

## Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy as a Form of Liberatory Praxis

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This article uses Paulo Freire's problem-posing method, youth participatory action research, and case study methodology to introduce an alternative instructional strategy called Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (CHHP). This approach attempts to address deep-rooted ideologies to social inequities by creating a space in teacher education courses for prospective teachers to re-examine their knowledge of hip hop as it intersects with race, class, gender, and sexual orientation; while analyzing and theorizing to what extent hip hop can be used as a tool for social justice in teacher education and beyond. Borrowing and extending the work of critical race theorists, particularly, Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, CHHP utilizes the following five elements to form its basic core: "1) The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of oppression; 2) Challenging traditional paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; 3) The centrality of experiential knowledge of students of color; 4) The commitment to social justice; and finally 5) A transdisciplinary approach" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 312–315).

The meaning, purpose, and function of hip hop as a field of academic inquiry, an aesthetic, and a weapon in the fight for racial justice has undergone a host of significant transformations since the emergence of the "Big Bang"<sup>1</sup> in the South Bronx in the early and mid-1970s (Chang, 2006). The death of civil rights; the militarization of urban space; the infiltration of political movements (Black Panthers, Brown Berets, Young Lords); massive joblessness; urban blight, the dozens<sup>2</sup>; the digital age; declining parks, schools, and youth programs; the growth of the prison industrial complex; epidemics of drugs, guns, and violence; and innovation, creativity, and play—all have collectively converged to make "Hip Hop's origins multifaceted, politically conflicting, consistently debated, and highly complicated" (Hoch, 2006, p. 350).

Most aficionados locate the origins of hip hop's five fundamental elements: deejaying, break dancing, graffiti art, fashion, and emceeing (rapping) in New York. Yet there are others, and I am among them, who trace the origins of hip hop back to Africa<sup>3</sup> and argue that hip hop has multiple elements, histories, origins, and births (Davey D, lecture, February 2, 2006). My broad characterization of hip hop may seem inaccurate, however it reflects the hip hop community's refusal to be singularly defined and demonstrates the dynamic nature of hip hop as a global

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phenomenon that many in the community believe must be felt and experienced, in order to be understood and communicated (Aldridge & Stewart, 2005).

The purpose of this article is to critically examine the relationship between hip hop culture and the evolution and promotion of hip hop in the classroom. As a point of departure I challenge the ways in which hip hop and critical pedagogy have been dichotomized in the field of education and beyond. In much of the literature, hip hop is depicted as something occurring outside of school; something that takes place on the "bloc," in the "street," in "da hood," in "da club," after school, after dark, and in distinctive social spaces set aside for "play" (Kelley, 1998, p. 196). Indeed, the hip hop aesthetic in the world of education, whether it be fashion or a "cypher," is often associated with the realm of "leisure" and anti-intellectualism.

What I am suggesting, however, is that hip hop—for those of us from the hip hop generation or post-hip hop generations—has had a significant presence in the classroom; particularly during the 1990s and into the twenty-first century when a remarkable thing happened: aspects of youth culture in general, and aspects of white and Asian youth culture in particular, underwent a Black<sup>4</sup> reincarnation<sup>5</sup> via the hip hop aesthetic (Akom, 2009). The reality that hip hop is a growing presence in the classroom is obvious to any casual observer of the expressionistic style and innovation of young people today (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005). However, the fact that hip hop as an academic field of inquiry has been historically marginalized—particularly, however not exclusively, by our cathedrals of "higher" education that we have anointed with the task of training teachers for urban and suburban communities—speaks volumes to just how "mis-educated" our society has become. Additionally, it suggests that Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy is now more relevant than ever as a method for eradicating racialized opportunity gaps in achievement and for creating educational spaces that ameliorate the life and death issues that many of our youth face on a daily basis.

Having introduced the essential outlines of my argument, it is important to note my discussion is guided by the premise that "Hip Hop is the dominant language of youth culture, and those of us who work with young people need to speak their language" (De Leon, 2004, p. 1). Scott Heath, in *Making Some Noise: The Academy's Hip Hop Generation* (Hamilton, 2004) supports this assertion when he argues that:

Hip Hop is an area where we might see theory and practice coming together . . . where we might see an attempt to develop innovative approaches to using Hip Hop as a method for organizing African American youth around issues that are important to their survival. (p. 35)

Following Heath's call to merge theory with practice, many broad and interconnected questions frame my analysis: What is the relationship between hip hop and critical pedagogy? How can hip hop be used as a tool to promote social justice and youth activism in the classroom? What is the relationship between hip hop culture and the development of critical consciousness amongst urban and suburban youth?

