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I, Deborah M. Sánchez, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Literacy and Second Language Studies.

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Hip hop and Literacy in the Lives of Two Students in a Transitional English Course

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Abstract
This qualitative dissertation study investigated the following research question: How does Hip hop influence the literate lives, i.e., the connections of Hip hop to readings, writings and other communicative practices, of students who placed into transitional college English courses? The impetus for the study came from the importance that Hip hop has in the lives of young people (Smitherman, 1997). The participants in this study, Dionne and Mike, were students placed into a 1st year non-credit bearing English course, also known as a transitional course (Armstrong, 2007), at a 4-year university. The study employed tools of ethnography (Heath & Street, 2008), such as interviews, classroom observations and textual analysis of students’ language and literacy practices in spaces inside and outside of the classroom. This study is conceptually framed within cultural studies (Hicks, 2003, 2005, 2009; Nelson, Treichler, & Grossberg, 1992) and sociocultural studies (Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Street, 2001). Data were analyzed using linguistic analysis (Alim, 2006) and textual analysis (Kellner, 2009). Findings suggest that Dionne and Mike, two students who disliked reading in the traditional sense, found rhetorical power (Hicks & Dolan, 2003) and humanistic understanding through participation in Hip hop culture. The historical moments, ideological stances, and language of Hip hop contributed to the social construction of these young people’s literate identities. These two cases provide evidence which might add to a more robust philosophy of “remedial”, “developmental”, or transitional education, with a renewed focus on affective issues involved in literacy learning.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract 2

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background 7
Rationale 8
Statement of the Problem 12
Significance of the Study 13
Conceptual Framework 14
  Cultural Studies 14
  Sociocultural Studies on Language and Literacy 16
  Composition Studies 17
  Social Networking Sites and Literacy 18

Definitions of Terms 20
Guiding Research Question 22

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview 23
History of Hip hop Culture 23
  African American Language (AAL) 25
Hip hop Linguistics (HHLx) 29
Hip hop Literacies 31
Research on Hip hop and Literacy 32
  Hip hop Pedagogy: The Bridge Metaphor 39
History of Open Admissions 40
Research on AAL and College Literacy 42
Hypocritical Language Practices 44
Summary 47

Chapter 3: Methods

Overall Research Design 48
  Qualitative Data 50
  Constant Comparative Perspective 50
  Co-occurrences for Pattern Detection 52
  Research Context 52
  Research Site 52
  Research Participants 53
  Sampling Procedure 53
  Purposeful Sampling 53
  Ethnographic Tools 54
  Data Content 54

Table 1: Data Content 55
Table 2: Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Memos</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing on Facebook and Other Artifacts</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textual Analysis</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Analysis</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip hop Linguistics (HHLx)</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Analysis of African American Language and Literacy</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recursive Process</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexivity and Ethnocentricity</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline of Study</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 4: “We Are All Queens”

Case One

Who is Dionne? 72
Findings 75
Black Self-Pride 75
Female Self-Pride 77
AAL in the Everyday/prosaic 81
Activism in Non-Traditional Spaces 85
Hip hop as Activism 85
Christianity as Activism 89
Poetry as Activism 90

Chapter 5: “A Call to My Soul”

Hip hop as Cultural Practice 98
Humanistic Understanding 99

Case Two

Who is Mike? 103
Findings 103
Hip hop tells a Story 103
Hip hop is Freedom 108
Hip hop is Philosophical 111
The Soul 115
Multiple and Contradictory Texts/subjectivities 122
Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications

Discussion 129
An Absence of Caring in Education 132
Sociocultural Theories of Language Learning—the Moral Link 133
References 141
Appendices 155

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1  Data Content 55
Table 2  Data Sources 55
Figure 1  Screenshot from Mike’s Facebook page 65
Figure 2  The multiple modes at work within a Facebook page 66

Appendices

A.  Hip hop Survey 155
B.  Interview 1: Protocol 156
C.  Interview 2: Protocol 157
D.  Adult Consent Form for Research 158
Chapter 1: Introduction

“My son, Christopher Wallace, told stories. Some of them were funny. Some of them were sad. Some of them were violent. But people listened.”

Voletta Wallace, Mother of beloved and deceased rapper and Hip hop legend, Christopher “Biggie/Notorious B.I.G.” Wallace

Background

Why, as Voletta Wallace argued in the quote that introduced this section, did people listen to the stories that her son told? Why are urban youth so moved by the stories expressed in Hip hop music? Smitherman (1997) begins to address the answers to these questions in the following quote about Hip hop in the lives of young people: “This music has become—the—principal medium for Black youth to ‘express their views of the world’ and to seek to ‘create a sense of order’ (Allen, 1996) out of the turbulence and chaos of their, and our, lives” (p. 5). This study focuses on the ways in which Hip hop influences the literate lives of two students, one Black and one White, who were placed into a non-credit bearing transitional English course. I am using instead the term transitional to describe the course, and the students in it, in order to move away from any pejorative connotations associated with the words, remedial or developmental. I also wish to describe students who place into these courses as people who are learning academic literacy, which is a complex process that develops over time, not a set of skills that can be mastered in a quarter or semester of “remediation” (Armstrong, 2007; Sánchez & Paulson, 2008). The transition is not a single transition, from worse to better, from inferior to superior, but part of the process of discourse and genre acquisition dependent on situations and life experiences (Ivanič, 1998). This study is both timely and important because the numbers of students enrolling in “remedial” English courses is growing (Boylan, 2000). In addition, although scholars have found that Hip hop plays an important role in the lives of students, and national organizations highlight the importance of connecting literacy to the self and the human
experience (NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts, 1996), these goals often go by the wayside in discussions about policy, remediation and school reform (Rose, 2009a, 2010).

Hip hop was created in the 1970’s by mostly young African Americans in New York City (Smitherman, 1997) in response to the social conditions that they witnessed around them. More recently, the commercial influence of Hip hop has transcended race and influenced students from many different backgrounds (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2008). Despite its origins as a black cultural art form, Chang (2005) in a historical rendering of the history of Hip hop, argues that cultural homogeneity--the idea that people from many different backgrounds can come together over a similar cultural practice--was one of the original goals of Hip hop. The goal of this research project was not to make the role of Hip hop an essential one in the lives of Black urban youth, or to assume that all Black youth live in urban settings, or that all youth who live in urban areas are Black. While keeping the above points in mind, but at the same time adopting Smitherman’ s view that Hip hop does play an important role in the lives of many Black youth, I hoped to investigate what students did with Hip hop texts and why Hip hop was so important to them. Since I only included findings from two students in the following study, results are not generalizable.

Rationale

The rationale for investigating the role that Hip hop plays in the literate lives of students comes from scholarship which argues that students’ literacy practices, which are often overlooked, undervalued or ignored, should be utilized in academic settings. Students who enroll in transitional English courses, usually non-credit bearing courses, often come from underfunded schools, and they have had insufficient access to college preparatory courses and other support
services (Swai, Redd, & Perna, 2003) that would prepare them for the academic and personal demands of college.

Culture-based, class-based and race-based affinities play a part in whether or not students learn (Kohl, 1994), and students who see these affinities validated in academic settings have a better chance at retention and success (Valenzuela, 1999). Since transitional classes often function as gatekeeping or “cooling out” (Patthey-Chavez, Dillon, & Thomas-Spiegel, 2005) measures to thwart student success, it seems that the problem of retention and its relationship to affective issues in education, such as the connection between the human experience and literacy learning, is a field based problem that is prevalent in higher education. Along these lines, while both the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association assert the importance of reading to understanding the human experience (NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts, 1996), this standard often goes by the wayside in schooling, where knowledge of cognitive skills takes precedent.

Another part of the rationale comes from a field based problem—the overrepresentation of Black students in transitional, non-credit bearing courses. While Blacks overall are underrepresented in university and college settings, they are overrepresented in transitional courses, which often do not count toward graduation credit. Boylan, Bonham, & Bliss (1994) found that: “Just over 9% of those enrolled in American institutions of higher education are African American students. In developmental programs, however, African Americans accounted for 23% of the population at 2-year institutions and 30% of the population at 4-year institutions” (p. 2). In addition Saxon & Boylan (2000) write: “African-Americans… are already overrepresented (relative to their representation in higher education) in remedial programs and it is expected that these numbers will continue to grow along with their increased participation in
higher education” (p. 2). As an example of Saxon and Boylan’s assertion, I include a statistic from my own university: The presence of African American students who make up much of the diversity on campus were overrepresented in University of Cincinnati’s now defunct quasi-open access program, the Center for Access and Transition (CAT). In fact, in 2006, 45.2 %—almost half of all incoming African American students—enrolled in the CAT (Diversity Task Force Report, 8) and placed into transitional English courses. Another example can be found in Greene and Alexander (2008). Greene traces the history of the basic writing (BW) program at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. The program began in 1953, largely as a result of demands made by French-speaking students of color who filed a lawsuit against the university and won. Therefore, in 1954, the university became desegregated and a “full open admissions policy” (73) was put into effect. Unfortunately, the move toward selective admissions in 1999 and a reduction in the BW program—a battle won by the elitists—resulted in a drop in the overall African American enrollment at ULL, whose presence made up a large part of the basic writing program (Sanchez, 2008).

Further, even though “…the most studied variety in the sociolinguistic literature is BL [Black Language], including its rich and diverse linguistic practices” (Alim, 2007b; p. 25); African American students continue to be the victims of linguistic discrimination (Baugh & Welborn, 2009) and their overrepresentation in transitional English courses is a possible result of this discrimination (Kynard, 2005). The above is a claim about the intersections of race and language and how they affect access to higher education. Even though nearly 40 years of sociolinguistic research has shown what Alim argues above, teachers’ lack of knowledge of sociolinguistics hinders access to and acquisition of literacy for African American students (Dyson & Smitherman, 2009). The academy has a history of subverting the rhetorics of African
Americans while posturing its own white liberal rhetorics (Bonilla-Silva, 2003), despite the role that Black radical movements—and the role that Black language had in the rhetoric of these movements—have had in shaping the field of composition (Kynard, 2005). While some would argue against a position which centers students’ cultural and literate identities, I position myself with scholars who view students’ cultural and literate identities from profit perspectives (Brandt, 2001; Kinloch, 2005; Kirkland, 2008b). The preceding scholars view students’ cultural and literate identities as valuable and crucial to learning rather than as a hindrance to learning.

Inherent in my research interest and question is the desire to center the literate and cultural practices of students who are overrepresented in transitional English courses. What I mean by centering students’ cultural and literate identities is that students’ class-based, race-based, and culture-based identities might be placed more at the center of curriculum choices and policy decisions. Advancement to higher level college literacy courses should not have to be at the expense of students’ cultural and race based affinities and/or identity development. In regards to Hip hop literacies in the transitional English classroom, Campbell (1997, 2007) and McCrary (2005) have argued for reading and writing about Hip hop and hybrid texts as a way for students to insert themselves into the academy, to “represent” and maintain their African American cultural and linguistic identity. Also, Forrell (2006) argues that Hip hop is a relevant cultural practice and teaching tool in a basic writing course.

Students placed into transitional English classes have a plethora of literacy resources that they draw on in their writing. As I think about my own former students, I recognize that, given the chance to write about what they chose, many of them drew on their participation in Hip hop literacies (Sánchez, 2010). I view their participation in Hip hop literacies from a profit, rather than deficit, perspective (Kirkland, 2008b) despite its unsanctioned and lowbrow status in
college level literacy courses. The impetus for the present study came from this contradiction and a willingness to see students as in a position to educate teachers/researchers about their literacy practices.

Statement of the Problem

The goals of educating students at the primary and secondary levels are mostly economic ones (Rose, 2009a). In postsecondary education, economic goals are also principal, and the humanistic goals of a university education often go by the wayside. While many have written about using Hip hop in the classroom to teach academic skills, there is little research that explores the ways that Hip hop influences students’ literate lives or the ways that young people learn humanistic principles through Hip hop though there are a few exceptions (Hill, 2009; Kirkland, 2007).

The goals of a transitional education, and current theory about teaching in transitional education—with its focus on helping students transition to college level work and/or the world of work—have failed to discuss a humanistic education as part of what it means to be successful in college and as a citizen of the world. Rose (2009b) concurs that in current educational policy there is “not a lot…that addresses the wider human dimension of education” (p. 27). In regards to the social turn in literacy theory and research, many researchers working within the field of sociocultural studies acknowledge the role that other human beings play in learning literacy yet, as Hicks (2000) argues “The complex particulars of morally imbued relationships have been oddly missing from theoretical discourses about learning in social context” (p. 227). Hicks’ concern with the feelings, emotions, and histories, that make up the particulars of learning literacy in social contexts relates to the gap in the literature.
So then why study Hip hop? What does looking at the culture that students produce and consume get at? How can looking at their culture help us help them to be successful in college and in the world? Willis (1977) wrote in the conclusion to his foundational study about working class boys and culture, that in regards to education for the working class: “This whole study… suggests… that there is some room for action at the cultural level, and certainly that there is scope here for exposing to their members more clearly what their own cultures ‘tell’ them about their structural and social location...” (p. 186). Willis argued that in educating the working class, teachers should study and analyze the attitudes and other social and cultural forms and use them as texts for class work. He argued that these texts could and should be studied for the possibilities—what Willis called penetrations—and limitations inherent in texts for the purposes of learning academic skills while conducting self and cultural analysis. While not all students in transitional English courses come from the working class, many do, and could benefit from a curriculum which views their culture from a profit perspective.

**Significance of the Study**

Despite research in many of the subdisciplines that make up transitional education, such as ESL, Reading and Basic Writing, and the increasing numbers of students who place into transitional courses, the legitimacy of the field is frequently under scrutiny and transitional education programs are usually the first to go when budgets are cut (Chung, 2005). They are usually under scrutiny because they are seen as remediating students who should have learned certain skills in high schools, and they are seen as a burden to taxpayers who fund public education. Chung (2005) argues that a way to build theory about the field, thus lending more legitimacy to it, may be to use knowledge from practice—from a “bottom-up” perspective. The bottom-up perspective would include using practitioner knowledge and the voices of students to
build theory about the field. This study hopefully will result in a better understanding of the language and literacy practices of students who are in transitional courses, therefore adding to the field of literacy studies and studies in developmental education. This may work to provide a more adequate knowledge base for teachers of students placed into transitional English courses. What better way to build a knowledge base than from the epistemic perspective of the students—the people who know, who are in a unique place to educate their teachers about their literacy and cultural practices?

*Conceptual Framework*

The following section provides brief descriptions of the traditions that frame my study: cultural studies, sociocultural studies on language and literacy, composition studies, and social networking sites and literacy.

*Cultural Studies*

Scholars working within the tradition of cultural studies reject the idea that popular culture is lowbrow and vulgar and therefore not worthy of study (Nelson, Treichler & Grossberg, 1992). Instead, they argue that the culture of everyday life, the symbolic and material resources, including language, that are interwoven into people’s everyday lives should be studied if scholars are truly interested in research projects that are both political and answerable to human beings (Hicks, 2009). The idea of answerability is an element of dialogue, as theorized by Bakhtin, and made easier to understand by Hicks (2000). Answerability includes the notion that we are morally responsible in our individual utterances to other people, but at the same time those individual utterances are situated in a sociocultural and historical context. The idea that students are in a position to educate teachers follows from scholarship in the tradition of cultural studies, as Brunt (1991) reminds us in the following quote: “The best kind of cultural studies has always
taken an explicitly partisan position...there’s an acknowledgement that partisanship includes a willingness on our part as educators to be educated precisely by listening to the kernel of very good sense among those in our audience communities who are telling us precisely why they can’t or don’t want change on our terms...” (p. 75). Alim (2006) writes, “Most Blacks in the US since integration can testify that they have experienced teachers’ attempts to eradicate their language and linguistic practices... in favor of the adoption of White cultural and linguistic norms” (p. 54). The above quotes speak to the reality that, despite attempts to eradicate African American Language (AAL), and scathing critiques of Hip hop, young people continue to assert their agentive selves through the use of AAL and participation in Hip hop (Alim, 2006).


Students may be drawing on Hip hop and its’ rhetorical power in ways that teachers and scholars may not be aware of. The notion of rhetorical power, an important theoretical and analytical tool, which I draw on, comes from Hicks’ (2003, 2005, 2009) research. Hicks’ interdisciplinary research in literacy and cultural studies is concerned with the educational outcomes of white, poor, and working class girls. Hicks argues that the girls in her studies draw rhetorical power from horror fiction. Their non-academic ways of reading, writing, speaking and living draw on cultural practices steeped in the history and people of the Appalachian Mountains. I use Hicks’ notion of rhetorical power to explain how one can live creatively by literate means, despite structural forces.

H. S. Alim, a linguist and educational scholar, working within multiple traditions, including cultural studies, studies Hip hop as a literate and cultural practice and seeks to center students’ participation in Hip hop literacies for the purposes of social justice and educational equity. Alim (2006) writes: “My own studies seek to reinvigorate cultural studies’ commitment
to the people and put into practice what cultural anthropology espouses, that is, a nonhierarchical, anticolonial approach that humanizes its subject” (p. 12). Following in the tradition of Alim and others working within the field of literacy and cultural studies, this study investigated the influence of Hip hop on the literate lives of students, from a perspective that humanizes the student participants.

**Sociocultural Studies on Language and Literacy**

The scholars cited in this section work from different disciplines such as New Literacy Studies, sociolinguistics and composition. Nevertheless, they all have in common the idea that language and literacy learning is shaped by social and cultural forces outside of the mind. According to Street (2001) literacy practices and literacy learning and teaching must be understood within an ideological framework. Literacy is taught and learned depending on social, cultural, material, and cognitive aspects rather than cognitive aspects alone. Brandt & Clinton (2002) expand on Street’s framework by explicating the link between local literacy and global contexts. Literacy practices are socially situated and should be studied in local settings, but at the same time are not invented in the mind of individual agents. Brandt uses the metaphor of a “sponsor of literacy” to show the link between literacy practices of individuals and their wider historical and global contexts. Brandt & Clinton (2002) explain that the concept of a literacy sponsor “recognizes the historical fact that access to literacy has always required assistance, permission, sanction, or coercion by more powerful others, or at least, contact with existing ‘grooves’ of communication” (p. 349). In the context of a “remedial”, “developmental” or as I am using it here, transitional English course, to teach only basic skills to students who have been underserved in previous academic settings and who are underprepared for the demands of academic literacy is not just to teach basic skills. To teach basic skills is to teach an ideology that
says that higher order thinking skills, such as analysis and critique, are only for the more worthy, more intelligent students in more advanced literacy classes. Using Brandt’s metaphor, the interests of students in transitional English courses who are sponsored by others, whether local or distal, may not converge with the interests of the sponsors. What students learn, or don’t learn, the content that we teach or don’t teach, convey powerful messages—about the world, who they are allowed to be and who we let them be (Dyson & Smitherman, 2009).

In the following section, I draw from research in composition studies and sociolinguistics under the sociocultural studies subheading because work in both disciplines have in recent times focused on the ways in which language and literacy is rooted in socially situated practices (Gee, 1999).

*Composition Studies*

Bazerman (1989) defines rhetoric as: “The study of how people use language and other symbols to realize human goals and carry out human activities...ultimately a practical study offering people great control over their symbolic activity.” (p. 6). The last part of Bazerman’s definition highlights the agency that writers do have despite structural forces that inhibit or limit human action. Much like scholars working within the tradition of cultural studies, both Bazerman (1989) and Brandt (2002) are composition scholars who incorporate the turn to viewing literacy and language as social practices into their scholarship. Brandt’s (2001) research attempts to understand what people do with reading and writing from a non-judgmental perspective. In addition, her research attempts to understand not only the development and use of literacy in localized settings and across the lifespan, but what is done to people with literacy in the name of economic development, and how this can “contribute to their sense of identity, normality, possibility” (p. 11). The notion that literacy and economic changes are inextricably
linked comes from Brandt’s (2001) assertion that print and print-based technologies have become a part of almost all aspects of commerce. The idea that individual literacy development and use depends on social, economic, and institutional forces, rather than inside the mind alone, fits squarely within the tradition of New Literacy Studies. Brandt coined the term “sponsors of literacy” which she defines as, “…any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (p. 19). Brandt’s definition of sponsors of literacy fits well with the idea that learning literacy is a process that develops over time and is dependent on allowances and constraints, whether local or distant.

Ivanič’s (1998) ideas about writing and identity align with Brandt’s in that she argues that “…it is important not to think simplistically about ‘the acquisition of academic discourse’. There is no such single-tracked process: it’s not a smooth progression towards possession. People change their preferences as their life experiences and values change, moving in and out of discourses according to particular demands of particular occasions for writing and particular readers” (p. 52). Just as identities are not fixed (Kamberelis & Scott, 1992), neither are literacy practices. Writing and identity are constitutive; they’re always in construction simultaneously.

*Social Networking Sites (SNSs) and Literacy*

An important medium for agency is the use of Facebook, a SNS, which is demonstrated in the ensuing data from two case studies. The use of Facebook as a significant data source in this study makes sense in regards to how the aforementioned conceptual frameworks are interrelated. That is to say, Facebook offers young people an important medium to express their agentive and literate selves, to negotiate and contest discourses and identities which are available to them within the context of everyday life. A general description of Facebook is that it is a SNS,
which allows users to create an online profile in which they can share messages, photos, notes, links and other representations of literate identity with other online users called “Friends”.

According to Facebook.com’s statistics page, there are over 800 million active users (https://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics, retrieved Jan 15 2012). Facebook works as a literacy tool because young people use it, and increasingly the Internet in general, as a tool for social communication. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, “Some 93% of teens use the internet, and more of them than ever are using it as a venue for social interaction—a place where they can share creations, tell stories, and interact with others” (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, & Macgill, 2001; p. 3i). Facebook has become a popular literacy tool for young people to express themselves, tell their stories and read the stories of other online users.

The next two paragraphs provide supplementary information in regards to the sociocultural conceptual framework that frames the dissertation study, and the case study on Mike, in particular. Kamberelis & Scott (1992) argue that “text construction and subjectivity are mutually constitutive” (p. 359). Subjectivity, or the construction of identities, is a lifelong process. This process comes about as a result of a human being’s participation in discourse communities and being positioned in material, social, and ideological ways. Subjectivity recognizes social forces but allows for agency, in the construction of identities. Kamberelis & Scott articulate that, “The self is continually created in the integration of one’s discourses, experiences, and practices into a single social being” (p. 361).

Social network/networking sites, like Myspace, Facebook, and Twitter allow users to make visible their social networks. Boyd (2008) uses the term ‘network’ rather than ‘networking’ to make the distinction that SNSs are most often used to stay connected to people in one’s already established off-line social network rather than a place to begin relationships with
strangers. SNSs afford textual development of personhood. They are a popular technologically literate way for social and human development. Individuals who use SNSs, create profile pages that are literate spaces, or as boyd (2008) argues, SNSs are spaces where people can “type oneself into being” (Sunden, 2003, p. 3 as cited in Boyd, p. 211). In regards to agency and the construction of texts, another important term is useful—that of voice. Kamberelis & Scott explain the concept of voice in this way:

Discourse always embodies ideologies…Bakhtin has referred to these ideologies as ‘voices’ arguing that the content and style of any utterance constitutes a voice or an ideological stance toward both the discourse used and the real-world referents of the discourse…All people borrow and transform others’ voices in order to construct their own utterances…all writers and all texts anticipate responses from future writers and future texts. (p. 363)

In regards to SNSs and the co-construction of texts and subjectivities, SNSs represent newer technological ways in which young people articulate and negotiate voices in the development of a literate self.

