to affect my interactions with the youth, the coordinators, and the producers.

In this chapter I described my research relationship with Chronicle Creations and how I approached the multiple sources of data from the interviews, weekly sessions, and my personal reflections. I also worked through my positioning as an insider researcher of urban hip hop culture and as a participant-observer throughout the documentary process. I attempted to map out the multiple
ways that insider-ness affects the research relationship and how the fluidity of insider-ness flows throughout the research process. Now that I have set out my theoretical foundations in chapter 2 and my methodological foundations in chapter 3, I present the participants and how they position themselves in the hip hop community in chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4
HIP HOP STATE(S) OF MIND

Hip hop culture can be described as an emerging worldview among adults and youth born after 1965. This worldview is comprised of sharing beliefs, practices, and language all tied together by a common appreciation for the urban aesthetic. Hip hop culture shares at least two important characteristics. First is the urban youth aesthetic, which is perhaps the most easily recognizable aspect of hip hop culture because it is expressed through music, clothing, language, and art. More than simply rap music and graffiti art, the urban youth aesthetic refers to visual and artistic expression of hip hop culture…Second is urban youth experience, which is often shaped by economic isolation, poverty, and a struggle to ‘make it out’ of the trappings of urban ghettos (Ginwright, 2004, pp.31-32).

I open this chapter with a definition of hip hop culture that is representative of how hip hop is conceptualized in academic circles. Ginwright’s definition is neither definitive nor exhaustive, but rather it is a jumping off point from which to delve into how the participants define hip hop through their commitments, style, and art. In this chapter, I introduce the participants through comments and stories shared in interviews, filming sessions, and pre-production sessions. I do this in order to unpack some of the competing elements of what I refer to when I refer to participants identifying with hip hop culture. It is necessary to understand what participants mean when they say “I am hip hop” so that we can understand how hip hop culture affects how they negotiate their identities as young adults. Taken together the portraits in this chapter work to uncover what constructing identities in hip hop entails for young adults and what might a hip hop ideology look like.
Throughout the chapter we see evidence of the familiar contradictions within hip hop culture dealing with issues of gender, race, and education (Alim, 2006; Hill, 2008; Rose, 2008), but we also see how the participants intricately re-work their identity construction in hip hop in the face of the challenges that come with leaving the school system and entering the workforce. Thus there is a sense of evolution within identity constructions in relation to hip hop evident in the portraits that have yet to be explored in the available literature of ethnographies of hip hop pedagogy.

Here we get a sense of who they are, what living hip hop culture has come to mean to them, and also how hip hop culture interacts with other parts of their life. In this chapter I examine the construction of participants’ identities in relation to hip hop culture in two ways: first through their initial trajectories into hip hop, and second through their attempts at achieving authenticity as a member of the hip hop community. I provide examples taken from interviews with eight of the participants\(^{13}\) and from transcripts of the pre-production sessions where all 13 participants were present. I initially intended the interviews to be a forum for individually de-briefing on participants’ reflections on the learning process, but they emerged as a space where they could tell their story unencumbered by twelve other voices. Whereas the pre-production sessions provided each of them with a forum to discuss their views on hip hop culture today and where it will/should go tomorrow, the interviews gave them my undivided attention to listen to their past stories of hip hop and thus provided context for, and also sometimes contradicted, statements they made in pre-production.

\(^{13}\) All 13 participants were contacted for interviews after pre-production. Only eight were available during the interview stage.
The producers divided the participants according to the element they most closely associated with: the dance group comprised of b-boy Jean Franc, b-girl Eve, and hip hop dancer Lise; the emcee group comprised of Jeffrey, Theo, Prince, and Simon, all active emcees or slam artists in Montreal; the graffiti group comprised of Carlos and Ivan both part of the same graffiti group, and the DJ group comprised of Joshua, Benjamin, and Everson, of which Joshua and Benjamin both had hip hop radio shows, while Everson had knowledge and interest in DJ culture. Emanuel did not belong to any group as his main interest was writing, as in screenplays and stories, rather than rhymes. In some cases the division into one of the elements was not fully representative of the participant’s engagements, such as Ivan who was an emerging emcee in Montreal but worked within the graffiti group. As well the producers’ vision of sticking to the four elements did not account for all of the participants’ activities. While the four elements are a popular method of explaining hip hop culture, they fail to represent groups in between such as hip hop dancers such as Lise and the technical production side of making beats that Jeffrey, Joshua, and Benjamin are all invested in. As mentioned earlier in chapter 3, I floated between the four groups and Emanuel throughout the sessions, although towards the end of pre-production I spent significant more time with the DJ group as a result of Roman, their coordinator, leaving coupled with my more extensive knowledge of DJ culture than the two participants in this group. My presence among the groups was more fluid so as to grant me access to the workings within each of the four groups and Emanuel.

It is important to note that it was the staff that chose the four artistic elements of hip hop as the organizing factor behind the documentary and also as
the tool for selecting and recruiting participants. The staff had a clear vision of presenting hip hop culture as a community of diverse artists producing hip hop culture.14 Chronicle Creations prides itself as giving youth a voice in the media and a space where youth can construct, re-tell, and share their stories about growing up in Montreal. For the producers and youth coordinators at Chronicle, developing a critical consciousness was not an explicit goal in the same way that we see in similar hip hop projects such as William’s (2009) Freireian based Critical Cultural Cypher. However while the producers and coordinators were not trained educators, they modelled a critical pedagogical framework through their efforts to create a participatory filmmaking framework, enacting the type of Freireian problem-posing pedagogy that Williams (2009) consciously sought to embody.

Pathways into Hip hop

Before we examine the participants’ attitudes towards authenticity, I provide insight into the various ways the participants came to be involved in hip hop culture and their respective hip hop art of DJing, emceeing, graffiti writing, or dancing. I found that there were external factors such as familial influence, the aesthetic appeal of the style and sound, and the ‘cool’ factor of hip hop that drew participants to initially enter hip hop culture. There were also internal factors such as participants seeking a way of expression and a community that solidified their engagement in hip hop and their art forms.

14 In a filming session where they filmed Jeffrey volunteering at a hip hop literacy program, I met the program coordinator who had interviewed to be a part of the documentary. While she has been active in the hip hop community as an educator for almost five years, they did not select her because she was not a part of the elements. This surprised me as they voiced concerns about lack of female representation. Interestingly, Emanuel, who is also not a hip hop artist and moreover has not been explicitly involved in any hip hop organizations, was selected. The staff’s rejection of the white female educator and their selection of the Black male with no active participation in the hip hop community, speaks to how the staff constructed and created the boundaries of hip hop identities within the documentary even before filming began.
From stepping back and trying to understand how each participant entered their relationship with hip hop culture, it becomes clear that hip hop plays a role that the participant needed it to fill at the time. So when Benjamin needed a mentor, he sought out specific types of music in hip hop and reggae to fill that role of mentor. When Lise was not fitting in at school and in jazz dance class, she looked to hip hop for a more freeing expression in dance. When Ivan and Carlos were looking for something fun to do with their friends they decided to pick up some markers and do some tagging. There are aesthetic and leisure-related reasons that people are attracted to hip hop at an early age and it is not always the social message behind hip hop that is the reason (Osumare, 2005). It also seems that each participant was looking to hip hop to fulfill a specific role or void in their life at the time; understanding what that role or void was helps us to understand how each relates to hip hop culture individually. Thus although the notion of a ‘hip hop generation’ seemingly presents a monolithic entity with the same concerns, fears, and aspirations, this is not the case for these participants, each of whom came to and stayed with hip hop culture in his or her own way.

“I Brush my Teeth Hip hop”

‘Being born’ into hip hop was expressed by three participants – Emanuel, Everson, and Joshua - while the remainder of the group could remember more or less the reasons and path through which they came to be involved in hip hop culture. When participants would talk about their initial attractions to hip hop culture, Emanuel and Everson often were the only ones who could not recall a moment of introduction and cited their growing up in Brooklyn as all the introduction and education they needed on hip hop culture. Significantly, they were also the two participants that did not practice any of the four elements of hip
hop, although Emanuel’s main ambition as a writer was to write stories set in a hip hop culture background. Joshua was the other participant who saw himself as being born into hip hop. Raised in Montreal by Jamaican immigrants, Joshua recalled his mom putting up posters of Salt ‘n’ Pepa and Heavy D in his bedroom and how his uncle who was a rapper taught him hip hop dances such as the running man. Joshua’s affinity for reggae culture also came from his parents, which we will explore later in this chapter in relation to how it affects his identity in relation to hip hop.

While Emanuel, Everson, and Joshua seem to be introduced to multiple aspects of hip hop community, others were introduced primarily to the musical aspect of hip hop first. Ivan, who came to Toronto as a refugee from Communist Russia, speaks of how he first came to hear of hip hop music through his father’s music collection:

Ivan: My dad bought like, remember those Columbia CDs? you get like ten cds for like 12 pennies?… I’ll never forget this, he ordered Salt ‘n’ Pepa, he ordered Queen Latifah….Grandmaster…um, no, Funkmaster Flex and Beastie Boys ‘Illcommunication’…he was always into black music….to him it’s like, it’s almost a duty to find out what this is all about. Like he doesn’t listen to it now…but I listened to it and the sounds are so cool. It was so appealing to me.

Ivan’s attraction to the sound of hip hop was shared by many of the participants, especially those who did not speak English and for whom the lyrics

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15 By referencing posters up of Salt ‘n’ Pepa and Heavy D specifically, Joshua may have been drawing on the hip hop canon song by Notorious B.I.G. “Juicy” where he narrates his growth in hip hop culture and has the line “Salt n Pepa and Heavy D up in the limousine/Hangin on the pictures on the wall”.

16 In the transcriptions “…” represents a pause in speech.
made little or no sense. Prince talks about how he first heard hip hop music in Montreal after arriving from the Congo with his family: “I was just chilling back and on the radio it busted the [starts beatboxing a slow deep beat] and I’m like yooooo. Yo, that’s nice yo. So I got into it. Because I never really…I came here I was like oh yo, what’s going on? I never even knew English! (laughter)”. Prince’s draw to the beat of hip hop which was shared by all the other participants, reminds those of us concerned with ideological attractions to hip hop that the pull of hip hop aesthetics and sound is also a factor.

Participants shared that it was years later that they began to understand the ideologies and politicization of hip hop culture. In Carlos’ words:

Carlos: Like I understand the lyrics but I don’t understand understand\textsuperscript{17} the lyrics you know? Cuz like they’re rapping, they’re talking about something but you don’t know what that is right? And when you’re like ten, eleven you just like the music you don’t really care, you just, you’re just hearing it – you’re not listening.

There was a clear distinction between listening to hip hop music and being engaged in ideological interpretations of hip hop culture. When Carlos says he was ‘hearing it and not listening to it’, we can interpret that as him getting aesthetic value from the music and not ideological messages. This process of understanding the greater meaning of hip hop was often mentioned in conjunction with getting older. When I was asking Ivan about his initial forays into graffiti, he quickly deflated any romanticized notions I had about him and his friends taking up spray cans to ‘fight the power’:

\textsuperscript{17} Italicics signify the speaker’s emphasis through tone.
Ivan: Now I’m 23 and now I have more concrete opinions about it but uh if you ask my opinion now it’s a lot different than what it was before. Before it was like you know ‘I’m cool and I tag and like I want to go out and tag’ it was just doing it that was fun you know? Throughout the interview Ivan worked hard to express that the first years he and Carlos were into graffiti, their primary concerns were having fun, being cool, and hanging out with their friends. I asked Ivan what graffiti represents to him and he responded:

Ivan: It’s freedom. It’s like freedom. It’s total freedom. There’s rules and you’re like choosing not to go by the rules. Therefore you’re being more free than everybody else. It’s like…you know…when you’re a kid you don’t think of all these things.

The fact that as a kid Ivan was not thinking about how his acts of graffiti were an expression of freedom and disobeying the rules may be irrelevant since he clearly was feeling a draw towards the freedom that graffiti gave him as a teenage immigrant who was just learning English and French.

“It Felt Cool to Belong to Something”

Hip hop culture gave the participants a sense of belonging to a community. Joshua talks about how he felt when his mom put up posters of Salt ‘n’ Pepa and Heavy D in his bedroom: “I didn’t know who they are but like…some reason, like it felt cool. It felt cool to belong to something”. For the participants who grew up in Montreal as immigrants or refugees, hip hop was a sort of open door into a community of peers while they face of language and cultural barriers. The participants who immigrated to Montreal did so in the early 90s when hip hop did not enjoy/suffer from the type of ubiquitous presence it does today, and
consequently they did not have much exposure to hip hop in their home country. Prince, Ivan, and Carlos all remembered how they recognized that hip hop was cool in their schools and that they saw it as a way to relate to the other kids. Ivan saw it as a way to form community among other immigrant students whose English and French were not fluent:

Ivan: …hanging out with a lot of Filipino kids and Latino kids…we all kind of learn at the same pace – like English and all that. So it’s kind of like we have to stick together because there’s nobody else to help you. Like a kid who’s advanced in French is not going to want to hang out with you because you can’t speak to them really…so we would chill and you know educate ourselves and you know there’s a few people in our school who already had like a good knowledge of hip hop.

Though they were not aware of it at the time, by seeking out membership in the hip hop community the participants were entering into a community of practice through which they would come to make meaning of their art (Hughes, Jewson, & Unwin, 2007; Wenger, 1998). This new community of practice would allow them to come together with other immigrant youth by building upon an existing network of meanings in hip hop. They live the three elements of communities of practice by (a) connecting with other youth through mutual engagement in hip hop practices and events, (b) by co-creating in hip hop through joint enterprises with other members, and (c) drawing upon a shared repertoire of both a hip hop knowledge and an immigrant street knowledge (Wenger, 1998). But even for those who grew up in Montreal, hip hop still provided a much needed community. Lise grew up in a working class neighbourhood in Montreal and felt alienated in her upper-middle class school where her mom sent her envisioning a
better environment than the local public school. Lise described her classmates as ‘snobs’ and took to jazz dance classes offered for free at her school as a medium of expression. Yet jazz class still left her feeling alienated as she did not have a typical dancer’s body or the tight expensive jazz clothes her peers had. As a medium of expression it also did not incite the same passion that hip hop did for her eventually: “It’s [jazz] really controlled…like ‘point your toes, fingers’….hip hop I could just let it all out…at first I did hip hop and it was like drugs straight into my blood”. She goes onto talk about how happy she was to discover a community of hip hop dancers where she could be herself, wear what she wanted, and experience the sense of freedom that Ivan referred to in relation to graffiti.

A Way to be Black

Jeffrey, an emcee poet, was searching for a way to connect and express his blackness. Jeffrey is half Scottish and half Badian and grew up in a mostly white city before he moved to Montreal. Before coming to Montreal he spent much of his time with native youth from the nearby reservation who were heavily influenced by a gangsta hip hop image. When he noticed that the native youth were into hip hop, he saw a chance to explore his blackness which he had not previously had many opportunities to express:

Eloise: Why were you attracted to hip hop?

Jeffrey: Well uh…before again it was identity. You know because I wanted to at one point like, race was a very important thing to me and I wanted to be more black (laughter).

Although Jeffrey attempts to brush off his concerns with his bi-racial background as a thing of the past, throughout the sessions and the interview he often made reference to his struggles with finding a community he was
comfortable with. At one point in the interview he showed me two tattoos on the insides of his wrist where one is the outline of an empty circle and the other is a circle filled in black and he explained: “Because it’s my everything and nothing because it means, like, because my whole life is based off of black and white whether it be m mind and my body or whatever…I can always put it in that light of being split between two different things”. He proceeds to share how even musically he feels split between the so-called white style of folk and the so-called black style of hip hop. Jeffrey seeks out ways to connect to the black community because he feels that his blackness is not apparent in his visual appearance as a light-skinned bi-racial person and he feels he has not had many ‘black’ experiences in his life. As Johnson (2003) states “The fact of blackness is not always self-constituting” (p.2), and as a result members who feel on the periphery of the black community may search for ways to authenticate their blackness through performance and affiliation such as Jeffrey. While Jeffrey says off-handedly that he began listening to hip hop because he ‘wanted to be more black’, he eventually came to align strongly with the theme of resistance within hip hop culture as he says, “But hip hop also forms like my attitude. Like I wrote a paper about civil disobedience and like you know I don’t really like to take shit from people. I don’t know, that’s like…it’s hip hop”. Thus we see how his position within hip hop progresses from an outsider seeking authentication to someone who identifies with the culture’s messages and ideology.

Each participant identified hip hop as being cool aesthetically (sound, image, style, language), but also being cool allowed them to find a community. This sense of belonging to a community and the aesthetic allure of hip hop stay constant for many youth who were drawn to hip hop at an early age. This is
relevant to educators because it recognizes that a student, who appears to be merely rocking a hip hop style or speaking in hip hop language, may actually have a great deal more invested in hip hop besides an aesthetic look or sound. It recognizes that people’s engagement with hip hop is deeply connected to their identity formation and their sense of worth as being part of a community.

*When Hip hop has Company*

It quickly became apparent in the interviews that participants had other musical interests besides hip hop. However, despite a *taste for or interest* in reggae, techno, rock music, motown, 70s music, R ‘n’ B, or cumbia, they did not see themselves as being a part of any community growing around those musical styles, as they did with hip hop. The one exception to this was reggae. The participants who identified reggae as a strong musical influence on them – Benjamin, Prince, Joshua, spoke of reggae’s ability to relay positive social messages in the face of hip hop’s current music which they see as generally lacking in its social consciousness. For these three participants, reggae did seem to have a ‘way of thinking’ as hip hop did. Benjamin talks of reggae artists’ influence on him: “…they have a positive message, a way to live your life amongst others in society…” Joshua shared Benjamin’s esteem for reggae music and its conscious message that he juxtaposes against hip hop’s mainstream ‘party’ and ‘gangsta’ style that he does not embrace. Thus Joshua lives hip hop culture as he works to be a beatmaker in hip hop, but yet rejects current hip hop music in favour of reggae music. While it seems strange that one could so strongly align themselves with hip hop culture but not keep up to date with its music, perhaps that for many in the maturing hip hop generation this is representative of the norm. Dolby’s (2001) ethnographic work examining how students’ taste preferences worked in tandem
with their identity constructions speaks to the conscious and purposeful choices that participants make in consumption of music; she writes “Youth use taste in conflicting ways: to reproduce their positions within racialized structures, and simultaneously to challenge those positions, cracking open spaces for the emergence of new identities, locations, and forms” (p.67). Dolby’s statement is especially relevant given that after hip hop, the most popular music among the group was another black musical culture associated with resistance, reggae. From examining the various paths that led participants to hip hop, we can begin to see how their tastes cannot be solely explained away by hip hop’s cool factor or aesthetic appeal. As Rose (2005) reminds, “We do not invest in cultures randomly; cultural exchanges, desires, appropriations, and affinities always speak to already existing relationships, conscious and otherwise-those we want to reinforce, transform, deny, embrace” (p.viii). Indeed with these participants there is no trace of ‘randomness’ evident in why they chose and continue to choose hip hop.

