

**Trap Civics: Amalgamating Critical Conscious Learning with Joy for Critical Civic  
Education and Beyond**

by

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my grandfather who worked as a school principal before the schools were integrated and was told whether he got a doctorate or not he would not be able to lead a school with white students. I dedicate this to my grandmother who spent summers cleaning up white people's homes so she could afford to be an elementary school teacher and still send my mom and uncle to college. I dedicate this to my family at Abundant Life Christian church who was my village. I dedicate this to my aunts uncles and cousins who taught me what Black excellence looks like. I dedicate this to my god sister Sai Sai the next doctor in the family. I dedicate this to JoAnn, Joi, and Uncle Buyny who helped raise me. I dedicate this to my sister Jonli who held be down to the fullest. I could not have dreamed this up without you. I could not have funded plane trips to job interviews without your help. Seeing you as a change maker in higher education fuels me to believe in the changes I can create. I dedicate this to my father who taught me to dedicate my life to the betterment of the world. To be a leader and a beacon of goodness. Who woke up at 3 in the morning because someone in his congregation was in the hospital or in jail. He taught me to be a servant leader. I dedicate this to my mother whose love and prayers got me through many struggles. Who took me to work with her at LA Unified public schools and helped spark my passion for education. Who poured all she could into me. Who taught me to step out on faith and that could I do whatever I put my mind to. I love you all and I would not be here without you.

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**Abstract:** This project investigates the relationship between joy, critical consciousness, and critical civic learning that exist in critical hip hop pedagogy. In order to discover what is revealed about young people's collective definitions of joy, critical consciousness, and civic identity/literacy, I designed a methodology called Blackout Rap Transcription that draws from multiple qualitative forms of inquiry. This study looks at how the critical hip hop curriculum I designed and taught facilitated joyful consciousness and what that teaches us about liberatory social studies education. Joyful consciousness is language I have given to a quality in Black music that alchemizes narratives of pain into joy like Billie Holiday does in the song, Strange Fruit. Joyful Consciousness can be a pedagogical tool within the larger project of Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy, that can aid teachers in developing critical civic reasoning capacities in their students while prioritizing both an honest understanding of history and the emotional wellbeing of students. The questions that guide this study are: 1)How are students developing critical consciousness through joy in the Trap Civics pedagogical model? 2)What implications does this have for social justice social studies learning models? Initial findings suggest that when students write their own rap songs as opposed to just analyzing existing ones, it demonstrates new forms of civic literacy that positions students and knowledge producers as opposed to knowledge consumers.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In my eight years teaching social studies my goal was to address parts of history that traditional curriculum leaves out in order to prepare my students for the complexities of participation in American government. I thought I was doing a great job until on a random Tuesday one of my students looking dejected asked me ‘man Mr. Tunstall did anything good ever happen in history.’ This short phrase had a major impact on my educational philosophy. I realized that in my zeal to teach essential topics most social studies teachers ignore, I was not providing space for students to process these topics in ways that can ensure their emotional well-being. While facing history is important, I forgot to be mindful of how potentially traumatic a truthful account of history is. Lynchings, Jim Crow, and other large-scale acts of violence towards African Americans are heavy topics for children to learn and digest. However, the answer is not lying to them with feel good stories about America’s slave owning freedom fighters. The answer is teaching in a way that allows students to process the various atrocities and hypocrisies present in American history in ways that are nourishing not damaging to the soul. The good news is a prototype already exists in Black musical traditions.