Definitions of Terms

**Rhetorical power** - The notion of rhetorical power is an important theoretical and analytical tool in the dissertation. I borrow this term from Hicks’ (2003, 2005, 2009) research with young girls from a poor, predominately white community. Her research explored how the girls’ passion for horror fiction evoked power through their imaginative spoken, literate, and lived responses to the readings. Despite the material reality and sense of powerlessness that goes along with living in a high poverty neighborhood, their creative spoken and literate responses to horror fiction gave them the power of fantasy. The power of fantasy that came from the literacy practice of reading
horror fictions allowed them to imagine and to hope, in spoken and literate ways, for lives outside of their high poverty neighborhood. I borrow Hicks’ notion of rhetorical power to explain how one can live life creatively by literate means, despite structural forces.

**Middle-class White liberal rhetoric** - In this dissertation, I use the term white liberal rhetoric to describe the way in which issues around race and language are sometimes presented in academic settings. Bonilla-Silva (2003) argues that “By framing race-related issues in the language of liberalism, whites can appear ‘reasonable’ and even ‘moral,’ while opposing almost all practical approaches to deal with …racial inequality” (p. 28). The following are some examples which make up the rhetoric of white liberals, especially in regards to education: 1) Despite the overwhelming evidence of institutionalized racism in many sectors of life, including education, we are making progress in racial equality (Bonilla-Silva, 2009), 2) Black language is great, but not good enough to use in schools or for the language of wider communication (Alim & Baugh, 2007), 3) Access to higher education for racial and ethnic minorities is due largely to the actions of white women like Mina Shaughnessy (Kynard, 2005). While not all individual white liberals agree with the above ideas, scholars point to the preceding ideas that make up a collective white liberal rhetoric, which shapes much of discourse and policy.

**Color-blindness/colorblind racism** - Bonilla-Silva (2003) asserts that white liberal rhetoric is a part of the framework of colorblind racism. For example, the notion of ‘equal opportunity’ can be spun to ignore the facts that people of color are disproportionately underrepresented in many professions and in education. In their argument against affirmative action and for equal opportunity, some White liberals may deny that they see color in order to assert that all people should be judged according to merit. The myth of colorblindness makes racism more insidious by perpetuating the false idea that race no longer plays a part in one’s life chances.
**Hip hop communicative practices** - Hip hop communicative practices are rooted in the African-American oral tradition. Tonal semantics, narrativizing, signifyin’, Africanized syntax and other communicative practice give Hip hop its power (Alim, 2006; Richardson, 2006; Smitherman, 1997). Some themes that dominate Hip hop are absence, survival, consumerism, racism, violence, self-love and self-empowerment among other themes which concern youth from many walks of life (Alim, 2006; Kitwana, 2002).

**Guiding Research Question**

The following study seeks to investigate, within the interrelated conceptual frameworks of cultural studies, sociocultural studies and writing studies conceptual frameworks, the following research question: How does Hip hop influence the literate lives of students in transitional English courses?
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

This literature review sets the stage for the study, which investigated how Hip hop influences the literate lives of students placed into transitional English classes. The first half begins with a short history of Hip hop culture and a discussion of African American Language (AAL) since Hip hop as a literate practice is inextricably tied to AAL practices. I also discuss recent scholarship on Hip hop linguistics since scholarship in this field is deeply concerned with issues of education, access, and social justice.

The second half reviews research studies on the intersections between Hip hop, literacy and pedagogy and AAL, literacy practices and college literacy, in order to situate my study within this growing, yet relatively small, body of research.

History of Hip hop Culture

In a historical retelling of Hip hop culture, Chang (2005) writes: “If blues culture had developed under the conditions of oppressive, forced labor, hip-hop culture would arise from the conditions of no work” (p. 13). During the 1970’s, residents of the Bronx borough of New York City witnessed their neighborhoods falling to destruction because of severe unemployment, major cutbacks in social services and other circumstances which amounted to a “benign neglect” (Chang, 2005, p. 14) on the part of city, state and national officials. The witnesses to this benign neglect began to describe the material and social conditions around them via the medium of the rap, a verbal/musical art form with its antecedents in African American language tradition.

Smitherman (1997) writes that in the late 1960’s, when the term rap entered mainstream language, it came to mean; “…any kind of strong, aggressive, highly fluent, powerful talk” (p. 4). One of the first to put this strong, influential, rhythmic talk over music, as a witness to the
material and social conditions of inner-city life in the Bronx, was Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five with their highly influential rap song, “The Message” (Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, 1982, track 7). They described life on the streets in the following lyrics to “The Message:”

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Broken glass everywhere
People pissing on the stairs, you know they just
Don’t care
I can’t take the smell, I can’t take the noise
Got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice
Rats in the front room, roaches in the back
Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat
I tried to get away, but I couldn’t get far
Cause the man with the tow-truck repossessed my car
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Hip hop culture has always been and continues to be a resistance culture rooted in the African American language tradition. It is a resistance culture in which, despite difficult social and material living situations, people find agency through the material resources available to them. In regards to the early pioneers of Hip hop, Chang (2005) writes that “Seeing politics exhausted, they channeled their energies into culture…” (p. 23). One of those early pioneers was a Disc Jockey named Afrika Bambaataa who used the boom box and cassette tapes—the material resources available to him—to generate and lead a Hip hop Movement. Bambaataa, the son of West Indian immigrants, grew up in the Bronx River housing projects. He was seduced into gang life as a youth and became a warlord for the Black Spades. But after a gang truce in 1971, Bambaataa had an epiphany and was inspired to look for a way out of the gang. His way out was
through DJ-ing; the role of the Disc Jockey (DJ) is to play the records which will move the crowd, to be “masters of records” (Toop, 2004). He learned the craft from other ex-Spades and began throwing block parties of his own. He also created the Bronx River Organization as an alternative to the Black Spades gang. Chang writes about Bambaataa’s relationship to the audience during this time: “Bam’s sound became a rhythmic analogue to his peace-making philosophy; his set-lists had the same kind of inclusiveness and broad-mindedness he was aspiring to build through The Organization…He played salsa, rock and soca with the same enthusiasm as soul and funk. He was making himself open to the good in everything” (p. 97). Bambaataa took this philosophy of peace and cultural homogeneity and created the 1st Hip hop institution, the Universal Zulu Nation, which was an organization that tried to raise social consciousness through the 5 elements of Hip hop: DJ-ing, MC-ing, b-boy/girling, graffiti writing and knowledge (Chang, 2005). The Disc Jockey plays the records, the Master of Ceremonies is the rapper, and the b-boy or b-girl refers to breakdancers; breakdancing is a competitive and acrobatic style of dancing (Banes, 2004). Chang writes that “Bambaataa is the generative figure…of the Hip hop generation. He transformed his environment in sonic and social structure, and in doing so, he called forth the ideas that would shape generational rebellion” (p. 92). The above history is important because it demonstrates that from the beginning, Hip hop was more than just music, or any one of the other elements; it was a culture and way of life for many young people. The language that emanated from this generation of young people shaped views about society and their language shaped society itself.

_African American Language (AAL) and Cultural Modes of Discourse_

A discussion of African American Language (AAL) is essential to a discussion of Hip hop culture since the two are inextricably linked. Rather than an exhaustive discussion of AAL,
this discussion focuses on the relevant aspects specific to Hip hop, and is based on Geneva Smitherman’s (1977) seminal work, *Talkin’ and Testifyin’: The Language of Black America*. Despite the influence of Smitherman’s body of work over the last 30 years, a discussion of AAL is still essential given what linguist Alim (2006) argues, that: “the richness of BL [Black Language] goes completely unnoticed and is regularly censored in White public space” (p. 56).

The classroom is one of these White public spaces where Black students’ language practices get censured. This censorship comes from continued misunderstandings and pejorative assumptions about AAL, including that it is not appropriate for the classroom (Alim, 2007b). Therefore, the importance of Hip hop in the literate lives of young people from all backgrounds cannot be understood without an understanding of the richness of AAL, and its ties to historical and social circumstances. I include the phrase ‘from all backgrounds’ because the influence of AAL on non-black students has also been documented (Cutler, 1999).

Smitherman (1977) writes that, “There are four traditions that Black Semantics draws from: West African language background; servitude and oppression; music and ‘cool talk’; the traditional black church” (p. 43). For a full discussion of the above traditions, see Chapter 3 on “Black Semantics” from Smitherman’s book; for the purpose of this study I focus on the third element, music and ‘cool talk.’ Smitherman argues that, “Its [Music’s] cultural import and impact on black life are…of such great magnitude because black music is more heavily African than any other single aspect of Black American existence” (p. 51). The way in which the music, Hip hop in this case, is more African comes from its roots in the African, and by extension African-American oral tradition, of tonal semantics, narrativizing, signifyin’, Africanized syntax and other communicative practices. Smitherman (1997) writes that:
The oral tradition itself is rooted in the surviving African traditions of ‘Nommo’ and the power of the word in human life…The rapper is a postmodern African griot, the verbally gifted storyteller and cultural historian in traditional African society. As African America’s ‘griot’, the rapper must be lyrically/linguistically fluent; he or she is expected to testify, to speak the truth… (p. 4)

Richardson (2006) defines tonal semantics in Hip hop discourse: “Tonal semantics refers to the use of vocal inflection and vocal rhythm to convey meaning” (p. 11). Alim (2006) also writes about tonal semantics, and he calls on Smitherman’s definition in his discussion. He writes, “Smitherman (1977: 134) describes tonal semantics as the ‘use of voice rhythm and vocal inflection to convey meaning in black communication,’ and depicts the voice as instrument. Black American tonal semantics consists of talk-singing, repetition and alliterative word play, intonational contouring and rhyme” (p. 84). Therefore, not only the lyrics, but inflection, intonation and rhyme have rhetorical power, that is, the power to move people, in Hip hop.

Narrative sequencing, or narrativizing, is central to Hip hop culture’s major form of storytelling; that is, the rap. The oral tradition of storytelling harks back to the griot in African tribal culture. The griot was the person in charge of communicating the history, customs, morals and overall worldview of the tribe. More recently, the preacher in the traditional African American church holds a similar role. Smitherman writes that,

The rendering of sermons in the traditional black church nearly always involves extended narration as a device to convey the theme. Rarely will black preachers expound their message in the linear fashion of a lecture. Rather, the thematic motif is dramatized with gestures, movement, plot, real-life characterization, and circumlocutory rhetorical flourishes. (p. 150)
In a similar vein, the success of many Hip hop artists has been dependent on their ability to tell stories well. For example, before the Hip hop group, Public Enemy, became famous for their politically radical lyrics and indictment of White America’s dominant narrative, they were college students at Adelphi University on Long Island, New York. Andrei Strobert, jazz drummer and professor of a class called “Black Music and Musicians” recalls mentoring the members of Public Enemy during the early days and telling them: “Tell a story…A rap means nothing if it tells no story” (as quoted in Chang, 2005; p. 240). Likewise, Voletta Wallace, the mother of the highly popular Hip hop artist, Notorious B.I.G., has said that her son’s success was based on the fact that he told stories that people wanted to hear.

Smitherman (1977) writes that, …[T]hese…narrative forms have as their overriding theme the coping ability, strength, endurance, trickeration capacity, and power of black people‖ (p. 156). The ability of Hip hop artists to “flip the script” (Smitherman, 1997), to turn dominant narratives on their head and assert counternarratives of strength and survival, may speak to the popularity that this literate form has with young people. In this dissertation study, textual and linguistic analysis of Hip hop texts and two participants’ readings of Hip hop texts further illuminates the reasons behind Hip hop’s popularity and influence.

Gates (1988) writes that Signifyin(g)—a sophisticated verbal art form— is the “trope of tropes” in the African American rhetorical tradition and that “Signifyin(g) is a trope in which are subsumed several other rhetorical tropes, including metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche…aporia, chiasmus…all…are used in the ritual of Signifyin(g)” (p. 1199). Hip hop artists, employ the art of signifyin’, whose characteristics include indirection, humor, rhythmic fluency, puns, play on words, in order to drive home a message; sometimes the message is serious and other times it is lighthearted (Smitherman, 1977). Alim (2006) writes that, “signifyin is ubiquitous in Hip hop
lyrics” (p. 83). Like other African American communicative forms before them, Hip hop uses signifyin’ to encode messages or meanings to the audience which may elude audiences who are not familiar with this cultural form of expression. Alim (2006) gives an anecdote to explain the above phenomenon. He writes:

The Roots [a popular Hip hop group] have been known to signify on audiences that are not as culturally responsive as they would like them to be. During a recent concert at Stanford University, they stopped the music and began singing theme songs from 1980’s television shows like ‘Diff’rent Strokes’ and ‘Facts of Life’ snapping their fingers and singing in a corny (not cool) way. The largely, white middle class audience of college students sang along and snapped their fingers—apparently oblivious to the insult. (p. 84)

Signifyin’ also plays an important role in regards to the struggle between culture and capital that Hip hop artists experience as they attempt to communicate authentically and in solidarity with their audience while at the same time work to make money for themselves and the record companies. Dionne and Mike, the two case study participants, are members of the audience with whom Hip hop artists are attempting to communicate. The idea that the language of Hip hop plays a role in educating young people, that it may have a role in influencing the kind of people they are becoming is one that I discuss later in the interpretation of findings in both case studies.

*Hip hop Linguistics (HHLx)*

H.S. Alim, a linguist dedicated to marrying linguistic scholarship to social justice and educational concerns, studies HHLx and argues for “linguistic equanimity—the structural and social equality of languages” (Alim, 2006; p. 52). Alim works from the tradition of linguistic
anthropology, using quantitative and qualitative research tools, to come to an emic understanding of Hip hop culture. He views rappers as “critical interpreters of their own culture” (p. 11) whose insights can help us understand Hip hop culture as an influential musical and literate form. In a similar vein, students who are fans/participants in Hip hop culture are in a perfect position to educate us about its importance in their literate lives. I include Alim’s work in this review because his framework helps uncover how language is central to Hip hop culture and Alim (2006) reminds researchers: “the linguistic continuum cannot be separate from the sociocultural continuum” (p. 12). In regards to the language of Hip hop and agency, Alim writes that many Hip hop artists, “believe that their words have the power to change not only their lives, but the lives of members of their community as well” (p. 107). This quote underscores the theoretical framework that guides the study, that is; from a cultural studies perspective, participants in Hip hop culture use the language and other resources to intervene in their lives. The purpose of the study is to investigate how Hip hop influences the lives of students, including ways of looking at the world.

Alim (2006) refers to Smitherman’s scholarship on AAL in Hip hop lyrics to assert that the five following features of AAL syntax and two features of AAL phonology are common in Hip hop lyrics:

1. Habitual be—indicates actions that are continuing or ongoing. Example: “He be getting on my nerves.”

2. Copula absence—absence of is and are in some present tense forms. Example: “We tryin to get all this paper, cousin.”

3. Stressed been—denotes the remote past. Example: “I been had that Jay-Z album” (meaning I had it a long time ago, and I still have it).
4. Gon—indicates the future tense. Example: “You better watch him cause he gon take credit for the work that you did.”

5. They for possessive. Example: “They schools can’t teach us nuthin’ noway.”

6. Postvocalic –r—Mother becomes “Mutha” (the r after the vowel is absent”).

7. Ank and ang, for “ink” and “ing.” Example: “I’ma get me some drank” and “You wouldn’t understand; it’s a Black thang” (drank = drink, and thang = thing). (Smitherman, 1997 as quoted in Alim, 2006; p. 115).

In addition, Alim argues that Hip hop artists consciously control their copula use and variability in order to create a street-conscious identity, which adds to the argument about language, agency, and identity. Speakers and writers make choices about the language they use which both constructs and reflects the social environment (Kress, 2001). Also, in addition to the above syntactic and phonological features, Alim also analyzes Hip hop lyrics and the language of interviews with Hip hop artists from the perspective of Smitherman’s (1977) scholarship on cultural modes of discourse steeped in the African American oral tradition. Some of these include: call and response, signifyin—also called bustin, crackin, and dissin in more contemporary terms--tonal semantics/poetics and narrative sequencing.

**Hip hop Literacies**

Richardson (2006) writes about Hip hop as an expressive form that emerged from and is inextricably tied to the historical, material and political realities of African Americans. She argues that, “Hiphop discourse tells us a lot about socioeconomic stratification and the struggle between culture and capital. Hiphop discourse, like previous African American expressive forms, is a black creative response to absence and desire [italics added] and a site of epistemological
Richardson explains that Hip hop literacies, as a creative and expressive form, represent the keen understandings of social realities lived by many African Americans. Similarly, Alim (2006) argues that, “Hip hop is cultural practice embedded in the lived experiences of Hip hop-conscious beings existing in a home, street, hood, city, state, country, continent, hemisphere near you” (p. 12). Thus, Hip hop literacies emerge from a privileged knowledge that is unique to many students from African American communities. Alim also asserts: “The racial segregation present in American society has led some scholars to use the term ‘American apartheid’ to describe the deliberate isolation and exclusion of Blacks from educational, occupational, and social institutions in the US (Massey and Denton 1993)” (p. 56). The “deliberate isolation and exclusion” relate to the theme of absence that many Hiphoppers draw on in their discourses, likewise which African American students might sensibly draw on and use to mediate their academic literate activities (Sánchez, 2010).

Research on Hip hop, Language, and Literacy

This section outlines research studies that explore the intersections among Hip hop, language and literacy, and personhood. Some studies focus on building academic skills through analysis of Hip hop texts; others focus more on affective issues in learning, such as pleasure, human agency and creativity, and comprehension of the human experience.

Buckingham & Sefton-Green (1994) conducted a research study which analyzed data from a teacher/researcher project in which 12-year-old students had to create popular culture media texts, like fanzines, raps, album and cassette covers, etc. Also students had to create secondary texts, “that is texts about music, rather than music itself” (p.61). The latter were used to practice critical reflection and commentary and academic discourse. The authors used textual analysis of students’ texts and transcripts of student interviews for the purposes of data analysis.
Part of the data analysis focuses on a 15-minute radio segment for a fictional radio show created by two female students in the class, Karen (DJ KC) and Nicky (MC Rheality). Karen and Nicky’s radio segment consisted of rap, hardcore and Hip hop songs introduced by Karen interspersed with jingles and advertisements written and spoken by both girls and an original rap written by Nicky called “The Female Force”. The data analysis focuses on the rap written by Nicky and an interview with her about the secondary text, which she wrote. Buckingham and Sefton-Green found that through her rap, Nicky was able to express herself assertively and from an anti-authoritarian stance. They also found from interviewing Nicky that what she appreciates and tries to appropriate from her favorite Hip hop artists is “their honesty to the realities of inner-city life and their sense of black history” (p. 79). They found that for Nicky, rapping is, from her own words, both “constructive” and “worthwhile” (p. 80) and also rhetorically purposeful, or about “having a message to get across” (p. 80). This study relates to a gap I see in that while an important finding is that Nicky finds rapping to be “worthwhile”, there is still research that needs to be done to make explicit what exactly this “worthwhile” means in so far as: How does Hip hop add meaning or value to a young person’s life? What might young people, especially ones who do not like to read, learn about what it means to be human from Hip hop?

In a teacher/researcher study conducted in a secondary classroom, Morrell (2004) taught Hip hop music/poetry alongside other poets and historical periods. For example, students studied canonical poets such as Eliot, Whitman and Shakespeare alongside Hip hop poets such as Grandmaster Flash, Public Enemy, and Nas. He found that students developed oral and written debate skills and expository writing skills. He found that students were engaged in the learning process because they were able to make connections across texts, historical periods and genres. For example, in a group presentation for a unit evaluation, one group discussed how both
Grandmaster Flash, a rapper/poet, and T.S. Eliot both envisioned “wastelands” in their commentaries about their communities. In a similar vein, in a qualitative teacher-researcher study of middle school students in an English Language Arts class, Keaton Jackson (2007) implemented a culturally relevant pedagogy through the use of Nas’s rap lyrics. Keaton Jackson found that students performed close readings of Nas’s lyrics and used writing as a tool to help them further their critical and analytical skills.

Developing skills is important but developing skills should also be tied to something larger, as Rose (2009a, 2009b) argues. Rose argues that learning, and literacy learning more specifically, should be tied to developing personhood. This dissertation is for teachers and scholars who like Rose, argue that within the educational context, students should feel cared about and should learn about caring for others. The gap filled in this dissertation is the articulation of how Hip hop builds two young people’s concern for self and for others. Like Rose, I am concerned with how to build a more humane philosophy of education, which might influence current curriculum and policy.

In a qualitative study of two spoken word poetry classes in a high school setting, Fisher (2005) used ethnographic methods to investigate the following research questions: “How is literacy defined in these writing communities? What are the skills that teachers and students value? What are the practices of the teachers and students in these two writing communities? What are the ways in which reading and writing are partnered with speaking and ‘doing’?” (p. 116). Fisher argues that the teachers of the two spoken word poetry classes viewed the writing and performance associated with spoken word poetry not as a teaching strategy but “as a movement and way of life for students” (p. 117). Fisher references Anderson (2004) in her argument that Hip hop should also be viewed as a culture, rather than as a teaching strategy.
From interviews with the two teachers, Fisher found that both engaged with Hip hop culture in purposeful ways in order to reach students. From a field note entry about Mama C, a classroom teacher in the study, Fisher writes,

Mama C strategically used the word ‘spit’ in the first line of her poem to show that she valued students’ relationship to Hip hop culture and music in particular.

Mama C believed that Hip hop ‘saved’ young people. She explained that Hip hop music encouraged young people to listen to each other in a particular way and appreciate language and words. (p. 124)

Hip hop encouraged students to “listen to each other”, it fostered respect for each other, a humanistic goal which we need more of and which I found that young people like Dionne and Mike, the two case study participants, were hungry for. In the course, students were not only asked to write and perform their own poetry, but they had to read narratives of people who used reading, writing and speaking to enact change, such as the autobiography of Assata Shakur, a Black Panther party member.

Through this investigation, Fisher found that teachers used the culture of Hip hop, and the culture of spoken word poetry, as a means to foster a love of learning and a love of literacy and language. She also found that both teachers expected all students to share their work in a public format in order to improve their reading, writing, and speaking skills. In this way, Fisher found that in these learning communities, reading, writing, and orality were inseparable aspects of literacy learning. In another study, Fisher (2004) argues against the oral/written dichotomy, which places expository writing at the top of the hierarchy and renders student literate practices, such as Hip hop, as invaluable for the classroom. She writes, “In a study of spoken word poetry open mic venues and Black-owned and –operated bookstores (Fisher 2003a, 2003b), I found that
many men and women of African descent were turning to these communities to access both spoken and written words. In these spaces, speaking was a natural outgrowth of reading and writing, but most important, all three were linked with a sense of purpose” (p. 292). This last point is also reflected in the findings from the 2005 study where in spoken word poetry classrooms, students read true life accounts of people, like Shakur, who used reading, writing and speaking for action.

In a qualitative study of four 15 to 21-year-old rap composers, Weinstein (2007) found that for all 4 participants, the composing process associated with writing rap lyrics provided various forms of pleasure that they did not experience in traditional school settings. Using textual analysis of participants’ writings and transcripts from participant interviews, Weinstein found that three forms of pleasure emanated from the participants’ participations in literate and cultural practices of Hip hop. The three forms of pleasure were: discourse membership, self-expression and self-representation, and play. Weinstein highlighted these findings in order to argue against the notion that the pleasure of rap as a literate practice should be secondary in school settings. She argued instead that understanding how young people find pleasure through their participation in Hip hop and how their participation has potential for language and literacy learning in school are both equally important aspects to the field of literacy research. Including pleasure as a component in the process of literacy, expands on a traditional notion of what counts as literacy, which relates to the gap in understanding literacy and its ties to personhood.