Participants associated hip hop as encompassing more than just music and style; rather they interpreted hip hop to be a culture, a way of life - a common answer to my question of what is hip hop was ‘hip hop is a way of thinking’. The rest of this chapter attempts to clarify what this way of thinking entails.

Authenticity

The notion of authenticity and ‘keeping it real’ has been treated numerous ways by hip hop scholars (Hill, 2008; McLeod, 1999, Low, forthcoming). The ubiquitous hip hop phrase ‘keep it real’ was the most popular answer when I asked participants how they would describe hip hop – ‘hip hop is being yourself’, ‘the most important thing is keeping it real’, ‘to be a good emcee you gotta stay true to yourself’. Yet despite these blanket statements, there were marked ways that
participants policed the borders of realness. By presenting two scenarios that took place within the pre-production sessions, I touch on four themes which came up repeatedly in relation to how participants construct their own notions of ‘authentic’ within hip hop culture: (a) authenticity as gauged by level of engagement in the hip hop community, (b) authenticity as performed through specific attitudes and behaviours within their art form, (c) authenticity conveyed by style and image, (d) and lastly authenticity as defined by race and class affiliations.

The idea that ‘the more work you put into hip hop, the more authentic you are’ was the most debated aspect of authenticity throughout the sessions. Cultural production was highly valued as a measurement of one’s commitment to hip hop and participants had a shared respect for each other’s hip hop initiatives. To date, there are few studies of hip hop identified students where students are all committed producers of the culture and not only consumers. In Williams’ (2009) work with the Critical Cultural Cypher there are some students who are cultural producers of hip hop, but this aspect of their hip hop identity construction is not foregrounded as this study and documentary do. Thus this reading of authenticity by this group of hip hop artists is a new addition to the literature on hip hop and authenticity.

While the previous section on first steps into hip hop drew exclusively from the interviews, the rest of the chapter adds the pre-production session data and introduces us to the rest of the 13 participants more fully: Jean Franc, Eve, Theo, Simon, and Everson. In the scenarios that follow there are no neat constructions of authenticity, instead we see contradictory constructions of authenticity not only among the participants but also within their own individual constructions. We see how participants construct their notions of authenticity to fit
their own needs and based on their own experiences; thus what it means to ‘keep it real’ for one person might be ‘whack’ to another and how I think of ‘keeping it real’ today might be different from how I thought of ‘keeping it real’ ten years ago. Again we see the fluidity of identity construction within hip hop from the participants that works against the dominant dichotomous constructions of hip hop narrative such as resistant and conscious versus criminal and commercialized. This fluidity is not evidence of the type of postmodern ‘supermarket of style’ that Hodkinson (2005) alludes to in post-subculturalism; what we see here is more complex. Rather this fluidity is tied to hip hop’s progress from a youth culture in a specific locale imbued with specific socio-ethnic-economic demographics to its current status as a culture for all ages in a range of locations. Now that there are multiple perspectives in hip hop culture, the constructs of what is ‘real’ with hip hop naturally reflect the diversity within the culture.

Performing Versus Living

I present three scenes that took place during the classroom sessions to illustrate the four aspects of authenticity I mention above. The first scene brings out the contradiction between hip hop’s image of ‘on the street criminality’ with its mantra of ‘keeping it real’. In this scenario, the coordinators and producers asked the participants to think about how to present the essence of each element. The most controversial responses came from the graffiti group who heavily tied graffiti to its illegal nature. Graffiti most certainly began as an activity that was inextricably tied to the illegal acts of ‘vandalizing’ public property with pieces (or masterpieces, in graffiti terms) and tags (Conquergood, 1997). It was not only an

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18 By conscious hip hop I refer to music and artists who explicitly frame their work as anti-oppressive and resistant. Such artists include Common, Lupe Fiasco, and K’naan.
unsanctioned form of literacy, but a counterliteracy in that its purpose was to speak back to the structures that silenced the voice of urban youth and young adults (Ferrell, 1995; Gustavson, 2007). But today a creative industry has emerged around the art of graffiti providing graf writers an alternative to the strictly criminal activities of graffiti’s history. As George (as cited in Gustavson, 2007) explains: “Hip hop didn’t start as a career move, but as a way of announcing one’s existence” (p.67). The following scene embodies this tension between hip hop’s (specifically graffiti’s) roots as an illegal act and how young people today are negotiating those roots today.

Scene: “Graffiti is about going out, doing your shit, getting your name up”.

After the smaller groups had discussed what they thought was the essence of their element for half an hour, we moved our chairs around the rectangular set up of tables to share responses with the group as a whole. Graffiti writer Carlos gave this response when Marissa asked what advice he would give someone who wanted to get into the graffiti scene: “First I would tell them the consequences of graffiti which would be like paying fines or going to jail, which is a possibility”. Carlos defined graffiti by its criminality and went on to label legal graffiti as art rather than illegal graffiti which is true graffiti. He used the example of an art show he went to on the weekend because he heard it was a graf artist. To his disappointment, the young woman was selling t-shirts with graffiti inspired images which were not graffiti in Carlos’ eyes. Carlos seemed to give the example of the art show as what passes for graffiti today, contrasted against his definition of a graf
life filled with paying fines and in his words “destroying\textsuperscript{19} the city”. His statement was met by unanimous support by Ivan and the two other graffiti writers who dropped in that day. However when the graffiti writers shared their notion of authenticity with the larger group, there was a sense of uneasiness emanating from the other participants. The staff chose to remain silent and their body language expressed active listening, but not necessarily agreement. While Carlos talked about how graffiti had to be a criminal act, the other participants did not respond with the usual affirmations of ‘yeah, I hear that’ or ‘true that’, instead there was a lot of shifting in the seats and looking around the room for someone to talk. Everson emerged as the first to respond and his words captured the group’s feeling of resistance to Carlos’ thoughts:

Everson: We could go on for days on how you’re supposed to do hip hop. But if you do have a conversation about hip hop - about how certain things are supposed to be done, then you’re not really representin hip hop. Because it’s not somethin thachu…you don’t have a guideline you have to follow, you have to just be yourself. So you can’t tell me that because in order for it [graffiti] to be official it has to be illegal cuz that’s bullshit…You know, it’s your show. You use it [hip hop] for whatever thing that you want. It’s [hip hop] not a good thing or a bad thing, nothing really is… I don’t hafta be from the street or I don’t hafta do shit in the street for me to be glorifying hip hop or whateva cuz if that’s the case I don’t wanna be hip hop period! Cuz I don’t wanna go to jail! I don’t want to hafta pop nobody, I don’t wanna…like c’mon man…like, I dunno yo.

\textsuperscript{19} Destroy does not imply that he thinks he is ruining the public spaces he performs on; rather destroy is a word meant to convey the aggressive action of putting up work in graffiti.
In contrast to the group’s silent rejection of Carlos’ words, Everson’s statement was accepted by the other participants who responded with nodding heads and murmurs of agreement. While Carlos and his graffiti writer peers construct a romantic notion of graf writers as resistant and illegal (a romanticism underscored by the fact that none of them have ever been to jail, though they have been in danger of going to jail), Everson refuses to romanticize the criminality of hip hop with notions of resistance.

Everson represented a unique addition to the group given that he was raising a daughter by himself and his practical concerns were different from the other participants who mostly lived at home or at the most were financially independent but without children or partners. From the above scenario it seems that while the graffiti writers were concerned with how to ‘perform’ a hip hop affiliation by certain rules and expectations, Everson represented how to ‘live’ hip hop without being bound by rules of conduct. The graffiti writers carved out a space for themselves within the group as ‘the heads’ similar to the group of ‘heads’ within Stovall’s (2007) and Hill’s (2009) classrooms. As ‘the heads’ they often laid down what they felt were the best tracks, the best walls, the best emcees, and the best style. They only seemed to defer to others on matters of breakdancing, which they left to Jean Franc, Eve, and Lise. The heads were the most involved in policing borders and made it known that they had little patience for those who had no hip hop creds in their minds. They were the only ones in the group that continually made me feel as though I had to earn the right to talk hip hop with them. As a construct, the hip hop head is a familiar figure in conversations around authenticity in hip hop. They are often students of hip hop, researching and
keeping up to date with the oldest and the latest going ons in the hip hop world. For them, hip hop is to be lived one way and the rest are just posers.

Everson did have the support of his fellow participants when he called out the graf writers on promoting illegal behaviours in hip hop, but that support was soon tested in the same discussion. Whereas above Everson was in agreement with the majority of participants that graffiti did not have to be illegal, he stood alone in his opinions in a discussion about hip hop artists’ responsibility to spread positive messages.

*Scene: “Eat some dirt and get that money. That’s what it is”.*

The following scene took place the same day as the one above. The topic had now turned to whether or not emcees should rhyme stories of violence at the expense of conscious rap. The discussion showed that the group all agreed that rhymes should be conscious and that while gangsta rap has its place, only those who had experienced those events should drop rhymes about them and even then it should be meant to tell a story and not glorify violence. There was not a lot of disagreement happening and each statement built upon the previous participants’ statement in an affirming way. This easy consensus was challenged by Everson who made the following statement:

Everson: If I want to say something with substance or whatever [as an emcee]… if I’m tryin to feed my family and I need that money and I need to talk about poppin three dudes and that’s what sells out then ima hafta eat some dirt and get that money. That’s what it is. That’s what hip hop is about.

Immediately following Everson’s statements the group as a whole erupted into a sea of discontent and the group had to be called in order twice by Edwin,
one of the youth coordinators. It was clear that Everson would not receive any support from the group on this thought. In my event log, I wrote how I felt a sense of relief when Everson spoke because I was beginning to get frustrated with the group’s singular conception of what hip hop should be, that is namely conscious and not used as a tool to make money. I wrote in my reflection that night that I felt Everson was one of the few in the group that had the courage to admit that there people involved with hip hop are bound not only by artistic concerns, but by financial ones as well. Once Edwin managed to bring the group to a state of order more or less, Jeffrey emerged from the sea of voices and seemingly spoke for the group saying: “I don’t know how you can say hip hop is all about making money. It’s a culture”. Everson quickly responded: “Okay then…success?”. At this point, the body language of the group conveyed the sense that Everson was on his own, except for his friend Emanuel and me. The staff also seemed to be disappointed in Everson’s comments, demonstrated by their shaking heads and lack of verbal support for Everson.

For Everson ‘keeping it real’ in hip hop had implications beyond being true to yourself; for him ‘keeping it real’ also referred to doing what you had to in order to survive. Everson was speaking hypothetically in the above quote because he is not an emcee and has no plans to make money off of rhyming. However, Everson was the only participant who conceded that if he had to, he would use hip hop to make money even if it meant not being ‘conscious’. For me this moment seemed crucial as dividing the group along ideological lines of what hip hop really is, it also seemed to ostracize Everson from the group and he never seemed to bounce back. The staff’s role in this scenario was significant because they very much seem to let Everson stand on his own and did not come to his defence or
offer clarification as they often did when a participant was faced with disagreement from the larger group. On the whole the staff was concerned with increasing understanding among the group and keeping it as a cohesive whole; consequently they were usually more vocal when situations where an individual was up against the wall such as this one. By not endorsing Everson’s notion of authenticity, they implicitly favoured a notion of authenticity predicated on artistic purity at all costs and an idealized association between hip hop culture and positive social consciousness. I approached Marissa after Everson stopped coming because of work reasons and stated that it was a shame that he could not attend because I felt he offered a different point of view. Marissa responded that Everson “didn’t seem to fit in with the group’s thinking, but did offer a lot of interesting points”. It seems that while Marissa found Everson’s point interesting, they were not points of view that the staff wanted to promote in the construction of the documentary as they were working to promote counter-narratives within the discourse of hip hop culture.

For Everson, he could see how if he was pushed into a corner as an emcee that he would sacrifice the social message to get paid. We can surmise that his daily obligations have necessarily shaped how he lives hip hop today. As a father he necessarily faces a different set of expectations than the other participants; for him hip hop cannot be the pure idealized and romantic version of hip hop that some of the others cling to. Although I am not claiming that Everson is representative of all single fathers in hip hop culture, he does show how one’s lived experiences influence one’s hip hop ideology. This abandonment of consciousness was not an option to Jeffrey perhaps because at the moment his cultural production of hip hop is not his only option for livelihood.
The scene that unfolded above reveals some of the complex ways that participants decide where to draw those important lines between real and not real in hip hop. For the graffiti writers, they had no problem going to jail for their art, but they – like the rest of the group – would not sacrifice any integrity of their art in exchange for commercial success. For Everson to associate hip hop with criminality at all was inauthentic, and to dismiss the possibility of making money off of hip hop in a way that did not promote social-consciousness was also inauthentic. However as noted, Everson was in a different stage of his life than the rest of the participants and this may influence his perceptions. This interplay between Everson and the group demonstrates the need for research on hip hoppers from a range of ages, life stages, and socio economic experiences. Given that the majority of hip hop literature focuses on youth listeners, we fail to see how those hip hop ideologies might progress and be shaped by different life experiences.

*Scene: Earning ‘it’ versus being born with ‘it’.*

The ‘it’ in the above subtitle refers to hip hop credibility. The following scene is an excerpt from the discussion that was the most cited discussion by participants throughout the sessions and into the interviews several months after it took place. Again Ivan and Everson are at the centre of the debate, joined by Eve whose comments in French are translated into English. Here we see the tensions between earning your place in the hip hop community through producing cultural artefacts such as graffiti and being granted a place in the hip hop community through nature of being black.

We were gathered as the larger group and our discussion began with the importance of involvement in the hip hop community. It was a fairly active discussion, but not a debate on the topic. This quickly changed when Ivan
addressed Everson specifically among the group as a person who does not participate in any of the elements. Although there were four other people in the room who neither participate in any of the elements – myself, Emanuel, Roman, and Edwin – he chose to speak to Everson exclusively saying, “… you (addressing Everson) don’t really have like a, like you’re not really a hip hopper, you just enjoy hip hop. Right?”. Everson immediately replied “That’s not what I said”. The group discussion switched to a conversation between the two as Ivan rebutted: “Well you don’t do any of the elements right? You don’t, you don’t, you don’t freestyle. You don’t breakdance. You don’t really do any of the elements, am I right?”. I noted that I was taken aback by Ivan’s seemingly personal attack on Everson. Up until this point, group discussions were engaging, but never personal at this level. Everson’s response to Ivan was full of emphasis and energy when he said, “Hip hop is a culture! You don’t have to do –”. Ivan cut him off and continued, “A person who puts in work and who’s been a rapper or who’s been a graffiti writer. It’s kind of, they’re in a certain position to talk about it more than perhaps you. You know what I mean?”. The rest of the group did not move to join their conversation. Everson replied, “I don’t think that’s true” and Ivan stood his ground, “I think it is”. At this point people were shifting in their seats and Marissa intervenes to translate in French for the Francophones.

After the quick French translation of Ivan and Everson’s conversation, Eve spoke up in French as she voiced support for Everson, translated\textsuperscript{20} she said “It’s not cuz you dance or you do graffiti or you don’t DJ or anyway that I take part in hip hop culture…it’s not cuz I take my personal time to dance and that I spend 24 hours in a dance studio, I live hip hop but I live it in my own way, you get it?

\textsuperscript{20} All translations were completed by the author.
Everyone lives it in their own way”. There was another comment by Jean Franc who basically echoed Eve’s thoughts. Ivan responded in French and translated said, “The person who creates, can talk about their element more because what he says has more weight”. At this point the group erupts into disagreement with Ivan and Irwin calls the group to order shouting “Whoa! Whoa! Whoa” over everyone’s voices. There was a palpable energy in the room where it seemed everyone wanted to address Ivan at once. Everson came out and said clearly to Ivan, “Well then, I have more weight than you because I’m black and you’re not”. Mayhem ensued and again Irwin tried to bring the group to order. Everson’s comment about being black took the participants by surprise and it was hard to decipher if people were supporting Everson or not since everyone was talking at the same time. I gathered that people supported Everson up until he made the comment about being black.

The above scene sparked a discussion that occupied the last hour of the session. Although it was Everson’s bringing up of race that ignited the discussion, the ensuing comments were remarkably sparse in their reference to race or blackness. The generic comment that was made by multiple participants was that (a) we must recognize that hip hop is based upon black cultural forms and give credit where credit is due and (b) as a culture hip hop is diverse and welcoming of all ethnicities. The other black participants either did not address the issue or took the stance that race played no part in authenticity in hip hop. This silencing of race and of blackness specifically was remarkable given that the group rarely skirted around topics as blatantly as they did that day. Just as in Hill’s (2009) classroom, race, blackness, and racism became unspoken realities throughout the sessions. I was surprised by this silencing because I thought that at the point of this discussion – almost two months into pre-production sessions – the group was developing into
an open and safe space for critical discussion. Everson’s comment momentarily uncovered racial tensions within the group and put on the table that as much as Ivan and others could ‘put in the work’, there would always be something unknowable about hip hop culture to them because they were not black. Johnson (2003) expands upon this idea that there is more to blackness than performative acts:

…blackness is not always facilitated by performance. There are ways in which blackness exceeds the performative…blackness does not only reside in the theatrical fantasy of the white imaginary that is then projected onto black bodies, nor is it always consciously acted out; rather, it is also the inexpressible yet undeniable racial experience of black people – the ways in which the ‘living of blackness’ becomes a material way of knowing (p.8).

Johnson puts forth that there is an essence to blackness in North America tied to the history of oppression and racialized experiences that continue to shape black lives today. His words support Everson’s comment by asserting that there is some sort of essential quality to the black experience that must also be considered when one appropriates black cultures. Yet as Rose (2005) states, there is a way to honour the type of racialized knowledge Johnson speaks of, while also honouring the works of non-black folk in black cultures such as hip hop:

Much ink has been spilled in the service of defending both the presumed fixity of blackness and the immovable parameters of black cultural boundaries…sustaining the category ‘black culture’ does not require the denial of incorporation, hybridity, transformation and exchange….to acknowledge incorporation, transformation, change and hybridity in black
culture does not bring an end to the category ‘black culture’ or black people, for that matter (viii)

Between Johnson (2003) and Rose (2005) it is evident that there was much to be explored and that was left unsaid during that group discussion on race. The scene depicts how the group was not yet able to stray from the safe narrative of hip hop as an inclusive space and instead suss out the struggles each of them have with race and hip hop in their daily lives. The group’s collective stance that race did not matter was not consistent with the individual interviews I conducted four months after the above scenario. While the group sessions were a public place for performing their status as hip hoppers, the interviews offered a kind of confessional setting to the participants as they divulged their attitudes towards the group sessions, the staff, and many of the same hip hop issues we spoke of in the group sessions. The interviews reinforced my belief that that day the participants were not forthcoming with their issues of race and blackness. In all eight interviews, the notion of blackness as authentic in hip hop came up, unsolicited from me. For example, Prince shared how he thought hip hop was a way to be black in Canada when he arrived from the Congo, Ivan shared how he and his friends ‘learned’ most of their hip hop education from one of the black kids at school ‘who just knew’ what was going on, Jeffrey sought out hip hop as a way to be more black as a bi-racial teen, and Benjamin shared how he has always felt the scrutiny of others in hip hop who see him as white and not Latino, which is an identity that is more easily accepted by hip hop in his eyes. Clearly, behind closed doors and away from the censorship of the group, Everson’s statement about having more weight because he is black resonated with many of the other participants. This discrepancy between the session and the interviews speaks to the
advantage of being an insider and participant-observer within one’s research community; in the interview they were confiding in someone who had sat through the sessions with them and had built a personal relationship of trust and shared background in the documentary. As well the discord between data from sessions and the interviews speaks to the ways in which interviews allow participants to directly tell their own stories about identity as mentioned in chapter 1 (Sfard and Prusak, 2005).