Black music throughout the generations provides models for the radical pursuit of joy in places where it should not exist. It’s why the caged bird was singing! Joy in the face of slavery and Jim Crow is an act of radical resistance. *Strange Fruit* (Meeropol, 1937) provides an example of Black music evoking imagery so powerful and emotionally laden that it allows the audience to process a mangled murdered Black body against the backdrop of a fruit producing tree; death where there should be life. When Billie Holiday sings ‘*Strange Fruit*’, people process the abject terror that is the government sanctioned murder and torture of Black bodies. Billie’s

rendition is the radical pursuit of joy through release. *Strange Fruit* hits a lot different when properly contextualized in history. So do rap songs that talk about the murder of Mike Brown and Eric Garner like 'Heaven Help Them' by Kendrick Lamar. Billie Holiday made musical a story about the abject terror Black people faced from lynch mobs and the sensations one feels when hearing *Strange Fruit* is rich with insight into how criticality and joy can work in tandem as vehicles for processing America's difficult histories. The production and consumption of critical histories using hip hop, birthed from Black musical traditions, holds potential for powerful learning experiences.

Twenty-first century social studies classes need to develop what I call critical civic reasoning capacities in their students. Meaning they should develop students who can think for themselves, understand the biases of media and politicians, and be active citizens who are empathetic to others (Lee, 2021). Lee refers to these set of competencies as *civic reasoning*. In order to facilitate civic reasoning, there are difficult topics social studies classes must address. However, difficult histories are being ignored because they are considered too political, potentially traumatic, and white parents fear it will make their children feel bad (Epstein & Peck, 2017; Schwartz, 2021; Zembylas, 2017). Difficult histories add criticality to civic reasoning. Difficult histories are those that depict violence against historically marginalized groups in service of a dominant group; a violence that leads to generational trauma which still exists today (Epstein & Peck, 2017). The oppression of African Americans at the hands of European Americans through slavery and Jim Crow are examples of difficult histories. Many parents are currently protesting for legislation that prohibit even mentioning these histories in classrooms (Schwartz, 2021). These parents and legislatures want laws passed that require a school curriculum that only shows American history in a positive light, while ignoring the struggle for

civil rights and human dignity which more accurately depicts the story of America (Baldwin, 1953; Schwartz, 2021). Schools are ignoring difficult histories in favor of a feel-good American myth (Baldwin, 1968). However, this myth is not adequate twenty first century social studies education (Lee, 2021). Instead of ignoring these histories, educators must teach in ways that allow students to process difficult topics (Mirra & Garcia, 2017; Epstein & Peck, 2017). Unfortunately, many teachers are not being provided with the support or education for this type of twenty first century social studies learning (Mirra & Garcia, 2017; Zembylas, 2017).

This project aims to tap into the power of Black musical traditions, to alchemize pain into pursuits of joy (Love, 2019). Specifically, this project aims to understand how rap creates a psychic space where young people can process police brutality, anti-black media, and the overall state of intersectional racism all while immersed in joy (Akom, 2009; Love, 2019). Hip Hop pedagogy allows for critical analysis of the socio-historical oppression acting on the lives of students (Kelly, 2003). When used in conjunction with critical social studies it has the potential to root these critical analyses in history providing historical context to legacies of injustice and how people fought against them (Kelly & Sawyer 2019; Akom, 2009). Interrogating the state of police brutality is good education, rooting modern police forces in slave catchers of the Antebellum South is great education. It is great education because it has the ability to embolden students with legacies of resistance and provides actionable models and strategies for how students can resist modern iterations of injustice. Rap is the newest iteration of Black musical/cultural traditions and holds potential to facilitate joy, healing, and critical consciousness for students the same way Black music and arts have throughout time, from slave songs to The Harlem Renaissance all the way down to hip-hop (Dando, 2017; Kuttner, 2016; Love, 2019; Stovall, 2006). Rap music can be operationalized to improve social studies education by

analyzing difficult topics in order to elevate the consciousness of students and do it in a way that is joyful (Akom 2019; Kelly, 2019). I draw on Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (Kelly, 2023), Ratchetdemic Pedagogy (2022), arts-based learning methods (Halverson, 2021), Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) (Paris & Alim, 2017), and Culturally Historical Responsive Education (CHRE) (Muhammed, 2023) to critically examine a hip hop curricular model I call Trap Civics. Trap Civics operationalizes the power of hip hop to facilitate critical consciousness through joy for civics education (Kelly, 2023; Tyson & Park, 2008).

