

# (Re)Imagining TESOL through Critical Hip Hop Literacy

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## *Abstract*

In this study, I intend to contribute to the expansion of American-centric Hip Hop pedagogy discourse by taking up the view of Hip Hop as a *global* youth culture - a view that is rapidly gaining ground in Hip Hop scholarship (Ibrahim, 2009; Pennycook, 2007; Roth-Gordon, 2009). To this end, I use an applied ethnographic approach to understand where the combined insights of scholarship and theory on critical literacy and global Hip Hop might lead us in a *real* high school ESL classroom setting. The principles of the lesson I co-facilitated (with the main ESL teacher) are grounded in what I am calling Critical Hip Hop Literacy (CHHL). CHHL draws attention to social issues and power relations as they are expressed through Hip Hop literacies. Data were collected through interviews and transcribed data from recorded video footage of the CHHL lesson. Throughout this paper I capture the ways that student identities are engaged within and around the task of interacting with Hip Hop literacies and interpreting text. The findings reveal the role that the underlying sociocultural concerns and practices of the Global Hip Hop Nation (Alim, 2009) play in mediating students' articulations of (dis)affiliation along ethnic, national and linguistic social axes.

**H**ip Hop language and culture generate rapidly globalizing sites of multimodal literacy practices in which youth around the world are experimenting with new forms of meaning-making and identity. From Brazil to Japan (Roth-Gordon, 2009; Tsujimura & Davis, 2009), recent trends in Hip Hop scholarship are increasingly pointing to Hip Hop's proliferation as a forum of sociopolitical resistance, linguistic innovation, "internal inconsistencies and open, discursive spaces" (Alim, 2011). Therefore, in this study, I seek to contribute to the expansion of this focus by using an applied ethnographic approach to understand where the combined insights of scholarship and theory on critical literacy and global Hip Hop might lead us in a real high school ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom setting.

To date, few studies have sought to apply the insights of critical literacy to an ESL context, partially out of concern for forsaking traditional "developmental" goals (Huang, 2011). In this exploratory study, in the role of co-teacher and researcher, I attend to the aims of core ESL instruction through an integrated skills lesson (speaking, reading, writing and listening). These aims are complemented by a critical literacy approach, which seeks primarily to consider the role of individuals as social actors operating along power differentials in their engagement with literacy.

With a particular focus on race and ethnicity - as an underexplored area in TESOL research (Canagarajah, 2006; Lin & Kubota, 2009) - I use two of Lankshear's (1994) three dimensions of critical literacy to analyze how 14 high school ESL students relate to Hip Hop as a global(izing) form of literacy and how they engage with Hip Hop text as part of an in-class critical literacy exercise. The principles of the target lessons are grounded in what I am calling Critical Hip Hop Literacy (CHHL). CHHL draws attention to social issues and power relations as they are expressed through Hip Hop literacies. CHHL foregrounds those aspects of Hip Hop literacy that function to interrogate, reflect and shape reality.

## A SOCIOCULTURAL VIEW OF CRITICAL LITERACY

In a review of 30 years of literature, Lewison, Flint & Sluys (2002) offer four broad categories to characterize the aims of critical literacy: 1) disrupting the commonplace, 2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, 3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and 4) taking action and promoting social justice. None of these categories mutually exclude any of the others. In many cases, these categories overlap in the ways that they serve the core goal of considering the role of individuals as *social* actors operating along power differentials through literacy.

Several scholars have proposed adopting a view of literacy as a social process (Beach, Campano, Edmiston & Borgmann, 2010; Gee, 2010). In doing so it is important to consider the ways in which learners, too, are socially situated and

how this affects their interaction with the content. The tenets of critical literacy disrupt conceptions of literacy as an ideologically neutral or purely cognitive pedagogical process. This point becomes especially apparent when we consider the role of texts in emphasizing and reifying particular regimes of knowledge, truth and power. Giddens (as cited by Fairclough, 2003, p.40) suggests that power be viewed in a relational sense as “the capacity to secure outcomes where the realization of these outcomes depends upon the agency of others”. This study is thus concerned with these transformative capacities and the ways that they are activated, analyzed and reformed through interaction with (Hip Hop) literacy practices.