The staff’s reaction to Everson’s statement about ‘being black’ played an important role in shaping what the group accepted and rejected. From the beginning the staff shared that they wanted to emphasize how hip hop was a culture that attracted and accepted all cultures. When the participants did not raise the theme of multiculturalism during an early session of brainstorming themes for the documentary, Marissa interjected and placed race, diversity, and multiculturalism on the table as the staff’s sole contribution to the participant-generated list. Marissa had a clear commitment to exploring why hip hop attracts so many cultures, yet this was not shared by the group who actively steered conversation away from race, multiculturalism, and blackness. Uncovering and speaking to those tensions instead of veering away from them could have been a mutually engaging learning process for the group.

*Style as Knowledge, Style as Ideology*

From the three scenes above we see how the participants constructed multiple notions of authenticity circling around: (a) street behaviours associated with criminality, (b) romanticized resistance, (c) financial opportunities within hip hop, (d) level of involvement within the hip hop community, and (e) blackness. The final theme in authenticity I address is authenticity as performed through style.
Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss’ concepts of bricolage and homology are central to subculture à la CCCS. The bricolage, coming from Levi-Strauss’ (1962) work in *Savage Minds*, refers to the bringing together of tools, or in this case styles, which may not ordinarily be used together but taken together produce a new creation. Hebdige (1979) conceives of subculturalists as bricoleurs given their creative ability to bring objects such as safety pins or glass beads and create a new style imbued with meanings of resistance. Seemingly, hip hoppers are bricoleurs par excellence as everything from fashion to music to lyrics is an impressive collage and recreation of old parts made new again, complete with new meaning and significance. The concept of the bricoleur is indeed useful but perhaps unlike Hebdige and other CCCS’ authors I would argue for moving beyond admiring the bricolage nature of style to deconstruct the social, political and economic forces behind the need for bricolage in subculture. This exercise would be particularly useful in hip hop where a re-examination of the meaning and origin behind hip hop symbols such as “bling” (referring to jewellery, embellishments, and accessories that draw attention to one’s appearance and connote a sense of success) could educate (politicize even?) the new hip hop generation on the foundations of their subculture. Where bricolage is a subcultural process, homology is a guiding principle according to Hebdige’s (1979) reading of Levi-Strauss. Homology brings together ideology and style: “The symbolic fit between the values and lifestyles of a group, its subjective experience and the musical forms it uses to express or reinforce its focal concerns” (p.113). Hebdige in this instance was using punk as his inspiration which he felt “was nothing if not

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21 Hebdige’s introduction of bricolage is interesting in that it seems to only further the exotic and spectacular nature of subcultures and their processes: “…the magical modes utilized by primitive peoples (superstition, sorcery, myth)…magical systems of connection” (p.103).
consistent...the punks wore clothes which were the sartorial equivalent of swear words” (p.113). Deconstructing hip hop and its style in relation to homology reveals it as a culture of contradictions and paradoxes. While it values community, it also flaunts criminality; while it praises women, it relegates some to being bitches and hos. In its style it is equally contradictory, moving from one extreme to the other: business gentleman in the mode of Jay Z in a blazer and shiny shoes works, as well as ghetto corner boy in baggy jeans and a big t-shirt, while anything in between does not. Style was brought up frequently throughout the months of group sessions, both in informal comments on participants’ style choices and in formal discussions focussed on the importance of style in hip hop. Style was ubiquitous as a conversation piece and in the beginning of the sessions it served as a way to form a common connection such as mutually admiring each other’s sneakers.

Style also functioned as a way of marking out one’s hip hop ideology to the others. Theo, an emcee who was on the quiet side during sessions, described how style is about more than fashion in hip hop: “Style is who you are from inside not outside, attempt to take the inside and bring it out through the way you walk, the way you talk”. Theo and the other emcees felt strongly that your style should be consistent from your clothes to your persona to your flow because your style was essentially your version of hip hop and not how you think you should act in hip hop. The range of identity construction in hip hop was most evident in the first meeting during the ice-breaker activity I mentioned in chapter 3. While the twenty or so participants stood in a circle, shoulder to shoulder, the contrasting hip hop styles hinted at the contrasting hip hop ideologies we would come to uncover over the months. For example, Jeffrey stood that day wearing a string of wooden beads
around his neck, baggy pants, and a worn t-shirt in muted colours. Months later, Sasha commented that when he first saw Jeffrey he thought ‘this guy ain’t hip hop’. To Jeffrey’s left stood a young black male who did not return the following week. He was an emcee who modelled himself after 50-Cent and introduced himself to the group as Curtis (50’s real name). Curtis wore a Yankees baseball jersey, flashed a grill (which is piece of ornamental jewellery that is worn over one’s teeth) up in his mouth, and a large gold chain around his neck. The two of them standing side by side, Jeffrey and Curtis, were both perfectly hip hop and perfectly contradictory. When Curtis introduced himself, he chose to highlight his bling and grill by pointing and boasting with his chest, when Jeffrey followed he held up his wooden beads and said ‘my name is Jeffrey and for those of you who don’t know, my bling don’t shine cuz it’s made outta wood’. Participants performed their authenticity through their choice of personal style choices: for Curtis hip hop is about success and demonstrating that success to the world with showy items, while for Jeffrey hip hop is also about succeeding as an artist, but that success can be demonstrated in ways that speak against the commercialism of the culture. What functions the same for both Jeffrey and Curtis is that their style is a thought-out process, carefully selected to convey their reading of hip hop to the world. Their style automatically sends signals to fellow hip hoppers and locates them within specific hip hop genres and the type of hip hop ideology that accompanies those genres.

In a later session, Jeffrey stated that “style is a person magnified”. It was a brilliant metaphor because style in hip hop can act as a magnifying glass, broadcasting one’s opinions to the world through the choice of one accessory. But Jeffrey also captured the performativity of style in hip hop that is not fully
encompassed by the CCCS’ theorization of homology and bricolage. In hip hop, style has a much less theorized partner – swagger. If style is what you put on your feet, swagger is how you walk it out. If style is the kind of bling you choose to rock (referring to wearing a piece of clothing), swagger is how you choose to make it shine (referring to drawing attention to oneself). Style provides the content and swagger performs it to the world. In many ways, swagger is more essential than style in hip hop because even without any hip hop gear, with the right swagger one can unmistakably convey a hip hop vibe. Theo described swagger as a “confidence or belief you have in your own style”. He went on to say that as an emcee you need both style and swagger to reach an audience and used Tupac as an example of an emcee who had both. Thus, style and swagger together make a vehicle that both carries and expresses one’s message to their audience.

However, without a clear message behind one’s style and swagger, one becomes inauthentic because in hip hop meaning and message is everything. Prince and Roman quickly jumped after Theo’s comment about “swagger” in adding that emcees need content to complete style and swagger, citing P. Diddy and Lil’ Wayne as emcees who ooze style and swagger but come across empty because they are not saying anything important. Participants often conveyed the idea that even if your message completely contradicts mine, at least you have one. The phrase ‘keep it real’ presupposes that you know what real is, that you have something to be real about. It is the act of ‘knowing’ what is real that keeps one real in the first place. The participants never discounted another hip hopper based on their taste for gangsta rap as long as one had a connection to that music and style – whether that connection was actual or felt did not matter to them, what mattered was that a connection existed. Yet the one type of hip hop music they
frequently dissed as inauthentic was what they called party music associated frequently with Souljah Boy. Souljay Boy was brought up all day as an example of someone who says nothing in hip hop and therefore means nothing to hip hop. They went so far as to strip Souljah Boy’s association from hip hop to just music, and being ‘just music’ without a message or a point of view is as inauthentic as you can get for the participants. In Emanuel’s interview he drew an analogy between real hip hop music as soulfood and party music as McDonald’s. In his words,

Like I tell my girlfriend that music was like soulfood music. That’s the food like that you get from home, your parents make. This music now is like McDonalds. It’s really empty… It will fill you up for like …The best comparison I can make is to that because, ,hen I eat my mother’s food I’m full for, like, a good 3 hours, 4 hours. When I eat McDonalds? Half an hour. Maybe.

The greatest crime in hip hop is to not have a message, to not understand one’s own meaning of hip hop, and to instead understand hip hop as nothing more than music, clothes, and catchy phrases. Thus even if Everson and Ivan disagree about whether or not graffiti means going to jail, or whether or not being black gives one more weight in hip hop, or whether or not one should go commercial for personal survival, at the end of the day they both gave each other respect as authentic hip hoppers because they both had a message, essentially a hip hop ideology.

While style is connected to swagger, it can be fluid and at times style must be fluid to remain authentic. Carlos shared with me a story about how he ran into a
friend of his and how talking with his friend made him think about how Carlos can still be hip hop while rocking a different style:

Carlos: This guy’s hip hop. He used to dress, I think he’s one of the flyest dudes I know. Even with the slang and everything. And I seen him not too long ago and he was dressed in like kind of baggy pants but they were tighter, still running shoes and like a nice vest. And I was like ‘what’s with the style dude?’ and he’s like ‘yo this is a mature hip hop look’.

Eloise: (laughter) When hip hop grows up!

Carlos: Yeah! And he’s like “I’m like…I’m like I got a degree now, I got to look like I got a degree” but he’s not going to change the way he is. And I was like ‘you know what I really feel that, I understand what you mean’ because it’s true. Like I’m saying, like if I had the time, the choice, I’d dress hip hop like baggy clothes as much as I can. But at the same time as you grow up you don’t want to look like you’re 17, you’re a kid. I was, the other day I was in the metro and I seen myself, I get into the metro I had on like a hoodie, jeans, shoes, my bag and I look at these kids, these 17 year old kids and they’re dressed almost the same as me. They were just a little more extreme. I was like ‘damn I’m 23 and these guys are 17, 16, I can’t be looking like that’ especially if I want to…and that’s not me conforming to anything. It’s me maturing my own style or just in my mind wanting to look older. Because someone told me the best way to change people is to influence them. Not in a bad way or in a good way just lead by influence. So if I’m dressed in a proper way, yeah I’m like you and you see the positive that I’m doing. You know it’s going to make people believe that
‘wow this guy can do it? I can do it, I can do it’ you know? So that’s what I’m…that’s it, that’s it.

Hip hop has always faced criticism for the seemingly contradictory messages that its mantra ‘keep it real’ sends. But of course ‘keeping it real’ is contradictory from person to person because one’s own ‘real’ or truth is out of necessity different from another’s own ‘real’ or truth, whether we are talking about hip hop or not. For Carlos and his friend, how they ‘kept it real’ a couple years ago is different from how they ‘keep it real’ today because of the different experiences they have had and also because of the different position they occupy in their community today. Carlos is an emerging leader in his community who is bringing responsible graffiti education programs into the community centre where he works and he wants to use his style to shine a light on his work instead of keeping it in the dark. Carlos knows that his friend is “not going to change the way he is” because even if his style is a little switched up, his swagger and ideology stay the same. Carlos’s story shows us how the participants grow, struggle, and flourish in hip hop from their first steps into hip hop as we saw in the beginning of this chapter. Hip hop has developed from something they did to ‘be cool’ to a framework through which they live their lives not only as artists, but as young adults. Again we are reminded how these participants are not just living in hip hop, but growing up in hip hop and necessarily changing the face of hip hop itself.

Living Hip hop Culture

I started the chapter with a definition of hip hop culture in the words of an academic with insider hip hop knowledge and I end with a definition of hip hop culture in the words of Ivan:
Ivan: Because it’s [hip hop] like “I’m the shit’. That’s what it is all day, everyday ‘I’m the shit and you suck’. That’s it. That’s all. Like I’m the freshest kid. I have the coolest shoes. I have the nicest girlfriend. I rap better than you…That’s what hip hop is. But at the end of the day it’s still friendly because it has no physical confrontation. It’s all verbal or visual confrontation. There is, of course, there’s scuffles and somebody gets punched, somebody catches feelings and gets knocked out…I automatically think I’m like fresher than everybody and I know more than everybody, which could be wrong but that’s the way I think. I can’t help myself, you know? And…a lot of the times people were saying things [in the pre-production sessions] and I’m just like ‘that’s not the way I see it’ so it’s automatically wrong to me. It’s like ‘no you don’t know what you’re talking about’. But then I realize that like hey once you box hip hop it’s not hip hop anymore. So it’s like…to him what hip hop is, it is hip hop because to you it might not be the real shit because it’s like he’s not deep into it but he’s living it in his own little way and that’s as much hip hop as…just because you have more shoes doesn’t mean that you’re more hip hop. That’s what I realized actually.

Ginwright’s quote at the beginning of this chapter provides a hip hop definition that speaks to the characteristics that bind the hip hop community together such as beliefs, practices, and shared experiences of marginalization. Complementary to Ginwright, Ivan’s definition builds upon Ginwright’s construction by providing a look at how it feels as an individual to live hip hop everyday. In the beginning of Ivan’s quote we see him expressing the confidence and swagger that hip hoppers feed off and feed back into the culture. Also, Ivan
gives a glimpse into the challenges hip hoppers face which are not addressed by Ginwright. Ivan shares how because hip hop can be defined such as by Ginwright, it sometimes is easy for hip hoppers to box hip hop in by a set of conventions. Ivan’s definition brings to life some of the contradictions of hip hop culture such as between violent and non-violent. Ivan is a self-appointed hip hop head because of his involvement in graffiti and emceeing, his self-attained knowledge of hip hop history, and his ability to perform his identity as a hip hopper through his style and swagger. He sees himself as the ultimate expression of authenticity in hip hop because of his hip hop knowledge and his street knowledge from his experiences as a refugee from Russia and his experiences as an immigrant in Montreal. Yet even as he can claim authenticity and is tempted to police others’ authenticity in hip hop, he realizes that to do so would not be in the spirit of hip hop when he says “once you box hip hop it’s not hip hop anymore”. This perhaps is one of the most poignant statements shared in this chapter as it gets to the heart of what a hip hop state of mind is. Hip hop culture started out as a culture of expression that revelled in freedom, individual style, and strength in community; yet today that freedom is being muted not only by commercial forces but by internal forces as well as we engage in the practice of defining what hip hop is and seeing what/whom measure up against our definitions. By examining the multitude of hip hop states of mind in this chapter from Everson’s ‘gotta get paid’ mentality to Jeffrey’s ‘bling don’t shine cuz it’s made outta wood’ vibe, we see that hip hop culture is found equally in Ginwright’s (2004) words as in Ivan’s.

Underlying all the participants’ expressions of identity in hip hop culture is a common critical consciousness. All participants revealed a critical consciousness evidenced by their understanding of the way political, economic, gender and racial
structures work against them as urban youth. Though they have different ways of responding to this critical consciousness, sometimes contradicting each other, they all display an ongoing concern for how they can improve the material circumstances for themselves and their communities. This common critical consciousness is probably one of the factors that drew them to the participatory filmmaking project in the first place. From here we move onto examine how the participants’ construction of identities within hip hop addressed the nexus of schooling, education, and learning and how Chronicle Creations’ participatory framework worked in and around participants’ existing conceptions of schooling, education, and learning. We will see how in some cases their commitment to learning made the participatory project easier, while in other significant ways the participatory framework was challenged by the participants’ ideas of education as a result of their hip hop ideologies.
CHAPTER 5
CONSTRUCTING PARTICIPATION, CHASING EMPOWERMENT

Chronicle Creations stressed a participatory filmmaking approach from the beginning of their collaboration with the participants. This chapter looks at how the staff defined participation, how they attempted to enact this participation, and how the participants responded. Coupled to participation is the process and product of empowerment. Here I explore how individual and collective empowerment weaved in and out of the process in unpredictable ways.

First I provide a brief context for the participatory filmmaking movement that Chronicle Creations belongs to. I examine how participation and empowerment have been constructed in the field and locate how the staff at Chronicle creates their own version of participation in the documentary. The participants’ response to Chronicle’s construction of participation is documented through their attitudes during the sessions and their reflections of the 13 sessions in the interviews. I present how collective empowerment for some participants who have gone onto create and produce on their own. Then I examine how the staff’s expectations of empowerment and participation may not have fallen short in relation to gender. I discuss how the underdeveloped element of developing a critical consciousness may have contributed to the issues surrounding gender in the sessions.

Locating the Participatory Documentary

The type of participatory filmmaking that Chronicle Creations engages in has its roots in a practice called participatory video. Participatory video is based in international and community development work where it was seen as a way to empower, impart organizational and technical skills, and give voice to
marginalized communities (Goodman, 2003; Shaw & Robertson, 2007; White, 2003). The main distinction between participatory filmmaking and participatory video is that participatory video’s focus is exclusively on process and the product is secondary and made for a local audience. In this way video tends to stay in the realm of ‘community media’ which Huesca (2008) defines as “emerging from civil society, free of the constraints of either the market or the state” (p.98) and that focuses on speaking to a local audience about local issues. Participatory filmmaking takes the concept of video and moves into the realm of producing “alternative media” that “aim toward counterhegemonic or oppositional social action” by producing media accessible to an audience beyond the local community (Huesca, 2008).

Youth video-making projects contribute to what Low and Hoechsmann (2008) identify as the “wildfire of youth cultural production”. Kim (2007) documents how youth video projects have exploded in Canadian urban centres largely funded by government cultural arts programs. This growth began with independent media artists in the 1960s influenced by McLuhan’s theory of media and European and American cinematic movements (Goodman, 2003; Mayer, 2003). “Guerrilla video” work flourished in the hands of antiwar activists who strived to provide alternatives to the commercial television, film, and news industries. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the shift moved from antiwar films to an inner-city community development with groups such as The Young Filmmakers Movie Bus from New York City that screened youth produced projects along their trans-American route. But it was the cheap and accessible technology of the 1980s that sparked the growth in youth filmmaking projects that we continue to see today (Goodman, 2003; Shaw & Robertson, 1997). With video technology easy to
access, community activists once more began to see the potential of grassroots media, such as community produced documentaries, as a way to combat the rising ubiquity of commercial television productions that spoke to the audience as a homogeneous general population, with programming specific to local audiences (Mayer, 2003). The documentary had the potential to connect with the audience not only as an individual, but as a concerned citizen with a shared stake in public issues. Documentaries could talk to people in a way that mainstream media could not, given mainstream media’s construction as an escape from reality and the documentary’s construct as a means to delve deeper into reality. Chanan (2007) provides a Freirean reading of the important work that documentaries do:

Documentary, in this perspective, is not the simple reflection of reality, but an act of reflection upon it, first by the film-maker and then by the audience. As long as it remains dialogically oriented, it thereby contributes to the burgeoning of political self-awareness which Freire calls conscientizacion, a term roughly equivalent to consciousness-raising in English, which comes about ‘because human consciousness, although conditioned, can recognise that it is conditioned’…the urgent task of documentary is this act of unmasking (p.196).