In trying to make sense of the relationship between hip hop and critical pedagogy, I argue that the use of hip hop as a liberatory practice is rooted in the long history of the Black freedom struggle and the quest for self-determination for oppressed communities around the world. As early as the late 1970s, hip hop artists, such as KRS-One, also known as "The Teacher," criticized the educational system, its power, its practices, and its pedagogy. In particular, "The Teacher" was concerned about the role of an embedded Eurocentricity in the U.S. public school curricula and

its impact on Black children and youth. In "You Must Learn" (KRS-One, 1989) "The Teacher" flows: "It seems to me in a school that's ebony, African history should be pumped up steadily, but it's not and this has got to stop." In another rhyme that sounds like it is straight out of a Black History class, KRS-One (1989) further elucidates the importance of our "real" history:

No one told you about Benjamin Banneker, a brilliant Black man (who created an) almanac  
 ... Granville Woods made the walkie talkie, Louis Latimer improved on Edison, Charles Drew  
 did a lot for medicine, Garret Morgan made the traffic light, Harriet Tubman freed the slaves at night.

By using Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy<sup>6</sup> (CHHP) as a form of literacy for freedom, KRS-One paved the way for a younger generation of critical hip hop pedagogies. For example, New York based Hip-Hoppers, dead prez, draw on Malcolm X, Carter G. Woodson, and other Black freedom fighters in "they schools," while offering a scathing critique of the ways in which Black folks remain mentally incarcerated if and when we rely on a Eurocentric education system rather than developing curriculum that reflects our own culture, history, socioeconomic, and spiritual realities (Alridge, 2005). According to dead prez (2000):

They schools can't teach us shit. My people need freedom, we trying to get all we can get ... Tellin'  
 me white mans lies straight bullshit. They schools ain't teaching us what we need to survive, they  
 schools don't educate, all they teach people is lies.

Through the use of "imaging"—a term Alridge (2005) describes as "the process by which Hip Hoppers reproduce or evoke images, events, people, and symbols for the purpose of placing past ideas into closer proximity to the present" (p. 229)—the "they schools" (dead prez, 2000) video is able to illuminate both symbolic and active forms of racism by equating the image of the noose with the ways in which the U.S. educational system means a slow death for too many students of color (Tatum, 1997).

Even though for generations Black people have successfully undertaken the task of educating our own children and youth, teachers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century have been slow to critically engage with hip hop as a viable discursive space full of liberatory potential. I am not suggesting that all forms of hip hop are emancipatory, revolutionary, or even resistive—many forms are not—and some are quite the opposite. However, I am suggesting that given the long history of socio-political conscious hip hop as a tool for illuminating problems of poverty, police brutality, patriarchy, misogyny, incarceration, racial discrimination, as well as love, hope, joy—academic institution's under-utilization of hip hop's liberatory potential in the classroom is surprising.

One of the goals of this article, then, is to introduce a Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (CHHP) that can respond to issues of racism and other axis of social difference that Black people/people of color face in urban and suburban schools and communities. I begin by reviewing the work of Paulo Freire to fuse hip hop with critical pedagogy and introduce a new framework that I call CHHP. Freire's work, in particular, provides us with the foundations for a theory of democratic schooling that is linked to serving the most marginalized groups in our society. This is followed by a brief account of my own experiential knowledge implementing CHHP in the classroom. I conclude by suggesting that the most important contribution of this framework is the fact that it is student-centered, and as such, can be an important tool for helping potential teachers to "identify

and name the societal and systematic problems students of color face, analyze the causes of the problems, and find solutions to the problems" (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002, p. 80).

### CRITICAL HIP HOP PEDAGOGY AS LIBERATORY PRAXIS

Since the early 1970s, hip hop has become one of the most influential, artistic, social and cultural movements for youth and young adults in the world (Chang, 2005). CHHP starts from the premise that hip hop is an important lens for socio-political analysis and representation of marginalized communities, and that youth-driven research on hip hop and popular culture is an instantiation of reading and acting upon the world, that is, critical pedagogy (Fischer, 2002; Freire, 1970; Stovall, 2006; Yang, 2006). Through curriculum, work, videotaped classroom practice, and student interviews, CHHP seeks to operationalize what Freire (1970) termed *conscientização* by suggesting that transformative education for the poor and disempowered begins with the creation of pedagogic spaces where marginalized youth become aware of how their own experiences have been shaped by larger social institutions. Through a counter-hegemonic curricula that focuses on youth culture and resistance (Giroux, 1983; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Solórzano, 1998), racial identity and social reproduction (Akorn, 2006, 2008b), and counter-narratives (Akorn, 2003; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), students of color are able to provide alternate explanations of school inequality and simultaneously gain a critical perspective of their world.