Educators must teach in ways that allow students to process difficult histories and topics while centering joy and through the arts teachers can accomplish this. In order to accomplish this I developed a hip hop learning model I named, Trap Civics. Trap is a slang term from Atlanta that means a house where drugs are sold. Trap music is a sub-genre of rap that contain lyrics which are particularly violent and depict criminal enterprises like trap houses. Trap Civics is a critical hip hop curricular design that teaches students how to write rap songs in order to process difficult histories in ways that facilitate critical consciousness and center joy. I taught this curriculum in two different environments: 1) A summer bridge program on the campus of UCLA and, 2) a middle school in a midsized Midwestern school district.

This project was created as a design framework so that topics are interchangeable and can be personalized based on the needs of individual teachers. Instead of a static curriculum, “design invites educators and learners to develop the goals and learning processes to support their work (Halverson, 2021, p.86).” It is my hope that implementing Trap Civics will provide insight into addressing the aforementioned barriers related to social studies education and provide a model for antiracist learning. While there is research that uses hip hop as a tool for engagement and science and English content learning, there is a dearth of research on how the conscious elevating

and joyful elements of rap work in tandem and how this work can be operationalized in the classroom in ways that extend beyond rote memorization (Love, 2019). I designed this study in order to attend to ways students experience joy at particular moments when they are engaging with difficult histories. It is especially important we attend to critical consciousness in the current moment, as parents are protesting the teaching of these histories and law makers are drafting legislation prohibiting them (Schwartz, 2021). I hope that this information will be useful to social studies teachers and programs that work with children for liberatory learning (Duncan, 2020). Ultimately, I hope this research provides insight into ways to improve social studies and social justice education. The research questions that guide this study are:

1. How are students developing critical consciousness through joy in the Trap Civics pedagogical model?
2. What implications does this have for social justice social studies learning models?

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Roots**

### **Theoretical Argument**

Critical conscious learning is needed not only for twenty first century civics education but for a just society, where racism and sexism does not thrive. The critical consciousness of people should be nurtured as often as possible. In order for critical consciousness to occur one must be racially conscious as well. I use Black historical consciousness to explain the need for anti-racist learning as well as how it differs from non-racist learning which avoids taking honest looks at society. In order to develop racial consciousness one must engage with difficult history. There is no avoiding it. Joy is a powerful tool which prevents the damaging narratives present in difficult history from damaging ones psyche. Art making is a way to operationalize joy when studying difficult history in order to facilitate critical consciousness through nourishing means.

## **Critical Consciousness**

Critical consciousness is described by researchers as one gaining knowledge of intersectional social inequalities and how it relates to their lives (Ringsager, et. al. , 2022; Seider & Kelly, 2020). While critical consciousness is defined by some scholars as simply having knowledge of social inequities; other scholars suggest political action and agency are needed for critical consciousness to occur (Ringsager, et. al. , 2022; Seider et., al., 2017). Critical consciousness is often related to other terms and concepts underlying liberatory education (Seider et., al., 2017; Seider & Kelly, 2020; Watts, et. al., 1999). Researchers define critical consciousness as a process that works in cycles that move from knowledge acquisition to action as people analyze the larger structures of social inequity that impact their lives (Sachs and Schönfeldt-Aultman, 2018; Seider & Kelly, 2020; Villanueva, 2022). Understanding how to recognize and interrupt harm is a common quality amongst the various definitions of critical conscious learning. Some scholars prefer the phrase sociopolitical consciousness defined as the knowledge and capacity needed to understand the interlocking systems of oppression that govern society as well as the efficacy to take action (Karvelis, 2018; Seider & Graves, 2020; Watts, et. al., 1999). This includes developing racial consciousness as race has a big impact on America's social and political life (King, 2019).