Since its inception, the documentary has been inextricably linked to a narrative of empowering the marginalized. Chanan’s reflection illustrates how the documentary has the potential to be a tool of critical self-reflection. This narrative of empowerment continues today as youth video projects are associated with notions of transforming urban youth into engaged citizens. Similar to my discussion of the discourse surrounding ‘community’ in chapter 2, the discourse of youth media projects is often uncritical praise of the participatory process. Mayer
(2003) reveals how in her work in a community video project in San Antonio, Texas at times led her to emphasize the positive impact of the process:

Recent ethnographies of grassroots video projects portray largely utopian narratives of the cultural transformation of their subjects through the production of a video. For example, the participant-observers in one video project concluded that women of color became more confident from the video-making process: ‘Given the tools, space, and encouragement, youth are able to construct powerful and engaging representatives of their own lives’. Looking at my own field notes, I also tended at times to overgeneralize the power of video (p.115).

In this chapter while I explore participation and empowerment in the filmmaking process, I attempt to remain mindful not to ‘overgeneralize the power of video’ by focusing solely on the positive spaces that emerged. Truthfully, while it is common to speak of the ‘improvements’ these type of participatory media projects have on participants, reporting substantive ‘improvements’ is a difficult task. Goodman (2003) who has worked for over 10 years on participatory filmmaking projects with youth in New York City, states that is difficult to assess the long-term effects firstly because participants are hard to track down, and secondly, because even when you have found participants, they cannot necessarily express how the project affected them. When Goodman began tracking down past participants he found that he was not able to get the kind of definite cause-effect he might have been expecting:

22 One participatory documentary project that has attempted to address this issue of documenting long-term effects is Still Longshots (2007) by directors Maureen Marovitch and David Finch who originally created Longshots 10 years prior working with street kids to document their lives. Still Longshots brings together members of the original Longshots team with a set of new street kids to share their experiences.
In the midst of the project, they can’t always articulate just how it is changing them. It’s just another experience that gets filed away, another part of their older, more mature selves. Sometimes it is no until months or even years later when, upon reflection, a memory surfaces of a lesson learned that stayed with them, and then it takes on a sharpness and importance that it didn’t have at the time (p.110).

So while it remains hard for participants to articulate how their participation is affecting their lives, I draw upon participants’ actions related to the documentary process and infer how their participation led them to certain pathways as we will see in the case of Prince, Lise, Carlos, and Joshua’s collective projects.

*Participatory Documentaries Beyond the Local*

Documentaries of urban life promise to *tell it like it really is*, unmediated and pure as they are ‘created’ by urban youth themselves. There is something about giving someone a camera that conjures up notions of empowerment. As Low (2008) explains, “hopes of ‘giving voice’ to the disempowered” are often at the heart of projects like Chronicle Creations and at the heart of documentaries more generally. Today documentaries reach a wider audience than when the medium was confined to the small screen (Chanan, 2007). Increasingly products of youth media projects are attempting to make the product as relevant to the process as they strive to be viable contenders for media space with quality videos (Mayer, 2003). Chanan (2007) speaks of the ‘new wave of documentary’ where documentaries have become real contenders on the small screen and in the box office, citing the financial success of 1994’s *Hoop Dreams* documentary of a group of black teenage boys who played basketball to escape from their problems.
This growing creative industry is largely dependent on government grants and film festival circuits. Throughout the sessions we would receive updates on the producers’ attempts to find a television network to back the project and this connection to a ‘professional real world’ only served to concretize the participants’ investment and pride in the project. It also created a certainty that we were doing something that mattered in the sense that it would affect other people besides those sitting in the YMCA room. With the knowledge that the film would hopefully be broadcast to a public audience came the responsibility of representing their hometown of Montreal in a respectable light in the larger global hip hop community. Participants often remarked that they did not want the film to look corny. In this way the staff of Chronicle work against the type of “fetishization” of the filmmaking process that results from the lack of resources and attention that youth film projects often do not bestow upon the circulation and distribution of the film (Fleetwood, 2005).

As the sessions progressed, there was a growing sense of excitement (and confusion) over what the process of filming and distribution would be like, this confusion is evidenced by the increasing number of sessions spent on trying to focus the documentary through the choice of an overall theme. The participants knew the process was important but for them the product was equally if not more so. Consequently while *Breaks and Beats* is located within a strong tradition of youth media projects, the team is different from most of its contemporaries in that from the beginning the product was just as important as the process. From the start Chronicle Creations had their eyes set on a commercially viable product that would sell in the mainstream media. This decision manifests itself in a multitude
of ways for the participants and the staff which we will explore throughout this chapter.

Participation: The Essential Ingredient

Of course, key to the participatory documentary is participation. The concept of participation is meant to combat issues surrounding voice and power in a typical documentary situation where there is a marginalized subject at the centre of the documentary and a director who manipulates the footage to tell the story as they like. In many ways the conflicts surrounding the issues of participation, voice, and power in documentary filmmaking with urban youth are the same issues that surround urban youth research (Fine, 1994). As Low and Hoechsmann (2008) point out, “stories about young people are most often not written by youth and are usually tempered by moral opprobrium and generational bewilderment” (p.1). A participatory framework attempts to flip the script and let young people write their own story or show their own story in this case. Youth participatory film projects are a way for youth to combat the negative images of themselves in the media by producing their own self-images for the public to consume (Messias et al., 2007).

The National Film Board (NFB) was one of the first large scale media organizations to address the conflict of voice, participation, and representation by pioneering the Challenge for Change program in the 1970s. Challenge for Change premised that if a documentary was going to be about a marginalized community, it should be by the marginalized community it represented. Colin Low, the director behind most of the decade long Challenge for Change program, described the films as vertical films whose product was directed by the process, as opposed to horizontal films whose product is a montage of related events (Crocker, 2003). The participatory framework first enacted in the Challenge for Change spurred a
serious growth in *participatory* filmmaking projects in international and community development by providing a model of how filmmakers could work with participants as invested co-creators rather than passive subjects.

*High Hopes*

Community educators have high hopes for participation in community programs. Checkoway and Gutierrez (2006) state, “participation is about the real influence of young people in institutions and decisions, not about their passive presence as human subjects or service recipients” (p.2). While many organizations may strive toward achieving ‘real influence’ of youth and young adult participants some fall short and instead remain as “youth-led, but adult-controlled” programming (Nygreen, Ah Kwon, & Sanchez, 2006, p.115). Youth-led/adult-controlled programs allow youth to shine by sharing their stories and ideas, but do not disrupt the dichotomous structure of youth-adult power as decisions are made behind closed doors about the direction of the project and the technical skills needed to make the project happen - such as filming, editing, and producing - rest solely with the adults. Instinctually one might assume that adults in these youth-led/adult-controlled programs do not want to acknowledge youth as equal partners in the production process. However, more often the case is that adults are not prepared for the gamut of possibilities that arise from a fully participatory framework. McKenna’s documentary *The Year Before* granted the teenage boys “full editorial control” over the content during specific moments of the production process by handing over the cameras and letting them tell their own stories of their lives the year before they began university. The shots the boys chose to tell disappointed McKenna as she apparently ‘hoped’ for a documentary that would speak to deeper issues of social consciousness (Low, 2008). However what the
boys came back with was hours of tape that more resembled the film *Jackass* than a social commentary on young men’s lives. What McKenna had hoped for from the participatory process evidently did not match the students’ output.

Kim (2007) finds in her review of youth video projects that there are four differential spaces that emerge in participatory projects which she identifies as the “perceived, conceived, lived and hoped for spaces”. In these differential spaces our expectations for participatory work come to head with realities that often times do not measure up. Kim’s description of her “hoped for” differential spaces of youth filmmaking seems to resonate with the type of hopes that McKenna had for the boys she gave the camera to:

In my hoped-for differential youth video project (YVP) space, YVPs are post-colonial spaces of interpretation where youth can reframe the public conversations and policies that concern them. In this vision, the communicative work of videos produced by youth has to do with (re)interpreting and circulating discourses and images of ‘youth’ in the social imaginary/civil society. YVP work can interrupt the dominant discourses that have constructed youth - particularly marginalized youth as ‘at-risk’/ ‘a risk’ to society; ‘anti-social’/ ‘socially-engaged’; media savvy/media ‘vulnerable’; media producers/media consumers by complicating these simplistic dichotomies (p.133).

Kim’s hopes for media projects align with Chronicle Creation’s goals of achieving full participation by all participants. Marissa, Jean Franc, Roman, and Edwin were dedicated to the notion that the documentary’s direction should be dictated by the group of participants but their hopes of participation were not so easily met by the group. Chronicle Creations were committed to creating a
participatory space where participants could take ownership of the documentary as a product that they produced with only the guidance of the staff. Marissa frequently reminded them “this is your documentary” when she wanted them to take more control of the reins, which was quite often.

Bery (2003) provides a continuum of participation with six degrees of participatory frameworks that projects can embody. The six degrees along Bery’s (2003) participation continuum for participatory filmmaking projects are: (a) co-option – producers meet with community members but make the decisions, the audience may or may not be local; (b) compliance – community conducts research while producers decide issues and make the decisions, audience remains local; (c) consultation – community shares their thoughts and opinions about issues, which producers consider when developing their program, the audience may not be local; (d) cooperation – community members and producers develop the script together while the producers make the video, local audience will see it but they are not the main audience; (e) co-learning – community members and producers discuss the issues and develop the script while the production is made jointly with an outsider directing the process, local audiences will see and have access to the production; (f) collective action – community members determine the important issues, develop the stories, and make the video themselves, the purpose is to raise awareness and change. Though we can devise ways to evaluate degrees of participation, as with Bery’s continuum, this betrays the complexity of processes that can move in multiple and often times conflicting ways. Participation can never be experienced in the exact same way by different participants and, furthermore, the process of participation does not always progress linearly – that is, every day does not bring a greater sense of participation, building upon the work of the
previous session. This is not to say that because participation is a complicated process we cannot attempt to map out its presence in community filmmaking projects. Throughout this chapter we see how the staff and participants move through Bery’s continuum in unpredictable ways and often move back and forth along the continuum. As well we see how participants can experience a certain level of participation on the continuum while simultaneously their peer can be experiencing a different level along the sliding scale.

*Pushing For Participation*

Through the staff’s constant calls to the participants to take full ownership of the project, the staff seemed to want the process to be one of ‘collective action’ as described in Bery’s (2003) continuum. Participation is simultaneously process and product, and through their actions the staff seemed to primarily define participation as the ability to influence and create content and form. During the sessions the coordinators and Marissa were extremely attuned to getting everyone in the group to speak up and give everyone their turn. As a result of the constant talking over each other, we brought in a ball that we threw back and forth to determine the speaker. ‘Having the ball’ quickly became a privilege everyone wanted to have. The staff also wanted to ensure that the participants knew their voices would be heard outside the weekly sessions. The second week began with Roman and Marissa inviting participants to call them at any time during the week if they had any thoughts they wanted to share or if they were confused about the task they were to do that week. The staff worked hard to create open lines of communication for each of the participants to validate each member as an important part of the team.
Many of the activities were designed to promote Chronicle Creation’s definition of participation: brainstorming themes for the documentary, brainstorming people to interview, brainstorming a *fil conducteur* (thread) to run throughout the documentary, and so on. These types of group and individual activities were meant to lay the groundwork for participation. Building on this, Roman set out two rules when he led smaller group discussions; the first was that the group had to produce something tangible and not just discuss, and the second was that everyone had to contribute an idea to the final product. Roman was fairly adamant about the two conditions as demonstrated in one session where he was animating the emcee group who was tasked with coming up with the foundations of their element. Throughout the hour and a half long discussion, Roman carefully brought out the voices of quieter participants until everyone had contributed to the product that was to be presented to the producers and other participants. Participation was also encouraged in quieter ways that were not readily visible in the sessions. Many of the participants spoke about how they liked how Marissa would call them and email them during the week and get them to write out their thoughts to her in long e-mails if they could not share their thoughts during the session. Lise specifically found this useful because she was too shy to speak complicated ideas in English in front of the group sometimes but had no problem writing her thoughts out. Ivan also wrote Marissa constantly throughout the process and continues to do so through 2009.

To gather full participation from the participants, the staff had to impart specific skills to the team; thus there was also a dimension of learning new skills involved in their definition of participation and this was largely focused on developing their research skills. The two other activities that explicitly provided
training were a guest speaker from CBC Radio who spoke about how to conduct a successful interview and a storyboarding activity that was completed in groups and then presented to the larger group in a mock competition for the best storyboard sequence. Through their body language it seemed as though participants were extremely interested in the guest speaker and took her presence seriously. It was the only session where participants were taking notes and Prince even brought a camcorder to record her talk. The speaker gave the participants a three step approach to doing successful interviews: first find your subject and do your research, second find an angle to approach your subject with, and third have a theme that will run throughout your interview. She applied this to the documentary and shared how she saw hip hop as the subject, the participants’ own stories as the angle, and how hip hop draws people from all cultures as the theme. Interestingly, the speaker was trying, as the staff had been, to get the participants to see that they were the *fil conducteur* they were searching for. During her talk, some of the participants seemed to switch into ‘professional’ mode as evidenced by the note-taking and filming mentioned above. Usually the sessions are filled with banter with the educators, but the room was silent and eyes were fixed upon the speaker for the duration of her presentation. The talk seemed to serve as a turning point for the group who had yet to see themselves as producers in the process. The intense level of engagement by the participants demonstrates how they took seriously their task as future interviewers in the documentary. For some like Prince who is interested in a career in radio, the experience was also motivating because it represented a step closer to one of his professional goals. As the guest speaker was from the Congo like Prince, the experience was doubly meaningful: “She [the guest speaker] was a great teacher to me and being from Africa, she understands”.
Prince’s attitude towards the speaker directly contrasts with his comments about his past teachers: “I never liked teachers…they’re like your enemy type thing”.

The guest speaker appearance exposed Prince to a teacher-student relationship that he has not had in his formal schooling experiences. Her Congolese descent coupled with her position as an authoritative figure with professional experience gives Prince an educational and professional role model that he feels he can identify with because of their shared background.

**Participants Pulling Back**

The participants’ attitudes towards the participatory framework were mixed. At times it seemed as though they were more comfortable in a level of participation more in keeping with ‘consultation’ than ‘collective action’ following Bery’s (2003) continuum of participation. But at other times it seemed as though the participants wanted more control of the production and not less. Ivan was one of the participants frustrated with the participatory framework, especially towards the end. As one of the more outspoken and directed participants, he often felt that the staff’s reliance on participation was hindering their ability to direct the project. In his interview he shared his frustration with the process:

…they [the staff] are the responsible, they have to have a vision! They can’t just be like ‘oh you guys’. We all have different fucking views. You can’t…you can’t let us just make everything. You have to tell us what you want, you know? I’ll give you what I want but that doesn’t mean everybody else in the crew will want that. Like I could feel that right away. Because I was the one giving ideas all the time. People were just not saying anything.
Ivan’s uncertainty towards the participatory framework stemmed from conflicting views between the adult-youth relationship between the staff and the participants. In Ivan’s eyes ‘they have to have a vision’ because they are the ‘responsible’ ones, seemingly because they are the adult staff. However, this inherently conflicts with the participatory framework in which the adult-youth relationship departs from the familiar construct where the adult is the authority with power and control and the youth is a token representative with little substantive influence on process or product. Instead the adult-youth relationship is one where there is equality and mutual respect for both parties. It is similar to a Freirean reading of the teacher-student relationship where the teacher still has expertise of the subject matter but refrains from transmitting knowledge and instead co-creates knowledge (Freire, 1970). Importantly, in neither the Freirean nor the participatory framework reading, the educator does not relinquish their authoritative role and still must be able to guide the youth or student in the learning process. Perhaps Ivan did not feel that the staff was still providing the necessary direction in their quest for full participation. For both adults and youth this transformation is difficult because of how pervasive traditional dichotomies of power are, and it is easy to slip back into the roles of adult as expert authoritarian and youth as passive receptacle. All eight of the participants interviewed were confident that the staff was committed to making it happen, they just were not sure what ‘it’ was after 13 weeks of meetings, activities, and writings. Cotterell (2007) describes the struggle for youth participants and adult leaders in his study of youth-adult relationships in community programming:

The participants struggled to accept that being equal does not necessarily mean being the same, and that having adults not interfere can also result in
not providing the support and direction that young people may need at a crucial point in the project. The adults made mistakes of taking over, out of frustration that deadlines would not be met, and made other mistakes of hanging back when they should have been more proactive (p.242).

Cotterell’s reflection touches on many of the bumps on the road to participation that were experienced in the documentary. He echoes Freire when he says “that being equal does not necessarily mean being the same” as it is essential for the adult educators to guide the learning process in a meaningful way.

While Ivan’s frustration was shared by other participants, the participants also highly valued how the staff gave them the space to voice their thoughts and how the staff seriously listened to their ideas. All eight interviewed participants had no doubt that the staff listened and contemplated their writings and words during the sessions. The staff’s open attitude throughout the week also contributed to the participants’ comfort level with them as adults who listened and were accessible. Benjamin shared in his interview how he valued the participatory sessions as they were a space where his opinion was valued by his peers and the staff:

Benjamin: Yeah, actually I really really liked the sessions. I mean um because people, like in your daily interactions with people you’re not… you don’t have deep conversations about your impressions and your feelings and like… what what, you know like your opinions. You don’t really get to express your opinions and then have everyone listen and then you debate it. Okay.

Eloise: Well… you’re supposed to do that in school?
Benjamin: Yeah but like…I mean how…like… you do, yeah you’re right, you’re right... But it was more like us one subject that we all kind of knew…

Eloise: Passionate about?

Benjamin: And we all kind of had a lot to say about it and we all wanted our voices heard and we all were there to share.

This part of the interview with Benjamin was interesting because his description of the sessions as a place to share deep feelings, impressions, and debate should be something he also experiences at school but clearly does not given his inability to draw a connection between the two sites. The other seven interviewed participants expressed similar sentiments that it was nice to have a place where people listened to them, took them seriously, and where they could listen to each other. Having sites where young people are taken seriously, where we invest time in young people’s motivations, and where we involve young people in skill building and decision making all contribute to raising young people’s social capital. Goodman (2003) describes social capital as, “the civic skills, community connections, and relationships that the individual youth producers developed through the process” (p.105). Social capital is essential for young people such as the participants, many of whom do not have the opportunity to interact in the type of professional adult relationships that Chronicle offers to them. Although, as mentioned earlier, it is difficult to ascertain precisely how these participatory frameworks affect participants, we can say that the participatory framework exposed participants to situations and relationships that have the potential to translate into positive opportunities in the community, their professional lives, or their academic involvements.
From the experiences of Prince, Ivan, and Benjamin we see how participation was negotiated between the staff and the participants. While the staff had visions and hopes for what they wanted participation to look like, evidenced by their stress on ‘this is your documentary’, at times the participants yearned for the familiar adult authority figure to set the course for the documentary. In many ways participation was negotiated through a push-pull process through which the staff and participants continuously re-worked what they wanted, hoped for, and needed from the participatory framework.