CHHP insists that students are active agents and as such should analyze a diverse set of data: field notes, video footage, photo-voice<sup>7</sup>, web research, artifacts of popular culture, interviews, archival research, oral history, and surveys, to name a few. Epistemologically and ontologically, CHHP then asks students to turn their sociological gaze back toward the community and begin to solve everyday problems by interrogating how our findings impact social theory (Burawoy, 1991). One of the primary objectives of CHHP is to demonstrate the ways in which youth-driven research supports students' long-term academic trajectories, both because of the academic rigor of the research and concurrently because of the socialization of critical intellectual identities (Baquedano-López, 2000). According to Yang (2006), "Through reading the world, young people begin to meaningfully develop strategies for pursuing social justice, and take increasingly public roles in advocating, organizing, educating, and being educated by our communities in an effort to create positive social change" (p. 1). In essence, they become what Gramsci (1971) terms "organic intellectuals" (p. 41).

Because of its commitment to social justice and action as part of the research process, CHHP represents an orientation to inquiry that is highly consistent with the principles of youth participatory action research (YPAR) (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Minkler, 2004). As a collaborative approach that breaks down the barriers between the researcher and the researched, and values community members as equitable partners in the research enterprise, CHHP also underscores the liberatory principles of agency, equity, and self-determination. At the same time, CHHP identifies research as a significant site of struggle between traditional Western research and decolonizing frameworks that reflect the inherent ability of people of color to accurately assess our own strengths and needs, and our right to act upon them in this world (Smith, 1999).

Although differing in some of their goals and strategies, CHHP and YPAR share a set of core values and principles, and have as their centerpiece three interrelated elements: participation, experiential knowledge, and action (Minkler, 2004). Borrowing and extending the work

of Smith-Maddox and Solórzano (2002), Darder, Baltodano, and Torres (2008), Fals Borda (1987), Minkler (2004), Cammarota and Fine (2008), Ginwright, Noguera, and Cammarota (2006), Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008), and others, below I outline the essential elements of CHHP. My goal is to inform the training of prospective and existing teachers with a fresh innovative approach that avoids the pitfalls of cultural-deficit models. The fundamental elements of CHHP are as follows:

- It is participatory and youth-driven.
- It is cooperative, engaging students in a joint research process in which each contributes equitably.
- It foregrounds race, racism, gender, and other axis of social difference in the design, data collection, and analysis.
- It helps prospective teachers focus on the racialized, gendered, and other intersections of social difference, experiences within and by communities of color.
- It challenges the traditional paradigms, methods, and texts as a way to engage in a discourse on race that is informed by the actual conditions and experiences of people of color.
- It is committed to co-learning, co-facilitating, and multi-directionality.
- It is trans-disciplinary, drawing on Black/Africana Studies, Raza Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Women's Studies, to name a few.
- It involves local capacity building<sup>8</sup>.
- It is an empowering process through which all participants can increase control of their lives.
- It seeks a balance among critical thinking, reflection, analysis, and action.
- It emphasizes a union of mind, body, and spirit rather than a separation of these elements.

The elements that form the basic core of CHHP draw on YPAR, Freirian pedagogy, and critical race theory to challenge racism and other intersections of social difference<sup>9</sup> in order to prepare young people to be prospective teachers inside and outside of urban and suburban schools. Freire's work, in particular, provides us with the foundations for a theory of democratic schooling that is linked to serving the most marginalized groups in our society. His critical praxis starts from the premise that all education is political, and thus schools are never neutral institutions (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002). Freire (1970) firmly believed that one of the ways that schools maintain and reproduce the existing social order is by using the "banking method of education" (p. 71). This approach often leads to: (1) students being viewed as passive receptacles waiting for knowledge to be deposited from the teacher; (2) mono-directional pedagogical formats whereby students do not feel their thoughts and ideas are important enough to warrant a two-way dialogue with teachers; (3) "cradle classrooms," in which students are dependent on teachers for the acquisition of knowledge; and (4) students viewing schools as key mechanisms in the reproduction of inequality rather than places where education is seen as a practice of freedom, a place to build critical consciousness, and social mobility (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002).