### ***Black historical consciousness***

Black historical consciousness is defined as understanding diverse Black perspectives and its impact of Black existence in America (King, 2019). Black historical consciousness consists of historical consciousness, diaspora literacy, and Black critical theory. Historical consciousness refers to having a knowledge of history and an understanding of the ways history is taught is

influenced by power (Thorp, 2014). Historical consciousness considers what students think about history when entering the class as well as what an ideal understanding of history looks like in order to consider their trajectory of conscious development (Seixas, 2005). Included in black historical consciousness is the concept of , "diaspora literacy," a person's ability to understand, analyze, and speak about Black history and culture globally, understanding the multitude of global voices present (Clark, 2009). Also included is the concept of, "Black Crit," the endemic nature of racism and how Black suffering dictates American policy (Dumas, 2017). These frames work together to illustrate the global impact of Black existence on the world and the need for comprehensive teaching of Black history from multiple perspectives in order to counteract the ideas of racism inherited from the past (King, 2019). Critical consciousness in this sense refers to when you can offer counternarratives to traditional beliefs.

The tenets of Black historical consciousness are in line with emancipatory pedagogy, Black Crit, and CHHP (King, 2019, Duncan, 2020, Kelly, 2019). Emancipatory pedagogy is a theory for anti-racist learning that claims one can develop the critical consciousness of people by teaching them strategies to overcome oppression using change groups of the past as North stars (Duncan, 2020). The Freedom Schools and The Black Panther School are historical examples of emancipatory pedagogies, they directly taught critical conscious education by theorizing and teaching African Americans strategies on how they could work against oppressive structures (Duncan, 2020; Seider & Kelly, 2020; Seider et., al., 2017). All theories provide models for affirming the culture of Black students, while simultaneously providing critical conscious development for all students by teaching Black history. A history that includes both the struggles and successes of African Americans, in addition to their contributions to society both past and present (Duncan, 2020; Kelly, 2019). The above-mentioned studies and theories define critical

conscious learning as occurring when students are able to name social injustice while recognizing historical precedencies responsible for both concrete forms of oppression and psychological narratives of white supremacy (King, 2019; Seider & Graves, 2020; Seixas, 2005).

### **Defining Joy**

This study is concerned with critical conscious learning through joy. Watkins (2020) defines joy as a subjective emotion, they distinguish joy from happiness which they define as a response to a fleeting occurrence. While some studies on joy describe it as the culmination of all positive emotions others see joy as possessing specific qualities which differentiate it from other positive emotions (Watkins, 2020; Van Cappellen, 2020). Conflating joy with other positive emotions inhibits the study of joy. Watkins (2020) claims joy is a unique discrete emotion and confusing it with happiness or pleasure can undermine both the theorization and recognition of joy. He writes that “either joy is the fundamental positive affect from which all other positive emotions emerge, or joy is a discrete emotion with its own unique appraisal story (Watkins , 2020, p., 27).” Psychological researchers define joy as contextual and contingent upon individual appraisals, which means different individuals can have different interpretations of which experiences are joyful (Van Cappellen, 2020). These interpretations are based on a number of factors including identity and sociopolitical experiences. Joy is a subjective emotion, meaning it is connected to an individual’s core identity, unique values, and ability to connect with both self and others (Watkins, 2020; Valiant, 2008; Tomkins, 1962; Izard, 1992).

Emmons (2020) distinguishes between happiness as a passive emotion and joy as requiring agency and choice. While happiness is defined as a response to stimuli, studies show joy contains agentic elements leading to greater permanence including personality, identity, and culture (Watkins, 2020; Valiant, 2008). This is why different people have different thresholds for

joy, meaning the same experience that is interpreted as joyful for one person is not necessarily joyful for another.

Defining joy as connection to something bigger than oneself has overlap with theological definitions of joy (Emmons, 2020; Watkins, 2020). Emmons (2020) documents individuals' descriptions of spiritually transcendent experiences as being especially joyful as they felt connected to something greater than themselves. Unlike happiness, joy and pain can co-exist: "Without the pain of farewell, there can be no joy in reunion. Without the pain of disapproval, there can be no joy in forgiveness (Watkins, et. al. 2018. p. 131)."