## **CRITICAL LITERACY AND TESOL**

Among the emerging body of literature on critical literacy in ESL/EFL contexts, some studies reveal, a perceived tension between the goals of critical literacy and language learning (Huang, 2011; Ko & Wang, 2009; Kuo, 2009). Dichotomizing terms such as “developmental” literacy, when juxtaposed with critical literacy (as non-developmental?) expose the competitive relationship between two orientations to literacy, which do not often co-exist in ESL curricula.

In the face of learning English for “survival” purposes, critical approaches to language and literacy instruction can seem distracting and even trivial. Rather than ignoring this tension, Huang (2011) offers solutions on balancing traditional and critical literacy goals based on a reading and writing course in Taiwan. Her study also draws important attention to student perspectives on critical literacy, with some students finding it too “serious” and others finding it “motivating”.

As the studies mentioned above suggest, using critical literacy approaches with ESL students may pose particular challenges. In my view, this serves as a call, not to avoid or abandon the idea, but to continue responding to this challenge through exploration and inquiry. I make this assertion in consideration of a Freirian stance on (literacy) pedagogy as a process of socialization in becoming and not becoming, in doing and not doing. That is to say that the ways that we (don't) teach students to participate as interpreters of text speaks volumes about the ways we (don't) expect them to participate more broadly as agents of change in society.

As co-instructor of the lesson in this study, my aim was to attend to all four commonly recognized second language development skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) while incorporating aspects that will also urge students to consider meaning beyond that which is stated. With that in mind, however, I must state that the analytical focus of this study is not on teaching methods. Instead, I use a sociocultural orientation to understand English language learners' ways of interacting with Hip Hop in general as a form of literacy as well as the ways they respond to a critical language approach through Hip Hop text.

## CRITICAL HIP HOP LITERACY

Alim (2007) conducted a project called Critical Hip Hop Language Pedagogies, which he designed to raise student awareness of language varieties and co-existing power dynamics that impact those in contact with these varieties. Similarly, Hill (2009) implemented a “Hip Hop Lit” curriculum that formally examined the literary components of rap compositions. The activity I cover in this study corresponds to what I am calling Critical Hip Hop Literacy (CHHL). CHHL can be understood as a confluence of Hill (2009) and Alim’s (2007) approaches to Hip Hop language pedagogy. CHHL draws attention to social issues and power relations as they are expressed through hip-hop literacies. CHHL also foregrounds those aspects of hip-hop culture that function to interrogate, reflect and shape reality.

The discursive tendencies of Hip Hop as a culture of (social) resistance (Kirkland, 2008) lend themselves considerably to critical language pedagogy. Politically “conscious” hip-hop does much to expose the power inequities that are a central focus for critical literacy, as Pennycook (1999) points out in his overview of approaches to critical TESOL. Instructors looking to employ a critical literacy approach can work with students to draw out these relationships. For instance, Morrell (2002) uses T.S. Eliot’s and rapper Grand Master Flash’s accounts of devastation in their communities to have students discover interpretive linkages between social commentary in canonical poetry and hip-hop music.

Overtly stated social issues need not confine the set of curricular goals of CHHL in a completely literal sense, however. Bradley’s (2009) *Book of Rhymes* provides numerous illustrations of hip-hop texts and their underlying poetic functions (rhyme, rhythm, wordplay, etc.). These structural elements are in fact socially situated as they are deliberately and strategically manipulated by artists in a multi-layered fashion to subvert “standard” language forms (Alim, 2011) and express other nuances unique to hip-hop literary tradition. As such, they hold as much merit as the messages flowing through them. The emphasis on structural elements and techniques depends largely on overall instructional goals.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Setting and Participants*

This applied ethnographic project took place in a suburban area of a major city in the northeastern United States. The study is part of a larger, team ethnographic project aimed at understanding various linguistic, media and pedagogical practices occurring in an high-intermediate to advanced (proficiency) level high school course called “English for English Language Learners.” I visited the class once

weekly over the course of three semesters (12 months). Typically, I observed classroom activities; however, I have collaborated with Mr. Paul to teach a total of three music-related language activities.

The focal participants of this critical literacy exercise were a total of 14 seniors (12th grade) from 9 different countries. Languages spoken by the students include Hindi-Urdu, Spanish, Tagalog, French and Liberian English. I also include interview data from a Pakistani student from a previous semester to contextualize linkages between identity and student engagement with Hip Hop literacy.