Empowerment: An Uneven Process

Empowerment cannot occur without the types of participation described in the section above. The discourse of participation in youth video projects is intertwined with a discourse of empowerment. Akom et al. (2008) describe what they call youthtopias, which are spaces where “young people depend on one another’s skills, perspectives, and experiential knowledge, to generate original, multi-textual, youth-drive cultural products that embody a critique of oppression, a desire for social justice, and ultimately lay the foundation for community empowerment and social change” (p.2). Chronicle strives to create a space of youthtopia as defined by Akom et al., as we see from their website where they describe how Breaks and Beats works to “… inspire youth today to be more critical and to make choices in their own lives based on knowledge and passion”.

Much like participation, empowerment is a slippery concept. You could talk to one participant one day and marvel at how they have become empowered to make some amazing change in their life, and the next day witness the same participant take two steps back. In this way empowerment is not a door that one opens, enters and lingers in; instead empowerment is better understood as a series
of choices that are not necessarily linear and probably will contradict each other. Thus while empowerment is often discussed as a product to be sought in youth programs, I prefer to discuss empowerment as an ongoing process. Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger Messias, & McLoughlin (2006) offer six dimensions of Critical Youth Empowerment that have become widely used among community youth researchers: (a) a welcoming, safe environment; (b) meaningful participation and engagement; (c) equitable power-sharing between youth and adults; (d) engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and socio-political processes; (e) participation in sociopolitical processes to affect change; (f) integrated individual- and community-level empowerment (p.32). The six dimensions provided by Jennings et al. (2006) bear similarities to the frameworks of Critical Hip hop Pedagogy provided by Akom (2009), Williams (2009), and myself in chapter 2. Interestingly in Jennings et al. (2006) review of theories of empowerment, they found that of the four theories they reviewed only Freire’s dialogical pedagogy explicitly mentioned, (d) ‘engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and socio-political processes. They found that while the other theories reviewed stressed the creation of safe spaces and participation, they did not stress the development of critical consciousness as Freire does, and consequently as Critical Hip hop Pedagogy does as well. Critical hip hop pedagogues (Akom, 2009; Williams, 2009) argue that hip hop politicizes young people by developing social consciousness. Akom (2009) states that hip hop helps youth to become ‘organic intellectuals’, while Williams (2009) believes hip hop can be used to work towards a critical consciousness similar to Freire’s consientização. Thus, the development of a critical awareness is central to the development of a Critical Hip hop Pedagogy.
In this next section of this chapter I examine how empowerment manifested itself in what I call ‘uneven ways’ throughout the documentary process. I begin by looking at an initiative by Prince, Lise, and Joshua that speaks to how the four participants are creating a culture of empowerment through the network provided by Chronicle Creations. Then to demonstrate how empowerment was not a one-way journey, I look at three brief scenes centring on female empowerment and disempowerment. The juxtaposition of these two manifestations of empowerment is not meant to show the success and failure of the project, rather it is meant to show how participation and empowerment are ongoing processes that must be clearly linked to critical consciousness development in order to manifest more fully within the participants’ lives. Similar to my discussion on community, Akom (2007) writes that “…there is no such thing as neutral space. Instead I argue that all spaces are politicized, racialized, and gendered, insofar as they are infused with questions of power and privilege” (p.611). Akom reminds that even in community programming and participatory frameworks, whether they be in formal education or in community settings, we cannot escape the structures of power we bring into those spaces. The following three scenes are meant to draw out how those structures at times can be challenged by the type of work we do within those participatory frameworks, but at times can fall prey to the structures of ‘power and privilege’ Akom speaks of.

Scenario\textsuperscript{23}: Creating Beyond Chronicle

A few months after the sessions had ended in April 2008, Prince, Lise, and Joshua came together and decided to create a foundation that works with arts to

\textsuperscript{23}Although I refer to this as a scene, it is not a time bound conversation or discussion as the other scenes.
promote anti-violence messages. All three of them had been touched by violence and wanted to create a foundation that addressed the growing problem of violence in Montreal through the arts. They immediately turned to Marissa who is well-connected within the city as she has worked for a school-based program that works against violence amongst youth. Together the four of them have been working on applying for funding and setting up a framework with objectives for the youth arts foundation. Prince sends me e-mails keeping me up to date on the foundation's progress and in the summer of 2009 they will be holding a hip hop benefit concert in Montreal featuring some of their fellow participants such as emcee Theo.

As I received word over the months of the growth of the participants’ arts foundation, I was moved. Prince, Lise, and Joshua did not know each other before the process and while they were not delinquents by any means, creating a foundation was not a familiar process for any of them. In their quest to set up their foundation they have begun to manoeuvre through the confusing world of arts foundation grants filled with writing letters and cold calls to organizations they have had no contact with prior. In many ways their work associated with the arts foundation is drastically different from the types of task they do currently as a dance teacher for Lise, an emcee for Prince, and a part-time student and aspiring producer for Joshua. I cannot say that their involvement in *Breaks and Beats* directly created their inspiration and confidence to pursue this new endeavour but I can say that they can draw upon the professional skills learned throughout the sessions to make their aspiration a reality.

Prince, Lise and Joshua’s work. is a manifestation of how the community of participation within the documentary process has begun to move outside of Chronicle Creations and into the community at large. What is remarkable is that
Prince, Lise, and Joshua are reaching out to the larger community without the aid of the documentary in hand; they are reaching out on their own terms and of their own initiative.

In many ways the story of the new arts foundation would be a perfect way to conclude this dissertation. I could have told the story of Prince, Lise, and Joshua’s arts foundation on the last page of the dissertation and wrote about how the participants have come full circle from unengaged youth to promising youth leader in the community. Prince, Lise, and Joshua’s work is a first class example of how youth development is translating into community development which is one of the goals of Critical Youth Empowerment (Akom et al., 2008; Jennings et al., 2006). However, as much as closing the circle in that way would have been act of praising their accomplishments, it would also have been a way of silencing the stories within participatory frameworks that often do not get told – stories that speak of disempowerment rather the elusive empowerment we chase as community educators. While the scene of the anti-violence arts foundation fits in nicely with what we expect from participatory community projects, the three scenes which followed it disturb our utopian hopes for these types of projects.

Massey writes how, (1994) “Ethnicity and gender, to mention only the two most obvious other axes, are also deeply implicated in the ways in which we inhabit and experience space and place” (p.164). We saw in chapter 4 how the narrative of race, specifically blackness, was effectively pushed to the side with claims of colour-blindness within hip hop and a universal celebration of diversity. Now here we see how the narrative of gender stays within the confines of the existing dichotomy between the good sister and the bad ho already present in hip hop. Thus while Massey states that ethnicity and gender are two of the most
obvious axes that affect how we inhabit a space, they also continue to be two axes that represent great challenges to community educators struggling to develop a critical consciousness amongst their participants. Williams (2009) describes a critical conscious identity as one that works to create counter-narratives and develop a language of critique and transcendence in relation to hip hop culture. While the participants were more than apt at creating counter-narratives based on class, immigration experience, education experience, and their hip hop experiences, they were less able to do so surrounding gender, and to a lesser extent race. Contrastingly Williams’ (2009) participants exhibited the ability to identify counter-narratives from the beginning of their involvement in the Critical Cultural Cypher.

Scene: **WOMEN!**

Although the staff of Chronicle Creations sought to create an environment where all youth were comfortable, equal, and safe, Lise remarked numerous times to me that she felt no one wanted to hear about the woman’s experience in hip hop. Nearing the end of one session where the staff asked if there was any other aspect of hip hop the group felt like addressing in the documentary, Lise passed me a note that said ‘**WOMEN!**’ in capital letters, underlined, and followed by an exclamation mark. I quietly urged her to bring it up and motioned to the clock that there was plenty of time, but she shook her head and put her hand down. When the session was over, she told me she had her hand up for awhile because she felt that women’s issues in hip hop was not taken seriously by the overwhelmingly male

\[24\] Williams’ (2009) Critical Cultural Cypher project was an initiative where students were taken from a high school Social Studies class, and perhaps their ability to create counter-narratives was a cross over skill from their formal education.
group of youth. She shared later in her interview her thoughts on that night she passed me the note:

Well, no. [They did not talk about women] Not that much because they’re all guys and like since they are…they’re serious about the subject they talk, it’s good and it’s okay. It’s not as if they were talking about stuff that was just like bullshit and I was like ‘I want to talk about real stuff’. ..And so yeah, it doesn’t really bother me that much that it didn’t get talked about.

But Eve and me, we brought it up, in one.

**Scene: Females and Bitches**

The theme of the second session was ‘women and hip hop’. The routine was that at the end of the session the last hour was devoted to debating the week’s themes. The debate started off with the staff asking the participants to discuss the issue of ‘sexual discrimination in hip hop’. Given that the staff had framed the debate within the terms of sexual discrimination, the conversation began discussing the sexist representation of women in hip hop videos and lyrics. The conversation shifted when Theo said: “hip hop is not disgracing women, we’re disgracing women ourselves and women are disgracing women. So guys who gotta mention that there’s a ho and that there’s a slut in every song that they make, or in most of them, need to find something else to do with their lives. But girls who are going to be hoes and sluts need to find something else to do with their time”. The room was filled with ‘mmm hmmms’ and ‘uhh huhs’ and applause from a few people.

The first female comment came when Marissa asked the group to let Leesha speak and she said, “I was just gonna say, there’s a difference between a female, and there’s a difference between a…bitch”. Here, there was laughter from
the participants. Ivan piped in and said “It’s true!” . Leesha continued, “A female I would say has the choice to do whatever she wants with herself. She’s proud of herself. But um, I dunno”. Vanessa, a female dancer who only came to the first two session added, “They basically put it on themselves, you make a choice, you deal with it”. Someone in the group says “yeah”. Marissa asks “I know I’m interrupting, but how do you two as women feel about that?” . Leesha responds, “It’s not me!” and Vanessa responds, “I know who I am, I know what I’m doing, I don’t care what they do. They can go shake their little booties and whatever”. The conversation continued but it revolved around the group consensus that there was an inherent difference between females and bitches, affirming Leesha’s original comment.

*Scene: Bitches and Sisters*

In this scene I was sitting beside Carlos in the graffiti group while they were supposed to be working on tasks within their smaller groups. The energy in the group was a little restless that day and instead of focusing on the task of hand, Carlos began talking about a concert he did on the weekend with Ivan and some of their other friends. He described how there were scantily clad girls dancing with them on the stage and how there were drinks flowing from the bar. Carlos went on to talk about how some of the girls were promiscuous and how this added to the baller (referring to a high-profile successful individual) type of scenario that went down that night. I told him I thought that his story suggests he only values women for their sexual appeal and he responded by playing me Jay Z’s (2002) *Bitches & Sisters*. The song narrates the ubiquitous hip hop dichotomy between the faithful

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25 As this was only the second session, I was not as vocal in this session as I came to be later when a relationship of trust was stronger and more developed. I did however contribute to the debate at the end.
woman who supports her man and the promiscuous woman who is only concerned with using males for money. In the song Jay Z raps:

Sisters get respect, bitches get what they deserve
Sisters work hard, bitches work your nerves
Sisters hold you down, bitches hold you up
Sisters help you progress, bitches'll slow you up
Sisters cook up a meal play they role with the kidz, bitches in the street
with they nose in ya biz

I tried to give the earphones back to Carlos, telling him I already knew the song and understood what he was trying to say but he insisted I listen to it again. At the same time, other male participants were passing around a nude hip hop magazine to look at, while the staff did not comment. When I had finished listening to the song it was time to reconvene as a larger group.

The three scenes revolving around gender should be of particular interest to educators interested in working with hip hop culture. As we saw from the first scene, the ways in which gender was silenced also contributed to the silencing of Lise as she put her hand down although she clearly had something to say as seen by her note to me. The second scene involving Leesha and Vanessa’s comments about females and bitches was revealing in that at a central point in the discussion, the debate became a conversation between Leesha, Vanessa, and Marissa. The men in the group were largely seen as ‘off the hook’ given that Leesha and Vanessa were the ones who were exhibiting the anti-female comments and not them. Marissa most often took the stance of moderator in the weekly sessions, so as to not impede the voices of the participants, although her facial expressions sometimes betrayed a frustration with the lack of critical thinking displayed. Rose
(2008) reminds us that in relation to women’s position in hip hop, “sexism socializes all women and men; it is a group-based form of discrimination against women that can’t be avoided by any of us unless it is challenged and reduced for all of us” (p.173). While it was important for Marissa to address the two women in the group, she never turned to the men and explicitly asked them for their opinion on the comments which suggests that sexism was more relevant to the women than to the men in the group. Though the staff attempted to continue discussions of women and hip hop throughout the sessions, they inevitably evolved into the type of discussion as exhibited in the second scene. The group’s attitude towards women is concretized in the third scene where Carlos asks me to listen to Bitches & Sisters while the erotic magazine is passed between a group across the room. Moments like this were often met with laughter, though Marissa often would try to get the participants to speak straight about what was going on. For the young women in the group, the reproduction of the existing stereotypes within hip hop culture is especially harmful given that the documentary production group was supposed to be a safe space for participation by all. Scenes such as the three highlight will only reinforce the young women’s idea that the dichotomy between good sister and bad ho are “a key to belonging”, in Rose’s (2008, p.173) words, to hip hop culture. Richardson’s (2006) own work with young women in hip hop culture also exhibited how they were keen to question hegemonic structures of race and class but did not extend this to issues of gender. She writes, “in their quest to keep it real, they also display instances of succumbing to racist stereotypes and controlling myths of Black womanhood” (p.49). Thus there is much work to be done in hip hop community programming in regards to counter-narratives of gender empowerment. Yet is important that such quests do not focus
solely on female participants, but as well involve male participants in the process of deconstructing the imprisoning narratives of women in hip hop. Brushwood-Rose (2009) speaks of how adults in community programs must rigorously bring to the forefront structures of power - across gender, race, and sexuality - and how they are reproduced in community settings. She calls us to re-consider how we can better conceptualize our relationships with the youth and young adult participants:

How might we re-imagine the role of education, the educator, and the adult in these projects of youth cultural production? How can we hold on to both the limits and possibilities of education and how might this balance produce a more ethical and, in the words of Maxine Greene, “wide awake” pedagogy? These questions are crucial for all educators, but especially for those of us who work in community-based contexts where the dynamics of authority are less institutionalized, and thus often less clear, and where our fantasies of emancipation, collaboration, and, indeed, community may blind us to the complex social relations of power at work.

Brushwood-Rose’s call for a ‘wide awake’ pedagogy conveys the sense of urgency needed in community programming. We must not be satisfied with hearing stories such as of Prince, Lise, and Joshua’s work, when stories such as the others explored here continue to manifest themselves in our participatory community projects.

In this chapter I explored the participatory filmmaking process of Chronicle Creations and attempted to tease out the various ways that participation was enacted throughout the process. I demonstrated how levels of participation can be constructed along a continuum such as Bery’s (2003) but that these levels are not mutually exclusive or linear in nature. Through the staff’s and participants’
voices I depicted how participation was conceived by different people on the team in different ways. Following the discussion on participation, I looked at how empowerment was a similarly fluid concept. Through an analysis of some of the participants’ present endeavours and one of the participants’ reflections on the silencing of gender in the sessions, I showed how empowerment can be thought of as a collective and an individual endeavour.

The next chapter focuses exclusively on participants’ attitudes towards education and learning. I examine both the participants’ existing attitudes towards the institution of education and educational attainment. I contrast these with participants’ attitudes towards learning and the pedagogical strategies employed by the producers and educators. The next chapter builds upon the constructions of identity in hip hop culture we saw in chapter 4 as it exposes how hip hop culture works with and against education and learning in a multitude of ways.
CHAPTER SIX
LEARNING IN SPITE OF BECAUSE OF HIP HOP

As Williams (2009) puts it in reference to hip hop, “Many students today are choosing cultural affiliations that often put them in opposition to a mainstream academic culture” (p.1). References to schools can be found in the works of almost every hip hop artist. Widely acclaimed emcee Notorious B.I.G. (1995) mockingly sends the hip hop anthem *Juicy* out to his past teachers: “Yeah, this album is dedicated to all the teachers that told me I'd never amount to nothin’”. Au (2005) identifies two central themes in hip hop’s anti-school lyrics: firstly that schools have failed to provide the economic success they promise and, secondly that schools continue to be sites of Eurocentric white cultural reproduction. Although participants’ investment in hip hop culture may be in opposition to mainstream academic culture, this does not mean that their investment in hip hop culture is necessarily in opposition to education and learning in general. In this chapter I argue that while hip hop culture is critical of formal education institutions, hip hop is a worldview that inherently celebrates, demands, and reproduces networks of education and learning. While I cannot draw upon the type of multi-site data that Dimitriadis (2008) calls for by following participants from their work with the documentary into their school lives, I can show how participants exhibited a penchant for learning and education while they simultaneously showed disdain for formal institutions of schooling. As well in this chapter I make the case that because hip hop culture is inherently educative, it is a place of pedagogical possibility, especially for those underserved by formal

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26 Au’s (2005) textual analysis of 28 rap songs on their lyrical content addressing school and education is helpful for mapping out narratives of education in hip hop.
education. As Pardue (2005) writes of Brazilian hip hop community educators, “Hip hoppers have become increasingly persuasive that their work is educational because they reach large populations of urban youth that previously were isolated from public education” (p.412). Pardue’s words are echoed by Jean Franc when he proclaims in one of the sessions – “I learned more from hip hop than he did from school”. Jean Franc’s comment was met by overwhelming affirmation from the other participants, nodding their heads and spitting words of approval.

The session where Jean Franc shared his thoughts on hip hop versus school was centred on the theme of education; however education was mentioned almost every session regardless of the prescribed theme for the day. School, education and learning were frequently brought up by participants in the group sessions. The terms were rarely used interchangeably and the participants’ displayed distinct attitudes towards each and also conveyed how they understood the relationship between the three and their lives as hip hop artists. Again, in compiling data for this section, I found instances where participants seemed to be in agreement with an issue in the group workshop but voiced a dissenting opinion in the personal interviews. It is important to suss out the distinctions and differences that participants draw between school, education, and learning because it reveals a layer of complexity to the education-hip hop nexus that is usually reduced to (a) hip hoppers dislike school because it is irrelevant to their lives, and (b) we need more culturally relevant pedagogy so that hip hoppers will become engaged. While I believe the above is true, it fails to capture the dynamic and fluid relationship between education, learning, and school for hip hop engaged learners. The participants represent an interesting set of voices because the existing research on hip hop learners either works with those in highschool (Williams, 2009), those in
post-secondary studies (Petchauer, 2007) or those in prison (Pardue, 2005). These participants represent a more diverse set of pathways between those demographics with only one participant in post-secondary education, some in certificate programs, some pursuing their hip hop career fulltime, some balancing their hip hop artistry with an unrelated job providing income, and some unemployed and out of school.