In contrast to the banking method, Freire (1970) suggests a method of social inquiry known as the pedagogy of the oppressed—a social praxis where we learn to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality. His problem-posing methodology includes five general phases: (1) Identifying a problem, (2)

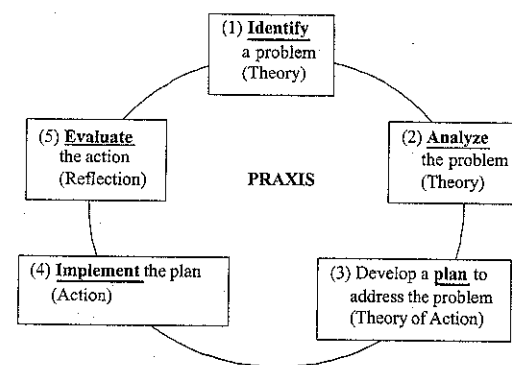


FIGURE 1 Freire's (1970) Critical Praxis.

analyzing a problem, (3) developing a plan, (4) implementing the plan, and (5) evaluating the plan (see Figure 1).

In many ways, the problem-posing methodology creates opportunities for young people to engage in what Freire (1970) calls "critical praxis"—reflection and action. Through engagement in real world issues that shape their daily lives such as environmental racism, police brutality, school safety, school closure, tracking, and racial profiling, youth learn to move past victimization and confront unjust social and economic conditions. At the core of Freire's work was the desire to understand the ways in which adults "read" the world's existing political and economic stratifications, as these stratifications organize the system we call education. However, even though Freire's pedagogical techniques revolutionized adult education and literacy programs world wide, absent from Freire's analysis was an explicit commitment to understanding how young people "read" existing racial and socioeconomic stratification in the realm of education.

These empirical and theoretical oversights raise a number of questions that need to be explored by critical educators interested in amplifying youth voice, while at the same time, addressing the impact of processes of racialization and other axis of social difference on educational achievement. For instance, what is the relationship between hip hop and critical pedagogy? How can hip hop be used as a tool to promote social justice and youth activism in the classroom? What is the relationship between hip hop culture and the development of critical consciousness among urban and suburban youth?

In order for Freire's (1970) message to remain relevant to today, we must reposition students as subjects and architects of research. Enabling youth to deconstruct the material and ideological conditions that oppress them inspires a process of community building and knowledge production (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Educators need to find ways to identify the resources and strengths of youth of color and place them in the center of their research, curriculum, and teaching practicum's (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002). Indeed, by combining Freirian pedagogy, CRT, and YPAR, a pedagogical space of resiliency and resistance can be developed that challenges the dominant mind set, increases academic engagement and achievement, and builds new understandings of the strength and assets of youth of color and the communities from which they come.

## OUR EXPERIENCE IMPLEMENTING CHHP: THEORY, METHODOLOGY, AND PRACTICE

For the past four years, I co-taught along with Dr. Shawn Ginwright (three years) and Dr. Dawn-Elissa Fischer (one year), one of the most popular courses in the College of Ethnic Studies through a university-based Africana Studies program.<sup>10</sup> Many knowledgeable hip hoppers would argue that the “Bay area” hip hop community is one of the most knowledgeable, talented, and innovative hip hop communities in the world, so in many respects we found ourselves working at ground zero (Vincent, 1996). The classes are usually made up of approximately 130 students and are fairly diverse: African American, white, Latina/o, Asian American, Native American, and Afro-Caribbean; wealthy, middle-class, and poor; from urban and suburban zip codes; integrated and segregated schools; and deeply tracked and supposedly de-tracked educational institutions.

During our first semester we had multiple goals, but two emerged as primary. First, we decided that if our course was going to be taught through the lens of CHHP, it needed to be a collaboration between hip hop scholars and hip hop artists that utilized hip hop as a vehicle to explore social justice themes such as, police brutality, Black incarceration, misogyny, homophobia, racism, sexism, white supremacy, Black nationalism, and commodification, while articulating the demands for social justice. A second goal of the class was to develop a counter-hegemonic public sphere in which students explored deep-seated norms about race, class, gender, culture, language, and the availability of institutional resources and privilege inside and outside of schools.

In developing our course we met frequently to discuss goals, content, strategy, and purpose. Our point of departure is that teaching is an art (See Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). As a result, we spent significant portions of our week planning and preparing (and often lamenting over) our practice and how to do it better (Duncan-Andrade, 2007). At times we found ourselves hyper-analyzing almost every interaction with our students, our pedagogical approach, and our curriculum in an effort to try to understand how we could be more effective teachers (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Most importantly, we listened closely to our students—which is the heart of critical pedagogy. In doing so, we created on-line feedback loops by distributing anonymous mid-semester reviews so that our students could give us continuous feedback throughout the semester and we could include their suggestions into our pedagogical approach. Finally, we invited colleagues and community members to our classes for outside critique.