For a teacher/researcher study of a Hip hop curriculum in a secondary classroom, Kirkland (2007) used Halliday’s framework for language learning, that is; “a child learns language, through language and about language” (p. 135) for a unit he called the “The Classroom, the Community, and the World” which focused on learning Hip hop, learning through Hip hop
and learning about Hip hop. A larger goal of the unit was to use Hip hop to help students meet national standards for the English Language Arts. Most of the students in the course were African American and the school was set in an urban context.

One example of how students learned through Hip hop was through their close analysis of two rap songs, “Dear Momma” and “Changes” both by rapper, Tupac Shakur. Using their knowledge of literacy terms such as metaphor, alliteration, and chiasmus, students evaluated the merit of Tupac’s work based on their knowledge of the above terms. From the above activity, students created their own rules for writing rap and used the rules to compose their own.

Kirkland’s curriculum unit based on Halliday’s framework lines up well with Fisher’s (2005) assertion that Hip hop should be viewed as a cultural and literate practice which has value for study in the classroom. An important note about the above research is that one of the goals of the classroom unit on Hip hop was to understand the black human experience. Although the first two NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts include specific goals for literacy and understanding of self and the human experience, it is these goals that often go by the wayside in discussions about policy, remediation and school reform (Rose, 2009a, 2010). Kirkland found that students met the following standards, which often go by the wayside. The two standards are:

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience (http://www.ncte.org/standards)

Edward Said (2004), a scholar usually referenced in literary and postcolonial research, concurs with NCTE/IRA Standards 1 and 2 in his discussion about some of the humanistic goals
of literature. He writes, “Humanism is the achievement of form by human will and agency; it is neither system nor impersonal force like the market or the unconscious, however much one may believe in the workings of both… Humanism and literature, understood as the dedicated study of good and important writing, have an especially close relationship with each other” (p. 15-16). I use Said later in Chapter 5 in the case study about Mike, to discuss how some Hip hop intersects with the goals of humanism in Mike’s literate life. Hip hop, or musical literature, as Alim (2006) sees it, could help students understand the human experience. This is a large pedagogical and research gap, which is waiting to be filled.

In a qualitative case study of Antonio, an African-American high school student, poet and athlete, Jocson (2006) examined this student’s poetry practices in the contexts of in school and out of school. She used data from participant observations, student and teacher interviews, Antonio’s written drafts and other poetry-based literacy artifacts to investigate what she called “hybrid literacy practices” in this student’s life. She found that, as a poet and an athlete, Antonio had a difficult time balancing various subject positions, especially since his peers saw him only as an athlete. As a fan and participant in Hip hop culture, Antonio created Hip hop beats with an audio computer software called Fruity Loops. Jocson found that Antonio found agency and contested essentialized notions of Hip hop through his musical creations. For example, Antonio created a musical composition that put the lyrics of Bob Dylan over traditional rap beats. Antonio critiqued the commercialization of Hip hop, and he insisted that Hip hop should be dynamic and that artists should look for non-traditional ways to make new Hip hop creations.

The notion of agency is an important underlying component in my study and to the importance of humanism in education. As Said (2004) argues, “Change is human history, and human history as made by human action and understood accordingly is the very ground of the humanities” (p.
10). The above study reveals how Antonio used Hip hop as a cultural and literate practice as an agent of change, to combat essentialized notions of Hip hop. Humanists believe in the power of people to change the course of history; Hip hop in the above study was the literate medium by which one young person was an agent of change.

**Hip hop Pedagogy: The Bridge Metaphor**

In a teacher/researcher study in a secondary English classroom, Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2004) investigate the ways in which Hip hop can be used as a pedagogical strategy to teach students canonical poetry. The conceptual framework that led the study involved a bridge metaphor. The authors assert that, “[L]anguage like that of hip-hop music and culture is culturally authentic and also…a viable bridge between popular culture and the school culture” (p. 250). Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2004) collected data from students’ written artifacts, and video recordings of class sessions and students’ group presentations. The authors introduced politically and socially conscious Hip hop music in order to teach students expository writing and literary analysis. The intention of the curricular unit was to be culturally relevant while facilitating academic literacy skills. The research question which guided the study was: “If [academic literacy] skills can be demonstrated in student critiques of popular culture texts, in what ways or through which pedagogical strategies can these skills transfer to student critiques of canonical literacy texts?” (p. 253). The authors used language, such as ‘bridge’ and ‘transfer of skills,’ which establishes a hierarchy in which popular culture such as Hip hop is at the low end and canonical poetry is at the high end. In a later study, Morrell (2004) regretted the implied hierarchy and attempted to resolve the problematic notion by arguing that,

… [T]he move from the popular to the classical/traditional is more one from proximity to distance than it is from the simple to the complex. That is, once
students have learned to make sense of the texts that permeate their own world, they will be better able to engage the texts that represent the languages, cultures, and experiences of worlds distant and past. (p. 43)

Although the bridge metaphor may be appealing since students who are placed into transitional English classes are making a transition to college level literacy, the metaphor still conceives of a problematic hierarchy in which academic literacy is seen as more valuable and Hip hop literacy as second rate. As an extension then, students see their own language, literacy practices and identities as second rate. Alim (2007b), a scholar who argues against this supposed hierarchy, reminds us that in regards to the language and culture of African Americans and schooling practices: “Why must their language and culture always be used to take them somewhere else? Right here look good to me [emphasis in original]” (p. 28).

History of Open Admissions

Although the history of African Americans in higher education dates back much further than the advent of open admissions in higher education, I focus on this time period since it has relevance for the study. During the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, many African American and Puerto Rican students, who traditionally had been excluded from higher education, demanded that institutions change policies to be more inclusive. Students staged sit-ins and protests in order to be heard. In “‘Runnin with the rabbits, but huntin with the dogs’: Race, literacy instruction and black protest from 1969 to 1977”, Kynard (2005) paints a different portrayal of the above history; one which counters the iconic legacy of Mina Shaughnessy, a teacher of basic writing whose seminal work, Errors and Expectations (1977), is still widely cited today. Kynard quotes Stephen Steinberg, a sociology professor who taught at the City University of New York during this time, who argued “Now if there is one lesson to be drawn for the history of race in the
twentieth century, it is that ‘America’ did nothing to confront its racial problem until it was 
forced to do so by the rise of black insurgency [italics added]” (Steinberg as quoted in Kynard, 
2005; p. 117). The idea that black student activism was responsible for the changes in university 
policy, counters the dominant narrative which mostly gives credit to benevolent liberals for making policy changes. The preceding idea also extends to literacy, as Kynard reminds us: “The history of black student activism… has important social, political, and cultural consequence for how academic literacy is imagined” (p. 114).

Mina Shaughnessy’s important book, Errors and Expectations (1977), in regards to teaching basic writers, proposed ideas that were considered radical at the time of its publication, such as the educability of basic writers, the logic behind their errors and the value of open-admissions programs in universities. Although the ideas that emanated from her book were considered radical at the time, a continued reliance on the liberal idea that students’ languages interfere with academic discourse eclipses the truly radical idea that students’ languages are perfectly acceptable for the classroom (Kynard, 2005). Geneva Smitherman’s important book, Talkin and Testifyin (1977)—published the same year as Errors and Expectations—proposed a truly radical view, one much different from Shaughnessy’s ideas about error correction and “converting the natives” (Shaughnessy, 1976, p. 3) as demonstrated in the following quote: “What is needed to prevent further miseducation of black kids is a change in teacher attitude and behavior, a complete reordering of thought about the educational process and the place of black students in that process” (p. 216). All of Smitherman’s work in the past 30 plus years has taken the onus away from the students and placed it onto teachers and the social and linguistic conditions that create remediation. This last idea is central to this study, as students’ participation in Hip hop cultural and literate practices from a profit, rather than deficit perspective. An
example of a view of Hip hop from a profit perspective is the way in which Alim (2006) views Hip hop as musical literature.

Research on AAL practices and College Literacy

Armstrong (2007) found, from an analysis of students’ metaphors about academic writing, that many students viewed academic writing from a transmission model—that students are containers waiting to be filled with knowledge about writing. On the other hand, privileging the literacy practices that students engage in, such as Hip hop, could contribute to a more participatory approach.

Campbell (1997) used textual analysis to study the AAL practices from the in class writings of one African American student in a 1st year composition course. He found that the student, Gary, used AAL and rhetorical practices, such as signifying (Smitherman, 1977) in order to assert a “black cultural identity in the face of white or mainstream cultural-linguistic dominance” (p. 69). Campbell (2007) argues that in 1st year composition there exists a “hegemony of whiteness and middle-classness” (p. 330), which punishes students from other races and other social classes. He argues that a hypervigilance on notions of propriety, what Campbell deems “a sanitized approach to language” (p. 333), is most detrimental to students who fall outside the category of middle class whiteness. Campbell argues that the obsession with propriety extends to ways of being and ways of looking at the world and in this way, he argues that the “ghetto-centric” (p.333) worldview of some Hip hop artists’… could teach us a thing or two about the persuasive power of language” (p.333). In a similar vein, Kirkland (2008a) explains that the worldview of Hip hop is, “…a world having no fixed boundaries, a world continually in flux due to the constant movement of things, the collision of differences, the ongoing ruptures of particular norms, and the geneses of new forms of life and being” (p. 71).
This worldview counters the obsession with propriety that looks to prescribe and protect standard notions of writing at all costs and is a worthwhile point to understand when arguing for the importance of my study.

Rice (2003) collected data from a teacher/researcher study of students in a 1st year composition class in which he taught Hip hop, specifically the rhetoric of digital sampling, to teach writing and academic discourse. Rice outlines his explanation of Hip hop pedagogy through a historical retelling, or sampling, of events that happened in 1963. The purpose of the above retelling, or sampling, was to demonstrate to students how they could research and form arguments through historical research, or their own sampling of events. The significance of the study is that Rice centered the communicative practices of Hip hop for the purpose of teaching the argument essay, rather than relegating Hip hop as a vulgar or illiterate practice.

Similar to Campbell’s (1997) study, but in the context of a basic writing class, McCrary (2005) used methods of textual analysis to investigate the hybrid discourses in a popular urban magazine, a newspaper article, literary non-fiction and students’ literacy autobiographies. McCrary referenced Bakhtin’s notion of hybridity, or “a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance…” (Bakhtin, 1981; p. 358 as quoted in McCrary, p. 75) to frame the investigation of various texts and in the curricular approach to teaching basic writing. He found the appearance of more than one social language in the various textual evidence that he studied. McCrary encouraged students to read and write hybrid texts as a way to “awaken my students to the possibilities and use of language, to heighten their awareness of how language works and to what purpose” (p. 77). McCrary used hybrid texts, many which contained AAL, as a way to foster a richer, more varied understanding of rhetoric than one which views and teaches “Standard English” as a monolith.
Richardson (2007) investigated the discourse practices of four African American college-age females. More specifically, she wanted to investigate the discourse and literacy practices of females who participate in Hip hop culture. She included an important definition which speaks to the ways Hip hop intervenes in the lives of college age people: “Hiphop literacies refers to ways in which people who are socialized into hiphop discourse manipulate as well as read language, gestures, images, material possessions, and people, to position themselves against or within discourses in order to advance and protect themselves” (p. 792). To collect data, Richardson arranged focus group and individual semi-structured interviews around the viewing of rap videos. The research question she posed was: “How do young African American females negotiate stereotypical representations of African American culture, gender, labor, and sexual values in rap music videos?” (p. 791).

Richardson used critical discourse analysis and linguistic analysis to understand the data. She found complex contradictions in the discourse and ideologies expressed by the women in focus groups and interviews. For example, she found that the women acknowledged and recognized the dire social circumstances of young black females while at the same time succumbing to racist stereotypes about black womanhood. To explain the above contradictions, Richardson argues that since black discourse is a part of, and inextricably tied to, dominant discourse, the women “…work hard to prioritize certain meanings over stereotypical ones. This is seen in speakers’ self-repair, hesitations and restatements…” (p. 805). This finding speaks to the possibilities and complexities of understanding Hip hop literacies and their influence in the lives of young people making the transition to college level literacy. One implication Richardson makes is that, “Youth are aware of the dominating forces but do not possess the level of critical tools necessary to escape internal victim blaming for their predicament. Their awareness of these
forces is an aspect of their black consciousness, their street consciousness, and their hiphop literacies” (p. 806). This implication is significant to the dissertation study because it buttresses the argument that I am working from, which is that, Hip hop could be seen from a profit perspective.

Kynard (2008b) analyzed the essays written by African American students for a department-wide 1st year composition final exam. She found that the students who used Black discourses, ones steeped in the tradition of Black nationalism, Pan-Africanism and anti-colonialism, to counter dominant middle-class white perspective were penalized and discouraged from moving on to higher level literacy courses. This finding, what she appropriately deems “Writing While Black” demonstrates one way in which structural and institutional racism keep African American students from advancing in higher education. Kynard’s finding is significant to the study because it relates to the extent to which other Black discourses, such as Hip hop, are regularly excluded from the classroom. The material and social consequences, not to mention individual consequences on identity and literacy development, of these exclusionary practices need to be studied more in depth.

_Hypocritical Language Practices_

Although the Conference on College Composition and Communication published the “Students’ Right to their Own Language” (1974) more than 30 years ago which stated that teachers should respect and encourage students’ uses of many varieties of English, evidence similar to Kynard’s (2008b) study demonstrates that exclusionary practices that keep students out of advanced literacy courses and from higher education in general are still tied to exclusionary language practices at the hands of institutions and individual teachers and programs which advance these exclusionary practices. Scholars working within the tradition of linguistics and
education have argued that despite their good intentions, progressive language pedagogies, such as the bidialectical approach, are hypocritical in nature since the idea put forth is that, while Standard English and other varieties are different yet equal, Standard English is still superior and appropriate for school (Alim, 2007a; Kirkland, 2009a; Kynard, 2008a; Smitherman, 1977). The result of this ideology is the symbolic violence that goes along with the devaluation of one’s language and culture as Anzaldúa (1987) reminds us: “So if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language...Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself” (p. 81).

Kirkland & Jackson (2009) studied the attitudes of African American students toward AAL after they had been taught a code-switching pedagogy called contrastive analysis (CA). Each lesson in the curriculum used AAL to scaffold Standard English and students were instructed in the program for 9 months. Kirkland & Jackson designed the study so that students’ attitudes could be assessed pre- and post- CA instruction. He asked students to create drawings based on their attitudes toward AAL before and after the CA program. He also collected data from video-recordings of class sessions, field notes, interview transcripts and other artifacts. He analyzed the data using themes outlined by Fairclough (1995) and coded the data into 3 major themes: 1. Language and identity, 2. Language and society, and 3. Language and power (p. 140). Kirkland & Jackson found that in spite of CA pedagogy, students “retained and sometimes reinforced negative attitudes about AAL” (p. 140) and that students “were never truly able to resolve the critical-linguistic relationship of language and identity, language and society and language and power” (p. 140). Despite its good intentions, and despite overt attention given to AAL and popular culture such as rap and Hip hop, the program did not help students value their own culture and language and had the opposite intended effects. Without explicit discussion and
awareness of AAL as valuable and tied to identity, the effects of the CA approach promoted an anti-humanist view of AAL. While some may argue CA as a ‘neutral’ approach to language pedagogy, Kirkland and Jackson prove that there is no such thing as neutral language study. The effects were still deleterious. Although the students in the above study were not college age, the findings could still be applicable. The above study relates to the dissertation study because Hip hop, language and identity, and access to higher education are understudied in the field of literacy.

**Summary**

While the above research demonstrates that Hip hop has been used as a teaching tool in secondary and postsecondary settings, there is not much research that investigates the cultural practice of Hip hop from students’ perspectives—especially from the perspective of students placed into transitional English courses. In much of the extant literature, researchers have found students drawing on Hip hop in unofficial literate spaces, for the purposes of pleasure (Weinstein, 2007). Other studies found that students illustrate an awareness of language (Richardson, 2007) and how it is implicated in access to social goods (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). Implicit in much of Hip hop is this language awareness, which brings me to the importance of my dissertation study: Research still needs to be done to make explicit how Hip hop influences the literate lives of students. The participant in Buckingham and Sefton-Green’s (1994) study found rapping to be “worthwhile,” but there is research still to be undertaken to explore and make explicit what exactly this “worthwhile” means. The dissertation study fills this gap.
Chapter 3: Methods

Overall Research Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate, using qualitative methods, how Hip hop, a cultural practice, influenced the literate lives of students in transitional English classrooms with an eye toward pedagogical/theoretical implications. What I mean by “influenced” is in what specific ways did students’ participation in Hip hop compel them to think, act, speak, write or read in certain ways? The following paragraphs address views of language that coincide with the methods I chose to collect and analyze data.

A cultural studies conceptual framework guided this study. A central tenet of a cultural studies conceptual framework is that, “…it rejects the exclusive equation of culture with high culture and argues that all forms of cultural production need to be studied in relation to other cultural practices and to social and historical structures…(Nelson, Treichler & Grossberg, 1992, p. 4). Hip hop, as a cultural practice, emerged as a result of the harsh material conditions of life in the United States during the 1970’s. While Hip hop has evolved a great deal from its early days, its presence in popular culture and the impact it has on young people is still relevant per Smitherman’s quote in the first pages of this dissertation. In a study using Hip hop poetry alongside canonical texts in the secondary English classroom, Morrell (2004) argues that: “The positioning of Hip hop as a genre of poetry written largely in response to post industrialism was a concept with which the students were able to relate. The issues of joblessness, poverty, rage, and alienation all had resonance to the urban youth culture of which the students were a part” (p. 64). Because of the preceding reasons, Hip hop in relation to the language and literacy practices of young people who are making the literacy transition needs to be studied.
Cultural studies scholars reject the highbrow-lowbrow dichotomy and highlight culture as it is produced in the everyday experiences of people on the ground. From this perspective that rejects lowbrow assumptions about Hip hop culture, and with an eye toward pedagogical implications, I investigated the influence that Hip hop plays in the literate lives of students. I draw on Morrell’s (2004) expansion of Heath’s literacy event in defining a literate life. Morrell writes that a literacy event is: “a communicative act in which any text is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and interpretive processes” (p. 11). I investigated not only how students interpreted Hip hop texts, but what they did with Hip hop texts, that is how Hip hop culture influenced their lives.

Radway (1991) writes about the method behind data collection for the book Reading the Romance—a method she calls an ethnography of reading. An ethnography of reading involves more than relaying how people comprehend and interpret certain texts. Following in the tradition of anthropology, the empirical work of her book involved investigating how reading romance novels intervened in the lives of a group of women—that is, what were the creative and agentive uses of reading romance novels? A central component was that she listened repeatedly to the women talk about what reading romance novels meant to their lives. Radway used the tools of ethnographic investigation, including analysis of the narrative structure and themes in popular romance novels, in-depth interviews of women who read romance novels and analysis of the complex psychosocial process between reader and text, to understand from more than one angle what romance reading meant to the women in the study.

Much of Hicks (2003, 2005) research follows in the tradition of Radway’s ethnography of reading approach. Hicks’s (2003) research with young girls in a poor, predominately white community explored how the girls’ passion for horror fiction evoked power through their
imaginative responses to the readings. Despite the material reality and sense of powerlessness that goes along with living in a high poverty neighborhood, their creative responses to horror fiction gave them the power of fantasy. The power of fantasy that came from the literacy practice of reading horror fictions allowed them to imagine and hope for different lives and work to get out of their high poverty neighborhood. The notion of rhetorical power, or that one can live life creatively by literate means, despite structural forces, is an important theoretical underpinning and analytical tool in this dissertation. Rhetorical power is used as an analytical tool in the sense that I used the notion that stories have power in people’s lives (Hicks & Dolan, 2003) as part of my analysis.

**Qualitative Data**

Qualitative data allows the researcher the opportunity to “understand the world as seen by the respondents” (Patton, 2002, p. 21). The role of the qualitative researcher is not to affirm presuppositions rather it is to understand the relationships and co-occurrences across the data and to allow the data to reveal important information rather than assume a priori hypotheses about what he/she will fine (Patton, 2002). I collected data through ethnographically informed methods including, survey, interviews, participant observations in classrooms, and collection of the products of Hip hop culture, in order to describe how Hip hop influences the literate lives of students in transitional English courses.

**Constant Comparative Perspective**

The purpose of my investigation was to understand how Hip hop influences students’ literate lives. It was not to understand how Hip hop is different than or less than academic culture. Therefore, I employed a constant comparative perspective, which seeks to understand co-occurrences or patterns rather than rely on compare/contrast; good v. bad dichotomies. This
perspective helped me to avoid negative stereotypes or preconceptions about Hip hop culture. In a general sense, Heath and Street (2008) assert that central to this perspective is that researchers should go back and forth from the literature review to data and data collection methods. I followed the preceding advice in regards to the recursive aspects of data collection, data analysis and reviews of literature.

In the following paragraphs, I discuss the steps I took in following the constant comparative method of developing theory (Bogden & Biklen, 1998).

I began collecting data in September of 2009. I looked for key issues and events that recurred which might become categories to focus on especially in regards to my research question. For example, after the first interview with Dionne, I transcribed the audiotaped interview and took note of categories that emerged from the 1st interview. One category, for example, that I took note of and that came into focus was Dionne’s assertion that Hip hop is an avenue to Black pride.

As I began collecting more data, I found many more examples of the categories that I began to focus on, but I also kept my eyes open for examples of categories that I previously had not considered and for examples that diverted from or complicated original categories. To do this, I collected data from Dionne’s writings on Facebook. I captured this data by taking screenshots of the images and writings that she posted. I captured 52 screenshots of Facebook posts. One category that came into focus after mining this data for examples was Hip hop as activism, but I also took note of the extent to which Christianity influenced Dionne’s literate life. A theme that emerged that complicated an original category was that of Hip hop goes against Christianity.
I wrote conceptual memos (Heath & Street, 2008) to help me focus on categories that emerged and also to reflect on categories that were emerging. In addition to the above steps, I also used a recursive process of data analysis and literature review, especially in regards to Mike’s case study because I had not previously read sufficient literature to explain and interpret the phenomena that I saw.

**Co-occurrences for Pattern Detection**

Co-occurrences are patterns that emerge within and across data that the researcher has collected. My reason for looking for co-occurrences in the data was to understand the cultural practices of Hip hop; its connections to students’ literacy and language practices and to resist simple preconceived notions about culture. Heath and Street (2008) advise that, “The best way to get around the tendency either to contrast or compare in simplistic ways is to keep in mind that the constant comparative calls for vigilance to co-occurrence” (p. 38). Some questions that I kept in mind while looking for co-occurrences were:

1) What happens as something else happens?

2) How do such events take place similarly again and again? For example, Mike drew on lyrics from favorite Hip hop artists repeatedly in his writings. I captured this repetition, or pattern, through screenshots of his writings on his Facebook page.

3) When does a particular pattern of events or process for one or another phenomenon seem out of sync with established habits? (p. 38) The following screenshot is an example of the above phenomenon.