### *Data Analysis and Research Questions*

Similar to other teacher-researchers (Alim, 2009; Hill, 2009; Kirkland, 2008; Morrell, 2002), I am interested in the role of Hip Hop as part of a classroom's *main text* (Ibrahim, 2009b). At present, Hip Hop and other youth cultures (gaming, music, social networking, etc.) constitute a "*Creative Margin Curriculum*—a configuration of knowledge and a *mattering map* that are linked to students' identities and ways of knowing and learning—representing their *School of Reality*—but not directly addressed in their schooling process" (Ibrahim, 2009, p. 240, emphasis in original). As such, this study took form as an *applied* ethnographic study, seeking to understand where the insights of scholarship and theory might lead us when implemented then analyzed through an ethnographic lens in a real classroom setting (c.f. Hill, 2009).

Data for this study consisted of transcripts of the two 80-minute classroom sessions in which the Critical Hip Hop Literacy exercise occurred. I also collected the written portion of the assignment where students were asked to work with a partner to synthesize ideas from the Hip Hop song with their own thoughts and organize them textually to argue for two main points (along with supporting points). Following the classroom sessions, I conducted individual, semi-structured interviews with Mr. Paul and five students from whom I sought elaboration on interactions I observed with peers or from their written assignment, based on my initial pass of data analysis.

Lankshear (1994) notes that there are three dimensions along which our observations of critical literacy in action can be classified: 1) a general attitude toward literacy, 2) a particular way of engaging with texts, and 3) a manner of participating in the world that involves language and literacy. Following interviews, data were coded broadly using the first two of Lankshear's dimensions of critical literacy as an interpretive frame. The scope and purposes of the exercise motivated a focus on the first two dimensions. Within these dimensions, transcripts of interviews and classroom data were then analyzed in further detail using discourse analysis to attend to the following research questions:

1. How do the ESL students of this study perceive Hip Hop literacy and culture?
2. How do the ESL students of this study engage with the ideas from the Hip Hop text?
3. Do the student engagements with the text reflect the aims of critical literacy?

### DESCRIPTION OF THE CRITICAL HIP HOP LITERACY EXERCISE

The Critical Hip Hop Literacy session began with a discussion on the history of Hip Hop and its contemporary cultural trends. The lyrical and textual portion of the session was based on the song *I Can* (Jones, 2003) by the New York-based artist, Nas. The song uses narration and figurative language to warn children in U.S. ghettos about succumbing to negative influences and to encourage them to pursue education to “be anything they want to be”. The song also critiques the consequences of slavery and the perpetuation of racism in the United States.

We began by using the multimodal affordances of the music video to orient the students to the major themes of the song. Then, we shared the written lyrics of the song while students followed along, listening to the audio. After reviewing vocabulary and discussing the messages and purposes of the embedded narratives, as a class we arrived at the overall idea that Nas was trying to bring about social change by speaking to children endangered by the conditions of poverty. We also inspected the text to find the author’s suggestions on ways to meet the children’s needs.

Through our discussion of the song’s purposes, we were able to foreground the ways in which texts are used to *do* things, social things to be more exact. In light of this, students were then asked to work with one (1) partner to make their own suggestions about what was needed to ensure a better future for the children being addressed in the song. Ultimately the goal was for students to organize their thoughts into a short, informal speech, which they would deliver to other small groups. In a role-playing sense, this exercise challenged students to take on a position of advocacy like the artist did, trying on, in a low-stakes venue, the role of an individual using literacy practices to make persuasive commentary about sociopolitical issues (Lewison, et al., 2002). Before they began organizing their thoughts, I offered a few discussion questions for the paired groups as a warm-up and to scaffold the act of interrogating dimensions of Nas’ original claims:

1. What kinds of choices will the children face?

2. Does hard work guarantee success?
3. Do race and/or class affect one's opportunities in U.S. society?
4. How do the decisions of adults (parents, teachers, government, etc) affect the children Nas was speaking to?