Often we found ourselves expressing our political points of view. As two African American males and an African American woman (of mixed-race heritage), our experiential knowledge of race, class, and gender had a significant role in the development and implementation of our CHHP. Central to our work is the conception that students are not culturally deficient, but rather, enter classrooms with rich and diverse experiences, some of which raise serious questions about what counts as knowledge in the field of education and beyond. As a point of departure, we challenged our students to think of themselves, their families, and communities as resources and sources of strength (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002). In order for this to occur, we created spaces in our course for prospective teachers to re-examine their stereotypical knowledge of hip hop as it intersects with race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other axes of difference while analyzing and theorizing what it means to teach a diverse student population.

In the following pages I discuss how our student-centered, critical media literacy approach allowed us to address many of the ideological impediments prospective teachers may have

developed as a result of their own racial, gendered, cultural, and educational experiences. First, I discuss how the media justice component of our class—called Inside the Hip Hop Studio—allowed us to create a counter-hegemonic public sphere to re-examine stereotypical knowledge of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other axes of social difference as they relate to hip hop culture. Second, I discuss how we held each student responsible for participating in a community case study with students from different linguistic and social backgrounds. The community case study encouraged students to have immersion experiences in communities of color that helped them to understand and analyze how hip hop can be used as a tool for social justice and political organizing.

## INSIDE THE HIP HOP STUDIO: CREATING A COUNTER-HEGEMONIC PUBLIC SPHERE

In response to the glaring need for a merger of theory and practice as well as ongoing, sustained dialogue about the role of hip hop as a tool for social change and youth activism, we created Inside the Hip Hop Studio—a joint venture with KPFA’s Hardknock Radio. In an effort to model Freirean pedagogy, Inside the Hip Hop Studio began as a series of town hall style interviews, performances, and debates about issues related to hip hop, all recorded live on the SFSU campus, with an audience of 130 students.

The goal of Inside the Hip Hop Studio is to provide a public forum for debate and intellectual engagement of issues related to the production and consumption of hip hop culture and life. Modeled after the famed *Inside the Actors Studio* (Wurtz, 1994), a televised crafted seminar for students of the Actors Studio Drama School at Pace University and the New School University, Inside the Hip Hop Studio creates a public forum where scholars, students, artists, activists, community members, and members of the media gather to engage in intellectual and personal explorations of the intersections of hip hop and racial attitudes, sex, sexuality, substance abuse, violence, political activism, civic engagement, and social change. Unlike conferences on hip hop, which are important but difficult to sustain in terms of networking, policy impact, and ongoing public interaction, Inside the Hip Hop Studio creates community dialogues that serve as “virtual community centers” that enhance young peoples’ reading habits, their social and political engagement, and their desire to participate in our emerging cyber-civilization as agents of social change.

### Project Activities

The main component of Inside the Hip Hop Studio is a series of interviews, public performances, or debates with prominent figures in the hip hop industry. The emphasis of our interview series is to encourage intellectual engagement and open discussion; to develop skill and awareness, genuine dialogue and discourse (including modeling engaged-listening and discussion techniques to develop skills in mediation and conflict resolution); and to remove the pressure of conventional classroom performance norms so that students can participate honestly and without fear of being silenced.

The project is innovative in a number of ways. First, many of our guests are artists themselves who extend the boundaries of hip hop by using unique combinations of media literacy and new approaches to historical, literary, and dramatic texts. Artists and educators, such as M-1 from dead prez, Davey D, Jeff Chang, Bakari Kitwana, Danny Hoch, Anita Johnson (Hard Knock Radio), Weyland Southern (Hard Knock Radio), Boots Riley from the Coup, Traci Bartlow, Aya De Leon, DJ Backside, Dawn-Elissa Fischer and Marcyliena Morgan from the Harvard Hip Hop Archive, Brett Cook-Dizney, Adam Mansbach, Kevin Coval, Dereca Blackmon, Green Party Vice President candidate Rosa Clemente, filmmakers Kevin Epps, Eli and Kahlil Jacobs-Fantuzzi, and artists Marc Bamuthi Joseph and Ise Lyfe, to name a few, have rolled through the studio. After each guest lecture we use some of the audio- and videotaped footage to further develop and refine key themes and ideas in the interviews and make them available via podcast, radio broadcast, and web-based technology.