Researchers have also connected joy to longing (Watkins, et. al., 2018). They claim joy can occur when deep longing is satiated. The strongest longings being the ones for connection. Connection to people, objects of significance, something larger than the self, and experiences. Joy is defined as building connections, since connection is the other side of longing (Watkins, 2020). Connections can take different forms. Connection to something or someone important, be it an accomplishment or a connection or reconnection with a dear friend (Watkins et. al. 2018). Additionally, connection with self, others, and experiences, especially those previously thought to be unattainable as this represent the satiation of a longing (Emmons, 2020; Watkins et. al., 2018).

### **Black Joy**

As previously mentioned joy is contextual and related to individuality and identity. Writers on Black joy have emphasized its existence alongside Black suffering (Adams, 2022; Cruz, 2017). They assert Black joy and pain occupy the same part of the body. When Black folks do not let grief and righteous anger hold their joy hostage, this joy becomes radical (Cruz, 2017). Centering Black joy allows all people to think differently about adversity (Adams, 2022;

Cruz, 2017). Joy when paired with an understanding of Black suffering is an act of resistance (Cruz, 2017). The nature of this resistance is revealed when one considers what Johnson (2015) writes, “Black pain is used in service of the nation-state because (they) have been historically constructed as threatening by virtue of being loud, excessive, unruly, illegible, pathological, and outside the comfortable confines of white neoliberal, liberal, and conservative structures alike (p. 179).” He theorizes that since there is an assumption in America that Blacks are dangerous and must be controlled, expressions of Black joy are revolutionary. Black cultural aesthetics that foster Black joy like backyard BBQ’s, cookouts, parties, and any place where Black people are celebrating and having a good time are radical acts that work against antiblack racism meant to cultivate Black pain. Other researchers on Black joy agree and claim that the anti-black world African Americans live in work against their survival and intentional expressions of Black joy are radical acts that challenge the white hegemony (Cruz, 2017). Every time Black joy is experienced Black people are existing in a world beyond white supremacy. Some scholars argue that causing Black people to experience fear or guilt for expressing joy is one of the most insidious form of white supremacy. In Kleaver Cruz’s (2017) Black Joy Project over one thousand Black people wrote definitions of Black joy, and the number one response was being unapologetically themselves (Cruz, 2017). Black joy is radical resistance in all its forms, as it is an act that angers the invisible specter of white supremacy.

Black art represents both joy and pursuits of joy (Dunn & Love, 2020). Black arts generate joy by allowing artists to imagine what is possible beyond the everyday experience of white supremacy. Love (2019) refers to this radical imagining as freedom dreaming. Studies show that historically Black spirituality have been means for resilience and a method where Black people have transformed pain into joy (Lu & Steele, 2019). Gospel music in particular

utilizes the themes and motifs of Christianity to resist deep seated pain. It is no coincidence it arose during the time of chattel slavery when enslaved Africans needed radical resilience.

Enslaved Africans reappropriated gospel music and Christian spirituality (a religion shared by their oppressors) into messages of hope and hidden stories of freedom and resistance (Dunn & Love, 2020; Lu & Steele, 2019).

### **Black joy in the classroom**

Scholars agree that intentional acts of Black joy are manifestations of resistance in a society formed by anti-Black racism (Johnson, 2015; Lu and Steele, 2019). This is also true in the classroom which are sites that are historically known to cause harm to Black bodies (Dumas, 2017). Adams (2022) heeded the call to study environments that cultivate Black joy and found that one way teachers have fostered Black joy is by making Black students feel comfortable with being their authentic selves. One strategy teachers in Adams' study used was encouraging students to respond to questions using whatever language they felt most comfortable speaking in (Adams, 2022). Another example from Adams' study was using formal titles for students in order to position them as intellectuals with valuable contributions to make to the class. Teachers in this study additionally cultivated joy by developing lesson plans around fun activities related to student interest like fidget spinners and subway dancers.