**Research Context**

**Research site**
The research site is a transitional college English class on the campus of a four year research university in the capital city of a southeastern state. The transitional English class, called English 100: Introduction to Academic Writing, does not count toward graduation credit although students do receive elective credit upon completion of the course. The Fall 2009 semester was the first time students were able to self-place into the course. In the past, students were placed in the course based on a 19 or below score on the ACT or a 470 or below score on the SAT-critical reading test. Since the school is piloting the self-directed placement strategy, they also used 2 writing samples during the first week, one in-class, and one take home, as another factor in placement. I visited 10 sections of an introductory English course called English 100, at a large Southeastern university. While the course was described as “not developmental” by a faculty member at a department meeting at the start of the school year, students did not receive college credit for successfully passing the course. But students who placed into the course, either by self or direct placement, were required to pass it before moving on to English 101.

Research participants

The participants are students who have self-placed into the transitional course or have been encouraged to take the course based on the SAT or ACT test and writing samples written during the 1st week of class.

Sampling procedure

Purposeful sampling

Since my intended focus was to investigate the extent to which Hip hop influences the literate lives of students, it is essential that I study information rich cases that highlight the preceding connections. As Patton (2002) writes: “What would be bias in statistical sampling, and
therefore a weakness, becomes intended focus in qualitative sampling, and therefore a strength. The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (p. 230). I used an initial survey in order to choose information rich cases to study.

I used purposeful sampling in order to gain access to 4 to 6 information rich cases. First, I visited all sections of English 100 and explained my study to each section. During my visit, I invited students who were fans of Hip hop and/or participants in Hip hop culture to participate in my study. I explained that the 1st step would be an online survey (Appendix A) asking them about their interests in Hip hop.

*Ethnographic tools*

Although I did not conduct a traditional ethnography, I did borrow some of the tools of ethnography to assist me in collecting data for my study, in particular, I kept in mind the declaration that Heath and Street (2008) make stating, “Necessary qualities of the best ethnographers…include visual acuity, keen listening skills, tolerance for detail, and capacity to integrate innumerable parts into shifting wholes” (p. 57). Ethnographic tools coincide well with a cultural studies approach because both ethnography and cultural studies reject deficit assumptions about culture and posit that ethnographies do not make judgments about how other cultures are better or less than; instead they try to understand how cultures make sense of the world. Ethnographies do not place cultures on a hierarchical scale, rather they assume that all linguistic and cultural practices are valuable (Morrell, 2004). The use of ethnographic tools, especially “keen listening skills” (Heath and Street, 2008) were essential to my study because listening carefully to the actual talk of the student participants allowed me to share the emic perspectives of the participants for the purposes of theoretical/pedagogical implications.

*Data Content*
Ten students took the online survey, and from these ten completed surveys, I contacted six students for a follow-up interview. At the follow-up interview, I explained to students more in detail the purpose of my study, and I explained the consent form to them. On the consent form (Appendix D), I requested permission to access the reading and writing from their Facebook pages.

Table 1 shows the sources of data that I collected from both Dionne and Mike.

Table 1: Data Content Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Dionne</th>
<th>Mike</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screenshots of Writing/Images on Facebook</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Memos</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Correspondence</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Meeting</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip hop lyrics</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original Hip hop composition</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 demonstrates how each data source was used in the dissertation study.

Table 2: Data Sources and Uses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Use of Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answers to Initial Survey</td>
<td>The answers students gave on the initial survey about their interest and participation in Hip hop culture allowed me to compose questions for</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the 1st semi-structured interview. I learned about how Hip hop extended into Dionne & Mike’s literate practices, including reading Hip hop, and appropriations in their writing and composing practices outside of school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audio Recordings/Transcriptions of Semi-Structured Interviews</th>
<th>The interview data documented, from the student’s perspective, what, why and how Hip hop influenced Dionne &amp; Mike’s life.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive Field notes</td>
<td>These documented assertions about the data as it was being collected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Memos</td>
<td>These were used to assist me in the interpretive work of analyzing the data as it unfolded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email conversations with Dionne &amp; Mike</td>
<td>These were used to provide more information about Dionne &amp; Mike’s personhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal meeting with Mike</td>
<td>These were used to provide more information about Mike’s personhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio recording/Transcription of Mike’s Hip hop composition, Heavy Swagadelic</td>
<td>These were used to triangulate data from semi-structured interviews and writings/drawings on Facebook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screenshots of Writings/Drawings on Facebook</td>
<td>Using textual and linguistic analysis, these were used to triangulate data from semi-structured interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip hop lyrics</td>
<td>Using textual and linguistic analysis, these were used to triangulate data from semi-structured interviews, writings/drawings on Facebook, and Dionne &amp; Mike’s Hip hop composition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Survey**

Initially, I distributed a survey (see Appendix A) that asked students questions about who, when, what, where and how, in regards to Hip hop and their lives. After collection of these surveys, I chose four students who provided information rich cases. This initial method of data collection allowed me to access information rich cases, that is, students who participate in Hip hop cultural practices I concluded that they were information rich cases based on the breadth and depth of their responses. The write-up of this dissertation is about two of those students. I chose to write about these two students first because I had an inclination that the data that I collected from them would provide interesting stories that would add to the field. Also, because there is so
much data, for practical reasons I had to focus the dissertation on two student participants. The
survey contained open ended questions and it focused on the degree to which students listened to
Hip hop. Because it contained open-ended questions, students were allowed to answer in as
much detail as they wanted.

Interviews

Heath & Street (2008) write that, “Most ethnographers stick with questions of who, when, what, where and how. The fundamental challenge to ethnographers is to lay out *what is happening*” (p. 35). Heath & Street advise utilizing this straightforward approach so as to avoid making judgments about the culture of the research participants. In a similar vein, I used interviews in order to understand *what* is the sociocultural context of Hip hop according to the students and *how* Hip hop influences the literate connections that students make to this sociocultural context.

Ethnographic interviewing coincides well with a cultural studies approach to research since “central to traditional ethnographic research is the focus on cultural meanings” (Wolcott, 1982 as quoted in Heyl, 2001; p. 369) so that cultural studies research is often married to ethnographic methods of inquiry. Also since the ethical turn in anthropology, influenced by feminism, racism and postcolonialism, researchers have sought to employ anti-exoticizing and anti-essentialist methods during ethnographic interviewing (Nelson, Treichler & Grossberg, 1992). Therefore, ethnographers, in learning how and what people do with the cultural and symbolic resources of their world, are now more sensitive to and reflexive about (Heyl, 2001) how they are representing the culture and voices of the research participants.

*Semi-structured interviews*
I crafted semi-structured interview questions depending on the data I received from the survey. The interviews were semi-structured, because I did have some questions already written down based on the data that I collected from students’ answers to the initial survey. Although I did have prepared questions, new questions emerged during the interview as I tried to listen more to students and talk less. Bogden & Biklen (1998) write: “With semi-structured interviews you are confident of getting comparable data across subjects” (p. 95). To a certain extent, I received some comparable data across research participants which I used to make pedagogical implications after analysis of data. I asked both Dionne and Mike to elaborate on similar questions concerning literacy and Hip hop, for example, How do you feel about reading? Did you like to read in high school? Also I asked them both to elaborate on their answers to the question from the survey about what are or have been some of your favorite Hip hop artists? I asked them both to elaborate more with the follow up question: What is it about their style and what they rap about that really moves you or influences you?

*Interview 1*

I used the first interview (Appendix B) to collect more in depth information from the participants that I choose as information rich cases from the survey data that I received. The central themes that I focused on were: their literate likes and dislikes, experiences in English class, histories of participation in Hip hop culture and Hip hop artists that influenced them. The 1st interview lasted around 1 hour and it was face to face. I used students’ answers to the survey questions to elicit more information, for example, Dionne responded to the survey question: How does Hip hop influence your view of the world? With the answer: “Makes me proud to be black. I am not racist nor do I have anything against other races but Hip hop makes me feel accepted among my own people. It is appealing to me because it is what I know best. I grew up with Hip
hop and I will die with Hip hop” I encouraged her to talk more about this topic and her talk allowed me to pick up on other issues that she initiated. In this way, the 1st interview was a guided conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I audiotaped and transcribed these 1st interviews. 

**Interview 2**

The purpose of the second interview (Appendix C) was to discuss with students the themes, patterns, and ideas that I interpreted as significant after I had collected more data from the student participants mid-way through the semester of English 100. In a sense, I used this interview as a way to member-check with the participants about the themes that I saw emerging from textual analysis of data, for example I asked Mike the following question during Interview 2: Why do you like the song “Lost” by Gorilla Zoe? And why did you feel compelled to write the following lyric to your status? “Ima need councilin, I lost my mind and I still haven’t found it, I used to be so well rounded, but now I tip toe on hells boundries” I melded my analysis of the lyrics to “Lost” with Mike’s interaction and appropriation of the text in order to come up with a fuller interpretation—one which looks at a text from more than one angle. The above is an example of textual analysis within the tradition of cultural studies (Kovala, 2002). I also audiotaped and transcribed Interview #2.

**Conceptual Memos**

I wrote conceptual memos as a tool for thinking about emerging patterns and co-occurrences. A conceptual memo is a note to the researcher about ideas that come from reflecting on the data collected. In this memo, the researcher focuses on patterns detected, on insights, or on “aha! Realizations” (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 80). The following is an example of a conceptual memo that I wrote on January 24th 2010 in regards to interview data that I reflected on about Mike:
It’s doesn’t matter where you’re from, it’s where you’re at” raps Rakim of Eric B. & Rakim, rap duo in the song “I know you got soul” from their album Paid in Full (1987). Michael’s philosophy mirrors that of Eric B. and Rakim’s motto. His self-description: “I’m not a judgmental person” demonstrates how Hip hop has influenced his desire (and maybe also the human impulse) to learn to live and not be judgmental of other human beings.

*Writing on Facebook and Other Artifacts*

Other artifacts I collected include student writings on social networking sites, poems, and original oral Hip hop compositions. I also collected lyrics from music which students consumed. I decided to collect these texts, because rooted in cultural studies is the notion that study of a variety of texts is crucial for understanding the importance of texts to culture. These additional artifacts yielded important information regarding the literate connections that students made to Hip hop culture. I collected data from Dionne and Mike’s Facebook pages from September 2009 to July 2010. I visited their pages on a daily basis. I captured screenshots of their pages, and I made the decision to capture screenshots when I read or saw that they were engaging with Hip hop in anyway. For example, both Mike and Dionne appropriated the lyrics of Hip hop into the writings, either in their status updates or in other notes that they wrote on Facebook. I also captured screenshots of writings that they did which I thought were interesting or might be important to look at in my study, for example Dionne wrote about religion and black female pride and I captured those writings as well. Talk about how many screenshots I collected. In Mike’s case, I also collected original Hip hop compositions that he audio recorded and gave me.

*Data Analysis*

*Textual Analysis*

Textual analysis is a close examination of the elements of a text to determine its’ meaning. Within the tradition of cultural studies, researchers conduct close readings of texts
rooted in a humanities tradition (Kellner, 2009). However, textual analysis within the tradition of cultural studies departs from textual analysis within the tradition of literary analysis. That is, the texts of popular culture are not treated as privileged objects, as pieces of literature are treated as privileged objects, rather it is the interaction between the reader and the text which is privileged and an important part of the analysis (Turner, 1990). In addition, the researcher’s subjective interpretation of textual elements melded to the research participant’s ideas is an important part of the process of textual analysis. In the subsequent case studies, I have attempted to tell Dionne’s and Mike’s stories through themes which emerged from analysis of their words and writings and through analysis of textual products that they drew on in their words and writings. From a cultural studies perspective, text analysis as a broad umbrella includes the analysis of what people actually do with texts in the real world. I revisit this example of a question I asked Mike during Interview 2 to demonstrate textual analysis of data. I asked Mike the following question during Interview 2: Why do you like the song “Lost” by Gorilla Zoe? And why did you feel compelled to write the following lyric to your status? “Ima need councilin, I lost my mind and I still haven’t found it, I used to be so well rounded, but now I tip toe on hells boundries” I melded my analysis of the lyrics to “Lost” with Mike’s interaction and appropriation of the text in order to come up with a fuller interpretation—one which looks at a text from more than one angle. The above is an example of textual analysis within the tradition of cultural studies (Kovala, 2002).

Researchers should acknowledge the impact of new technologies and the fact that students are living and participating in Web 2.0 when considering data collection and analysis (Scollon & Levine, 2004). To that end, Scollon & Levine argue that all discourse is multimodal: “That is, language in use, whether this is in the form of spoken language or text, is always and
inevitably constructed across multiple modes of communication, including speech and gesture not just in spoken language but through such ‘contextual’ phenomena as the use of the physical spaces in which we carry out our discursive actions or the design, papers, and typography of the documents within which our texts are presented” (p. 2). The term “mode” refers to the myriad semiotic resources available to human beings in their pursuit to communicate with others. Analysis of texts, to a large extent, included students’ production and consumption of multimodal texts, such as pages on social networking sites, Hip hop videos or web sites associated with Hip hop culture. These types of texts are examples of elements in the textual analysis.

In Hip hop, for example, prosody conveys as much meaning as the words themselves, as Alim (2006) contends in the following discussion of tonal semantics:

Smitherman (1977: 134) describes tonal semantics as the 'use of voice rhythm and vocal inflection to convey meaning in black communication,' and depicts the voice as instrument. Black American tonal semantics consists of talk-singing, repetition and alliterative word play, intonational contouring and rhyme. Like the preachers in Smitherman (1977), rappers also believe that word-sound (which places emphasis on how words are said, in addition to what words are said) can move people. (p. 84)

Therefore a study of how Hip hop influences the literate lives of students entails a study and textual analysis of word-sound production in Hip hop texts, since word-sounds communicate just as words do.

Van Leeuwen (2004) writes that “…although visual structuring is replacing linguistic structuring in many types of print media, new types of screen genres (e.g. websites) make much
greater use of written language than older screen media such as film and television. To understand such changes, and their products, the study of speech and writing needs to be integrated fully with the study of other semiotic modes” (p. 11). In Figure 1 below, for example, the written does not dominate the screen, but the written text in combination with other modes, such as AAL present in the image and the audience, or the friends that have commented on the text/image’, or chosen, to read it, work to make meaning. Therefore, many different modes are involved in an analysis of the influence of Hip hop on the literate lives of students.
Figure 1. Screenshot from Mike’s Facebook page

Figure 2 below represents how one student’s Facebook page may take advantage of many communicative modes. Norris (2004) writes: “Kress et al. (2001) note that communication is achieved through all modes separately and, at the same time, together. This notion emphasizes the communicative function that is entailed in each mode, and at the same time highlights the
notion that modes are in constant interplay” (p. 103). In order to grasp a richer understanding of to what extent Hip hop influences students’ literate lives, textual analysis of the multiple modes at work was a useful analytical method.

Figure 2. The multiple modes at work within a Facebook page

For both Dionne and Mike, my unit of analysis was single sentences. I looked line by line at texts in search of meaningful ideas. After I transcribed the interview data from Dionne’s case, I coded the data using paper and pencil. I looked for themes that emerged and turned those themes into open codes (Bogden & Biklen, 1998), for example one code that emerged from her interview was that of Hip hop as a release. After I turned the interview data into codes, I looked for co-occurrences of these codes across other data sources, including my conceptual memos, linguistic and multi-modal data from her Facebook page, and linguistic data from popular culture texts referenced by Dionne and Mike, like song-lyrics by artists like India Aire. I developed new codes as I came into contact with new data.
After I transcribed the interviews with Mike, I uploaded the transcriptions into NVivo software. I uploaded the interview transcriptions and transcriptions of the two Hip hop songs that Mike composed and performed, along with the conceptual memos I took after informal conversations. I used the software to look for and record themes across data points which I turned into open codes.

Linguistic analysis

What does a linguistic analysis get at? How does Hip hop as a social-linguistic process inform the cultural practices and the literate lives of students? Since as Richardson (2007) argues, “the linguistic continuum cannot be separated from the sociocultural continuum” (p. 6), a linguistic analysis, or a scientific study of language, can help better understand the sociocultural situation of the students who use the language and who are participants in Hip hop culture.

Hip hop Linguistics (HHLx)

In regards to the relevance of a study of Hip hop and methodology, Alim (2006) writes "Since language ain't neva neutral, HHLx interrogates the development of unequal power relations between and within groups in an effort to make a contribution to our understanding of the world around us" (p. 8 ). The above quote relates to the already always critical nature of the language and literacy practices of the Hip hop Nation. In addition, Alim writes that “call and response, multilayered totalizing expression, signifyin and bustin (bussin), tonal semantics and poetics, narrative sequencing and flow, battling and entering the cipher” (p. 69) are discursive practices particular to Hip hop culture and ones that students may draw on in their literate lives.

In regards to the relevance of a linguistic analysis to the study, Alim (2006) argues, “…linguistics is often seen as a direct means to quantify and reverse the myriad social injustices facing Blacks in America, including educational, economic, and political subordination” (p. 7).
Hip hop came about as a result of socio political circumstances. The language of Hip hop comes from African American language, and AAL is a direct result of the sociocultural context of the “diasporic experience of living in the new world” (Richardson, 2007), therefore an analysis using HHLx may help illuminate the sociocultural context of students’ lives. Although Mike comes from a white European background, this is important in a study of literacy, because literacy learning cannot be understood outside of the social and cultural aspects of life (Street, 2001).

Alim (2006) argues "Importantly, the hiphopography paradigm integrates the varied approaches of ethnography, biography, and social, cultural, and oral history to arrive at an emic view of Hip hop Culture. We view ‘rappers’ as ‘cultural critics’ and ‘cultural theorists’ whose thoughts and ideas help us to make sense of one of the most important cultural movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries" (p. 11). Just as Alim views rappers as cultural theorists, I view the emic views of students as essential for schooling us, the researchers, about the influence of Hip hop in their literate lives. In regards to the importance of using ethnographically informed methods, Heath and Street (2008) argue that, “The emic or locally held perspective of an individual…can bring into its knowledge system that which has been established from an etic or comparative analysis” (p. 44). This approach humanizes the subject and validates the students’ epistemologies.

Linguistic analysis of African American Language and Literacy

Many young Black students find a lot of rhetorical power (Hicks, 2009) in the texts of Hip hop, written by African Americans and often times written for African American audiences, and steeped in AA language, literacy, history and culture. Dionne also finds rhetorical power in the texts of Christianity, the spirituals having a long tradition in African American life (reference). I use Smitherman’s (1977) sociolinguistic work and Alim’s (2006) critical linguistic
work on the language of Hip hop to locate features of AAL in the data and to connect language data to wider social claims. Because as Smitherman (1977) asserted long ago, “Words fit into a total symbolic and cultural system and can only be decoded within the context of that system” (p. 42). Therefore, words, phrases and semantics used by many African Americans such as Dionne should be understood in regards to the social, political, economic and spiritual contexts and circumstances in which they emanated. Further on in this chapter, in the findings section, I make links from Dionne’s use of AAL to wider social claims, using Smitherman’s work to back up my claims. The following is an example of linguistic analysis of AAL and literacy from Ch. 4 about Dionne:

‘Gurl’ is an inventive spelling grounded in Hip hop culture. Alim (2006) argues that hiphoppers make up their own words as a way to free themselves from “linguistic colonization” (p. 73). Dionne’s use of the word ‘gurl’ instead of girl is an example of her writing within this tradition. The use of ‘betta’ for better comes from the deletion of postvocalic –r in AAL, where the r after the vowel is absent (Alim, 2006, p. 115). Again, the use of ‘dem’ for them, and ‘da’ for the, comes from the non-existence of –th sound in West African languages (Smitherman, 1977).

_Recursive process of data analysis and review of the literature_

While analyzing and interpreting the data, I found that a recursive process of going back and forth from the literature and back to the data was instrumental in helping me interpret how Hip hop influences students’ literacy practices. For example, I found that as I was collecting data from Mike, developing codes and trying to interpret my findings, I lacked knowledge of
literature to help me interpret and explain the phenomena I was seeing. I had to go back to a literature search, and I found that Said’s (2004) writings on humanism and Lanham’s (1982) writings on literacy and humanism helped me understand and interpret my findings.

Reflexivity and Ethnocentricity

It was important to be aware of my own outsider status as a non-native speaker of African American Language (AAL) and outsider to the African American community throughout the data analysis and interpretation of the data from Dionne. It was also important to keep in mind Heath and Street’s (2008) advice about using ethnographic tools to resist making value judgments and instead focus on co-occurrences, especially in regards to the contradictions present in Hip hop and the critiques of Hip hop. Alim (2006) writes that: “Hip hop is constituted by popular cultural production and practices that are as contradictory as they are conscious..." (p. 3). The “struggle between culture and capital” (Richardson, 2007); that is the struggle to remain a cultural practice critical of the social, economic and political factors from which Hip hop and Rap music evolved versus the necessity to make money is one of the contradictions that affects Hip hop culture. Many opponents criticize Hip hop for the violent themes expressed in some artists’ music. On the other hand, insiders like KRS-One, a rapper who started out during the early days and has continued his career up to this day, “…insists that violence predates rap and speaks against escalating black-on-black crime, which erodes the social and communal fabric of already debased black inner cities across America” (Dyson, 2004, p. 63). The critique of Hip hop and rap music as violent genres while cherishing the works of Shakespeare, such as Hamlet, Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet (all centered around violence) is typical of the hypocritical language practices (Kynard, 2008a) that permeate schooling practices, and the media as well. While Hip hop and rap music should not be above critique, moral or value judgment is not the
purpose of this study. The purpose of this study is not to place value judgment on the themes that emerge from the influence that Hip hop has on the literate lives of students, but to investigate how it influences their literate lives with an eye towards pedagogical and research implications.

**Timeline of Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Research Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 2009</td>
<td>• Obtained IRB approval for study Hip hop and Literacy in the Lives of Students in Transitional English Courses 09-06-30-02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2009</td>
<td>• Obtained approval of dissertation proposal from dissertation committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2009</td>
<td>• Visited 10 sections of English 100 • Introduced project to all students enrolled in the sections • Interested students took initial survey • Obtained informed consent from 5 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2009-June 2010</td>
<td>• Conducted Interviews 1 &amp; 2 with 5 focal students • Collected artifacts from Facebook of 5 focal students • Conducted classroom observations, took field notes • Transcribed interview data from 5 focal students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2010-October 2010</td>
<td>• Analyzed artifacts from Dionne’s data sources using paper and pencil/Microsoft Word • Recursive analysis and literate review • Wrote case study paper about Dionne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2010-March 2011</td>
<td>• Analyzed artifacts from Mike’s data sources using Nvivo • Recursive analysis and literate review • Wrote case study paper about Mike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2011</td>
<td>• Narrowed dissertation down to two</td>
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In order to protect students’ privacy, I included the following information on the consent form: Information about you will be kept private by assigning a pseudonym to your real name. Your information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my campus office for 2 years. After that it will be destroyed by shredding any research files and deleting them from my computer. The data from this research study may be published; but you will not be identified by your real name.

I offered writing tutoring to all the students who consented to participate. Two of those students took me up on my help. I did not debrief with any of the participants. I would have liked to share some of my findings with the participants, but I assumed that they were busy with their lives and would not be interested in my results.
Ch. 4: Dionne: “We Are All Queens”

This chapter presents a case study of Dionne. My original dissertation research question: How does Hip hop influence the literate lives of students in transitional English classes?, emerged from a desire to find out how students use the tools of language and literacy and the texts of Hip hop to make sense of their lives. I found that Dionne was influenced by Hip hop, but also that Christianity played an important role in her literate life. Smitherman (1977) writes about the reach of the Black idiom into both the sacred and secular aspects of Black life and that the sacred and secular often overlap in the African American rhetorical tradition. The existence of and tensions between the culture of Hip hop and African American Christian beliefs played a significant role in Dionne’s literacies.