The second way our project is innovative is that it combines academic and theater work that is digitally-recorded live as a crafted seminar in front of 130 San Francisco State students. Each class ends with the teacher/facilitators answering questions from student audience members. In this way, people who are considered experts on hip hop also have the opportunity to learn from students in the audience who are immersed in hip hop culture. One of the overarching goals of this project is to initiate and institutionalize sustained dialogue among faculty, students, staff, and community members around compelling, controversial topics and to create a hospitable intellectual space to work through difference and build community.

Inside the Hip Hop Studio creates the conditions for prospective teachers to examine vital concerns of the hip hop generation while challenging their own intrinsic assumptions about race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other axes of social difference. Clearly, it is difficult to change deeply entrenched beliefs that students bring with them into the classroom. However, we have found that CHHP is an important tool to teach potential teacher candidates to unlearn stereotypical knowledge of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, "while analyzing, and problem-solving what it means to teach a diverse population" (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002, p. 80).

### THE COMMUNITY CASE STUDY

Drawing on the work of Freire (1970), Bell (1987), and other critical race theorists (Harris, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), the community case study begins with the premise that communities of color are places of strength. Social science research on communities of color over the last century has been dominated by studies that frame communities of color as "problems," "pathologies," and "poisons," rather than focusing on the communities' emerging assets, agency, and aspirations. More often than not, youth of color's educational under-achievement has been explained as individual pathology or cultural adaptations, which stem from social disorganization in their communities, or lack of individual effort (Lewis, 1959). CHHP argues for a more nuanced notion of community cultural production; one that posits communities of color as central subjects to knowledge production, and underscores their ability to actualize their agency for personal and social transformation (Yosso, 2005).

Following the work of Freire (1970), Fanon (1963), Kretzman and McKnight (1993), Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001), Akom, Cammarota, and Ginwright (2008), and Duncan-Andrade

and Morrell (2008), CHHP argues for an asset-based approach to community development that counters deficit-approaches to research. According to Smith-Maddox and Solórzano (2002):

Asset-based research is grounded in the recognition that a unique combination of assets exist in each community. Specifically, the assets can be found in at least four places: a) with individuals in the community, b) in community associations, c) within community institutions, and d) in indigenous forms of knowledge "native" to the community. Indeed, an asset-based strategy emphasizes the development of policies and practices grounded in the capacities, skills, and assets of people and their neighborhoods. (p. 78)

To introduce an asset-based community case study, we divided students into learning communities, and aligned our community case study assignment with Freire's (1970) problem-posing method. The purpose of the community case study assignment is to use hip hop as an educational tool for creating social change. Groups of no more than five individuals selected a social and local community issue, and were asked to use hip hop to educate the general public about the issue being studied. The community case studies follows Freire's critical praxis and includes the following elements:

1. *Begin with a question:* For example, do young people who identify with hip hop culture view race differently? How does the commodification of hip hop culture both perpetuate racial and gendered stereotypes while resisting racial and gendered stereotypes at the same time? Does hip hop contribute to the misogyny and homophobia in our national culture? What are hip hop artists and activists presenting as alternatives to the dominant representations? What is the role of hip hop in youth organizing and political mobilization?
2. *Analyze the problem:* Viewing communities of color with a critical ethnographic lens requires prospective teachers to consider the events and conditions that impact the day-to-day lives of students, teachers, parents, and community members. Being able to document these events and conditions is critical to analyzing the opportunities to learn and succeed in schools and communities. One way of accomplishing this critical investigation is by taking the classic ethnographic approach, asking the "5 Ws" and the "1 H" while you are collecting data about the events and conditions in the community (J. Duncan-Andrade, personal communication, February 15, 2007; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). In that vein, we thought it was important for our students to consider:
  - (a) *Who?* Identify the actors. (Who is involved? Who is affected? Who said what? Who did what?)
  - (b) *What?* Describe in detail what you are seeing. (Describe what you saw, heard, smelled, and felt, both physically and emotionally).
  - (c) *When?* Document things as simple as date, time (actual and in relationship to the day [i.e., in school, first and second period, or events happening in the community]); Describe the timing of the event and its relevance to the community. It is important to understanding the significance of an event in the schema of the larger day.
  - (d) *Where?* Note the location and history of the community or subject of study itself, including the surrounding neighborhood (close to freeway? Single family homes or multiple resident dwellings? Groceries available? Banks? Liquor stores?); What

is the history of the neighborhood/school (Gentrified? Red-lined? Ethnic shifts? Employment? Relationship with police? School reputation and history?)