Racially liberatory pedagogy is a curricular design that provides a framework for generating joy by affirming the culture of black students and elevating their critical consciousness (Castillo-Montoya et. al. , 2019). A racially liberatory pedagogy provides BIPOC students with culturally relevant learning experiences and situates Black culture in the constant fight for liberation. emphasizes how instructors can provide Black, and other racially minoritized students, with educational learning experiences where they can thrive personally and

academically by affirming their culture; raising their critical consciousness. This framework fosters intersectional critical consciousness by teaching students about Black struggles both historically and presently while centering positive emotions and relationships amongst students. This framework leans into the ideas that Black joy and Black pain exist in the same space and that centering Black joy in teaching takes anti racist pedagogy beyond struggle and provides the conditions for liberatory pedagogy (Adams, 2017; Castillo- Montoya et. al. , 2019; Cruz, 2017). Black students can experience joy though cultural affirmation and other students can break free from racist ideas

### **Goals of Social Studies and Civics Education**

While rooting the interrogation of history in joy is the aim of culturally relevant researchers and pedagogues they are not the goals of the national social studies agenda (Alim & Wong, 2020; Tuck, 2009). The National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) is the country's largest association dedicated exclusively to social studies education. NCSS states the goals of social studies and civics education is teaching students the necessary competencies to be active and engaged participants in public life. Social studies and civics education are the umbrella under which most civic competency related specializations fall (Barton & Ho, 2021). In this dissertation, like many researchers and teachers in civics education, I will use the terms "social studies" and "civics" education both together and interchangeably. Social studies researchers recognize the confusion caused by this constant shift in terminology: "The phrase social and civics education may sound cumbersome, but we use it to mean all the content and learning experiences aimed at preparing young people for a life of public participation (Barton & Ho , 2021 p.1)." The terms serve as useful language for pulling together various strands of civic competencies.

Gutmann (2014) claims that teaching students how to tap into the resources and benefits of citizenship while being critical of society is the new civic learning. Other civic educators claim the focus needs to be centering student perspectives on what it means to participate in democratic life as well as understanding how bias impacts our ability to share values (Mirra & Garcia, 2020; Lee, 2021). One point of agreement for many social studies and civics educators is that curriculum should be based on developing students for public participation in society, described as, “acting to improve the world by addressing poverty, violence, discrimination, and other societal issues, or working to preserve important elements of the world we already have (Barton & Ho 2021, p.3).” In order to accomplish this, students must learn to critically analyze societal problems and examine differing perspectives in order to create change (Barton & Ho, 2021; Frerie, 1970; Lee, 2020). These aptitudes are what Carol Lee refers to as civic reasoning skills (Lee, 2021).

### **Civic reasoning**

Civic reasoning speaks to not only naming the world as Baldwin suggests, but to students developing ideas about what type of world they want to see and how they can work together with others to achieve that world (Baldwin, 1968; Barton & Ho, 2021; Lee, 2021). Researchers claim that questions leading to the development of these civic reasoning competencies should revolve around human rights, conflict, resource distribution, and pedagogies around achieving harmony (Barton & Ho, 2021). They posit that in order to achieve harmony students must research societal problems from all sides and work together to create change; and that new research in civics education should focus on the *kinds of knowledge* students should wrestle with (Barton & Ho, 2021). These *kinds of knowledge* include understanding the racism, sexism, classism, and heteronormativity that guide American politics as well as ways to work together across

differences in order to have a healthy democratic society (Barton & Ho, 2021; Gutmann, 2014; Lee, 2021). Many of these *kinds of knowledge* are in line with tenets of social justice civics education (Barton & Ho, 2021; Tyson & Park 2008).