Case One

Who is Dionne?

Dionne is a nineteen year old self-described African American student from a small town in a southeastern state. The town’s nearest postsecondary educational institution is a community college about twenty minutes away. As the first person in her family to enter a 4 year university, this move inspired Dionne’s mother to enroll in a course at the community college. Dionne was placed into a non-credit-bearing English course based on the ACT score and one writing sample. She hates to read “long drawn out stuff” (Interview 1, September 29, 2009) but likes self-selected reading. She sings in her church’s choir. She is in a serious relationship with a Christian man. She is a friend, girlfriend, daughter, auntie, talented writer and thinker and trying to be a better person in the world. Dionne sees the nuances, and the possibilities and limitations inherent in Hip hop which many adults who are supposed to be fully “developed” cannot or are unwilling to see. When I asked Dionne about whether or not Hip hop should be discussed in the English
classroom, she answered yes, that it should be a part of the curriculum. She expanded on some of the issues in our initial interview:

The issues of drugs, money, sex, banging. You know people look at those as basically Hip hop within itself. They just wrap those little subjects up and call it Hip hop and it’s so much more than that. It’s about life; it’s about struggles; it’s about victories. You know it’s not just the negative stuff. Hip hop has some positive stuff to it too. And um I think that if there were open discussions about it you could see what people think, you know. They’re not just enclosed to one little subject. You see actually, they get to express theyself. You get to see what people think about it.

Dionne dropped the course two weeks into the semester. She attributed dropping the course to missing too many classes because of illness. Although she was positive about being able to pass the course, she mentioned that she had gotten too far behind because of illness. Although she never indicted a specific teacher, Dionne did express an awareness of racist attitudes toward Hip hop in school. When we first talked, she said that while she was going to learn regardless of what people thought, she acknowledged that her relationship to Hip hop affected how people viewed her:

Dionne: For instance when I go in the classroom with headphones and people can sometimes hear what I’m listening to outside the headphones…

DS: uh-hum

Dionne: I might get looks you know like oh I wish she’d turn that down you know stuff like that you know when you know you could hear somebody walking down listening to a different type of music but nobody say anything. You know I just
think people are biased toward Hip hop and they don’t really know the story behind the music.

DS: right

Dionne: they just go off you know it’s sad to say but there’s still racism going on so people just go off and they assume that Hip hop is THE black people’s music and that’s not it. It’s just music just like every other genre, it’s just a genre of music; anybody can listen to it.

While the dreams and possibilities for being at a 4 year university could be fulfilled, the pull of familial and spiritual relationships at home may have been more enticing, and the claim Kirkland (2009) makes that, “Black students… face academic, social and political penalties simply for embodying African American language, culture and identity.” (p. 377) may play a part in black students’, like Dionne, attrition from the university. She is allowed to define herself through the medium of her Facebook page. But she may not be allowed to define herself, to even be herself in an environment where white middle class values and ways of being are the norm, hence the pull away from the university. Kohl (1994) has written about a concept called “willed not-learning” in which students, in order to preserve self-pride, willfully reject learning certain ideas. Kohl describes willful not-learning in the following way,

Not-learning tends to take place when someone has to deal with unavoidable challenges to her or his personal and family loyalties, integrity, and identity…To agree to learn from a stranger who does not respect your integrity causes a major loss of self. The only alternative is to not-learn and reject the stranger’s world. (p. 6)
Although, I did not have the opportunity to collect in-depth data from Dionne’s participation in ENG 100 and therefore cannot make a claim about whether her departure from the course was an example of willed not-learning, I did find a lot of evidence from her out of class writings on Facebook concerning an affirmation of Black self-pride which is detailed below in the findings section.

Dionne refused to acknowledge or admit the possibility that her dropping the course had anything more to do than with her own illness. When I asked her about people’s negative attitude toward Hip hop and how this affects her education she said: “It may affect the way people look at me concerning my education but it doesn’t really affect the way I take in stuff, you know, I can learn regardless” She also mentioned, “It is real easy to sit around and blame your situation on the ‘white man,’ but if you aren’t trying to do anything about it, you’re just wasting your time and your breath, and life is going to pass you by.” In the end, Dionne believes in the power of the individual to overcome, which is not so different from the meritocratic values that society and the traditional school system espouses. The value of Hip hop as a cultural practice could play an important role in the classroom and serve as dialectic to the normative belief in the power of the individual. While many teachers and other stakeholders in education bemoan the value of Hip hop, Dionne holds the position that Hip hop is much more than a stereotype. Many in education could benefit from her insider knowledge of this cultural and literate practice.

Findings

In the following section, I discuss the themes that emerged from analysis of co-occurrences across data from interview transcriptions, email correspondence, Hip hop texts and writings on her Facebook page.

Black Self-Pride
I asked the following question on the initial survey (Appendix A) that I sent out to students: What impact, if any, does Hip hop have on how you view the world? This question was intended to foster further discussion about how students use Hip hop to make sense of the world. Dionne responded in the following way to the question:

*Makes me proud to be black* [emphasis mine]. I am not racist nor do I have anything against other races but Hip hop makes me feel accepted among my own people. It is appealing to me because it is what I know best. I grew up with Hip hop and I will die with Hip hop.

The theme of black self-pride and more specifically female-black self-pride was evident in the ideas she shared with me in interviews and in her writings on Facebook and a theme that occurred often throughout the data.
Dionne was a fan of the “I Love Being Black” page on Facebook and contributed writings to the site. The administrators of the fan page express that the mission of the page is, “To combat self-hatred and negativity coming from outside or inside our community, and to do it with style.” The administrators of the page supported this mission by frequently posting inspirational quotes from past and present Black leaders such as Harriet Tubman, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Cornel West and Black cultural icons such as Lena Horne. Fans of the page in turn used the site to share inspirational quotes and discuss topics related to being Black.

Female Self-Pride

One day, Dionne’s Facebook status update borrowed this lyric from a Hip hop song by India Arie called “Video” (2001). While most would not characterize India Aire as a Hip hop artist, Aire’s style of speaking words over music in this particular song fits in with the genre. In addition, Aire is using the tools of Hip hop—spoken word over music—to critique some of the more materialistic aspects of Hip hop.

She explained to me why this lyric reflects her view of the world, and her place in it as a young black women: “The message in the song is to be proud of who you are, no matter what size, color, shape, background…doesn’t matter. We are all Queens. God made us the way that we are for a reason and He didn’t make any mistakes, so we need to stop trying to change the way we are…” (Interview 2, November 11, 2009).

From the Hip hop song called “Video” (Arie, 2001, track 2) by India Arie, she writes:
Keep your expensive car and your caviar
All I need is my guitar
Keep your Kristal and your pistol
I'd rather have a pretty piece of crystal
Don't need your silicone I prefer my own
What God gave me is just fine

Arie rejects some of the material aspects of Hip hop culture, such as “expensive cars, caviar, Kristal and pistols” asserting preference for her guitar instead. Similarly, in the following example from her Facebook page, Dionne rejects the associations with gratuitous body exposure that the term swagga has, asserting instead the term ‘class’.

I asked Dionne if she would explain what she meant by ‘swagga” and she told me:

To me, swagga is more of a “gangsta” term. If you ask me, it is not a lady-like term at all. Swagga is SUPPOSED to be another word for class, but yet they have missed the mark by a mile. Class is not walking around with your pants halfway down your behind or all of your boobs hanging out of your shirt. For some reason, with all of the new terms and phrases that are out now, we seem to have lost how we, as ladies and gentlemen, are supposed to act. Gentlemen has been
replaced with “G” and “pimpin”, while lady has been replaced with “hoe” and “b****”. That’s a real problem.

“Swagga” is a term that emerged from a male dominated Hip hop culture. It refers to “How you present yourself to the world” or “The things that define a person's character how someone goes about things, way someone sounds when they talk, what they say when they say it, Style of their movement, the lasting impression you have of that person” (urbandictionary.com). However, Dionne rejects the use of the term to assert that while men may claim the term ‘swagga’, women should claim the term class to define their character. In this way, Dionne refuses to be defined by the male dominated term, preferring instead to define herself.

In her writing, Dionne exhorts other Black females to “watch…the words that come out of our mouth [or computer screens]…” She demonstrates a rhetorical awareness of audience that might go unnoticed in a traditional classroom where the academic essay is the only means of assessment. Young people are writing to different audiences in different rhetorical situations, such as social networking sites. While the use of the academic essay still dominates classroom life, the question is: is its use still relevant? Is knowledge of other rhetorical situations like the social networking site just as important?

Dionne also encourages Black females to “…break the cycle and the low standard that people have set for us…” This act of writing to a Black female audience demonstrates agency
over the anti-humanist discourses which construct young Black women as angry and violent (Oesterreich, 2007).

boyd (2008) writes about social networking sites (SNS) as networked publics, or as a digital audience grouped together by shared texts. One of the properties of networked publics is that of invisible audiences. Boyd writes of invisible audiences:

While we can visually detect most people who can overhear our speech in unmediated spaces; it is virtually impossible to ascertain all those who might run across our expressions in networked publics… a mediated public (and especially a networked public) could consist of all people across all space and time. (p. 126)

Four properties make networked publics uniquely different from mediated publics; they include the possible persistence of speech or textual products, easy searchability or access to people, easy replicability of speech or textual products and the notion that an invisible audience could potentially include any and all people who have access to the internet (boyd, 126). The last property, that of invisible audience, relates to the literate power Facebook and other SNS potentially play in the lives of young people, not only for “write(ing) themselves into being” (boyd, p. 129), to construct their identities through literate practices, but for speaking to a wider audience potentially.

Dionne said to me, “We, especially blacks, need to wake up and figure out what it is that we need to and want to do with our lives.” Smitherman (1977) writes about the change from the use of the term Negro to black:

The black consciousness movement of the 1960's was… asserting the right of Black America to define itself, including the right to select its own name. In a grand sweep to eradicate the old negative 'whiteness' from black minds, leaders of
this era deliberately chose a racial label that required blacks to purify themselves of white ideas and values, for to accept the 'black' of blackness amounted to the ultimate recognition that white skin and white values were no longer important.

(p. 41)

While Dionne’s use of the term ‘black’ is probably not a conscious move to reject white values, she does however find rhetorical power both in the use and rejection of terms from Hip hop culture told through the medium of an SNS for her own purposes of Black female self-affirmation and Black self-pride. She uses Facebook to assert this positive racial identity to an invisible audience, which could potentially include a large amount of people.

Although Dionne may not have everything figured out at nineteen years of age, she is trying to figure out the world and her place in it using the tools of language and a social networking site where she can dialogue with her peers. We often do not get to see the potential of a young woman like Dionne in transitional classrooms because we are not looking in the right places. The opportunity to linger over her writings as a human being in the world allowed me the opportunity to see all the literate possibilities that she does have.

_AAL in the everyday/prosaic_

Rickford & Rickford (2000) emphasize the ordered, rule governed nature and everyday use of AAL by speakers in the African American community in order to counter negative assumptions about AAL and allegations that AAL is mere ‘slang’. Regarding African American female speakers, feminist scholars (Collins, 2000) have asserted the idea that the personal is also political, and by extension, the everyday, systematic language and literacy use of individuals can also be political. A powerful example of this notion is demonstrated in Jordan’s (1988) account of students’ use of Black English in a letter written to the New York City police and to Newsday,
a New York City newspaper, over the shooting death of a classmates’ unarmed brother. Another powerful example comes from a recent Oscar nominated documentary called “Trouble the Water” in which Kimberly Rivers Roberts, a young African American woman, documents through her use of a hand held video recorder, life as a resident of New Orleans’s Lower 9th Ward neighborhood two days before Hurricane Katrina hit and the aftermath. The power of her narrative comes from not only the horrifying images and events that she documents, but the use of African American language and literacy practices that she uses to document her story. Smitherman (1977) wrote long ago, “Audiences are moved by message and style of delivery, not… lack of copula deletion, or the addition of the s-morpheme to third-person-singular-present-tense verbs” (p. 64). Rivers Roberts’ style of delivery, through her everyday use of AAL and her rap lyrics, drive home the social and political messages of the film.

The following section, while brief and hardly a full account of the richness of the lexicon, grammatical features, semantics or cultural values that are an inextricable part of AAL, will highlight the use of some of AAL in the everyday writings by Dionne on Facebook which sometimes are tied to larger social and political messages.

The use of ‘dis’ for this comes from the non-existence of a –th sound in West African languages (Smitherman, 1977). The use of ‘nigga’, in this case used as a term of endearment, is an example of flippin the script. “Flippin the script” or semantic inversion refers to the practice of imposing a completely different meaning onto the dominant definition of a word. Smitherman (1997) writes that
The inversion/script flippin that has taken place with “nigger” is often misunderstood by European Americans and castigated by some African Americans. When used by AAL speakers, “nigger” has a different pronunciation, because of AAL’s postvocalic –r deletion rule, and in today’s hip-hop world, a different spelling: nigga, and for the plural, niggaz….Encoded within the rhetoric of racial resistance, nigga is used to demarcate (Black) culturally rooted from (White) culturally assimilated African Americans. Niggaz are those Bloods (Blacks) who are down for Blackness and identify with the trials as well as the triumphs of the Black experience. (p. 19)

‘Gurl’ is an inventive spelling grounded in Hip hop culture. Alim (2006) argues that hiphoppers make up their own words as a way to free themselves from “linguistic colonization” (p. 73). Dionne’s use of the word ‘gurl’ instead of girl is an example of her writing within this tradition. The use of ‘betta’ for better comes from the deletion of postvocalic –r in AAL, where the r after the vowel is absent (Alim, 2006; p. 115). Again, the use of ‘dem’ for them, and ‘da’ for the, comes from the non-existence of –th sound in West African languages (Smitherman, 1977).

One day, Dionne’s status read: “Maybe God is tryna tell me something…maybe too many chicken nuggets last night.” In it she evokes the title and words to an African American
gospel song, “God is tryna tell you something” and links it to the prosaic account of possible overeating. The preceding example illustrates how Dionne draws on the traditional African worldview in her everyday life, that is: “…the fundamental unity between the spiritual and the material aspects of existence” (Smitherman, 1977, p. 75). I asked Dionne about that song and she told me:

   To me it's a message. Like the saying, "God gave you 2 ears and 1 mouth so you can listen more than you speak. It kind of reminds me of that, because sometimes we get so caught up in asking God for this and for that, we forget to listen to what He has to say. To have a "relationship" in the natural means that communication has to be a valid part and you can't "communicate" by yourself. Therefore, if we are to have a relationship with God we must listen to Him just as we would in a relationship on earth with a brother, uncle, boyfriend, husband, etc. (Email correspondence 3/26/2010)

   Smitherman (1997) concurs with Dionne’s claim that to have a relationship with God, you must communicate on a regular basis. She writes:

   And, like the traditional African God, the Black American God is viewed not only as Someone Who dwells on High but as One Who also inhabits this mundane earthly world of ours...Black American men and women, like traditional African men and women, are daily 'living witnesses' to God's Supreme Power; thus they look up to God while simultaneously being on regular speaking terms with Him (p. 92)

   Dionne finds rhetorical power in church spirituals which are steeped in AA language traditions. Her literate life highlights the possibilities for activism through Hip hop, Christianity
and poetry—all of these draw on the tradition of AA language and literacy practices in order to promote Black cultural understandings.

*Activism in Non-traditional spaces*

Through the medium of her Facebook page, a social networking site and non-traditional space, Dionne uses the tools of literacy and language, often rooted in the AA tradition, to promote Black female group solidarity and Black self-pride—parts of a larger social justice and humanistic project. Collins (2000) writes:

Prevailing definitions of political activism and resistance misunderstand the meaning of these concepts in Black women's lives. Social science research typically focuses on public, official, visible political activity even though unofficial, private and seemingly invisible spheres of social life and organization may be equally important. (p. 202)

As Collins notes, activism is traditionally defined as highly visible instances of political activities, such as collective protest, but I am using a broader understanding of activism as elaborated by Oesterreich (2007), Richardson (2006) and others. Dionne uses her writings on Facebook, which highlight the personal and lived experiences of her life, to promote solidarity and self-pride, which are aspects of a type of activist change, albeit non-traditional.

*Hip hop as Activism*

This section discusses the activist possibilities, albeit non-traditional, that Hip hop may play in the lives of young people, including Dionne.
In a documentary called the “Hip hop Project” about the use of Hip hop in the classroom, a young woman speaks about the importance of Hip hop in the lives of young people. She says, "Hip hop is about drums and bass and tones and power…you know… rah…I remember when grandmaster flash, Mellie Mel and the Furious Five and Run D.M.C. even every time they’d end a song they’d go arahh. you know…cuz it was about rah..letting that energy, let that fire out…you know….So when you hear the drums and the bass that just gets you moving…And then I get to like say whatever I want and I can curse if I want to, not that you’re promoting it, but you’re just letting me do me..aaahhh…you know…So that’s freedom…It’s freedom to be just able to say whatever I want. And nobody’s gonna stop me; nobody’s gonna check me; nobody’s gonna tell me that it’s wrong, cuz there is no right or wrong, and once I do that and I get all my stuff on the table, then I can jus be myself.

Similarly, Dionne writes that “that’s their release” in regards to rappers and their literate art. While people in her church, and many others in the African American community, look down on Hip hop, Dionne struggles with this issue and her writings reflect this ambivalence. The ambivalence—the pull in one direction by the Hip hop culture of her peers versus the pull by her pastor and older members of her church community who say that Hip hop is keeping Black people down—that she feels could be used as the basis for textual and critical exploration in the classroom. Willis (1977) in a groundbreaking ethnographic study which explored the reproductive means by which working class boys get working class jobs, gave some suggestions by which teachers might help young people break the cycle of reproduction. Willis found that both individual and structural factors influence the ways in which working class boys are caught
in a cycle of social and cultural reproduction. However, he rejected a hopeless view of the cycle, positing instead that, “…there are deep disjunctions and desperate tensions within social and cultural reproduction. Social agents are not passive bearers of ideology, but active appropriators who reproduce existing structures only through struggle, contestation and a partial penetration of those structures” (p. 175). Dionne’s struggle with the culture of Hip hop versus the tenets of Christianity espoused by her church is an example of individual agency working with and against structural factors. Whereas Dionne sees Hip hop as a diversion, as a “release” for people, she also is influenced by the dominant ideology of individualism which says that Hip hop is holding individuals back. For example, late in the semester she expressed on her Facebook page disdain for the song, “Empire state of mind” by Hip hop artist, Jay-Z. I asked her why she had a problem with the lyrics, and she told me:

He’s inconspicuous with what he says and he says it the way he does for a reason. Example: “On the avenue, there ain’t never a curfew. Ladies work so hard. Such a melting pot, on the corner selling rock. Preachers pray to God.” This is not as innocent as it sounds. Ladies work so hard—because they are prostitutes. Such a melting pot, on the corner selling rock—rock is the street word for cocaine. That is why the preachers have to pray to God. Also, what I don’t like is that this song makes it seem like it is easy for everyone to get a quick job just as he did when that is not the case. You wonder why so many drop out of school thinking they can make it in the music industry—because of songs like this giving them false hope. Everyone can’t make it as easy as he did. Some have to actually work for they want. They need to make a song about getting your education first, so that if you don’t make it into the music industry, you’ll have something solid to fall back
on… I have lots of friends that will sit around all day and talk about how life is not fair and how they wish they were rich like “white people,” but yet they are being lazy, not doing their work in class so they can graduate and get a better job, etc. They are just doing nothing, but complaining. It is time for blacks to stop complaining about what they don’t have and do something about it. (Email correspondence)

Willis (1977) advised teachers to "Take cultural forms, basic transitions, social attitudes sometimes as the basic texts for class work. Attempt to promote real skills and discipline in the pursuit of a form of social self-analysis" (p. 190). The preceding correspondence from Dionne reveals that she is already engaging in a kind of social self-analysis by reflecting on and analyzing the lyrics to a Hip hop song. However, Jay-Z’s “Empire state of mind” for example is seen as inferior, as non-academic and not an appropriate text for classroom study. The use of African American language practices in the song make it de facto inappropriate for study in the classroom (Alim, 2006) even though if teachers would see Hip hop as musical literature, as Alim argues, then they could teach humanistic understandings using Hip hop, which is what students are getting on their own.

Willis wrote that “The problem is that real forms of cultural understanding are broken up and distorted by an omnipresent ideology of individualism” (p. 188). The possibilities for examination of or deconstruction of popular social attitudes about Hip hop and individualism are oftentimes obscured by a predominance of White middle class texts and an obsession with mastery of “standardized” White ways of writing and thinking.

To draw on another example from the song “Video,” in which Dionne finds rhetorical power, India Arie raps: “So get in where you fit in [emphasis mine] go on and shine, Clear your
mind, now’s the time, Put your salt on the shelf, Go on and love yourself, Cuz everything’s gonna be alright.” RZA, a rapper famous for creating the rap group Wu-Tang Clan, in his latest book, *The Tao of Wu*, draws on Hip hop, among other philosophical and religious traditions in order to give wisdom to young people. He dedicated a chapter to expressions rooted in Hip hop that can offer real world advice to young people. One of these is ‘Get in where you fit in’; he writes: "One of our main problems is knowing your place and time. Get in where you fit in [emphasis mine]. It doesn't mean don't dream and strive for something better. It means that all things manifest in due time” (p. 143-144). Both India Arie and RZA draw on an expression rooted in the African American experience and the culture of Hip hop to communicate to a young audience of listeners. Dionne is part of that audience, and while many focus on the negative aspects of Hip hop, the above examples demonstrate the use of Hip hop for activist means.

*Christianity as Activism*

Matthew 16:26 "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?". Is it THAT serious to have material possessions that we would risk eternity in hell to have temporary pleasures? Hell is real people...please don't take it for a joke...stop following the "trends"...become a rebel for Christ...GET RIGHT OR GET LEFT...literally...

“Hell is real people. Please don’t take it for a joke. Stop following the “trends.” Become a rebel for Christ. GET RIGHT OR GET LEFT. Literally.” Get right or get left is an example of alliterative dichotomy. Smitherman (1977) wrote that African Americans, whether in sacred or secular settings, use simple alliterative dichotomy to move people. She alludes to Malcolm’s X exhortation to get out and vote when he said, “The Ballot or the Bullet” (p. 143). A more recent example of alliterative dichotomy used to move people was when Rev. Al Sharpton spoke at Michael Jackson’s funeral and he looked directly at Jackson’s children in order to comfort them.
He said to them, “Wasn't nuttin strange about yo daddy; what was strange was what he had to deal with.” Dionne’s call to “Get right or get left” is another powerful example of alliterative dichotomy, a component of tonal semantics. This example of rhythmic, dramatic, evocative language comes from the AA tradition of tonal semantics. Smitherman (1977) writes about the importance of tonal semantics for making meaning in AAL: "Key words and sounds are repeated in succession, both for emphasis and effect. Believing that meaningful sounds can move people [emphasis mine], the black speaker capitalizes on effective uses of repetition" (p. 143). Dionne uses the medium of her Facebook page and AAL practices to “move people.”

*Poetry as Activism*
In addition to the above poem titled, “Get Right or Get Left”, Dionne wrote a poem called “Midnight Aggression” and posted it to her Facebook page. The following is an excerpt from the poem:

They say talking is the best way to rid yourself of unwanted emotions. True in most cases. I did talk. I talked through poetry. Now I feel ok. Feel like I have rid myself of those emotions. I guess it’ll be a while before my pen meets yet another piece of paper. This is the last time I will be up writing like a maniac in the middle of the night. Thinking, wondering.
When will it stop?
When will my soul finally be cleansed of its impurities and be able to stand again as innocent?
I think the answer to that question is NOW!