- (e) Why? How? By considering these two questions together, we encouraged our students to think about why and how events and conditions are influenced by key stakeholders. (How is it affecting neighborhood development or organizing? How/why is it persisting? Is it good for the community? Why? How?)
3. *Guide your fieldwork with a plan.* Here we encouraged our students to ask: What does the literature say about this issue? Why is it happening? What needs to be done about it? We also encouraged our students to point out the gap in the literature that they are filling. In other words, what isn't the literature telling us about the issue that your research can shed light on or illuminate?
  4. *Design the key elements of your research (i.e., interview questions, interview guides) and methods for recording data (participant observation, formal interviews, informal interviews, sketching settings).* The methods section should emphasize the following:
    - goals of the project and key elements of the research design;
    - selection and application of different methodologies for conducting research;
    - background information on study participants. For example, list demographic details in tabular form including a table giving respondents' races, ages, marital status, education, and other key social identifiers relevant to your topic of choice; and
    - transparency in the research process. No matter how you choose to use data to support your argument, the systems you use to arrive at interpretations must be made explicit. A key way to achieve this goal is by being reflexive in your writing.

##### 5. *Implications/Evaluation.*

In this final section we asked students to position themselves as experts in the field. We asked students (based on what they have seen, heard, and read) what they uncovered in their research. Most importantly, we asked students to have a courageous vision and to be specific about what needs to be addressed and how will adhering to their recommendations address the issues (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). What would the community look like if we followed the students' plan? How would hip hop be improved? How would the community benefit? Why is this important?

Overall, the community case study provides students with an opportunity to use hip hop culture to hold a mirror to society; to name problems, to identify relations among problems, and to re-imagine them into new strategies utilizing transformational resistance. In addition, the community case study has an anticipatory power—projecting possible futures and offering hope through collective forms of sonic, corporeal, poetic, and visual action.

[The personal and cultural knowledge coming from communities of color allows] students to pay attention to the contextual reality and its impact on traditional victims of social justice while reflecting on the moral and ethical aspects of teaching and learning rather than exclusively focusing on technical competencies such as lesson planning, test construction, and assessment strategies. (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002, p. 80)

The overall process of CHHP is not only a way to reconstruct knowledge about communities of color but also to teach about diversity and cultural competency for prospective teachers.

## CONCLUSION

In this article I combine hip hop studies with critical pedagogy to introduce a new framework called CHHP. CHHP differs from hip hop pedagogy because it simultaneously (1) foregrounds race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of oppression; (2) challenges traditional paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (3) centralizes experiential knowledge of students of color; (4) emphasizes the commitment to social justice; and finally, (5) encourages a transdisciplinary approach (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).<sup>11</sup> “Embedded in this framework is a pedagogical approach that uses Freire’s problem-posing method and case study research as tools for helping student teachers to identify and name the societal and systemic problems students of color face, analyze the causes of the problem, and find solutions” (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002, p. 80). This framework is important precisely because it challenges the role that schools play in reproducing social inequality. Schools use “hidden” and “official” curricula that promote the hegemony of the dominant class (Apple, 1990), and embrace pedagogies that devalue the voices and backgrounds of urban and suburban students of color (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2002). School cultures and practices encourage students to believe that a meritocratic educational system exists, that students are responsible for their own failure (Akom, 2008a; MacLeod, 1987), and that issues of racial inequality, hip hop, and social justice are not worthy of study inside or outside of schools.

CHHP challenges these assumptions by suggesting that transformative education for the poor and disempowered begins with the creation of pedagogic spaces where marginalized youth are enabled to gain a consciousness of how their own experiences have been shaped by larger social institutions. Undoubtedly, it is difficult, however not impossible, to change the tacit beliefs, understandings, and world views that institutions of “higher learning” often hold toward youth of color and low-income youth. However, I contend that by implementing CHHP it is possible to increase the space in the curriculum for students to unlearn their stereotypical knowledge of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other axes of social difference while analyzing, problem solving, and theorizing what it means to be part of a diverse population (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002).

The pedagogical approach I have outlined in the preceding pages is a promising strategy to meet the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly diverse society. I would hope that subsequent researchers and practitioners will borrow, extend, and implement this approach in their classroom in an effort to better understand how young people “read” existing race, ethnicity, language, immigration, sexual orientation, and class stratifications as these stratifications organize systems of oppression. What is currently missing in the national dialogue on educational achievement are the voices of young people alongside adults and community elders. What we need is a transcendental approach in which youth development becomes synonymous with community development. This is the goal of CHHP. As always, I am hopeful.