These questions were designed to get the students to problematize, discuss and consider matters beyond the message presented in the song. The persuasive speech activity was an oral follow-up to the persuasive writing exercises the students had done a few weeks prior with Mr. Paul. To scaffold the organization of main and supporting points, students were given a graphic organizer (appendix A) with an abbreviated version of the outline skeleton they had used for persuasive writing.

## STUDENT PERCEPTIONS ABOUT HIP HOP AS CULTURE AND LITERACY

Our session took place within a larger thematic series of activities Mr. Paul had been leading on music, language and culture. Since students had already been doing research for a separate assignment called "World Music Projects", I began class with an overview of Hip Hop, presenting it as my own ongoing "music project". We discussed Hip Hop's history and contemporary trends toward globalization. This portion of the session included coverage of vocabulary words such as *controversy*, *social change*, *urban*, *rural*, *ghetto*, *mobile* (as in the global movement of Hip Hop), and so on.

Lankshear's (1994) first dimension of observing critical literacy involves considering attitudes toward particular forms of literacy. This dimension seems particularly valuable in helping us understand how students' complex ways of relating to Hip Hop connect with how Hip Hop literacy may be received as classroom pedagogy. I begin this section, then, with an analysis of how a class discussion resulted in discursive negotiation over the parameters of participation in Hip Hop as a form of literacy. The following conversation took place as we looked at digital images of Hip Hop in various countries:

1 Catrice: These guys are from Norway

2 =(loud laughter from a few female students)

3 Catrice: I wanna get to Mike because he made a comment. You said it's not weird.

4 Mike:=yeah

5 Catrice: What's your opinion?

6 Mike: It's not weird. White rappers like Eminem, they're like the best. They

- 7 dress the way they dress. They don't seem odd at all.
- 8 Tahir: I'm used to black people rapping and not other [races].
- 9 Catrice: [yea::h] But Mike made
- 10 the point that sometimes people who aren't black can have a lot of talent 11 and skill  
with Hip Hop. In that case do you still think it's weird?
- 12 Tahir: Yeah, kinda.
- 13 Enrique: I think not, because it's like sometimes, (.02) we think like you rap 'cause
- 14 you're like gangsta or something like that, but it's not true. Rap is like
- 15 uhm rhyme, a poem, and they make it like on a beat or something
- 16 like that. I think if you can like do something like a poem, you can rap.

Through Goffman's (1981) *participation framework*, we are able analyze participants' relationship to the utterances in the above communicative event beyond a limited paradigm of speaker and hearer. In fact, as the laughter in line 2 indicates, some students are participating in the discussion without "speech" in the traditional sense. Furthermore, it is precisely at line 2 that a divergent set of stances, or *footings* (Goffman, 1981), emerge. These stances develop and are sustained throughout the discourse, in a dichotomized fashion, over whether it is "weird/not weird" for non-blacks to participate in Hip Hop. Starting from line 2, each subsequent remark offers a rebuttal of some sort to its predecessor – e.g. Mike's assertion that "it's not weird" in response to the laughing, Tahir's resistance to my suggestion that skill can override the "weirdness", and so on. This debate, which occurred amidst the explicit foregrounding of race, reflects the relevance of race as sign-form in the reading of rappers' authenticity in global Hip Hop discourses (Pennycook, 2007). Enrique, on the other hand, in lines 13-16, rejects the attachment of any particular persona (racialized or otherwise) to Hip Hop participation. He suggests instead, that the requirements for production of Hip Hop literacies are technical in nature, paralleling the skills of poetry.

Prior to discussing Hip Hop in terms of race, our focus was on Hip Hop as a set of globally unifying and recognizable practices, thus paralleling Gibson's (1976) alternative model to multicultural education, which she calls "multi-cultural education as the normal human experience" (p.15). Through a "normal human experience" view, Gibson aims to abstract away racial/ethnic delineations of cultural practices, focusing instead on "repeated participation with one another in activities" (p.15). The constant laughter and subsequent discussion that the Hip Hop images generated pose a challenge to Gibson's model, however as they suggest that the normativity of social parameters such as race (Alim, et al., 2011) are not readily separable from Hip Hop as a cultural practice.