### **Social justice civics**

Social justice civics education is defined as teaching students to understand that systems of oppression are linked and enable each other (Tyson & Park, 2008). This lens presents civics education as (re) imagining ways to make the world a better place by educating students to directly confront injustice through understanding how different forms of injustice are linked (Tyson & Park, 2008; Love, 2019). In order to show the impact of interrogating issues of social justice to democracy many scholars have developed curricular designs around analyzing difficult histories and controversial issues (Epstein, et, al., 2011; Hess, 2002). One study revolved around a social justice civics curriculum that used the experience of literate slaves to show the disconnect between America's ideals of freedom and its reality as well as an example of ways individuals resisted oppression (Pang & Gibson 2001). New visions of social studies learning work towards addressing social inequities to make America worthy of its reputation of freedom (Barton & Ho, 2021; Mirra & Garcia, 2020). In order to do this curriculum must unflinchingly teach BIPOC history and Americans history of racism, sexism, and heteronormativity.

### **Difficult History**

Difficult history is a term for historical events and social topics around intergenerational trauma and racism (Epstein, et, al., 2011). It refers to stories that can be seen as controversial for some and as a result of this perception there are teachers who have avoided teaching them for fear of angering parent and facing consequences from principals and school boards (Epstein, et, al., 2011; Hess, 2002). Difficult histories include the role anti-Black racism has played in the

development of America. Avoiding these histories negatively impact the civics education of students, by giving them a false whitewashed history (Banks, 2006 ; Branch, 2003; Howard, 2004). Ignoring the impact racism had on history has been largely motivated by textbooks and state standards in addition to nationally held ideas on whose story is essential to the American narrative (Epstein, et, al., 2011; Branch, 2003; Loewen, 2007; Levstik, 2000). Studies have shown that difficult history is essential to understanding students lived realities and providing culturally sustaining pedagogy (Epstein, et, al., 2011; Paris & Alim, 2017; Howard, 2004). Ignoring the impact of racism throughout the history of America obfuscates present systems of injustice and allow their continued existence (Epstein, et, al., 2011; Howard, 2004; Mirra & Garcia, 2020). If social studies education is to provide students with the civic competencies to participate in a multicultural democratic society, they must teach students the legacy and impact of racism found within difficult histories (Epstein, et, al., 2011; Lee, 2021; Howard, 2004). Studies have found that the inclusion of difficult history is essential to any study of American government and society (Banks, 2007; Epstein, 2009; Hess, 2009). These studies also show the importance of including stories of success for developing the civic agency of students (Hess, 2004). They reveal that curricula that teaches ways people throughout history have successfully confronted racism, can inspire agency and critical conscious learning (Banks, 2007; Epstein, et, al., 2011; Howard, 2004; Hess, 2004; Mohammed, 2019).

### **Black history**

King and Chandler (2016) assert the connection between racism and social studies learning is under theorized in academic research. Teaching people to understand Black history affects their feelings about Black people today and can help foster anti-racism (King, 2019). Comprehensive Black history education provides a humanizing picture of Black existence and

helps foster anti racism in both students and teachers, who by virtue of living in America are exposed to anti-black propaganda. Studies caution teaching Black history through white structures as it limits a proper understanding of Black history (Chandler & Branscombe, 2015; King, 2019). These studies have found that traditional social studies curriculum provide discourses of invisibility where students are taught that white people provided the greatest contribution to society and other groups are less important (Ladson-Billings, 2003). This is the hidden curriculum in traditional social studies courses.