I asked her about this poem and why she posted it to her page, she responded: “I posted it to my page because I had read it out loud in a poetry club a while back and it changed someone’s life, so I figured that I would put it on my page and it may change someone else’s life as well.”

The poems that she posted to Facebook, “Midnight Aggression” and “Get Right or Get Left” are intended for a wider audience of black female listeners. The medium of the social networking page allows this kind of dialogue to take place. Smitherman (1977) writes, "The dynamics of black communication allow for individual variation within the structure. Thus all responses are 'correct;' the only 'incorrect' thing you can do is not respond at all...This interactive system embodies communality rather than individuality" (p. 108-109). This notion of communality goes against the message of individualism in higher education and in society at large.

In the midst of the Civil Rights era, Malcolm X described his experience with white supremacy and the anti-humanism that resulted from slavery’s legacy:

It was the same with other white people...One of them was the judge who was in charge of me in Lansing...he would look me up and down, his expression approving, like he was examining a fine colt, or a pedigreed pup… [I]t just never dawned upon them that I could understand that I wasn't a pet, but a human being. They didn't give me credit for having the same sensitivity, intellect, and understanding that they would have been ready and willing to recognize in a white boy in my position... [T]he thing you must always remember is that [Y]ou'll find that as fixed in him as his bone structure is his sometimes subconscious
conviction that he's better than anybody black. –Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, (p. 28)

Although Malcolm X wrote the above statement in 1964, white supremacy and anti-humanism still dominates our consciousness and institutional practices. The most recent and egregious example of anti-humanism being the passing of the Alabama House Bill 56, Beason-Hammon Alabama Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act, which makes it a crime for a non-resident to be without proper documentation on his/her person. The bill allows for state-sanctioned racial profiling, among other draconian rules, since there is no other way to determine “reasonable suspicion” about a person’s immigration status. The passing of this bill demonstrates one way in which fear and hatred of people deemed ‘other’ has trumped compassion for human beings. While not as obvious, but certainly an extension of anti-humanist practice, is the curriculum in transitional English courses, where academic literacy and rhetoric is often whitewashed and the language and literacies of brown and black students is suppressed. This example of symbolic violence is often masked by “good” intentions of teachers and other stakeholders.

The discussion about students who are labeled, “developmental, “remedial” and “at-risk” often focuses on what they lack (Hull, Rose, Fraser, & Castellano, 1991). Along these lines, Kirkland (2009) writes that: “Black students… face academic, social and political penalties simply for embodying African American language, culture and identity.” (p. 377). While many African American students embrace their language and culture as part of their identity and humanity, often teachers, whether consciously or subconsciously, treat their culture and language as inferior. While the challenges that face brown and black students, students who come from working class backgrounds and distressed neighborhoods are real, little too often do we focus on
the humanizing aspects of students' literate lives. And so Kirkland (2009) reminds us, “...by denying literacy, one also denies a person's humanity" (p. 378). When seen from the above perspective, the implications for literacy learning and the ethical implications for life come into sharper view: The importance of one’s humanity transcends mastery of skills or course outcomes.

Scholars working within the tradition of New Literacy Studies such as González, Moll & Amanti (2005) and Gutiérrez (2008) argue that schools can create academic and cultural capital, especially for students from various linguistic, ethnic and classed backgrounds, by cultivating biliteracy and encouraging learning in “third-spaces.” Cultivating “third-spaces” or spaces where the academic world and students’ worlds meet, and where students articulate the learning concerns that come from their everyday lives is important. Likewise, scholars have argued that students both can and should learn home and school languages simultaneously (Reyes & Moll, 2010). They have also argued for the importance of code-switching (Delpit, 1995). But there is a limitation to the aforementioned approaches. The third-space and biliterate pedagogical approaches do not attend to the inferior place which varieties of English other than the Standard have in the first year classroom -- in the transitional English classroom for the context of this study. Secondly, the biliterate approach does not attend to the negative attitudes which students have about themselves because of the inferior place that their languages and cultural practices have at the university. In addition, the biliterate approach does not attend to the oftentimes racist distancing and/or exclusion of Hip hop literacies from the first year classroom.

I wrote about Kirkland & Jackson’s (2009) study in the literature review chapter, and I revisit it here because it provides an example that illustrates the limitation of a biliterate, or code-switching approach. The authors studied the attitudes of African American students toward
African American Language (AAL) after they had been taught a code-switching pedagogy called contrastive analysis (CA). Despite its good intentions, and despite overt attention given to AAL and popular culture such as rap and Hip hop, the program did not help students value their own culture and language; in fact, it had the opposite effects. Kirkland & Jackson’s attention to a piece of data drawn by a focal participant in the study illuminates the limits to the CA approach. He ponders: “Why does Ian, an honor roll student who professes to love Hip hop, sketch an autolinguistic portrait that reflects negative reaction to African American culture?” (p. 145).

Kirkland & Jackson’s critical question concerning a student in the research study attends to the limitations of a pedagogical approach that does not include explicit attention to the linguistic inequality which negatively impacts students’ psyches and identities. Creating the conditions for linguistic plurality is of moral and ethical importance and cannot be separated from pedagogical importance. The disproportionate number of students in transitional English courses who do not move on to higher level literacy courses may be an example of the symbolic violence and real material consequences that go along with discriminatory language attitudes and practices.

The following literature applies to Dionne in particular, therefore I have included it here rather than in the Ch. 2. While African American students are underrepresented in postsecondary education, they are often overrepresented in developmental, non-credit bearing classes (Boylan, 1999). Take for example, the University of Cincinnati’s college for transitional education where almost 50% of incoming African American 1st year students were placed (Report of the President’s UC 21 Diversity Task Force, 2007). Students in transitional classrooms are talked about through deficit perspectives, and the possibilities in their literate practices are usually not highlighted. In addition, their cultural and literate practices are often silenced and penalized by the predominance of white middle class ways of knowing and writing in classrooms (Kirkland &
Jackson, 2009; Kynard, 2008). Our society has not eradicated many forms of institutional racism including the ways in which students of color are excluded from higher education (Santelices & Wilson, 2010). Female African American students face an additional burden in that in our stratified society, women of color are usually at the bottom of the economic and social ladder. As hooks (2000) reminds us: “Women of all races…are rapidly becoming the poorest of the poor” (viii). We live in a society where women are objectified and dehumanized, as Osterreich (2007) contends: “Black young women are constructed in schools as violent, loud, angry, belligerent, promiscuous, weed smoking, rap listening drains on society” (p. 10) and as evidenced in the pseudo-science of Kanazawa’s (2011) recent article in Psychology Today which argued that Black women are less attractive than all other women and this, he argues, is based in biological differences. Therefore, women in transitional courses, who are already in a vulnerable position, face the additional burden of society’s negative construction of them. Despite these challenges, women are not mere victims of circumstances; they create agency and possibility through the use of cultural and literate practices steeped in the African American tradition (Osterreich, 2007).
Ch. 5: Mike “A Call to My Soul”

Back then, songs were sung. Instruments were played. This was the voice of a man speaking words over music….that night, these were the first words I heard spoken over a beat. It's like it says in the Gospel of John: ‘In the beginning was the Word.’ And to me, those words weren't just rap lyrics. They spoke to something inherent in me. If you ask my older brother, he'll tell you I was reading Dr. Seuss in rhyme and rhythm at age three. But up until that night, I'd been living in my head. These words and this music, they were a call--a call to something deep inside me. They were a call to my soul. And it came in a simple party rap, a few lines that went on through the night.

Dip-dip, dive
So-so-cialize
Clean out your ears
Open your eyes (RZA, 2009, p.14)

“They were a call to my soul.” So writes RZA, the founder of the Hip hop group, The Wu-Tang Clan, about his first experience hearing rap music—the art of spoken word over beats. RZA’s experience is not so different from the one Mike Rose (2010) describes in an essay called “When the lights go on.” In it Rose reminisces about a school year in which he experienced a profound change in regards to reading, writing and engaging with ideas. The year was 1959, and not unlike RZA, Rose recalls that up until that year, “I lived in my head and felt unengaged by schoolwork” (p.73) until he was challenged to read Heart of Darkness by his teacher, Mr. McFarland. Rose recalls, “I still remember that assignment. It was one of the papers that flipped a switch in me, that helped me redefine who I was… I suppose I had been mediocre for too long
and took to the challenge to think hard. And I suppose I had lived internally for too long and enjoyed this more public engagement with ideas and with school” (p.73). Rose was moved by *Heart of Darkness*, and just as importantly he was moved to redefine himself because of a relationship with a caring teacher. Mr. McFarland encouraged Rose, a poor kid taking remedial courses (Rose, 1989) to engage with the ideas in the text. But there are other literate ways in which students can feel something, think hard, and experience humanistic understandings. Although Rose’s account demonstrates a more traditional entry to humanistic understanding through literature, RZA on the other hand, discusses how as a young man, an early experience with Hip hop music and culture invited him to take part in the world around him.

**Hip hop as a Cultural Practice**

Some social and structural situations which influence the discursive practices and worldview of Hip hop in the post civil-rights era are: increased visibility of Black youth, globalization, media representation and criminalization of Black youth, and the “illusion of integration” (Kitwana, 2002, p. 15). Kitwana (2002) cites West (1993) to argue that the visibility of Black youth, primarily through Hip hop artists and professional athletes, has resulted in a kind of Afro-Americanization of white youth. White youth adopt ways of talking and dressing usually associated with Black culture. The preceding point is true in Mike’’s case since his language and worldview are influenced by relationships with Black friends and the lyrical poetry and music of Black rap artists.

Much of the data is this chapter discusses Mike’s textual readings of Kid Cudi, a well-known Hip hop artist. In an article for Rolling Stone magazine, called “Kid Cudi: Hip-Hop’s Sensitive Soul,” Hoard (2009) argues that Kid Cudi “…epitomizes the sea-change in hip-hop toward more vulnerable characters” (p. 40). Said (2004) argues that, “…the essence of humanism
is to understand human history as a continuous process of self-understanding and self-realization…” (p. 26). This practice of introspection represents a gradation in the evolving cultural practice of Hip hop and a practice which Mike adopted via his verbal and written texts. Mike and I touched on this topic of introspection in the music of Kid Cudi when he tried to explain the difference between emotional rap and sentimental rap:

I don’t like emotional, really emotional rap I guess…like sentimental, emotional.

Cuz it’s kinda like…

DS: Okay, I have to interrupt you there cuz like SoloDolo [a rap song by Kid Cudi]. Like that’s…I see that’s not sentimental but that’s definitely EMOTIONAL.

M: oh yeah, definitely, definitely, but towards YOURSELF. Like not towards someone else, like “oh my god, you hurt me.” It’s more like you having battles with yourself other than like getting emotionally involved with someone else.

The above data illustrates that the practice of introspection in Kid Cudi’s music is what Mike is attracted to.

Humanistic Understanding

We want students to appreciate good literature because we believe they will learn important humanistic principles, such as compassion, kindness, respect and hope. When I asked Mike why he thought Notorious B.I.G. was so great, he responded, “the big thing about him is that most of his stuff that he’s done or that he did was, like, 75% of it he never wrote down. He just went in there and got on the mic and started talking and each one he did is kinda like a story, a story with a really, really good flow…” As literacy advocates, we believe in the power of
stories to move people. As literacy teachers/scholars working in the tradition of cultural studies, we do not judge the stories that speak to people, rather we attempt to understand why they do.

“It’s stuff like that that makes me want to get out of the humanities,” Mike told me at the end of the semester about feedback he received on a literary review he wrote about South Park, a television cartoon parody which pokes fun at just about everything in popular culture. His frustration came from a misunderstanding of the aims of the assignment. While Mike’s literary review was mostly reviewing an episode of the show, the instructor wanted more compare and contrast of scholarly literary reviews in his essay. Mike’s frustration resulted from his desire to include more of his own thoughts about the episode while the instructor wanted more analysis of the scholarly literature. Mike’s frustration could also have been a result of what Said (2004) calls the “dry-as-dust academic humanities” (p. 13), or the overreliance on traditional, western-centric ways of teaching the human condition and writing about it. Hip hop gives Mike the opportunity to think hard which he discussed in the following quote in regards to the difference between female R&B artists and Hip hop artists like Kid Cudi: “I mean I can listen to it, [R&B music] but I mean it’s just not something that I sit down and actual THINK about. It’s just something like if I’m in the car and it’s on I’m not gonna change it but I’m not really paying attention to it.”

At the core of humanism is that human beings from all cultures and societies share similar qualities and have the power of individual agency to change social situations. Liberty, freedom, hope, equality, coexistence, understanding of self and others are all qualities of humanism. Although literacy scholars know that literacy learning is socially constructed and mediated by language-filled relationships with others, and that discourses and ideologies are powerful structures that speak through people; they also know that human beings are powerful agents of social change. Literacy, from an ideological perspective (Street, 2003) is co-implicated
in the process of social and ideological reproduction. However, in tension with that perspective is the idea that there are “cracks in the billiard ball smoothness” (Willis, 1977, p. 175) of this process of reproduction. These ‘cracks’ are the creative ways in which people live out the process of social reproduction even as they change it.

Said (2004) writes that “…the abiding basis for all humanistic practice…is philological, that is, a detailed, patient scrutiny of an lifelong attentiveness to the words and rhetorics by which language is used by human beings who exist in history” (p. 61) and that “literature provides the most heightened example we have of words in action and therefore is the most complex and rewarding…of all verbal practices” (p. 60). But are there alternative verbal practices that might provide the important humanistic understanding to which Said refers, especially for youth who proclaim to not like to read literature?

This section discusses an alternative verbal practice not sanctioned in schools, that of freestylin. Freestylin is a cultural practice within Hip hop rooted in the African American language and cultural tradition. To freestyle means to invent a lyrical poem on the fly. Freestylin became part of Mike’s literary repertoire from being a member of the high school basketball team. He first learned to freestyle and take part in this practice with the mostly Black members of the team on the bus ride to basketball games. In the following excerpt from our 1st interview, Mike discusses freestylin:

MH: Because…when people freestyle, there’s like no limits or no rules and like on the radio you can censor stuff out. I mean freestyles are kinda done to entice the other person to try and say something to make you feel bad, I guess…Some freestylin topics would include their girlfriend um jus talking bout how bad they
played basketball was often one; how much they sat the bench would be part of it.

A kid on the team had really bad teeth—that was one of the topics

DS: [laughs]

M: being really short, BEING WHITE… being white.

DS: How did you deal with that?

M: Um [long pause]

DS: If you can remember, if that was something that somebody said to you.

M: I’m trying to think..something about being white..and it had something to do

with uh…it was a racial comment…but I came back at my teammate with

something about being burnt to a crisp or something like that.

DS: oh so you would…

M: But the thing is when you’re doing it, everyone knows you’re joking so you
can pretty much say anything you want.

Mike found this verbal and literate practice rewarding because “…you can pretty much
say anything you want…”

Said (2004) argues that at the core of humanism, human beings must be able to look at
history as a process of self-understanding (p. 25). To Mike the purpose of freestyle battlin is to
“entice the the other person to try and say something to make you feel bad.” Perhaps a comment
about race, within the context of a freestyle battle, even one that “makes you feel bad” allows
one to think at all about issues such as race—issues which teachers do not want to address
(Kynard, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999) in color-blind (Bonilla-Silva & Foreman, 2001) classrooms.
Bonilla-Silva (2003) explains that colorblind racism is a much more insidious form of racism in
which institutional racism is perpetuated and worsened by individuals and policies which claim
to “not see color” or to be race-neutral. Alim (2010) found that within the practice of the freestyle rap battle, rappers explicitly negotiate and contest issues of identity, including race, so that freestyling is explicitly color-conscious, rather than colorblind.

Case Two

Who is Mike?

Mike is a 1st generation college student from a small city along the shores of North Carolina. He grew up in the Baptist religious tradition of the South. Although his father did not attend college, his occupation in construction and set design offered Mike and his family access to a middle class lifestyle while he was growing up. Unfortunately, his father’s recent job loss has Mike worried about his family’s economic situation and influences his thoughts about a major of study in college.

Findings

Hip hop tells a story

“My son, Christopher Wallace, told stories. Some of them were funny. Some of them were sad. Some of them were violent. But people listened.”
--Voletta Wallace, mother of beloved and deceased rapper and Hip hop legend, Christopher “Biggie/Notorious B.I.G.” Wallace

In the initial survey, Mike wrote that one of his favorite artists is the Notorious B.I.G, aka Biggie, a rapper who was murdered in 1996. I asked him to elaborate on why Biggie is one of his favorite artists in our 1st interview:

DS: okay and so then you talked about how Biggie is one of your favorite artists?

So what about his music do you think is still appealing even though he’s dead?

M: the big thing about him is that most of his stuff that he’s done or that he did was uh like 75% of it he never wrote down. He just went in there and got on the
mic and started talking and each one he has is kinda like a story-- a story with a really, really good flow.

He also cited Kid Cudi as one of his favorite artists in the initial interview and I asked him about Kid Cudi and why he likes his music so much:

M: So Kanye [West] picked him up and produced him and so I just started listening to it. I just like the way his uh cd just came out he literally does after every song, he tells a story like about him. The whole thing. Each song has a little section of the story and like the last song ends the story. So it’s really good.

DS: oh I haven’t heard it. So he’ll do the song and then explain it?

M: yeah, he’ll start out…his first song is just…it’s called The Pursuit of Happiness, his first song…And then he starts talking about…uh…um he starts out he says something like “Long before um our lives were even born our pasts were already set in stone” and he’s not rapping at all, he’s jus speaking. And then he’s like “Some of us may never figure out our paths in life; some will”…They don’t never do that on the radio, but if you get the cd, every single song has a story behind it.

DS: That’s cool. So what do you think about that element?

M: I just really think it’s cool. Like even if you think about the song after you listen to it, it kinda involves what he’s saying.

The song which Mike cited in the above excerpt, “The Pursuit of Happiness”, discusses the power dreams have to both propel you forward and also to paralyze you:

tell me what you know about dreams, dreams
tell me what you know about night terrors, nothin’
you don't really care about the trials of tomorrow rather lay awake in a bed full of sorrow
Mike’s preoccupations with his dreams for the future mirror the themes which Kid Cudi raps about. This fact may be one of the reasons why Mike’s literate abilities take root with Hip hop as a literate and cultural practice. Lanham (1983) argues in regards to curriculum in the composition classroom, “…curriculum should be clear, as short as possible, and genuinely related to the students real and immediate needs” (p. 125) and by extension, the curriculum in the transitional English classroom in driven by similar motives. The tendency in composition is toward teaching for pragmatic reasons alone, but Lanham also reminds us that, “…man feels spiritual hungers as well…” (p. 125). The human impulse to understand the self and others and the meaning of life are what motivate Mike to seek answers to life’s questions in Hip hop music.

The above data reveals that Mike practices philological study (Said, 2004) from listening and reading the stories told in a rap song. The stories Kid Cudi raps may not be “literature” in the traditional way teachers view it, but in Black Language Spaces (BLS) (Alim, 2006); the linguistic and communicative norms of Black language are prestigious. Alim argues,

> It is the existence of BLS that enables Hip hop Nation Language [HHNHL] to come to life in full effect. By BLS, we mean a discursive space where Black Language is the prestige variety, where Black linguistic and communicative norms are the standard… (p. 102)

Alim goes on to assert that “HHNHL is best viewed as the synergistic combination of speech, music, and literature. Yancy (1991) speaks of Rap as ‘musical literature’…” (p. 72). It is this kind of reversal of the dominant perspective--where Rap music is seen as musical literature, and Black language is prestigious—which allows me to see Mike’s readings of Kid Cudi as philological. What is interesting is that Mike, a White student, appropriates the language of
Black artists for use on Facebook, an online space, where there is a blurring between While
language spaces and Black language spaces and language propriety and impropriety.

The line “some of us may never figure out our paths in life; some will” reflects Mike’s
real life preoccupations with his future: what his major will be and future work aspirations. In
our 2nd interview, Mike talked about the possibility of Religious Studies as a major: “I’m a
religious major right now but I wanna switch cuz there’s not much I can do with it. And I kinda
figured out what I wanna do but I mean it still interests me. Religion has always interested me.”
He also mentioned a desire to work in the field of set design, just like his father. His
concern about working in the field relates to one of the reasons he hates to read: a self-
described short attention span. He mentioned,

My Dad is the construction coordinator and his boss is the production designer
and I watched him do his stuff and like I was always really interested in that cuz
he gets a script and when he gets a script, he sits down and designs the entire set
from like the furniture to the wallpaper, the carpet, the color. I thought it was
really cool. And he does it all on computer on like his own software and stuff and
like he can turn the room around and look at it. And then I’d look at that and 3
weeks later, I’d go see what my Dad built off of his blue prints and it looks
exactly the same.

DS: that’s awesome

M: yeah, it’s really cool. So I think I wanna actually try and get a graphic design
degree here b/c I mean if I get that I already have a connection to into the
business.

DS: exactly.
M: cuz I mean the guy makes bank. And all he does is sit and design stuff all day and he’s always like and the bad thing I thought about it was well I can’t be able to sit down and do it all day, but I mean he does it and then he goes…He’s always busy and checking out stuff so…and I know if I had that design degree, and I wanted to get into it and could shadow him anytime I wanted, and he would probably give me an internship cuz he’s already told me like, “yeah dude, anytime you wanna come in” and like “if you really wanna do this I’ll help you in any way” so…

DS: That’s awesome.

M: I mean it’s something I’m interested in and it’s something that’s a possibility for me to do…cuz like religion is very wide and vast and I don’t know what I could do with it or what I wanna do with it so…

Mike’s dilemma concerning which major of study to choose mirrors the curricular dilemma in teaching students placed into transitional English classes and in education on a larger scale as Rose (2009b) has argued. Rose (2009b) writes that, “The economic appeal falls flat unless it connects with something of emotional significance in a student's life…” (para. 10). Yes, the knowledge that “…the guy makes bank” is important to Mike’s goals but just as importantly is the emotional connection to a profession in which he has seen what the hands of his father have made, as he describes in the following quote from an interview: “I’d go see what my Dad built off of his blue prints and it looks exactly the same.”

Teachers want students to master practical reading, writing and thinking skills yet they understand that education should include training for democratic citizenship. Lanham (1983) argues that “The humanist’s job on the curricular level thus turns out…to be the same job that he
performs in society at large: harmonizing the different ranges of motive” (p. 139). Mike’s affinity for rappers like Kid Cudi and Lil Wayne, who speak to his spiritual hungers, may come from what is lacking in education, that is, a lack of balance or harmony between economic goals and humanistic goals of an education.

Mike discussed another song, called Mr. Solodolo (Cudi, 2009, track 4), which spoke to him and the reason why:

DS: Mr. solodolo. Haven’t heard that. What’s it about?
M: Um like being alone and no one understands you. It’s like that’s in the middle. His story starts out, starts out talkin about life and hitting a high and then hitting a low, and that’s the song, where he hits a low in his life and he starts moving back up…I think that’s why I like him so much, cuz no rapper is like as mellow as him I guess.

In another interview, Mike told me that rap made him “apathetic” toward situations. The idea that a rapper, Kid Cudi, could discuss his personal and relationship struggles in such an open and “mellow” way, appealed to Mike; because he was also going through similar highs and lows during the semester. He needed these stories that Kid Cudi told in order to feel that other human beings were also having highs and lows in life.