In this final data chapter I look at how participants and staff constructed a dichotomy between school and education. Through participants’ comments and actions in the sessions it is clear that they opposed both formal schooling and the learning behaviours that went along with it, while simultaneously valuing education in general and actively pursuing learning in the hip hop community. Here I hope to do more than present participants’ anti-school attitudes by connecting these anti-school attitudes with the socio-economic realities that many urban youth face. Throughout this chapter I note how the staff, guest speaker, and I at times reinforced the participants’ dichotomous attitudes and at times pushed participants’ constructed boundaries around school and education.

Emcees: Anti-Education or Critical Pedagogues with a Mic?

From the first day I met the participants I immediately noticed their anti-elite attitude as evidenced in their suspicions of me as a student of McGill University. Many times while the recorder was on during sessions, Ivan and Carlos would whisper into the recorder “McGill sucks! Why don’t you go to Concordia?!”. I spoke briefly in chapter 3 how participants identified McGill University with an upper class white, stuffy student and teaching population and in contrast they viewed Concordia as a multicultural, working-class student population that they could more easily identify with. Indeed the one participant
attending university, Benjamin, was a student at Concordia and the other participant who took a hiatus from his first year of studies, Jeffrey, also attended Concordia. Emanuel attended McGill for one semester before dropping out, sharing that he only enrolled in McGill because when he moved to Montreal everyone told him that it was the gold standard for education and if he could get in there that would prove he was smart.

Many participants identified strongly with both of Au’s (2005) themes of economic and cultural validity of formal education. For example, Carlos shared that he wanted to go back to school, but that the tuition rates were too high. Later on in that interview, Carlos told me about how he went to an art show because someone mentioned it would feature a graffiti artist. He described his reaction to the show to me as such: “I was just not impressed. I was like yo if she went to school and this is what you did?! Yo, I don’t want to go to school”. Carlos does want to go to school but is wary of investing time and money in an institution based on what he sees from other supposed graffiti artists emerging with degrees. While Carlos speaks to the economic barriers to school, Prince is an example of a learner whose culture is not affirmed by the Eurocentric curriculum. The following is an excerpt from my interview with Prince about how his schools in Montreal addressed his African heritage:

Eloise: Did you um…learn about any of that stuff in school?

Prince: Music?

Eloise: No, about African history, groups and things like that?

Prince: No, no. I learned that from my country [Congo]. I learned that from where I was born and raised. You don’t learn that in schools. If you learn
that in schools then maybe you were not born there. But I learn that because I’m from there, born there. My roots in that land.

Eloise: So they never talked about those kinds of things in school.

Prince: In school here? No. They don’t really talk about that. They talk about Canadian history, there’s no really world history. The world history is more like if you do a project on your own country and then you bring it to them and you do a little presentation on your country. But they don’t really teach about the world like that. They teach more about Canada in history.

Prince describes how any culturally relevant pedagogy he received in his school had to come from himself. In chapter 5 we also saw how Prince was captivated by the Congolese guest speaker in his comments about how she ‘understood’ because she was also from Africa. Au’s (2005) two themes of economic and cultural barriers align with critical pedagogy’s theoretical framework. For that reason I argue that hip hop’s message in many ways calls for the same type of educational reforms that critical pedagogues do. Au (2005) speaks against the generalization that hip hop considers education a negative process:

Rappers’ critiques of the Discourse of education should not be confused with a disdain for education or learning among rappers generally. In fact, common sense should tell us that rappers would not rap about education at all if it was not important to them on some level. Furthermore, it could also be argued that these rappers, by virtue of expressing their critiques of educational Discourse through their lyrics, are indeed using their music to educate their listeners about the problems with education (p.215).
Through Au (2005) we see how it is not that hip hop is *not* interested in education, but rather that is *extremely* interested in education and is one of its fiercest critics.

At first glance it seems that hip hop presents education as a waste of time, contributing to the disdain of intellectualism and glorifying other paths to success. However hip hop’s relationship with education is not strictly filled with resentment and rejection. Nas (2002) approaches education as a tool for social mobility in *I Can*: “Nobody says you have to be gangstas, hos / Read more learn more, change the globe / Ghetto children, do your thing”. Usher27 (2009) argues, many hip hop artists have been enrolled in higher education even though their hip hop personas depict an attitude that seemingly speaks against the same institutions they were once apart of. Consequently there is an on-going “discursive battle between rap and education” as Au (2005) puts it, playing on the word battle which in hip hop refers to the non-violent fight between emcees or b-boys. Thus much like the participants, hip hop culture and schools are locked down in a love-hate relationship.

Next I present three short scenes depicting participants’ views towards formal schooling and as well the practices that they associate with formal schooling. These scenes show how although participants strongly oppose universities and grade schools, this disdain stems from the hegemonic nature of education that occurs in schools and should not be perceived as a dislike for learning in general.

27 Usher’s (2009) presentation “Student success and the convergence of hip hop culture in higher education” provides a lengthy list of hip hop artists and their various interludes with higher education as enrolled students. This will be published in a forthcoming book treatment of the subject.
Scene: “A Degree Don’t Mean Shit”

We were assembled as the larger group of participants, again sitting around the rectangular tables facing each other. A discussion had erupted that was off topic from what Marissa had set out, but she did not move to stop it since it was associated with the general theme of education which she set out to explore that day. We were discussing if there was any way you could decide who knew the most and had the most weight in hip hop culture. Ivan stated that if someone does a lot of work in something like graffiti or breakdancing, it’s like they have a degree in it and that having a degree should give their words more weight. Up until Ivan’s comment about getting a degree in hip hop, Jean Franc had been actively listening to the discussion but had not jumped in yet. When the word degree dropped, Jean Franc immediately jumped in and launched into his view on degrees:

A degree does not mean anything. Homie could be an emcee [pointing at Theo], I’m just using you as an example. He could be talking to me and be like ‘ra ra ra ra’ and telling me stuff like ‘yo man, Lil Wayne is the illest’ and I say something else. It doesn’t matter. But at the end of the day just because he’s been an emcee and he’s been in it - doesn’t mean that he knows more than me. You guys should know that. Even the work, I’m going to give you an example. Basic example I can say off the top of my head that has to do with hip hop – KRS One has never been to university. But he’s teaching at universities. He doesn’t have a diploma. His word is
worth more than someone that’s actually spending in that university and getting that diploma.

Scene: “You Want to be a Singer?”

Today was the first day that Pierre Michel and Marissa were going to attempt filming part of the session to perhaps use in the documentary somewhere. The first half of the session the cameras were off and before Pierre Michel turned it on, he re-arranged the participants and explained to everyone that we could not interrupt each other like we usually do because the camera needs to see who is speaking. They decided to ask us to talk about hip hop and education since it was always such a fruitful topic. Jean Franc was one of the first to have the courage to speak on film:

When you come to think about it, kids rule the world because so much is available to them. They can do anything. But why is it that when you go to school or when you’re a kid, they don’t let you know that and if they do they try to shrink it down. The example that I was giving was like when you’re in school they’re like ‘oh! What do you want to be when you grow up?’, ‘I want to be a singer!’ (imitating a child’s voice), ‘Oh that’s good! Now open your book to page 79’. Like, that’s it?

Joshua chimed in quickly after Jean Franc, “Or the other one, when they say um”, and he was quickly cut off by Marissa who asked him to wait because she needed the participants to speak one at a time and Jean Franc and Joshua were sitting at opposite sides of the room. When Pierre Michel had adjusted the camera, Joshua resumed his thought on school”
Like when they say you’re hyperactive, you’re a very active child. And an active person, when they’re really active, they would always want to express themselves in different areas. So they’ll say ‘you need Ritalin, you need this medicine’. At the age of 8 I remember a woman pulled my mom into the office and said ‘your son needs Ritalin, your son is too active’ and I seen many of my friends on Ritalin. So from that, society does not want you to express your true emotions, your true feelings and to be who you are. Hip hop allows you to do all those things. If you start relating to Talib Kweli, start relating to Public Enemy, start understanding the thug life of Tupac and what his theme is, then you start thinking.

Constructing Anti-School Narratives

From the two scenes we see the multiple ways that the participants position themselves in opposition to formal education. In the first scene Jean Franc references KRS-One as an example of someone who shows that you do not have to have a degree to be smart. KRS-One is a central figure in the discussion of hip hop and education as he has spent much of his career discussing education whether it be in his hip hop philosophy, his lyrics, or in his professional speaking at universities (Parmar, 2009). In the second scene we again hear Jean Franc speak about schools and this time concerning how they disregard the creative energies of students and push them into a standardized mode of learning. In the same scene Joshua reinforces Jean Franc’s point by sharing how schools do not allow creativity to flourish, but how the stories that hip hop artists tell allow students to think about the stories they tell and relate in a way that they cannot at school.

These first two scenes speak directly to the themes of economic and cultural barriers that Au (2005) finds in his analysis of hip hop lyrics. Jean Franc
shines a light on KRS One as someone who is able to make it without a degree and Joshua speaks out at the oppressive climate of schools for expressive youth. These ideas were brought up again and again throughout the sessions and seemed to be brought in to support participants’ decisions not to go to school. For many youth higher education is constructed as the key to social mobility as Laidler (2002) states: “The high return to university education, for the individual and for society, is a central tenet of belief in the United States…” (p.46). The participants questioned and indeed challenged the seemingly blind and unrealistic faith in higher education that Anderson (1993) speaks of here: “There is a broad public expectation that the universities will teach the young how to earn a living. It is also understood that the universities are a primary instrument of social mobility. This is how one moves up and out” (p.51). The participants would often bring up examples like KRS One and other friends who were making money without degrees. When the CBC guest speaker came in she shared how she learned her trade from doing the work, not at a university. The participants were very enthusiastic about this point and the room was filled with a lot of ‘yeah, yeah’ and nodding heads.

The university is something that youth are trained to aspire to, but we rarely question what the university actually means, represents, and provides; as a result of this lack of questioning the myth of the university as natural and all-beneficial prevails and as Kincheloe (1995) cautions, “The most powerful fictions are not only unquestioned but unarticulated” (p. 33). The participants consistently questioned why universities were supposed to be so important for them at this stage in life, especially since many of them were artists who did not find suitable space and validation for their creative expressions in school. Lise shared with me
how she did consider going to a post-secondary school for dance, but that the
dance programs she found only allowed her to major in jazz or contemporary and
not in hip hop. Thus while she attempted to reconcile her views of education with
her love of learning and expression in hip hop dance, only certain forms of dance
were deemed official and held a sort of hegemonic hold over what constituted
professional dance.

Scene: “I Can’t Write as Good as I Speak”

Everyone was working in their smaller groups and I was sitting with the
emcee group. When I sat down with them, they said to me “you’re finally with us!
You always with them other groups!”. I thought I had been doing a decent job of
dividing my time up, but I guess maybe I missed a rotation with the emcees. Today
they were working with Roman on trying to explain what they thought made a
good emcee. Working with Roman they were bound by his rules of participation,
that everyone had to contribute and that they had to have a finished coherent
product to present to the larger group when they were done. A routine had evolved
into going around the circle of emcees and when each emcee gave their take on the
question, they would then write it down onto the same piece of paper and pass it
on to the next person.

Prince’s turn came and he went into this long description of emcees who
can write songs but can’t write lyrics because they have no style. Then he listed
various types of lyricists: freestylers, ghostwriters, lyricists, entertainers,
songwriters, swaggatalkers, to name a few. When he was done, he turned to the
next emcee and passed the paper on. Roman stopped him and urged him to “write
it down, write it down”. The staff was often reminding and encouraging
participants to write down their thoughts and a lot of the homework activities were
either reflective writing tasks or research writing tasks. Participants never really responded well to these prompts.

Prince had somehow managed to get the next emcee, Jeffrey, to speak without writing it down as Roman had asked. Roman noticed and asked Prince once more to write his previous thoughts down on the group’s paper. Prince shook his head and said, “I can’t, I can’t write it in a paragraph form, I just can’t”. I made note of Prince’s reaction towards being asked to write things down and brought it up in his interview:

Eloise: But you don’t like the writing? Sometimes you…

Prince: No, it’s not really that I didn’t like the writing. It’s just that, I don’t….like you could say that I don’t really like to write but I don’t like to write. Sometimes I’m more likely to…I more just want to listen. I wanted to listen, you know? And writing, I wasn’t really getting the imagery of what was going on. And after we started getting deep into it, that’s when I started to understand it and that’s when I started writing because me I love to put ideas on paper, you know?

Eloise: Okay, why do you like to do that?

Prince: Why do I like to put ideas on paper, um…so you know, you could remind yourself and when you look back at the paper it’s like a little recording and you could see ‘oh that’s what I wrote about’.

Eloise: When you write a new song? Always on paper first?

Prince: Always on paper first.

Eloise: You never like um…

Prince: No, I don’t, I don’t do that. I always write it on paper. Because on paper, I could do a different flow. I could venture through a different flow.
On a recording, I could still do that, but I don’t know I’m never really comfortable doing that. I’d rather write and just keep it there and read it and practise it, just practising what I just wrote. Getting it into my head and then go to the studio.

The last scene illustrates Prince’s conflicting attitudes towards writing. He ‘loves putting things down on paper’, but he insists that ‘he cannot write things down in paragraph form’. Prince’s attitude towards writing as sanctioned by the documentary project is similar to participants in Long et al.’s (2002) program STRUGGLE who also resisted writing activities. Long et al. reason that participants in community programming often resist writing, “because of its association with formal schooling, so, too, in a community center, as elsewhere, people often bring with them anxiety-ridden school-based notions of writing as a venerated art” (p.136). As mentioned earlier, Prince was not the only one who refused to write in the sessions or in the homework activities. However Prince is a striking example because he clearly demonstrated in his interview that as an emcee he relies on his writing ability and rarely freestyles. After analysing his interview, I found that Prince mentioned writing over fifty times in his hour and a half interview, definitely more than any other participant had, including fellow emcees. The amount of time that Prince spends writing related to his emceeing should suggest that he have no problem writing in settings such as the documentary or in school. However for Prince the types of writing skills he uses in his lyrics are not the kind of writing skills he perceives will be useful in formal and informal learning settings. Probably the most challenging pre-conception for me to overcome approaching this research project was that learning through filmmaking was somehow going to be easier and always more fun than learning in a
classroom. As Prince shows, in many ways the learning through the sessions oftentimes mirrored the familiar construction of learning in schools.

**Spaces for Crossover**

I represented the minority in the group as someone who was pursuing higher education but still had strong roots in hip hop culture. The participants often commented on how it was cool that I could ‘get a degree in hip hop’ in their words. For the most part I did not do much to sway participants’ minds about higher education, except in the case of Emanuel who wanted to be a writer. As an aspiring writer, Emanuel did want to return to school and said one day “I don’t feel comfortable not being in school”. On occasion I would answer questions he had about degree programs I knew about in Montreal and I offered him help whenever he needed it. I also encouraged Carlos in his search for a suitable program because he seemed keen on translating his graffiti experience to graphic design or automobile graphic design, both careers that could benefit from formal training. In short, when I perceived that a participant’s turning away from education would close professional doors I did my best to present education in an inclusive and positive light. In a decade long study of changes in student values and attitudes at the University of Maryland, findings clearly displayed that times have changed from the 1970s where the majority of students cited “developing a meaningful philosophy of life” as a major reason for college attendance, to the 80s where almost 70% of surveyed students cited “to be able to make more money” as a reason to enter post-secondary studies (Bandalos & Sedlacek, n.d.).

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28 When participants came to my office in McGill for interviews, for many it was the first time being on the campus. While Concordia’s campus is largely integrated into the city, McGill is a kind of gated community with the impressive old buildings one would associate with an upper-class higher education institution. Many made reference to how it was strange that such an old institution would be concerned with hip hop. Carlos specifically asked if I felt like I fit in with my classmates given I was studying hip hop.
census report Educational Attainment in the United States claimed that “Workers with an advanced degree make an average of $74,602, and those without a high school diploma average $18,734” (Longley n.d.). We see the university as an institution that will provide us with stability, social mobility, and tangible economic success; although this is often not the case for some participants’ career aspirations, higher education could for many of them open the door to greater economic success.

Relevant to the third scene with Prince and his contradictory attitudes towards writing, Gustavson (2007) urges educators to build better bridges between the work of youth outside of school with the work we demand of them inside schools:

…it is not the kind of creative practice that is important; it is the complex process of work behind the practice that I contend can inform and influence the way we work and learn with students in schools…we need to learn from the ways in which youth work within art forms like zine writing, turntablism, and graffiti, and then allow these ways of working to influence how we talk, write, compute, read, plan, and literally be with students in our classrooms (p.7).

Carlos, who works in a youth center, seemed to share Gustavson’s view that the skills young people hone in hip hop could be transferred to other areas of their life in the future. One night, he described how at the community centre they did a hip hop workshop and an unprecedented number of kids came in. In Carlos’ words,

They learned some skills in writing, but it was hip hop that got them in the community centre. Maybe they’re writing about weed and girls now but
when they get older and they experience other things they can use the skills of writing and emceeing to express those new experiences.

Thus Gustavson and Carlos both agree that it is not the content that is learnt in hip hop cultural practices, but the processes that are important. Pardue’s (2005) work with hip hop education in Brazilian prison programs shares a similar understanding of the value of learning through hip hop. Pardue (2005) writes that instructors “presented hip hop as a set of useful skills for employment…It’s not that the instructors thought that the prisoners would become DJs, artists, or MCs, it’s that they were opening prisoners up to new ways to interact with the world” (p.424). In the same way Carlos also does not think that all the kids at the community centre will become successful emcees, but that it will serve them well in the future.

While Gustavson (2007) is speaking about transferring skills to classrooms, the participants were easily able to draw similarities between the sessions and the classrooms they had been in. At the end of one session Marissa exclaimed, “This is not school!” in an effort to get the participants to take more responsibility for the work she expects during the week. After a lengthy explanation of how what she was asking them to do was not homework and thus should be seen as fun and enjoyable, Prince interrupted and said jokingly, “okay, yeah, but what’s the homework?” Everyone laughed and Marissa proceeded to assign the homework. The participants’ adherence to pedagogical structures from formal schooling directly contrasts Williams’ (2009) experience with his Critical Cultural Cypher:

Appendix B outlines the homework assigned each week. Appendices C and D are hand-outs given for homework by the staff.
The students were referred to as group participants. Lectures were replaced with the democratic dialogic method (a more humanizing approach to classroom dialogue), and units of study were called learning units. The vocabulary changes might just seem a play on semantics, but the changes went a long way to redefining a space for the participants to authentically engage with each other and with the learning units without the baggage of mainstream academic school culture…I originally thought that the classroom environment would force the participants to adhere to the rules that govern student behaviour, but the participants were able to quickly move past their physical environment and adapt to their new roles as participants (p.10).