## NOTES

1. There are many competing theories on the origins of hip hop and the Big Bang theory is one of the most dominant (see Chang, 2005). More specifically, the Big Bang theory suggests that hip hop has a singular origin via multiple cultural pathways that all culminate in hip hop being born in New York City. On the other hand, hip hop historians, such as Davey D and others, argue that hip hop has multiple histories and multiple places of origins (see Davey D, 2006; Chang, 2006).
2. An element of the African American oral tradition in which two individuals engage in verbal jousting (see Baugh, 1983).
3. For more on hip hop's African origins see Chang (2005, 2006).
4. The capitalization of the word Black throughout the manuscript is a form of strategic essentialism and solidarity with the oppressed. Strategic essentialism is a term coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. It refers to a strategy whereby racio-ethnic groups sometimes essentialize themselves and make our group identities a priority in order to achieve specific goals (Darius, Jonsson, & Spivak, 1993).
5. Black reincarnation refers to the cultural appropriation of Black cultural products.
6. Following Alridge (2005) in this article:

I define Hip Hop and rap as socially and politically conscious, or "socio-political, when they focus on the social, economic, and political situation of oppressed people . . . This genre of Hip Hop or rap examines historical problems with black communities, such as racism, police brutality, crooked politicians, greed, poverty, and substandard education. . . . Socially and politically conscious Hip Hop and rap often espouses [agency, critical consciousness, and transformative resistance] as ways to ameliorate problems in black communities . . . It should be noted that other rappers who may not identify with the socially or politically conscious genre of Hip Hop sometimes have socially and politically conscious lyrics or messages in their music. Such artists include Jay Z, T. I., and Trina among others. (p. 249)

At the same time many artists categorized as socially or politically conscious sometimes have messages and lyrics in their music that reproduce the status quo, so it goes both ways.

7. Photo voice is a digital media tool that participants use to identify, represent, and enhance their communities.
8. Capacity building is defined as an ongoing process through which individuals, groups, organizations, and societies enhance their ability to identify and meet development challenges.
9. By social difference I am referring to how race intersects with other forms of social oppression such as class, gender, religion, nationality, sexuality, phenotype, accent, immigration status, and special needs.
10. In the Fall of 2000 Rickey Vincent (1996), author of a definitive discussion of the music, culture, and funk, convinced the Dean of the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University to allow him to teach a new course entitled the "Hip Hop Workshop."
11. Ricky Vincent is widely credited for establishing the Hip Hop Workshop at San Francisco State University.

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## “Music fit for us minorities”: Latinas/os’ Use of Hip Hop as Pedagogy and Interpretive Framework to Negotiate and Challenge Racism

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Using Critical Race and Latino Critical theories, this study examines 20 in-depth interviews conducted by the author with Mexican and Puerto Rican youth from the Chicago area. The author contends that youth utilized hip hop music in multiple and overlapping ways, engaging hip hop music as both a pedagogy that centers the perspectives of people of color and a framework to examine daily life. Specifically, youth used hip hop discourse to make sense of the ways race operates in their daily lives; to more broadly understand their position in the U.S racial/ethnic hierarchy; and to critique traditional schooling for failing to critically incorporate their racialized ethnic/cultural identities within official school dialogues and curricula in empowering ways. Succinctly conveyed by one youth, the theme “Music fit for us minorities,” explores the ways that students link hip hop music to the disempowering cultural identities they encounter about Latinas/os, the structures that marginalize them, and to broader systems of inequity. In doing so, youth use hip hop music as pedagogy and an interpretive lens to negotiate and challenge their racialization in schools and society.

It was introducing White America to the rest of society, it showed them the life of the inner-city, you know, and then as KRS-One and Chuck D, you know, started using it as a tool to politicize the youth, like hip hop started, hip hop was just, was just a tool that could be used as a revolutionary tool, as a tool for consciousness, for education or just to convey common stereotypes of the day . . . It introduced America to the culture of inner city youth, they had no choice but to listen and to accept reality, you know. They could either study and learn from it or they could go on with their assumptions (Ernesto, 22-year-old, Puerto Rican youth).

According to critical race theory<sup>1</sup> (CRT), counter-narratives are the stories told by people of color who are submerged in a racially hierarchical society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Counter-narratives are a powerful analytical tool because they challenge majoritarian stories embedded in a master-narrative that prioritizes notions of merit, objectivity, and color-blindness. These notions serve to uncritically accept social arrangements as a result of the superior intellect and abilities of Whites rather than as a consequence of interlocking forms of oppression and a focus on racism. In response to the master-narrative, counter-narratives center the knowledge and experiences of