In fact, some students are symbolically invested in particular alignments between Hip Hop and ethnicity as a way of negotiating their own personal identities (Ibrahim, 2009). As an example, I now turn to an interview response from



Gulshan, an English language learner from Pakistan, who describes his out-of-school participation with Hip Hop:

We feel like, when we listen to music, we have a lot of confidence, you know. That's right. We listen to Hip Hop because we act like a [*sic*] American, you know. That's why. We have a dressing like, you know, dress up. When we go somewhere, then we gonna dress up like an American. Then, we don't want to be like (.) we don't want to be like Desi you know. 'Cause now we in America. We don't wanna go back. That's why.

Within the purview of globalization, at a very basic level, Hip Hop “flows” can be conceptualized with a primary focus on movement. In many such discourses, the transnational, mass-mediated movement Hip Hop cultural *practices* and their subsequent uptake alongside “already local” practices outside the United States constitute the focal dimension of movement (Pennycook & Mitchell, 2009). Gulshan's statement, however, necessitates focus on a dimension of movement that functions in a mutually constitutive relationship with cultural practices – human movement.

A focus on human movement takes us into the realm of exploring the construction of the nomadic subject. Through her work on *flexible citizenship*, Ong (1999) maintains that in the midst of geographical movement, mismatches that arise between structured regimes of power and value, on the one hand, and group cultural logics, on the other, are socially resolved through a degree of flexibility in articulations of self across these horizons.

The term Gulshan used, “Desi”, functions as an *emblematic figure of identity* (Agha, 2007), or a distinct marker of a Southeast Asian persona. In his current context, popular culture is one resource recruited by Gulshan and his peers to mitigate the perceived liability of *Desiness*. To this end, they take up special “American” ways of dressing and routine reciting of rap lyrics in English as observable, everyday cultural practices. These practices are appealing inasmuch as they enable Gulshan and his peer network to draw from the symbolic capital of the perceived American “essence” of Hip Hop. Here, we can also notice that Gulshan has made no particular claims of *being* American, but rather states that his practices involve *acting* and interpreting a very specific version of American identity. This point demonstrates that it is precisely within these everyday practices that new notions of a late-modern self with relation to one's citizenship are worked through flexibly and maintained at a distance from notions of self that would be useful toward serving other purposes such as demonstrating piety or solidarity with one's home country, for instance.

It is these types of symbolic investments in projecting and legitimizing a certain “self” in relation to others, which manifests similarly in literacy practices. We are reminded of this further in Gee's (2010) assertion that in addition to learning

reading and writing skills, individuals participating in literacy practices of “different social groups . . . [learn] how to act, interact, talk, know, believe and *value* in certain ways“ (p. 167, emphasis mine). I would like to extend, and perhaps challenge this point a bit in the following section, where I uncover how, in some instances, these value systems are not inherited but negotiated.

## STUDENTS' WAYS OF ENGAGING WITH THE HIP HOP TEXT

As a class we worked through the Nas *I Can* Hip Hop song, first as a video, then as text to decode messages and identify major themes. The decoding and comprehension check portions of our textual analysis represent familiar practices of traditional literacy. Though valuable, alone, they are structured around limitations in the type of participation they generate. Wallace (2008) describes students' roles in this aspect of traditional literacy as “animators, [who] reproduce conventional textual meaning”. The layering of the critical dimensions of our exercise, however, generated an amplified space for literacy practice wherein students were invited to participate as articulators of new knowledge frameworks beyond the ones provided in the text. Rather than framing all students' interpretations in terms of resistance to some type of power structure, in Table 1, I instead aim to deconstruct students' complex stances, or *footings* (Goffman, 1981) by highlighting the focal areas of their primary arguments and three categories of relation to the original text – extension, challenging and restating.

Table 1 – Students' Written Responses to Main Themes of Nas Hip Hop Text

Group #	Names and Country of Origin	Focal Area	Relation to Original Text
1	Helena (Liberia) Mike (Liberia)	Religion as a remedy	Extend
2	Hari (Pakistan) Verna (Jamaica)	Health as the key for a better life	Extend
3	Cindy (Liberia) Manik (Bangladesh)	Racism against immigrants	Challenge
4	Kaiya (Liberia) Satta (Ivory Coast)	Black-on-black racism	Challenge
5	Sofia (Spain) Maria (Mexico)	Unequal access to quality education	Challenge
6	Brian (Philippines) Enrique (Mexico)	Need to avoid drugs	Restate