Marissa and the staff took many of the same steps that Williams did, calling them participants instead of students and avoiding terminology normally associated with schools and classrooms. Yet while Williams’ claims that his participants created a new role separate from student, the participants in Chronicle lingered between participant and student. Thus although the sessions were in an informal community learning setting, there still were pedagogical practices and rituals that transferred from formal settings. At the end of one session after Marissa was again explaining how the group had to narrow down the themes they wanted to explore in the documentary, Benjamin remarked, “This is just like doing a research paper”. Accordingly, the participants’ attitudes towards those transferred pedagogical rituals continued to be resistant despite the context of the community learning space. Thus perhaps we can debunk the myth that there is inherently something different about informal learning from formal learning. This is not meant to assume that there is no difference, but to begin with the possibility
that different types of learning may take place in each setting – sometimes parallel, sometimes contradicting.

The Learning Community of Hip hop

Scene: You Watch, You Learn

We had a guest speaker come from CBC Radio to speak about interview skills and some tips on how to conduct a good interview. While she set up at the front of the room, we mostly sat quietly waiting for her to be ready. I sat between Lise, the dancer, and Ivan, the graf writer. Lise has been doing a tag of her name in the back page of her notebook. It took up the full page in full colour; I did not know she could draw as she never mentioned it. I whispered that I thought it looked good and she tells me she wants Ivan to check it for her. She finished and passed it to Ivan through me. Ivan looked at it and immediately takes out his pencils, replicated her tag with slight changes to the shadowing and outlining. He handed it back to her and tells her that she got the lettering technique wrong and proceeds to show her how to do it properly. When he finished, I asked Ivan “Where did you learn that?” He gave me this look like he could not figure out what I was talking about and says “What?” I asked again, “Well how did you know that what she did was wrong and that she should do it the way you said”. This time understanding, Ivan replied “I don’t know. That’s just how it’s done by everyone. You watch and you learn”.

For every time a participant dissed the education system, another participant would reference the ways they learn through hip hop culture. Ivan urged me to check out Henry Chalfant who has written extensively on graffiti culture and co-produced Style Wars, one of the premier films to document hip hop culture. Ivan explained how he reads some of his books and really admires him, he
said to me that “Henry Chalfant was the first you” referencing how my work is linked to Chalfant’s groundbreaking accounts of graffiti culture. Carlos also shared with me how he does not really like to read, but he reads hip hop magazines for two reasons: to keep reading and to learn about what is going on. But perhaps it is the emcee group that drew the most explicit links to learning and hip hop. They would often school the group members who did not have much background, such as Simon who did not have extensive exposure to English music as he is a Francophone. In one session they explained how he should start with Talib and Roman tells Jeffrey he should check for Talib and Papoose and that the next week they would give him some more names to listen to once he had done that. Fellow emcees would encourage Simon to go home and find such and such track and to try and find specific mixtapes that exemplified the lyrical styles they would refer to in the sessions. As well a good grasp of vocabulary and current events was highly valued by the emcees. Prince was praising rapper Lupe for his thoughtful lyrics and commented that his audience had to have gone to university to understand him. Roman interjected that, “no, they don’t have to go to university, but they do have to be intellectual”. Thus these are just some examples of how learning is valued in hip hop.

As Hill (2009) states, “perhaps more than any other cultural movement, hip hop is obsessed with its past” (p.99). This obsession with history is one of the primary reasons that learning is so embedded within hip hop culture. Within each generation and with each passing generation the aesthetic forms of hip hop must be transferred. An excerpt from my interview with Carlos reveals generational differences of learning graffiti:
Like I work at the youth centre right? The other day there was these kids and they came because we have a graffiti wall and we were painting and I was showing them how to do some things. And the guy’s like ‘go on graffiti, graffiti dot org’ something like that? And I go on the site and it shows you how to do letters! You know like every style of letter that you could do and you could write your tag and does it for you and then you could colour it in, in whatever you want. And it was like wow that’s crazy. You know like you don’t even have to be good anymore you could just like…just copy it right there and then. Just print it out and re-trace it and you have your thing…You know? It’s not even like it used to be. Before it was straight up whatever you had, you would do. But now it’s like, it’s such a business. It’s just crazy. These kids, they’re like…their mom could buy them everything they want. And if they go to a wall it’s going to come out super nice because everything’s made to look nice now. That’s business.

From Carlos we see how learning hip hop aesthetic forms is still necessary, but how technology has influenced that process. Whereas learning used to take place face to face on the streets, now young people can learn how to do graffiti with the help of the internet. Carlos clearly is not impressed with this evolution of learning within graffiti and he identifies this change with a growing commercialism and mainstream appeal of hip hop, graffiti in particular. Jean Franc shared a similar view when he spoke about teaching breakdancing at a dance studio. Jean Franc said he “could teach them the steps but they won’t be b-boys”. Thus through Carlos and Jean Franc we see how the rituals of hip hop culture can be ‘bought’ or ‘attained’ through non hip hop channels such as the internet or
dance studios, the lifestyle and culture of hip hop is not transferred in those instances. Consequently when young people are learning hip hop rituals, they are learning more than the actions as they are also learning the various ways to construct identity within hip hop that we explored in chapter 4.

Rethinking Learning

It would be easy to look at this participatory filmmaking process and say they are learning about hip hop or they are learning about making a documentary. In attempting to pinpoint what it is exactly these participants are learning through this process keep in mind Dewey’s (1938) notion of collateral learning that:

Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time. Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is learned (p. 48).

With that in mind we can rethink and consider the following alternatives: they are learning about learning, they are learning about teaching, they are learning about themselves in relation to the world, they are learning about the world in relation to themselves. Thus although a room in a local community centre, an unused dance studio, or a graffiti-laden bridge may not be ‘official’ sites of learning and education, those are the places where learning took and continues to take place during this documentary. My participation in this filmmaking process has pushed me to reshape my visions of learning and education. I cannot help but think that the type of learning that Illich was rallying for is the type of learning that is taking place in this documentary. We have taken process in “educational matchmaking” in Illich’s words where a common object of knowledge - hip hop -
has brought different age groups together to simply learn. Reading Illich’s (1970) words on what a new educational institution might look like speaks directly to the emergence of ‘unofficial’ sites of learning in hip hop community programs:

Schools are designed on the assumption that there is a secret to everything in life; that the quality of life depends on knowing that secret; that secrets can be known only in orderly successions; and that only teachers can properly reveal these secrets. An individual with a schooled mind conceives of the world as a pyramid of classified packages accessible only to those who carry the proper tags. New educational institutions would break apart this pyramid (p.76)

Illich’s *Deschooling society* imagined what learning would look like outside of the systems of institutional education that we are familiar with: the classroom, the school, and the lecture hall. Any individual who has gone through the formal educational system is well acquainted with the idea that there are these secrets hidden in the ivory towers, in the elementary classrooms, and being held captive by the secret-keeping teachers. Throughout the filmmaking process we are all discovering that there are no secrets, only knowledge and that we possess much of that knowledge already.

*Constructing Identities Between Hip hop and School Cultures*

Livingstone (1999) defines informal learning as “Any deliberate effort to gain new understanding, knowledge or skill to which we devote a discernible amount of time and recognize as such may be considered to be an informal learning project” (p.14). For these participants participation in informal learning is nothing new as they learned their hip hop art forms in ways that similarly were not sanctioned as official sites of learning. Carlos shared in his interview that he likes
to help his friends out on their projects, such as a group of friends who produced a thirty minute movie which he edited and in which he both acted for free over the course of a year. Lise often would go to a local studio space with Eve after sessions to learn some breaking moves, oftentimes staying past midnight after a day of work and a night working on the documentary. Clearly the participants were involved in learning practices in engaged ways. Livingstone (1999) draws the metaphor of ‘educational pyramids’ versus ‘icebergs of informal learning’. Formal schooling is like a pyramid in that it is easily visible and is above the surface, while the types of learning that the participants engage in is informal and cannot be readily seen or measured. And while eventually we can work to see the ways in which informal learning occurs in participants’ lives, in our positivist culture what is most damaging is that we cannot measure their informal learning. Jean Franc remarked one day that “It’s not about knowledge or intelligence in society, it’s about results”. Given that there are no results, in the institutional sense, in informal learning, we cannot measure one’s success or failures. However this lack of positivist measurement might be one of the reasons that people like these participants are drawn to informal learning communities in the first place.

As Gee (2000) understands the multiple dimensions of our identities – Natural, Institutional, Discursive, and Affiliated – he states that identities are not mutually exclusive and in fact depend upon each other to sustain their identity as such. For example, a participant may identify as being part of the hip hop community because they affiliate with a hip hop affinity group through listening activities, the clothes they wear, the way they speak and think, and the way they structure their art. However, the portrayal or educational values associated with their affinity group of hip hop may work against their identity as a student, which
is an institutional identity bestowed upon them through the institution of school. Thus, as a student they must negotiate their institutional identity as a student with their affinity identity as a hip hop member. Gee (2008) points out:

Thanks to more subtle forms of institutional racism still prevalent, many "Black" children fill positions in schools that conflate being "African American" with being "at risk" for school failure and with a variety of other negative attributes. These positions come to constitute institutional identities for them, ones that they may accept or resist, but in terms of which their words and deeds are interpreted nonetheless (p.108).

Similar to the conflation of being African American with being at-risk, is the conflation of being hip hop affiliated (as perceived through actions, speech, clothing) with being uninterested or unable to excel in formal schooling. We are always in flux in relation to our various identities, at times working to reinforce an aspect while putting another in the background. However, as Gee asks, “What is at issue, though, is always how and by whom a particular identity is to be recognized” (p.109). This statement is of particular interest when we consider the concept of authenticity and ‘keeping it real’ in hip hop. If one has defined real-ness in hip hop as ‘staying true to oneself’ and thus making room for academic success and legal career choices, then one fights against being recognized and affiliated with the negative stereotypes of identity construction in hip hop.

If the combination of hip hop affiliated, urban, racially non-white, lower class youth is historically equated in the media, and as such in the consciousness of teachers and youth themselves, with disengaged, and academically mediocre non-learners, then hip hop youth face the challenge of either making inroads into establishing a precedent for a different way of constructing their identities in
relation to hip hop or abandoning either their affiliation as a learner/student or their affiliation as a hip hop youth. DeMeulenaere’s (2009) long-term work mapping out school success with two students show how it is a difficult thing to ask students to abandon part of their identities in exchange for one that is more harmonious with notions of school success. Building upon DeMeulenaere’s discussion on ‘good students’, Tsolidis (2006) asks: “Is it possible to succeed without assimilating? If students from the margins do succeed, is it because they have unlearned what made them different?” (p.7). Tsolidis (2006) goes on to discuss the complexities of the ‘good student’:

…success implies, almost by definition, a capacity for what Spivak (1993) describes as strategic identification…at the micro-level, students have to become adept at strategic identifications. Their capacity to manipulate the hegemonic discursive construction of the ‘good student’ will be responsive to a range of factors including their own ‘elusive’ cultures…For some, becoming this version of the ‘good student’ is not possible. Other students have to forgo their particular ‘elusive’ culture in order to perform the ‘good student. ‘Good student’ can become something that defines what some students do not want to become (p.8).

Although the thirteen participants are but a small portion of the hip hop population who are struggling with balancing their ways of constructing identity in hip hop with school, the paths they have chosen speak to Tsolidis’ question. Only Benjamin, who has turned away from hip hop because of its increasing commercialization, is enrolled in post-secondary education. While he heavily identifies with a hip hop ideology, he cannot find the time to pursue his DJ career like he once did and makes reference to how his friends that continue to spend
time DJing are not in school and therefore have different concerns. In our interview, I asked Benjamin what he thought the message hip hop was sending about education. He poignantly responded that he did not think there was anything unique about the message hip hop was giving in relation to education:

Benjamin: And uh…but the truth is even, I mean throughout history even in like in the 70s and in the 80s, the 60s it was like you know free love. Like why go to school you know? You can do it on your own you know. If you want to learn about psychology go buy some psychology books and you can be a psychologist or whatever. You don’t need a diploma or whatever, that kind of thing. So, so, so in the same sense you have like, you have a, you have a kind of, there’s always like a rebelliousness or kind of independent…

Eloise: No matter what the music culture is.

Benjamin: Exactly. There’s always like the kind of underground kind of like you know more positive or more grassroots. And there’s of course the more in-your-face style or whatever so. It’s just this is like of the age, this is like the era, this is how the young people are expressing themselves.

Then if hip hop is how young people are expressing themselves, in Benjamin’s words, educators must help these young people align their modes of expression with the demands we make of them in school. By ignoring the types of ‘unsanctioned literacies’ hip hop youth and young adults produce, we are ignoring the multiple ways youth engage in learning on their own (Gustavson, 2007, p.14). Critical Hip hop Pedagogy represents one way that educators, both in schools and outside of schools, can begin to make sense of these learning practices. Yet just as the previous chapter showed that empowerment was not a one step process, neither
is building successful academic identities. DeMeulenaere (2009) shares, “And finally, we must recognize that this is neverending work. A changed academic identity is not a static reality; rather, it is a pattern of choices in actions that is made, or not made, repeatedly (p.47).

This chapter looked at the various ways that participants constructed their attitudes towards education, learning, and practices associated with both such as reading and writing. It built upon work in chapter 4 which showed how participants perceived their identities in hip hop. The following concluding chapter looks back at the lessons learned from Chronicle Creation in this dissertation and looks forward to the questions this research poses to future avenues of exploration. The next chapter speaks to the challenges put forth to community educators, hip hop educators, formal educators, and policymakers in the informal education sector.
CHAPTER 7

NEW CENTURY LEARNING

The participants and staff at Chronicle Creations have presented a glimpse into what Critical Hip hop Pedagogy looks like for young adults in informal learning settings. I have presented here scenes depicting their hip hop identity construction and ideologies, the various ways they construct authenticity, the struggles for participation and empowerment by staff and participants, and their perceptions of school, learning, and education; this represents only a fraction of the wealth of knowledge Chronicle has shared with me. Their community of practice continues to grow with projects such as Prince, Lise, and Joshua’s anti-violence arts foundation and their continued journey to create a professionally produced documentary. Marissa and Pierre Michel report that as of summer 2009 they have secured a television network to air the documentary. While at times it was not clear what the end result would be as noted in chapter 5, the energy and commitment behind the project was always consistent. Chronicle Creations demonstrates the potential for community media projects to harness the energy, resources, and “funds of knowledge” of young people. Benjamin’s candid thoughts on what he liked most about the process speak to the participants’ engagement with the idea that they were creating:

Benjamin: Actually I liked the fact that we were trying to do something. (laughter). I liked the fact that it was like we’re getting together, we have an idea, we don’t know how to make it happen, but let’s do it anyway you know? And it’s like…It was like we got all these people in this room and let’s try and do something you know? And, and I found that everyone that was there actually wanted, the people who stayed and who were really
spending the time going every Wednesday we really wanted to do something. And what we had in common is that we all liked hip hop. So and we all wanted to, we all had our own vision or whatever of how we saw this documentary and we just had to kind of make it work for everyone. Use everyone’s input or do whatever we could to uh make it, make it worthwhile.

Benjamin’s laughter after he states ‘we were trying to do something’ suggests that it is somehow a novel idea that programs for young people create a product that has worth beyond the process itself. Listening to Benjamin talk about his peers in the documentary, one imagines a group of young people highly invested and committed to learning; it is an image that one may not be able gather from their current formal educational involvements. The fact that the team of participants and staff have managed to go from meeting in a community centre room to securing a television network contract in less than two years speaks volumes to the combined potential of committed educators, creative hip hop artist youth, and the possibilities of new ways of doing school in informal community learning spaces. Goodman’s (2003) on-going work with youth documentary production puzzles over how although,

In the field of community arts and culture, it seemed that the idea of youth media had truly arrived and was finding expression through every form possible: video, radio, photography, newspapers, and newly emerged web-based video…they have not succeeded in penetrating the classroom or changing the system of schooling in pervasive and enduring ways (p.18).

This concluding chapter attempts to rectify the mismatch that Goodman identifies by addressing implications my research with Chronicle Creations has for
hip hop researchers and educators, community educators at large, policymakers, and educators in formal settings such as schools and universities. While there is overlap, I divide my discussion of implications and further research into (a) implications for hip hop and community educators, (b) implications for educators in formal settings, and (c) implications for policymakers in informal community settings.

**Implications for Hip hop and Community Educators**

Here I address hip hop educators and researchers and community educators alike, whether it is from an insider position or not. Much of what I call for here is the creation of *space*. Akom’s (2007) conceptualization of “free spaces” calls for an understanding of space that is at once a “mental map” as it is “physical infrastructure”. As educators researching and working with hip hop communities we need to make both the mental and physical space to address some of the concerns brought out in this research. In terms of mental space, we must continue to carve out space for serious research on this growing demographic of young hip hop adults. The literature of hip hop and hip hop research has largely been consumed with the preoccupations of youth and school-based teenagers, and the participants demonstrate how their career and educational needs differ from those of their younger counterparts.

As well we must begin to work equally with the ‘Receptors and Directors’ (Williams, 2007) of hip hop culture. Directors of hip hop culture, such as these participants, have an investment that goes beyond a hobby-like status as they strive to find a financially viable way to make a living either off or by incorporating their skills into new careers such as a graphic designer. For example, Jean Franc has placed himself as a prominent member of the Montreal breakdancing community
by establishing a website devoted to promoting to b-boy and girl events in Montreal, some of which he organizes himself. In addition he makes a livelihood out of marketing his mix of public speaking and breakdancing by being a freelance Master of Ceremonies for private events around the city such as bar-mitzvahs. Thus these young adults are negotiating in creative and unique ways how to transfer their hip hop knowledge, skills, and experiences into their work life. In a way they embody the challenges to the maturing hip hop generation, as they ask ‘what happens when the hip hop generation grows up?’ As hip hop artists they refuse to relegate their involvement in hip hop culture to the background of their adult lives and insist on foregrounding their hip hop knowledge as they have had done throughout their youth. Carlos shares how he is trying to find a place for his graffiti skills in a career:

Before it would be like I wanted to go out and destroy shit. Now I’m just like this thing could actually bring me back some positive in my life…I could get a career but it’s mostly going to be because of the way I think when I do my grafs. And when I take that mentality and put it into something else. Like if I was telling you graphic designs you know? I’m gonna come, I’m gonna like, I mean we can both see the same picture but I’m going to use some of the stuff I learned from graffiti and make it more original than most people can. You could do it with anything. You could do it with tattooing, if you design cars. You could do T-Shirts. You can always use that extra thing that’s going to make you different from other people.

Carlos is testament to how the participants are implicated by hip hop in ways that go beyond concerns of authenticity and identity and encompasses the
dilemmas they face as they enter the adult work force armed with a set of hip hop skills, talents, and networks. Yet Carlos is largely trying to map out a third space between his hip hop skills and the professional world on his own. As hip hop and community educators we must venture into how we can better serve the maturing hip hop generation and their professional needs after highschool.