Hip hop is Freedom

The following data revealed to me that Mike sees the cultural practice of Hip hop as a liberating one, one in which people are more free to express themselves. In our first interview, I asked Mike about the difference between writing for the classroom and Hip hop writing, and he told me:
D: that’s really interesting to hear that. Um so what do you think really keeps you from writing what you really feel?
M: cuz you’re not sure if um how you feel about it or what you want to say is what the professor wants to hear cuz your whole purpose in the paper is trying to get a good grade in the class.
M: [Hip hop is different] because Hip hop is something that you’re just willingly doing and uh jus expressing how you feel. You’re not really doing it cuz it’s what everyone wants to hear cuz a lot of em are saying exactly what NOBODY wants to hear.

At another point in the interview, Mike used an anecdote about listening to Kanye West, a well-known rapper, speak on the radio to illustrate the view that Hip hop is freedom, or as Mike put it, Hip hop is “against being so developed in society.”

M: Kanye said something on…I was listening to him on a radio show and they were just talking about rap and [inaudible] everything cuz most of his stuff now is based on like religious kinda, he’s had a couple of religious songs and kinda mellowed out stuff, and they asked him why and he said ‘Well rap isn’t all about killing, sex and drugs, but the best rap is.’ Everyone started laughing about it. And I’m not sure why it is, but I can kinda agree with it; and that’s why it shouldn’t be in the classroom. Because the classroom is a very developed thing so what you’re doing in the classroom is trying to better your knowledge or better your skills and what rap talks about has nothing to do with bettering your knowledge or skills. It’s more about…just like…I’m not really sure how to explain it other than the fact of like…classrooms are really developed, rap’s more of like how to be
undeveloped I guess. And how to… rap’s more… It’s not really an anarchist view, but its more like against being so developed in the society…so formal.

I asked Mike about an answer he gave on the initial survey, in regards to the question, What impact, if any, does Hip hop have on how you view the world? What about Hip hop culture is appealing to you? Mike’s responded to the survey, “Hip hop in a sense helps people stray away from the uniform system everyone has become accustomed to, and it appeals to me because it’s nice to have a change of thought patterns sometimes, where you can say what you want and not be blinded by judgment and rules” What Mike is speaking to in the above quote is freedom from “linguistic colonization” (Alim, 2006, p. 73), that is, freeing yourself from prescriptive notions of language correctness and appropriateness which dominate language education in higher education settings and so many other aspects of life where language is tied to gaining access to social goods and status.

I asked Mike to elaborate on the above quote about being “content with being blinded by rules and judgment”:

DS: So what impact does Hip hop have on how you view the world? I thought that your answer was really, really interesting. About how in a sense it helps people stray away from the uniform system that everyone has been accustomed to.

M: uh-huh

DS: so what do you mean by a uniform system?

M: That right there is a… that’s a quote from Kid Cudi right there [points to survey answer] Yeah. I thought that that was maybe what he was talking about when you asked me that question. The only thing I could think of was maybe just
tired of being in the same limelight and doing everything the way every…er the way society wants you to do, just brainstorming on anything possible and not really caring about rules or consequences.

DS: That’s interesting.

M: So that’s probably why I like Kid Cudi right there. Cuz see you can jus grab anything from his stuff and you can relate to it…

The specific verse in which Mike refers comes from a song called, “In My Dreams” (Cudi, 2009, track 1) and it reads:

“There are a lot of us who are caught up in this hell we all live in, Content with being blinded by rules and judgment. We live in a world where it's more okay to follow than to lead.”

Human beings desire more individual freedoms (Sartre, 2007) and Mike is one who is concerned with freedom. In a documentary called the Hip hop Project, a woman concurs with this view of Hip hop as freedom. She explains:

Hip hop is about drums and base and tones and power… So when you hear the drums and the base that just gets you moving… And then I get to like say whatever I want… So that’s freedom…it’s freedom to be just able to say whatever I want…And nobody’s gonna stop me; nobody’s gonna check me; nobody’s gonna tell me that 10 it’s wrong, coz there is no right or wrong (Hip hop Project Documentary, 2006).

Hip hop is Philosophical

I found that Hip hop allowed Mike to engage with ideas and emotions in a way in which English teachers often argue literature is great for. One rap artist in particular, Kid Cudi, tells stories that speak to Mike’s desire to understand self and humanity. The music and message in
the lyrics of Kid Cudi allowed Mike to tap into an emotional discourse in which he may not have had the opportunity to draw on in the classroom.

DS: What’s philosophy to you? It’s kind of a big question I know.

M: um I guess it’s anything that stimulates your mind to think about it, I guess.

DS: Why is it that philosophical rap appeals to you?

M: Because all the other rap talks about money and bitches and drugs so…his [Kid Cudi] isn’t…I mean some of it is, but it’s a lot deeper. His stance on rap is more philosophical than trying to be a gangster, so..I mean most rappers, it involves drugs, sex and weed, or money so…

M: it’s not that strange for him to have marijuana in his songs, but it’s just in every single one

DS: so what about it, can you elaborate about the philosophical part?

M: well, just like being able to tell a story after every single one, um I’m trying to think of the lyrics he says after it, he says, “being a leader in this day and age is being a threat”

DS: being a threat?

M: Yeah. That’s in one of his little shpeils and “it’s okay in our society today to follow than to lead um being a leader is trouble for the system we’re all accustomed to”

DS: so yeah gives you a lot of stuff to think about obviously, if you’ve got this memorized

M: yeah
Said (2004) quotes Leo Spitzer to argue for the importance of reading and re-reading in order to receive a text:

How often...have I stared blankly...at a page that would not yield its magic. The only way leading out of this state of unproductivity is to read and re-read...in an endeavor to become...soaked through and through with the atmosphere of the work. And suddenly one word, one line, stands out, and we realize that...a relationship has been established between the poem and us. (Said, quoting Leo Spitzer, p. 65)

The kind of commitment to close reading argued for in the above quote parallels Mike’s commitment to reading and listening to Kid Cudi’s lyrics for hours at a time. It is not the kind of philological study that classroom teachers usually encourage but it is the kind that Mike is attracted to quite possibly because of what is lacking in the transitional course in which he was placed.

Said (2004) writes that, “...the essence of humanism is to understand human history as a continuous process of self-understanding and self-realization...” (p. 26). In the song “In My Dreams” by Kid Cudi, he alludes to the introspection called for by Said as the essence of humanism:

But toward the end of our first ten years into the millennium we heard a voice.

A voice who was speaking to us from the underground for some time.

A voice who spoke of vulnerabilities and other human emotions and issues never before heard so vividly and honest.

This is the story of a young man who not only believed in himself,

But his dreams too.
Mike wrote the following status update on his Facebook page, which is a reference to a line from the song “50 Ways to Make a Record” (Cudi, 2008) by Kid Cudi. His repeated readings of Kid Cudi influence his writings and enrich his ideas about self and society.

DS: and I imagine it stimulates your mind to think about stuff. Okay so one day you posted a cool lyric from “Drop the world,” (Wayne, 2010, track 8) by Lil Wayne: “I search but never find, hurt but never cry, work and forever try but I’m cursed so never mind and it’s worse but better times soon further and beyond, Ima pick the world up and drop it on your head”

M: that’s a good new song. I like that one.

M: I don’t know I mean I guess just things happen some times to set me back to where I was I don’t know. It’s kinda hard. I was living on campus and I had uh my roommate was my best friend from home and uh he stole some money from me and we got in an altercation in the parking lot and the police were involved.

So I almost got expelled from school. Um I got kicked off campus. So I’ve lived by myself in a really crappy apartment for a little while and I’m not allowed to go into any university housing. And I’ve had some problems at home with my sister and my parents too. It’s just you know… um that song just makes me feel like more apathetic toward the situations I guess...I just don’t care anymore. It’s just like pick it up and drop it on your head. Just like you know if I approach situations like that, it’s just easier to deal with it sometimes.

Mike explains that this song makes him “apathetic” toward situations and helps him “deal” with problems in life. There’s also hope in lyrics as illustrated in the following excerpt,
“better times soon further and beyond” which parallels Dionne’s argument that there’s more to Hip hop than “drugs, sex and banging”.

RZA remembered his 1st experiences with Hip hop as a spiritual one, as a ‘call to his soul.’ The dictionary defines soul in many ways including the following, “the spiritual part of humans regarded in its moral aspect” also as “deeply felt emotion, as conveyed or expressed by a performer or artist.” Mike was drawn to the power of both connotations in co-constructing texts and emerging identities.

In our 1st interview, as I was getting to know Mike and his musical tastes, he mentioned to me:

DS: so that answers my question then. So even though most people don’t respect rap or Hip hop artists, why do you? Cuz you can tell by how you talk about it that…

M: Um I used to I like hardcore music, I like oldies, I like all kinds of music. I’m not a very judgmental person. I’ve listened to some pop… I’m pretty diverse in what I listen to.

Mike’s self-description as non-judgmental and as having diverse musical tastes may speak to the reason he is attracted to and influenced by Hip hop music. Quite possibly, Mike, like RZA is looking for a call to his soul, and he finds ways to engage the spiritual, the ethical, the humanistic, by being a part of Hip hop culture. His non-judgmental, musical tastes coincide with his racial attitudes and some experiences he has had as a “race-traitor” (Bonilla-Silva, 2000).
M: It’s basically like pretty generic: black people don’t like country guys and country guys don’t like black people. And uh I was at school one time, and I was like really tiny, I was like 5’1 my junior year. And this really big country guy played on the football team and a really big black guy that actually involved in the bloods, the country dude called him -er and uh it was they had like 5 or 6 black guys and 5 or 6 white guys—they were about to fight and 3 cops showed up.

DS: That’s scary.

M: yeah. But I mean, in that situation, I was on the black people’s side cuz they didn’t do anything. They were just walking and the dude called him a nigger for no reason…If someone says -er I’m gonna be offended by it cuz then you’re just hatin on somebody for no reason.

Mike illustrates empathy for other human beings in the above anecdote which may come from his participation in Hip hop.

Facebook allows for free expression of ideas and thoughts via ones page. Young people can share their thoughts, feelings and vulnerabilities with a wide audience via Facebook, as Mike often did. In the following lyrics to the rap song “Cudi Zone,” (Cudi, 2009, track 11) Kid Cudi writes about the risk involved in expressing oneself to the whole world.

How could you blame me and my plan of attack?

'Cause I'm risking my soul attack

Now I'm heard all over the map…

From a long time ago, a young nigga, he was timid

Now I'm zone and see things so vivid…
Kid Cudi raps about the idea that self-expression involves risk and the potential for “soul-attack”, but that the alternative to “hide my soul” is not an option. The influence of Hip hop, especially by artists like Kid Cudi, as it intersects with the medium of Facebook allows for development of Mike’s soul and self-food.

“I’ll Fly Away”

Mike posted the following drawing as a tribute to his grandmother who passed away. Under the drawing, he wrote the words, “R.I.P. Grandma” The text reads “I’ll Fly Away” which is a reference to a Baptist hymn sung usually at funerals. It evokes a Christian hope for everlasting life. Writing is culturally specific, and the following drawing suggests Mike’s cultural upbringing as a Southern Baptist. The song, “I’ll Fly Away” is a Baptist hymn sung usually at funerals.

Interestingly, Kanye West, a well-known Hip hop artist, recorded this song on his 2004 album titled, The College Dropout.
Some glad morning when this life is over,
I'll fly away.

To a home on God's celestial shore,
I'll fly away.

I'll fly away, O Glory,
I'll fly away.

When I die, Hallelujah, bye and bye,
I'll fly away.

When the shadows of this life have flown,
I'll fly away.

Like a bird thrown, driven by the storm,
I'll fly away.

I'll fly away, O Glory,
I'll fly away.

When I die, Hallelujah, bye and bye,
I'll fly away.

Just a few more weary days and then,
I'll fly away.

To a land where joy shall never end,
I'll fly away.

I'll fly away, O Glory,
I'll fly away.
When I die, Hallelujah, bye and bye,
I'll fly away.

The words and the message evoked by the words, “I’ll Fly Away” (West, 2004, track 5) reflect a hope that the soul—the spiritual side—of Mike’s grandmother will survive death, and happiness will live on within her in a “land where joy shall never end.” Kamberelis & Scott (1992) argue, in regards to the concept of voice and the relationship between texts and subjectivity, that, “we use the styles and texts of other individuals and groups with whom we wish to be affiliated, have power over, or resist” (p. 363). Facebook allows for the discursive development of identity to take place. This discursive development always involves struggle and contestation as evidenced in the following data from Dionne’s page:

While Mike drew on his Southern Baptist upbringing in the above text in a positive way, he also expressed a limitation of his religious upbringing when we were discussing the book,
Siddhartha, that he “kinda read” for a religion class. Mike said, “I’ve always been like a Southern Baptist growing up in the church and everything and it was really cool. I mean it’s North Carolina. It’s the coast but it’s still the South you know they’re gonna be like: “oh I hate the Buddhists, I hate the Hindus and I hate the Muslims and all that”

This section discusses some themes that emerged from a rap composition, called Heavy Swagadelic 2, which Mike and his friend Quentin wrote together. Mike performed the rap and both Mike and Quentin made the simple beats using a program called Garage Band. Mike recorded the track and gave me a copy of it on compact disc.

Devil
Pleadin the devil please stop hexin me.
Look over my shoulder and see the devil dance and my world is fucked up just call me Charles Manson.
He’d be seein the devil poppin outta daisies.

The devil personified and showing up in Mike’s life appears as a theme in Heavy Swagadelic. It also appears as a theme in the song “Cudi Zone” by Kid Cudi:

And the devil in a hot pink dress
Tryin' to ask me for one dance
He think he slick but my guardians
Protect me from his wrath
So in my place no hate shall enter
Livin' high up there, up there
Copin', copin', floatin' I will find peace somewhere

Mike shared with me that he did enjoy reading a book that semester. He had to read the book in a religion class, not a literacy or English class.
M: the only book I’ve really enjoyed reading like actually wanted to read, and like
I didn’t really want to read it, but I just had to, and it didn’t bother me was that
Siddhartha.

DS: yeah

M: Like I enjoyed that a little bit.

DS: That’s not easy. So why did you enjoy it? What’d you like about the story?

M: Just at that point I was like…cuz I’m a religious major right now but I wanna
switch cuz there’s not much I can do with it. And I kinda figured out what I
wanna do but I mean it still interests me. Religion has always interested me.

DS: Yeah. You def. seem very interested in philosophy and religion and stuff.
And so I can understand that.

M: And I’ve always been like a Southern Baptist growing up in the church and
everything and it was really cool. I mean its North Carolina. It’s the coast but it’s
still the South you know they’re gonna be like: “oh I hate the Buddhists, I hate the
Hindus and I hate the Muslims and all that” and you know with that book…I
really like Buddhism, I really do. Like that and Islam is awesome. I studied that
too in my Religion class this semester. You know. I was one of those kids who
was like oh Muslims make me mad sometimes and I had no reason to say that and
their religion is SO much like ours, it’s not even funny. They basically have the
same background and beliefs that we do and their book, the Koran, was written in
the time that Jesus was alive and ours was written 400 years after he died.

M: I mean so when people say like I hate em, and I used to be like that too, but I
don’t know enough about em to say that I hate them or not hate them.
Multiple and contradictory texts/subjectivities

Willis (1977) argued “Even the most 'us' group or person has a little of 'them' inside” (p. 169). Willis expressed this idea to mean that we are always being positioned by ideologies and positioning ourselves in multiple and contradictory ways (Kamberelis, 1992). These multiple and contradictory positions are illustrated in texts. Facebook affords young people a textual space to write, assert and reflect on these ideologies. Mike is a fan of “Being Conservative” which is in opposition to some of the more progressive comments he made in our interviews.
Ch. 6 Conclusions and Implications

The following chapter discusses similar themes and implications that emerged from both cases. Some of those are that Hip hop influences Mike and Dionne’s awareness of race and racial barriers. Both are influenced by the Hip hop’s predominant color-conscious narrative. In addition, they both find rhetorical power in Hip hop music.

Both Dionne and Mike are 1st generation college students and self-proclaimed non-fans of reading, as they both stated in the 1st interviews I conducted with them. Dionne reads once-in-a-while if she is allowed to select the material, and Mike reads sports magazines and Mustang Monthly, but they both find difficulty with longer texts. While they proclaim to be non-readers, they in fact immerse themselves with reading—print and non-print texts—on a daily basis. Much of the reading they do is reading of culture and text.

Both Mike and Dionne are inspired by an original goal of Hip hop culture which was to break down racial barriers. I want to return to an idea from the literature review in regards to the original view of Hip hop. Chang (2005) writes about Afrika Bambaataa, the 1st founder of a Hip hop institution called the Zula Nation, and his relationship to the audience during this time: “Bam’s sound became a rhythmic analogue to his peace-making philosophy; his set-lists had the same kind of inclusiveness and broad-mindedness he was aspiring to build through The Organization…He played salsa, rock and soca with the same enthusiasm as soul and funk. He was making himself open to the good in everything” (p. 97). Bambaataa took this philosophy of peace and breaking down of racial barriers to create the Universal Zulu Nation, which was an organization that tried to raise social consciousness through the 5 elements of Hip hop: DJing, MCing, b-boying, graffiti writing and knowledge (Chang, 2005). Both Mike and Dionne are inspired by an original goal of Hip hop culture which is to break down racial barriers. Just as
Chang argues, “The iron doors of segregation that the previous generation had started to unlock were battered down by the pioneers of the Hip hop generation,” (p. 92) both Mike and Dionne are beneficiaries of the Hip hop generations cultural progress and both try and promote it as well.

I found that both Dionne and Mike acknowledge that racism still exists. To demonstrate, I want to look at a piece of data again from Dionne which comes from our 1st interview. Dionne did express an awareness of racist attitudes toward Hip hop in school. When we first talked, she said that while she was going to learn regardless of what people thought, she acknowledged that her relationship to Hip hop affected how people viewed her:

Dionne: For instance when I go in the classroom with headphones and people can sometimes hear what I’m listening to outside the headphones…

DS: uh-hum

Dionne: I might get looks you know like oh I wish she’d turn that down you know stuff like that you know when you know you could hear somebody walking down listening to a different type of music but nobody say anything. You know I just think people are biased toward Hip hop and they don’t really know the story behind the music.

Dionne: they just go off you know it’s sad to say but there’s still racism going on so people just go off and they assume that Hip hop is THE black people’s music and that’s not it. It’s just music just like every other genre; it’s just a genre of music. Anybody can listen to it.

Dionne acknowledges that there is “still racism going on” and her telling of this fact is mediated by her understanding of whites and others looking down on the cultural practice of Hip hop. However, she also recognizes the power that music has to desegregate racial barriers in her
comment that “It’s just music just like every other genre; it’s just a genre of music. Anybody can listen to it”.

Mike, also acknowledges that racism still exists during his telling of an incident in school where some white male students used the n-word in regards to some black male students. He recounts, “But I mean, in that situation, I was on the black people’s side cuz they didn’t do anything. They were just walking and the dude called him a nigger for no reason…If someone says -er I’m gonna be offended by it cuz then you’re just hatin on somebody for no reason.” In a society that often claims to be post-racial and color-blind (Bonilla-Silva, 2003), it is important to highlight students’ awareness of the existence of racism and their resistance to it.

I found that both Dionne and Mike are color-conscious (Wise, 2010). Hip hop music, as opposed to dominant narratives of color-blindness, often evokes a color-conscious rhetoric. For example, in the song “Mr. Nigga,” (Def, 1999, track 15) Mos Def raps:

One problem; even with the O's on his check
The po-po stop him and show no respect
"Is there a problem officer?" Damn straight, it's called race
That motivate the jake to give chase
Say they want you successful, but that ain't the case
You livin large; your skin is dark; they flash a light in your face

The above lines demonstrate an awareness of the way that race plays a role in police profiling. While neither Dionne nor Mike mentioned the above rap, it is an example of a color-conscious narrative that exists in Hip hop literacy.

Dionne, as an African American female, not surprisingly evoked an understanding of the way race plays a role in one’s position in society, especially as a black female. On her Facebook
page, she shared with friends a letter that was published in Sister 2 Sister magazine written by a Caucasian woman, called “A White Woman’s Opinion of Black Women”. In this letter, the author was seeking a response from Black men. Dionne also published the response to the letter in which a Black male offers the following words, “Black women were born with two strikes against them: being black and being a woman. And, through all this, Still They Rise!” Dionne has 1st hand knowledge of the reality of being black and female in society today, and she uses her page as a way to promote black female self-pride—a counternarrative to the negative portrayals of black females in society.

Mike also was explicitly color-conscious, and this color-consciousness was mediated by his participation in Hip hop as a cultural and literate practice. This was highlighted in a discussion about freestylin during our first interview. I will highlight again a piece of data discussed earlier in relation to the topic of freestylin:

MH: Because…when people freestyle, there’s like no limits or no rules and like on the radio you can censor stuff out. I mean freestyles are kinda done to entice the other person to try and say something to make you feel bad, I guess…Some freestylin topics would include their girlfriend um jus talking bout how bad they played basketball was often one; how much they sat the bench would be part of it. A kid on the team had really bad teeth--that was one of the topics [Also] being really short, BEING WHITE… being white.

In the cultural practice of freestylin, discussion about race is not off limits unlike in the classroom. Alim (2010) found that in the cultural practice of freestylin, individuals contest and negotiate meanings of race and ethnicity, unlike in the classroom where these topics are usually off-limits.
Also, in his own practice of composing Hip hop music, Mike demonstrated a color conscious awareness of the link between Hip hop music and Black English. In our first interview, he mentioned that he learned much of his vocabulary from his Black friends on the high school basketball team. In addition, one day in an informal meeting over lunch, Mike and I were discussing the rap he composed called Heavy Swagadelic. He knew about the research study and my educational background and interest in Hip hop literacy, and he said to me in regards to Heavy Swagadelic, “If you hadn’t studied Ebonics, you wouldn’t understand it.”

The interpretive work involved in qualitative data analysis is subjective, and I do not think it is a coincidence that I found that both Mike and Dionne were color-consciousness, since one of my preoccupations in educational research and scholarship is the problem of colorblindness and the idea that race still affects one’s educational opportunities. Speaking of off-limits, Center (2007) has written about the invisibility of race, not just in classroom discussions, but in basic writing scholarship. Center argues that it is important to make the teacher’s racial identity visible as well the student-participants’ race, because when a teacher-researcher fails to include race in the description of students and/or teacher, he or she is complicit with the narrative of colorblindness, the dominant story which states that race no longer affects one’s opportunities in life. My audience is scholars in basic writing and developmental reading, and I agree with Center’s argument. Therefore, so as not to perpetuate the narrative of colorblindness and denial of racism, it is important to discuss my own racial position. As a white-skinned Latina teacher researcher, I sometimes felt like an outsider while interviewing black student participants, because I was asking them about language and cultural practices that I did not necessarily share, even though I am a fan of Hip hop. I was worried that Black students would look at me as some lady who had a cold, anthropological interest in their
lives. To be honest, I am still on the fence about ethnography for the above reason. I also felt like an outsider sometimes while interviewing Mike, the only white participant, because although I have white skin, I was not raised white and I do not self-identify as white. I was raised by immigrants from Cuba who were not raised hearing the dominant U.S. ideology about race and white supremacy as maybe some of my white friends’ parents. I am not saying that they said that racism did not exist in Cuba, but in some ways they were outside of the dominant U.S. perspective about race, segregation, and white supremacy. I not only felt like an outsider because of our racial differences, but at the beginning I worried that participants would see our age difference as a barrier. I worried that they would not talk openly because they might think “what does this older, white-looking-lady know about Hip hop?” But Mike and Dionne did talk openly with me, and they seemed excited to talk with someone who was willing to listen.