### *Emphasizing Difference Through Dialogicality*

The proposed solutions students presented in the persuasive speech exercise ranged in the ways that they related to the aims of critical literacy and to the ideas from the original Hip Hop text. Some students used the task to provide additional ideas or elaborate on the author's suggested ideas. While their understanding of the text seemed to be keen, some groups (e.g. group six) simply restated ideas from the text, making it unclear to what extent their response involved the aims of critical literacy. In several cases, the students' own personal experiences and histories were interwoven into their arguments. For example, Helena (group 1), a student who self-professes to be very religious, used the line "in God we trust" from the original text to argue that "going to church can help kids do the right thing."

In other cases, students used their responses to address personally relevant issues of social contention. Using data from the responses of two groups – the only two groups to address the question of race – I now describe how these students reformulated the racial question to align with (and critique) the local politics of their school.

This section of the analysis is grounded in the capacity of text to serve as a *dialogue* among various voices, some harmonious and others not. Fairclough (2003) points to "intertextuality", or "the presence of actual elements of text within a text" (p. 39) as a central marker of the dialogicality of texts. A major distinction to make clear is that these "elements" need not be understood simply as direct quotes, reported speech or other attributable discourse, nor does "text" need to be limited to written text. In their written speech outline, Cindy and Manik (group three) incorporate multiple voices as follows:

Race is always around Immigrants [*sic*] because other people think they are better than others but they think that they are smarter too. People will tell others that they don't like [them]. [They] tell them to go back to their country where they came from.

Here, I argue that Cindy and Manik engage Lewison, et al.'s (2002) first, second and third aim of critical literacy – disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints and engaging sociopolitical issues. From a standpoint of representation, we can interpret this discursive production as a shift in interactional alignment, or *footing* (Goffman, 1981 – also mentioned above). That is to say that simply through the act of addressing a different (yet related) set of social actors and circumstances than those described in the original Hip Hop text, the authors purposefully transform the discursive space into one that accommodates the projection their own realities into this new text.

In the absence of reference to a particular time and set of individuals, the events described in the students' response can be categorized as abstract (versus

particular). Fairclough (2003) notes that the details within such abstract modes of representation can be observed through the manner in which constructs are classified, or ‘classification schemes’. For example, the lexeme ‘immigrants’ functions as to identify a group opposed by a generic group of “other people”. Through basic logic principles one can infer broadly that this “other” group would consist of non-immigrants. It is important to note that ‘immigrants’ as a group of social actors differs from the group the students were asked to discuss – the children in the Nas’ song. While the actors differ referentially, the students have drawn a parallel between the positioning of both of these groups as subjects in the perpetuation of racism and racialization. This re-adjusted framing layered the text with additional perspectives – a central aim in the realization of critical literacy (Lewison, 2002).

Similar to the group above, Kaiya and Satta (group four) identified racialized opposition between groups. Satta, a student from the Ivory Coast, shared the following argument during group discussion:

. . . people being racist. If you were trying to go to school, you are not going to learn enough education, especially [with] black being racist to a black person. That’s bad, and they need to change it. If they cannot- if black being racist to another black person, then white people they’re not gonna stop being racist to black people.

Similar to the group above, Satta and Kaiya formulate their argument as a platform to address racialized tension involving immigrant groups and non-immigrant groups. One primary distinction here is the identification of blacks as perpetrators of racism against other black subjects. With this argument, Satta and Kaiya engage a core principle of critical literacy by deeply disrupting the more commonplace notion (Lewison, 2003) of white-on-black racism referenced in the Nas’ song. An interview with Satta revealed that she had experienced disdain from African American students based on her African background. The intersection of this personal experience with the matters raised in the text and our exercise thus led her and Kaiya to problematize issues of race through a localized, school-based interpretive framework. As observed through Satta’s comment above, they then re-insert the matter back into the conventional model of racial problems by evaluating the local problem (black-on-black racism) as a particular hindrance in unlocking the power to solve a larger one (white-on-black racism).