Hip hop educators and community educators at large must also work to create safer and ‘freer’ spaces for discussion of gender in community settings, especially when working within the framework of hip hop. We must work rigorously so as to stop young urban woman from “parroting” the harmful dichotomies of women presented in hip hop as mentioned in chapter 5 (Rose, 2008). Although not discussed in this dissertation, hip hop educators must also work against the paralysis of male gender narratives in hip hop. Participants shared less frequently about stereotypes of men in hip hop, but did bring up their discomfort with the image of the hypersexualized, tough, and toned urban male. Similarly, hip hop educators must create safer and ‘freer’ spaces for discussions on blackness and race. We must work against the tendency to halt serious discussions of race and blackness in hip hop, such as seen in chapter 4, with idealized notions of hip hop as a homogeneously inclusive community (Hill, 2008).

Finally hip hop educators and researchers must address the need to create more physical space for hip hop cultural production so that hip hop members do not face criminalization. For the graffiti and breakdancers, the conflation of their art with criminal acts was extremely problematic. Jean Franc was often frustrated about the lack of public spaces to breakdance and cited numerous times when

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30 We see a similar process in Gustavson’s (2007) work with Miguel, a graffiti artist who eventually leaves the graffiti lifestyle because he does not want to go to jail.
police officers approached him and his crew. In his words, “I don’t understand why some guy in a Spiderman suit\(^{31}\) can dance on the sidewalk begging for money but we can’t dance on the sidewalk even though we’re not even asking for money…there are laws to make hip hop not work”. How can we as hip hop researchers begin to address the ways in which our society works against the ability of hip hop culture to produce itself, because when hip hop cannot be done in public places where learning and sharing occurs the growth of the culture is at risk. Pardue (2004) speaks of how the criminalization of hip hop spaces is not limited to graffiti and breakdancing:

> Hip hoppers' occupation of institutional spaces is different than occupying public spaces and street terrains…In this case, hip hop's value is not just about the right to occupy public space with boom boxes and powerful car stereos, it is also about restructuring institutional spaces, especially those places of discipline and surveillance (e.g., prisons) that have historically and systematically been indifferent if not hostile to popular culture in any organized fashion (p.423).

In many ways the public nature of hip hop meets hostility from society, such as the baggy pants which are an immediate signifier for educators and adults that the wearer is somehow delinquent, dangerous, or lazy. Those concerned with the pathways of hip hop youth and young adults must work at forging new spaces where members of the hip hop nation can be free of discriminatory practices. Carlos, a graf writer who works at a community centre, often spoke about how his centre helped youth find legal walls and is attempting to start a program where the centre takes the youth on a tour of graffiti murals in Montreal.

\(^{31}\) Jean Franc is referring to a specific street performer in Montreal.
Implications for Formal Educators

Mahiri (1998) wrote how he hoped *New Century Schools* would look ten years later, which would be today. He described schools that worked to include students’ identities, learning practices and, technological skills into the classroom, but has this manifested itself in our schools and universities? If we acknowledge hip hop culture as a site of epistemological construction and validity for some students, then the question of arises of how we begin. The step towards recognizing hip hop as a culture instead of as a musical fad is fundamental to its inclusion in the classroom as a valid space of knowledge production. Since it is the teachers who wield the power in the ‘hegemonic drama’ of our schools they should take the first step (Gresson, 2004). Teachers must be researchers not only of the subjects they teach but of their students (Kincheloe, 2003). A teacher as a researcher is one who attempts to know their students through listening, watching, and dialoguing without fear and out of love and respect. Rose Sanders, co-founder of the 21st Century Leadership Project, sums up the need for teachers to be researchers of hip hop: “Without hip hop I don’t see how we can connect with today’s youth”.

Educators must transform the culture of education as a space that actively seeks these connections in our students and in ourselves; this embodies the nature of critical pedagogy. The participants demonstrate that teachers must recognize students’ identity construction with hip hop because this identity construction influences how they perceive the climate of higher education. When Carlos came to the office in McGill for the university he shared this unsolicited reflection on how it felt for him to be sitting in the university for the first time:
It’s a totally different system [the university system]. High school you’re a
different system, then when you get here [to university], here it’s like high
prestige people that are just like…these people are like serious people. You
know you have like doctors that invented shit here that work here. Then
I’m like ‘whoa’. That’s why you have to like appeal to these people. Even
though a lot of them are really cool, you know? Like a lot of them are
really open, the majority is pretty much close minded. And since they’re
like older they already have a mentality of what things are and what they
should be. So it’s hard for new generations to come here.

Carlos imparts how the university system appears intimidating and
unwelcoming to someone like him who speaks HHNL and identifies with a hip
hop culture. Teachers at both the highschool and university level need to work at
ways of making their classrooms and campuses inclusive of students such as
Carlos.

The staff and hip hop focus of Chronicle Creations clearly ignited the
romance of learning for participants and even had Carlos asking one night, “can
we meet two nights a week?!”. Kincheloe (2000) refers to the “first step of
schooling – the romance of learning” (p.127). This lack of romance leaves our
students struggling to find meanings in texts written by people triply removed
from their reality by time, space, and culture. Many students sit idly in class with
their minds wandering elsewhere while teachers continue to preach, exasperated
by their disinterested audience. Clearly Freire’s diagnosis in the early 70s still
rings true: “Education is suffering from narration sickness” (Freire 71, 2005).
Teachers and teacher educators can learn from the participatory framework of
Chronicle Creations that put the participants’ shared culture of hip hop at the
centre of the learning experience. Teachers should be asking themselves how they can similarly inspire students like Carlos to want to attend class more frequently.

Implications for Informal Community Learning

Policymakers have not been mentioned in this dissertation as meaningful stakeholders in the field of informal community learning, yet their role is crucial as they can influence and guide the funding process for youth media programs such as Chronicle Creations. How can we address the need for stable funding for participatory community media programs such as Chronicle? Pardue (2004) writes of the case of Brazil: “hip hop stands as one of the few forms of expression which policy implementors (e.g., educational psychologists, social workers, and cultural department directors) have recognized as a potential medium of learning and community-building” (p.411). Funding is an essential part of any discussion of community based programming. The staff at Chronicle Creations consistently is searching for government funding partners so that they could continue the project. Given that much of the funding for these types of programs is unstable and often from government based agencies, this type of critical qualitative analysis of community programming could be helpful in informing funding distribution.

Smith (2006) questions: “If schools and colleges have only a limited place in the learning that occurs in a society, questions must be asked about the focus on such institutions. Would funding be better deployed elsewhere?” (p.15). Chronicle Creations has managed to stay a cohesive group for almost two years and are on their way of meeting their goal of creating a commercial media product. This is largely due to the cemented commitment of the staff who continued with the project even when the outcome did not look likely because of lack of financial support. If participatory media projects such as Chronicle can reach urban youth
the way they have reached the participants, how can we influence the sphere of policy to support these informal structures? These type of grassroots participatory programs that deal with hip hop urban youth are in dire need of stable funding. Programs such as Toronto’s Literacy Through Hip Hop and Montreal’s Hip Hop Sans Le Pop, while receiving successful reviews from educators, administrators, parents, and students alike, have a tenuous existence at best given that they must find yearly sources of funding (Indongo, personal communication 2009; Sackeyfio, personal communication 2009).

Uncovering Organic Intellectuals

Stuart Hall (1992) lays out the two roles of the organic intellectual:

1) It is the job of the organic intellectual to know more than the traditional intellectuals do: really know, not just pretend to know, not just to have the facility of knowledge, but to know deeply and profoundly

2) The organic intellectual cannot absolve himself or herself from the responsibility of transmitting those ideas, that knowledge, through the intellectual function to those who do not belong, professionally, in the intellectual class (p.281).

Hall presses the importance of these two roles for cultural studies theorists and insists that you need to constantly strive towards both otherwise you will advance theoretically, but will be politically disengaged, or in his words “worthless”. It is not enough to simply know the facts to teach; as Hall says you must know deeply and profoundly. But what does it mean to know ‘deeply and profoundly’? Perhaps to know ‘deeply and profoundly’ is to know with radical love at the heart of your teaching, perhaps to know in a way where your knowledge is contextualized not only in the current socioeconomic, political, environmental situation, but also in
the context of your participants’ lives. For at the heart of the organic intellectual is an intellectual who is involved with the world around her. Thus theory does not exist for theory’s sake, but for the sake of informing potential change.

The organic intellectual is central to both critical pedagogy and to cultural studies and goes back to the Frankfurt School which refused to fetishize knowledge as something separate from action (Jay, 1973). Both theories ask intellectuals to be more. Do more. There is no trade-off between action and careful studied thought, rather the action and the thought grow together – there is not one without the other. Allen (2006) wrote of critical pedagogy: “It’s about whether we are living up to our own ideals. And let us be judged not merely by our intentions but by our results” (p.17). This connection between intentions and results is what Benjamin alluded to in the beginning of this chapter when we spoke of his admiration for how they were simply ‘trying to do something’. I do not want to regress into the very type of success narrative of ‘wizards’ and ‘hopefuls’ I spoke of in chapter 1 and so I acknowledge that the process created by Chronicle has not been a one way linear progression to empowerment or success; in many ways they have fall short of the youthtopias Akom et al. (2008) call for, especially in relation to critical reflection of how power works through race and gender. Yet as researchers of informal community learning we must learn to acknowledge those spaces of falling short while being able to acknowledge the spaces where informal community learning succeeds; to do so we must continue the work of finding a new way to talk about our relationship with community learning.

The organic intellectual lives in my research because I am not interested in telling a story about a group of hip hop artists who have trouble finding their place in the world after high school. Rather I am interested in telling their stories so as to
affect change in the future for young adults and community educators. Similarly
the participants and the staff at Chronicle Creations live the spirit of organic
intellectualism as they strive to do more, to be more, to give more.

I include myself as an organic intellectual, as alongside the participants and
staff at Chronicle Creations I too strive to do more, to be more, to give more.
While I began this dissertation with a studied look at hip hop and informal learning
spaces touched my life, it should come as no surprise that my life continues to be
intertwined with the vibrant learning that takes place within hip hop culture and
informal learning spaces. In the opening pages of this dissertation I was a
participant in these informal learning spaces and throughout this dissertation I was
an observer in an informal learning spaces. Now I am an educator in the informal
education sector, working with a non-profit that uses primarily hip hop as a means
to educate youth in communities around Toronto about forms of oppression. I
encounter the same obstacles that faced Marissa with Chronicle Creations – how
do I get the youth to come back? How do I negotiate the fine balance between
encouraging critical thinking and the complexities of participation? I also
encounter the same passion for hip hop that Marissa found in the youth of
Chronicle Creations. Whether in suburbs or what are termed ‘priority
neighbourhoods’ of Toronto I find that youth not only connect to hip hop culture,
but that once they tap into the creative energy of hip hop culture as the youth in
Chronicle Creations there is no limit to their imagination, nor to the power of their
voice. This only further cements my belief that hip hop culture is the voice of
youth – yesterday’s youth, today’s youth, and tomorrow’s youth.

I leave with words from two organic intellectuals working hard to affect
change in their communities, Kelley’s (2002) *Freedom Dreams* and Ivan.
…the most powerful, visionary dreams of a new society don’t come from little think tanks of smart people or out of the atomized, individualistic world of consumer capitalism where raging against the status quo is simply the hip thing to do. Revolutionary dreams erupt out of political engagement; collective social movements are incubators of new knowledge…I have had students argue that the problems facing ‘real people’ today can be solved by merely bridging the gap between our superior knowledge and people outside the ivy walls who simply do not have access to that knowledge…it worries me when they believe that simply “droppin’ science” on the people will generate new, liberatory social movements. I am convinced that the opposite is true: Social movements generate new knowledge, new theories, new questions. The most radical ideas often grow out of a concrete intellectual engagement with the problems of aggrieved populations confronting systems of oppression (p.8)

IVAN: I just, I wanted to contribute, like one of my dreams is to have like a hip hop establishment for kids that – like now there’s all these little workshops. Like ah good for you workshop. But I want to have like a centre of like, with a gym and a cafeteria and a little theatre and a little worksh…and like a studio where any youth in Montreal can come and do their art and do it like right and have people to guide them through it. You know what I mean? That’s my dream. One day I hope that I’ll have enough power and money and whatever to do that you know? And I was like, I’m always, I’m so passionate about this hip hop thing I’m like yo this is great if they’re doing a documentary about hip hop in Montreal for the kids…first of all I’d like, I think I would be a really good candidate for that because I know so much and I live it so much. One. Two, I’m like it’s going to help me in my future projects because like I can go and if
I want a grant or something I can go ‘look I did this, from A-Z I was there I helped out, I did all the interviews, I was, I’m involved in this, I’ve been involved in this’. So it’s like, it was very, it was just the right thing for me to do you know what I mean? And it’s like I love hip hop.
Appendix A

Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Hip hop element</th>
<th>Self-identification shared in sessions</th>
<th>Employment and/or education involvement January 2008 – June 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lise* 32</td>
<td>Hip hop dancer</td>
<td>White, Quebecoise, grew up in Montreal</td>
<td>Hip hop dance teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>B-Girl</td>
<td>Black, Congolese, initially migrated to France, then to Montreal</td>
<td>Aspiring hip hop dance teacher, works in a store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean Franc</td>
<td>B-Boy</td>
<td>Black, Haitian-Canadian</td>
<td>Freelance master of ceremonies for special events, dancer, breakdance teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince*</td>
<td>Emcee, reggae singer</td>
<td>Black, grew up in Congo, moved to Montreal as a teenager</td>
<td>Works full-time at an office job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffrey*</td>
<td>Emcee</td>
<td>Half-Scottish, Half Badian, grew up in suburb outside of Montreal</td>
<td>Works part-time at a hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theo</td>
<td>Emcee</td>
<td>Black Montrealean</td>
<td>Works full-time at undisclosed location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emanuel*</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>Black, Haitian background, moved to Montreal from Brooklyn</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos*</td>
<td>Graf writer</td>
<td>Chilean, moved to Montreal as a child</td>
<td>Works at a community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan*</td>
<td>Graf writer</td>
<td>Russian, refugee from Russia, came to Montreal after living in Israeli refugee camp</td>
<td>Works full-time at an office job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates participants who participated in an interview.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Hip hop element</th>
<th>Self-identification shared in sessions</th>
<th>Employment and/or education involvement January 2008 – June 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joshua*</td>
<td>DJ, beat Maker, producer, radio host</td>
<td>Black Montrealer with Jamaican roots</td>
<td>CEGEP\textsuperscript{33} Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin*</td>
<td>DJ, beat maker, radio host</td>
<td>Half Costa-Rican, Half White, grew up in Montreal</td>
<td>University student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leesha</td>
<td>DJ</td>
<td>Black Montrealer</td>
<td>High school student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everson</td>
<td>Not affiliated</td>
<td>Black, moved to Montreal from Brooklyn</td>
<td>Works full-time at an undisclosed location</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{33} CEGEP refers to a post-secondary institution in Quebec that typically lasts one year. It is a prerequisite for undergraduate studies for Quebec students. However not all CEGEP students plan on attending university.
## Appendix B

### Pre-production Sessions: Themes, Activities, Homework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Theme/Focus</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Homework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introductions</td>
<td>Ice breakers; division into groups of DJs, emcees, dancers, and graffiti writers</td>
<td>Questionnaire about hip hop seen in Appendix C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Realness in hip hop; women in hip hop</td>
<td>Group work on the passion behind your element; debate on sexual discrimination in hip hop</td>
<td>Creating bios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Commercialisation of hip hop</td>
<td>Learning how to storyboard</td>
<td>Creating bios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Finding a theme for the documentary</td>
<td>Creating 12 themes for the documentary</td>
<td>Compile a list of Montreal hip hoppers to interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Interview skills</td>
<td>Guest speaker from CBC Radio</td>
<td>Research the roots of your element, for example emceeing, and how it began in Montreal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Foundations of style</td>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>Research the foundations of style in your element</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Finding a theme for the documentary</td>
<td>Presenting the foundations of each element; brainstorming the main theme for the documentary</td>
<td>Compile a list of people to interview and what you would ask them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Education and growing up with hip hop</td>
<td>Group discussion on growing up with hip hop</td>
<td>Filling out interview sheets as seen in Appendix D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Theme/Focus</td>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>Homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Role of community in hip hop</td>
<td>Mapping out scenes and interviews</td>
<td>Make contact with possible interviewees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Theme selection</td>
<td>Filming the group discussions</td>
<td>Continue to make contact with interviewees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Creating scenes</td>
<td>Brainstorming possible scenes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Creating scenes</td>
<td>Mapping out chapters for the documentary</td>
<td>Think about what role you want to play in the production of the documentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Creating a filming schedule</td>
<td>Finalizing interview angles and content</td>
<td>Set out a filming schedule for when you want to be filmed or an event you want to be filmed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C
Hand-out #1

WHO ARE YOU? / QUI ES-TU?

PART I: YOUR BACKGROUND

Please write as much as you can about your life from birth until now. The important things like:

Where were you born? Who did you grow up with? Who do you live with now? If you emigrated, from where to where? What was that like? What culture do you come from or feel most connected to? Were you an only child? Did you grow up with both parents, no parents? Was your childhood happy? Sad? What big events shaped your path?

PART II: YOUR GOALS, YOUR DREAMS

What do you want to achieve?
What is your goal?
What drives you?

Examples:

I want to succeed with my art.
I want to go to Peru to reconnect with my roots
I want to become a priest
I want to be a good role model for my brother and sister to make up for the father we never had
I want to make Montreal a center for urban dance
I want to open a Hip Hop school to help other youth like myself
I want to connect to my culture
I want to find my place in society / I want to do something positive in society

PART III: ACTION

What happens in your daily world?
What are you DOING to achieve your goal?
What obstacles do you face?
What have you already done in your life – things we might want to tell through voice over or do a reenactment?

Who are the people we need to meet in order to know you better? Ex. your graffiti or dance crew…
Who do you need to meet in order to help you achieve your goal?
3 categories:

Professional: What do you do for work? Who do you interact with? How do you deal with authority? Do you struggle for money?

Personal: Personal relationships – friendships, lovers, family members, roommates

Who is important to you? Who did you grow up with and what did they teach you? For example, maybe everyone in your family just settled for any old job to make money whereas you are the only one in your family to follow your passion. That is interesting.

Are you a loner or have many friends?

Private – What do you do when you are alone (ok, not that!)

Do you have pets? Do you have any weird hobbies? Do you have any special places you go or things you like to do?

Do you have any particularly strong points of view on any particular issues? Any particular personality traits we should know about…. 
Appendix D
Hand-out #2

Name of artist:  Element:

Contact information:  Who will be doing the interview:

Bio of artist:  Where the interview will be done:

Interview questions:

Themes covered by this artist:
Reference List


Brushwood-Rose, C. (2009, May). *Comments on 'youth as cultural producers: Critically engaging with community arts-based learning in education, research, and policy'*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies, Ottawa, ON.


Gore, J.M. (2003). What we can do for you! What can “we” do for “you”?:


Grossberg, L. (2006). Does cultural studies have futures? Should it? (Or what’s the matter with New York?) *Cultural studies*, 20, 1-32


out!: Bridging out-of-school literacies with classroom practice (pp.131-161). New York: Teacher's College Press.