I also found that both Dionne and Mike found rhetorical power in Hip hop music. Again rhetorical power is defined as the notion that one can live life creatively by literate means, despite structural forces (Hicks, 2009). The use of African American language practices in the song make it de facto inappropriate for study in the classroom (Alim, 2006) even though if teachers would see Hip hop as musical literature, as Alim argues, then they could teach humanistic understandings using Hip hop, which is what students are getting on their own. Dangerfield (2003) argues, “The power of Hip hop lies in its rhetorical strength” (p. 219). Dionne gets rhetorical power from Hip hop, that is; the idea that she draws on Hip hop in her creative literate expressions and responses to life.

Both are highly engaged in sharing texts, original and appropriated, with a digital audience. They both use Facebook as a site for discursive development where “all writers and all
texts anticipate responses from future writers and future texts” (Kamberelis, p. 363) and where they are sites for struggle and contestation.

Discussion

Hip hop music is color-conscious. Therefore Hip hop could mediate a color-conscious curriculum. While cultural homogeneity was an important aspect of Hip hop at its inception (Chang, 2005), the danger of post-racial narratives make a color-conscious approach more important than ever in today’s society.

A few implications come from the above data about Dionne. Oftentimes students in non-credit bearing courses are labeled “underprepared”, “at-risk”, “remedial” and other labels entrenched in deficit perspectives. These deficit perspectives focus on what students lack. Often what is implicit in these labels but goes unsaid is the student writer’s lack of conformity to white middle class writing styles. Österreich (2007) writes that, "Black feminisms name activists through a focus on what people do everyday in their time and space...Activism lies where other people don't expect it to--for a young woman of color it lies in her ability to (re)create her community, her race, and her womanhood” (p. 5). The above assertion relates to how Dionne uses literacy to write herself into being (boyd, 2008) and to re-write her identity (Kirkland, 2008b).

One implication is that Dionne’s literate life outside the classroom could enrich the experiences of other students in the classroom if she were allowed to draw on this literate life in the classroom. Österreich (1977) argues in regards to a young African American woman in her study, “Qualified teachers must do more than expect Lenora to pass a test and graduate from high school so she can make money; they must see her life and desires connected to larger issues of freedom and equity in her connectivity to people and places" (p. 2). Along those same lines,
when teachers place students’ humanity above mastery of skills, the implications for living and literacy learning come into sharper focus. This can be accomplished as evidenced in Kirkland & Jackson’s (2009) study where the teacher/researchers made language and identity and attitudes about the self as primary goals of the unit. Society’s negative attitudes about language reinforce students’ negative feelings about themselves. The repercussions are that students’ humanity is diminished. Out of school literacy provides opportunities to reaffirm the self, as Dionne uses AAL on FB to assert her humanity.

Lastly, teachers must recognize their position as cogs in the wheel, but rather than take a nihilistic approach, they can as Willis (1977) suggests: "Recognize the contradiction of a meritocratic society and educational system where the majority must lose but all are asked in some way to share in the same ideology" (p. 189) and deconstruct this idea with students using the artifacts of their culture. For example, students and teachers could take a look at the Hip hop song “The Good Life” by Kanye West (2006), told through African American literacy practices. West raps about characteristics of “the good life” as having access to economic wealth and being free from racist practices, such as police racial profiling. West also points out the inherent paradox in the message about wealth which many students hear: “Having money’s not everything; not having it is.” Students could take the lyrics of West’s song and at the same time examine the ways that the educational system is set up so that it is impossible that we all will have access and success in getting equal pieces of the capitalist pie. Students could analyze the ideas, and the possibilities and limitations that result from these ideas by looking at texts that are products of culture, such as texts from Hip hop. Students could learn the skills of analysis and critique while at the same time analyzing ideas and discourses that prevent them from fulfilling dreams for their lives.
Kohl (1994) writes about the gains and losses of what he calls “willed not-learning” – or the idea that you choose to not learn academic language, for example, for the purposes of self-preservation or for (re)learning self-pride. You may lose out on learning the ways of academia, but you retain more important aspects of your humanity. Willis (1977) argued a similar point in regards to the boys in his study. He found that the antics that they used in school to entertain themselves and to oppose the basic teaching paradigm gave them a sense of freedom. They chose to not learn on purpose, despite the consequences of a life full of mind-numbing factory work. Willis argues: “By penetrating the contradiction at the heart of the working class school the counter-school culture helps to liberate its members from the burden of conformism and conventional achievement. It allows their capacities and potentials to take root elsewhere” (p. 130). Similarly, the medium of Facebook allowed Dionne the space to share her thoughts and ideas and her literate capabilities through an alternative place outside the confines of school. Through the act of literacy, she was able to express herself and let her talent for writing and communicating shine. When I asked her about the kinds of things she likes to read, she answered:

L: I like magazines and it’s mainly stuff that I pick out.

DS: yeah

L: like it could be something that I pick out that I like and if somebody else pick out the same thing for me to read I might not like it as much just because they picked it out

DS: uh-huh. Having a say over it is important to you it sounds like

L: yeah
With the prospects of finding work even with a college-degree so low nowadays, maybe the curriculum needs to change to instead teach “skills” necessary to understand the contradictions inherent in our so-called meritocratic society—the ones that students reject—so that a new generation of youth can discover the ways to improve it.

An Absence of Caring in Education

In all of Mike Rose’s writings on education—on school reform, remedial education, intelligence and working class labor—there is an underlying concern for the individual and an argument for a richer orientation toward human possibility. Rose writes, “I’m drawn both analytically and emotionally to those moments when you see signs of the mind stirring, of people beginning to get a sense of what they can do” (para.16). As a teacher and researcher, Rose argues that the art of teaching and learning should always consider the emotional, cognitive and pragmatic views of an education. While the pragmatic view of gaining an education for making a living is important, it cannot be divorced from other approaches which appeal to students’ personhood. Moje (2009), in a review of literacy and identity studies found that there are many research studies on the literacy-identity relationship, yet there is a lack of influence on practice and policy that is conducive to student learning and personhood.

In regards to learning, identity and personhood, Valenzuela (1999) found from an ethnographic study of a high school in the southwest that schools are organized in ways that systematically subtract resources from its students. She found that:

School subtracts resources from youth in two major ways. First, it dismisses their definition of education which is not only thoroughly grounded in Mexican culture, but also approximates the optimal definition of education advanced by Noddings (1984) and other caring theorists. Second, subtractive schooling encompasses
subtractively assimilationist policies and practices that are designed to divest Mexican students of their culture and language. (p. 21)

She cites Noddings’ (1984) definition of caring as one in which “…the caring teacher's role is to initiate relation, with engrossment in the student's welfare following from this search for connection…” (p. 21). Valenzuela makes a distinction between aesthetic caring and authentic caring. The former is concerned with students learning things and ideas, divorced from cultural, linguistic and place-specific histories. The latter is concerned with “…search for connection where trusting relationships constitute the cornerstone for all learning. A sincere search for connection will reposition the ill-informed teacher as ‘student’ of the U.S. Mexican community and its history of subordination” (p. 263). This authentic caring will cultivate relationships between teachers and students but also will encourage more caring relationships among the students themselves, in this case, the U.S. born Chicano youth and Mexican born immigrant students.

I include literature on lack of caring in education because it relates to the findings from this study, in particular, which include that Mike found ethical and humanistic understanding in Hip hop. Teachers could use Hip hop as a cultural and literate practice to engage students—especially ones who hate to read—in the emotional aspects of learning literacy.

Sociocultural Theories of Language Learning and Caring—The Moral Link

This section responds to the gap in the research literature concerning the link between sociocultural theories of language learning and issues of caring, morality and personhood. In regards to a gap in research literature, Hicks (2000) argues that the breadth of M.M. Bakhtin's work offers an alternative to the sociocultural theories of learning that do not pay attention to moral and ethical issues and only to activity (Cultural Historical Activity Theory) (Roth & Lee,
Dialogue, which involves individual utterances between two people and utterances between one person and an imagined audience, is situated in social and historical settings; but this understanding of dialogue leaves out some important moral and ethical implications, as philosophized by Bakhtin. Hicks writes,

Bakhtin (1993) critiqued even the more situated historical-material theories for their lack of emphasis on what he described as the oughtness of lived experience. What helps to define practical living and reasoning are the ethical shadings that create meaningful engagements between individuals. Without a certain moral and emotional orientation toward others, activity between persons would be little more than the instrumentalist rationalities of scientific systems and totalizing regimes (p. 230).

In regards to language and literacy learning, Hicks draws on Bakhtin’s (1981) example of the way in which a mother conveys language later to be appropriated by a child. Hicks argues that the particulars of this relationship are what make language learning meaningful. She writes about this mother-child relationship,

It is the unique position that she occupies outside of the child's individuated life that enables her, in Bakhtin's view, to provide a horizon that shapes and makes more meaningful the child's life. What gives form and meaning to the learner's subjectivity is not language per se, but a certain kind of language-filtered social relationship [emphasis mine]. (p. 234)

The focus on the language-filled relationship, rather than on activity alone, is crucial to the idea of developing selfhood. An illustration of Hicks’s reasoning, within the context of teacher-student relationship, comes from a scene in Malcolm X’s autobiography in which he
discusses his plans for the future with his English teacher, Mr. Ostrowski. When he tells Mr. Ostrowski about his plans for becoming a lawyer, his teacher makes his low expectations obvious:

…[Y]ou've got to be realistic… A lawyer--that's no realistic goal…You need to think about something you can be… Everybody admires your carpentry work. Why don't you plan on carpentry?... What made it really begin to disturb me was Mr. Ostrowski's advice to others in my class…Most of them had told him they were planning to become farmers. But those who wanted to strike out on their own…he had encouraged...It was a surprising thing that I had never thought of it that way before, but I realized that whatever I wasn't, I was smarter than nearly all of those white kids. But apparently I was still not intelligent enough, in their eyes, to become whatever I wanted to be. It was then that I began to change. (p.129)

This extended quote demonstrates the heavy moral and ethical responsibility lacking in Mr. Ostrowski’s response to young Malcolm’s expressed desire to become a lawyer. It also illustrates what happens when people lack moral responsibility in their responses to individuals, and instead demonstrate allegiance to ideologies—a racist, white supremacist one in this case. I include literature on the absence of caring in education because it reflects why students like Mike turn to Hip hop. Caring about the self and caring for others is part of what it means to be human, and students like Mike who don’t like to read explore emotional issues while reading and listening to Hip hop. Hip hop influences young people from all backgrounds and many come together over a shared affiliation with the music and culture. And when teachers care authentically about their students, they are invested in the culture of their students. Teachers could use this
shared affiliation as a jumping off point to encourage students to cultivate caring relationships among each other. This investment could model the type of caring students need to turn around the negative images they have of themselves and their culture.

Mike’s story reveals that students from minority backgrounds are not the only ones looking for more caring in education, and by caring I am referring to the acknowledgment by teachers and others in education that: “Who we are, to whom we are related, how we are situated all matter in what we learn, what we value, and how we approach intellectual and moral life” (Noddings, 1992, p. xiii). While Mike is influenced by the impulse toward introspection and to connect with other human beings, the structure of schooling is designed to stifle this impulse. Instead it is designed to encourage students to compete with each other (Valenzuela, 1999). Bonilla-Silva (2007) argues that “We are not color-blind. And the more we are race conscious, the more we will be able to overcome issues of race.” I don’t want to confuse using Hip hop as an avenue for deeper humanistic understanding, as in the notion that humanistic principles are universal therefore, we can pretend that race doesn’t affect one’s chances or opportunities in life, with advocating for a color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, & Foreman, 2001). Color-blindness is the idea that we don’t see race. Bonilla-Silva has argued against this myth that we are color-blind and has asserted instead that the myth of color-blindness makes racism more insidious by perpetuating the false idea that race no longer plays a part in one’s life chances.

Instead, I am advocating for both a humanistic literacy curriculum that is at the same time color conscious. I want to be clear that teachers could use the cultural form of Hip hop to engage students in discussions about racism, to engage students in discussions about real issues and tensions that they confront, instead of ignoring them or letting them deal with these issues amongst themselves (Kynard, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999). One pedagogical implementation could
be to read the book, Scratch Beginnings, with a color-conscious lens. *Scratch Beginnings* is an autobiographical of a young man named Adam Shephard who conducted a social experiment in which he chose to give up all his possessions and start over in a new city with only $25 dollars to his name. The book was intended to be a rebuttal to Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Nickel and Dimed: On Not Getting by in America*. His goal was to, after one year, live in an apartment, own an automobile and have $2500 saved. While he does reach his goal, he never discusses how his whiteness and education provided advantages that others do not have. He concludes that hard work can still get anyone the American Dream. My goal is not to say that we should give up on encouraging students to read good literature, but to highlight the possibilities for other cultural forms as philological study. Alim (2003) has shown that Hip hop draws on traditional poetic and literary figures of speech but also “employs new rhyme strategies that require new categories of knowledge such as compound internal rhymes, primary and secondary internal rhymes, chain rhymes, back-to-back chain rhymes, and bridge rhymes” (p. 60). These new forms of knowledge are what put students in a position to educate teachers about the cultural forms which engage them. My goal is not to say that we should give up on encouraging students to read good literature, but to highlight the possibilities for philological study of other cultural forms. Alim (2006) argues for the importance of this kind of work: “It is hiphopography that obligates HHLx [Hip hop Linguistics] to directly engage with the cultural agents of the Hip hop Culture-World, revealing rappers as critical interpreters of their own culture. We view ‘rappers’ as ‘cultural critics’ and ‘cultural theorists’ whose thoughts and ideas help us to make sense of one of the most important cultural movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries” (p. 11).

There is an abundance of research and writing which demonstrates the richness of Hip hop (Smitherman, 1997) and the influence of Hip hop on the lives of young people (Alim, 2003).
However, teachers’ negative attitudes about Hip hop are still pervasive, and these influence students’ negative attitudes about themselves and their culture (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). What the data that I discuss in this paper revealed to me is that Mike, the research participant, is drawn to the work of Kid Cudi, and other rappers, because of his search for understanding of self and other. While research has shown that Hip hop is a diversion (Chang, 2005), is political (Forman & Neal, 2004) and is an effective pedagogical tool (Morrell, 2002), not much has been said about the power Hip hop has to help young people understand humanity and themselves.

Camangian (2010) has written about how young people use literacy practices, such as autoethnography, to reflect on how their individual self-sabotaging behaviors intersect with structural inequalities, such as the prison industrial complex. Likewise, since Hip hop provides critical social analysis which reflects structural inequalities that affect young people, teachers could use this literate practice to engage students in challenging topics and humanistic ideas such as race relations and co-existence. Camangian (2010) argues that “Humanizing literacies are possible when urban teachers utilize nontraditional instructional approaches that privilege the very texts that are most relevant to young people—their lived experiences” (p. 180).

Moje & Luke (2009) argue that within literacy and identity studies, questions about the literacy-identity relationship should center on its implications for shaping educational practice and policy. Moje & Luke reviewed studies of literacy and identity and found that they fell into 5 categories, as represented by 5 metaphors, that of identity as 1) difference 2) sense of self/subjectivity 3) mind or consciousness, 4) narrative, and 5) position. The authors argue that “The key to rigorous literacy-and-identity studies seems to lie in the recognition of what particular theories can do for our understanding of how literacy and identity work to develop one another…” (p. 432). This dissertation study falls into this category of a literacy and identity
study, and what both cases offer are insights into students’ literate lives so as to cultivate a more robust philosophy of education which accounts for the emotional, familial and other affective ties which literacy development and participation in Hip hop has to personhood. These cases provide evidence which adds to scholarship that promotes a more robust philosophy of education within the field of remedial or transitional education (Rose, 2011).

While I observed focal participants in the setting of the transitional English classroom in order to observe to what extent, if at all, students make literate connections to Hip hop in the classroom, I did not have the chance to observe Dionne and Mike, the two students whom I chose to write about. While the study is an investigation into the intersections of literacy and Hip hop culture, it was also initially concerned with academic literacies. Taking cues from Street (2008) and others working within the tradition of New Literacy Studies who argue against the dominant deficit literacy model in academic contexts and view literacies instead as social practices, I also reject the view of academic literacy as a prescribed set of skills. I had hoped to learn from classroom observations to what extent students’ and epistemologies inform the literacy, language and social practices of the classroom, but all of my data comes from readings and writing which students did outside of the classroom, interviews, and informal communication with Dionne and Mike. I originally framed the above sentence as a limitation, but I have come to see these literacies as strengths that students have. They are the funds of knowledge that teachers often do not know about or understand.
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Appendix A

Hip hop Survey

Who, what, when, where and how in regards to Hip hop

1. When did you first start listening to Hip hop?

2. Who first introduced you to Hip hop music/culture? Was there a person or persons who introduced you to the music/culture?

3. What are or have been some of your favorite Hip hop artists? Please explain why they are your favorites.

4. What are some or have been some of your favorite Hip hop songs? Please explain why those songs are important to you?

5. Do you not only listen to Hip hop, but do you perform it?

6. Do you write Hip hop songs/poems? If yes, what are they about?

7. Do you read any Hip hop magazines or blogs, such as The Source?

8. How does Hip hop inform how you view the world?

9. How has Hip hop informed/influenced your life?

10. What about Hip hop culture is appealing to you?

11. What does Hip hop represent to you?

12. Do you feel that Hip hop music, or the issues discussed in Hip hop music, should be a part of the school curriculum?

13. What ideas, if any, do you have for bringing Hip hop into the classroom?

14. Do you participate in any social networking sites, such as Facebook, Myspace, or Twitter?
Interview Protocols

Appendix B

Interview 1: Protocol

The first interview was a semi-structured interview, and the questions arose from students’ responses to the initial survey about Hip hop that I handed out to all students in English 100 at the beginning of the quarter.

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your history in English class? What was that like in high school?
2. Why did you pick ________?
3. How did you end up in English 100? Who’s class are you in? How’s it going so far?
4. What are your 1st impressions of English 100?
5. What do you read outside of school?
6. What kind of writing do you do outside of school?
7. How did your ______ introduce you to Hip hop?
8. Who were some of her favorite artists?
9. Can you remember any initial memories about your _____ and Hip hop?
10. Can you elaborate more on why you like these artists?
11. What is it about their style and how they sound like they really feel what they are singing?
12. Which artists do you consider to be socially conscious Hip hop artists? Which ones do you listen to?
13. Can you elaborate more on why you responded in this way?
14. Should teachers study Hip hop? Why or why not?
15. Should Hip hop be a part of the school curriculum?
16. Which issues that Hip hop talks about should be a part of the school curriculum?
Appendix C
Interview 2: Protocol

The second interview was a semi-structured interview conducted towards the end of the semester, and the questions arose from the themes that emerged using a constant comparative perspective (Heath & Street, 2008) from the initial interview and collection of written artifacts. The following are examples of questions which drew out rich data from each of the case studies:

Dionne:

1) Can you be a Christian and be a Hip hop fan?
2) Real ladies DON’T have swagga…we have class” First of all, what does swagga mean to you and why did you write this?
3) Are there certain artists that make you feel proud to be black more than others?
4) Could we talk more in depth about why you dropped the course?

Mike:

1) Why do you like the song “Lost” by Gorilla Zoe? Why did you feel compelled to write the following lyric to your status? “Ima need councilin, I lost my mind and I still haven’t found it, I used to be so well rounded, but now I tip toe on hells boundries”
2) Why do you feel comfortable, as a white person, using the word, “nigga”? Does it have anything to do with being a fan/participant in Hip hop?
Appendix D

Adult Consent Form for Research
University of Cincinnati

Department: Literacy Department/Division of Teacher Education
Principal Investigator: Deborah M. Sanchez
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Deborah Hicks, Ended.

Title of Study: Hip hop and Literacy in the Lives of Students in Transitional English Courses

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Please read this paper carefully and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Who is doing this research study?
The person in charge of this research study is Deborah M. Sanchez of the University of Cincinnati (UC) Department of Literacy in the College of Education. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Deborah Hicks, Ended.

What is the purpose of this research study?
The purpose of this research study is to investigate the influence of Hip hop culture on the reading, writing and speaking of students in beginning college English courses.

Who will be in this research study?
About 6 people will take part in this study. You may participate in this study if
- You are a student in English 100
- You participate in Hip hop culture

What will you be asked to do in this research study, and how long will it take?
You will be asked to take a survey about your interests in Hip hop, and answer questions about Hip hop and your reading and writing practices in 2 interviews. The researcher may also ask to see and make copies of the essay writing that you do in English 100. It will take about 16 weeks, or the duration of the semester long course. The research interviews will occur at a public place which is most convenient for the research participant, such as the school library.
- The written survey will take 15-20 minutes.
- You will be asked to participate in 2 audio taped interviews, one at the beginning of the semester and one at the end of the semester. Each interview will take about 1 hour.
- If you participate in any social networking sites, such as Facebook, the researcher may request to view your page in order to understand your reading and writing practices outside of the classroom and their connections to Hip hop. You are not required to grant access to the social networking sites that you participate in in order to participate in this research study.
- The researcher will observe class sessions during the duration of the semester.
Are there any risks to being in this research study?
- Since Facebook and other social networking sites are online open forums, there is a risk that your participation in this study may become known to others.
- I do not expect any additional risk to you by participating in this study.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?
- In exchange for your participation in this research study, I will provide tutoring/writing help throughout the quarter.

Will you have to pay anything to be in this research study?
- There are no costs to participate.

What will you get because of being in this research study?
- You will not be paid to take part in this study.

Do you have choices about taking part in this research study?
If you do not want to take part in this research study you may simply not participate, and you will not be treated any differently in English 100. Participation in this study will not influence your course grade in English 100. If you are interested in participating, you do have a choice about whether or not to grant access to a social networking site that you belong to. There is a place at the end of this paper to mark your choice.

How will your research information be kept confidential?
Information about you will be kept private by assigning a pseudonym to your real name. Your information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my campus office for 2 years. After that it will be destroyed by shredding any research files and deleting them from my computer. The data from this research study may be published; but you will not be identified by your real name.

Agents of the University of Cincinnati may inspect study records for audit or quality assurance purposes. Your identity and information will be kept confidential unless the authorities have to be notified about abuse or immediate harm that may come to you or others.

What are your legal rights in this research study?
Nothing in this consent form waives any legal rights you may have. This consent form also does not release the investigator, the institution, or its agents from liability for negligence.

What if you have questions about this research study?
If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, you may contact me, Deborah M. Sanchez at 513-227-6168. Or you may contact my research advisor, Dr. Deborah Hicks at 513-556-3536.
The UC Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences (IRB-S) reviews all non-medical research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or complaints about the study, you may contact the Chairperson of the UC IRB-S at (513) 558-5784. Or, you may call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547, or write to the IRB-S, 300 University Hall, ML 0567, 51 Goodman Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0567, or email the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu.

Do you HAVE to take part in this research study?
No one has to be in this research study. Refusing to take part will NOT cause any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise have. Your grade in English 100 will not be affected if you refuse to take part in this research study. You may start and then change your mind and stop at any time. To stop being in the study, you may advise the researcher at any time.

Agreement:
I have read this information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I give my consent to participate in this research study. I will receive a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep.

Participant Name (please print) ____________________________________________

I grant access to the researcher to view a social networking site that I participate in.
Yes_____ No_____

Participant Signature _____________________________________________________ Date ______

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent ________________________________ Date ______