## DISCUSSION

The global movement of people and ideas has created new paradigms for participating in 21<sup>st</sup> century labor markets and modes of knowledge and cultural production. Several studies have found students’ out-of-school literacy practices to align with these paradigms in new and unpredictable ways (Black, 2008; Gee,

2003). Similarly, this study finds the concerns and articulations of popular culture to be a ripe space from which we can engage students with broader, more socially cognizant forms of literacy in the structured environment of the classroom. Put differently, rather than operating from an increasingly paralyzing state of panic over youth practices (e.g., U.S. News, 2011), reconsideration is needed regarding ways to academically engage the sensibilities that these practices appeal to.

Through this study, I've aimed to consider primarily the ways in which students' personal experiences and histories are involved in the task of perceiving and interacting with Hip Hop as a layered formation of culture and literacy. Within the realm of multicultural education, the findings raise the question of how students may view their own participation around Hip Hop as part of the curriculum in the current classroom moment. Can global Hip Hop be offered as a form of perspective-expanding multicultural education? In what ways might Hip Hop (dis)engage the cultural routines and understandings that students bring to class (c.f. Hill, 2009)?

Perhaps the most important question this study raises, however, is how to proceed when students' engagement with critical literacy reveals problematic social relations occurring locally within their own school. If critical pedagogy relies on a commitment to equality and social justice (Breuing, 2011; Lewison et al., 2003), findings such as the racial and ethnic-based discrimination students in this study were facing cannot simply be brushed aside or accepted as "normal". Indeed, these findings point to the iterative nature of critical literacy in its capacity to bring issues to our awareness and leave us at a point of pondering over which actions can activate the destinies we want to inhabit.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR PEDAGOGICAL ACTION**

Beyond its value as a source of authentic language material for ELLs, music is also a cultural gateway into the histories and contemporary realities of global societies. As noted earlier, music and media-based pedagogy such as CHHL have the capacity to cover all four skills of second language learning. Critical literacy does not need to compete with core language goals, but rather, can be incorporated through an iterative phased approach. This begins in lesson planning with a clear outline of the specific language goals alongside the critical thinking/literacy goals of the lesson. A first phase of engagement with the text could consist of cloze or text-ordering exercises to build listening, vocabulary and overall comprehension. Completion of this phase can then work as a springboard for moving into a critical analysis of the concepts uncovered in the first phase. In the CHHL lesson of this study for instance, students reviewed vocabulary and concepts related to social class, race and urban communities. After their understanding of this was

established, they were asked to do a speaking activity that required them to organize and synthesize these concepts with their own ideas.

As the results of this study show, students have various degrees of interest and familiarity with forms of popular culture such as Hip Hop. Activities should be structured in a way that seeks to balance participation and not simply create new hegemonies that privilege those familiar with the genre. One way to achieve this is to engage students with the larger social principles artists have sought to address. Students can then work in smaller groups through a variety of activities - informal paired speeches, surveys, debates, etc. - guided by prompts designed to layer their own voices with those of the text. As a final consideration, the selection of text/material should be viewed a negotiable process that gains even more variety and depth when ELLs are invited to make global popular culture resources of their own choosing the object of critical inquiry.

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## APPENDIX A

### Paired Persuasive Speaking Activity – I Can (by Nas)

**Persuasive** speaking is a form of communication in which the speaker tries to convince the audience to agree with his or her point of view or to do something specific. Pair up with a partner to make a short *persuasive* speech about this topic: **Think about the children Nas was talking to in his song. What do they need in order to have a better future?**

Be ready to share your ideas with other groups.

### Prepare your Speech

- ❖ **START** your speech with a position statement. Clearly state your opinion or what it is you are trying to persuade the audience to agree with or do.
- ❖ **NEXT**, write a few reasons that *support* your position statement. Be sure to explain each of your reasons.
- ❖ **END** your speech with a concluding statement. The conclusion should show the audience why they should agree with your position statement. Try to include something memorable. To do this, you might ask a question that will make the audience think about the issue after hearing your speech.

## APPENDIX B

[ ]	Marks the start and end of overlapping speech
<u>Underlining</u>	Indicates emphasis
(0.4)	Measures pauses in tenths of a second
(.)	A micropause, hearable but too short to measure
((turns head))	Additional comments from the transcriber, e.g. about features of context or delivery
she wa:nted	Shows elongation of the prior sound
solid= We had	Marks the immediate 'latching' of successive talk