Race Pedagogical Content Knowledge (RPCK) provides strategies for how to teachers can move from non-racist pedagogy to anti racist pedagogy (Chandler & Branscombe, 2015; King & Chandler, 2016). Nonracist approaches to history are described as passively teaching ideologies that ignore the racism that exist in the current society (King & Chandler, 2016). In contrast, anti-racist approaches work against present structures of racism and seek to discover ways to uncover, and interrupt ways racism shows up in the current society. Nonracist approaches to classroom teaching dissociate from obvious overt racist ideas while ignoring the structures that allow their continued existence. Researchers found that traditional social studies classes employ a non-racist philosophy while ignoring topics like police brutality, voter suppression, and redlining which impact the current state of the Black community (King & Chandler, 2016). Nonracist approaches use rhetorical phrases to render racism invisible. Talks around topics like genocide, slavery, or police brutality are described as a few bad actions by a few bad people as opposed to designed structural forms of replicating cycles oppression (King et. al., 2010). Nonracist pedagogy is invested in a fictional image of America based on myths that uncritically celebrate slave owners as heroes of liberty and justice (Baldwin 1963; King & Chandler, 2016). Antiracists approaches confront racism in direct ways and are uncover ‘the

specter of racism' that still exist in society today (King & Chandler, 2016). In order for critical conscious learning to occur classrooms must employ anti-racist pedagogy which requires studying difficult history.

### **Social Justice Art**

Researchers on arts-based learning find that when students are creating art around social justice topics it facilitates critical consciousness (Dewhurst 2014; Freire, 1970; Hanley, et. al., 2013). Arts-based curricular designs are models of social justice learning using culturally sustaining vehicles (diSessa, 2004; Paris & Alim, 2017; Halverson, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Artistic representations of social justice issues have been found to highlight particular features of social problems while adding contextualized student perspectives (Halverson, 2021; Dewhurst, 2014). The creation of art can allow for insight into patterns of injustice not easily seen in reality (diSessa, 2004, Halverson, 2021). Graffiti, murals, theatre, and spoken word performances are examples of social justice art which illuminate present social problems. Teaching artists and researchers found that while creating social justice art students were also deconstructing socio-political problems and that students were externally representing the internal work they were engaged in (Dewhurst, 2014; Halverson, 2021; Hanley, et. al., 2013). Dewhurst's (2014) study in a juvenile detention center is an example of this internal and external work. In this study young men wrote and performed a play highlighting the social conditions which led to their incarceration. The play was representative of the rigorous, in depth reflection the young men engaged in, and reflected a critical understanding of their sociopolitical reality. Creating social justice art allowed students the creativity to imagine reality in whatever ways they could conceive of and then translate those imaginings to an arts-based medium. These mediums inspire action both in the artist and in others, allowing art to convert thought into

possibilities of change. The artists' visions of socially just worlds can transform both the artist and society (Love, 2019). Closely attending to critical moments in students' art making, when they are translating their insights and visions into artistic representations can provide insight into methods for social justice learning (Dewhurst 2014; Dewhurst 2014; Hanley, et. al., 2013; Halverson, 2021; Halverson & Magnifico, 2013). This makes many art-based pedagogical models, particularly ones with hip-hop, forms of organic culturally sustaining education (Ladson-Billings, 2014). These models create moments where students can experience joy and critical conscious learning (Halverson, 2021; Hanley, et. al., 2013; Dewhurst 2014).

### **Hip Hop Pedagogical Models**

While Hip Hop Pedagogy can be a form social justice art, not all hip hop pedagogical models are (Love, 2019). Hip hop pedagogy is often used in education as pedagogical lures and bridges to learning content (Hill 2009; Duncan-Andrade et al., 2008; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Hip Hop Pedagogy has been used in English classes as vehicles for teaching students literacy skills (Hill, 2009; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). In social studies classes, hip hop has been used for student engagement and for students to learn historical narratives (Love, 2016). Students listen to and memorize rap songs about historical events like 'The American Revolution' or 'The Thirteen Colonies' (Stovall, 2006; Love, 2016). These songs are used to learn vocabulary terms and historical events used on tests later (Love, 2016). In hip hop science classes, students make rap songs about scientific concepts like the rain cycle as a way for teachers to offer alternative representational formats of student learning (Adjapong & Emdin, 2015). Some science hip hop educators also use hip hop for engagement, they host regular science rap battles where students publicly perform science themed raps (Adjapong & Emdin,

2015; Emdin, 2016). These hip-hop pedagogical models made students excited about learning science by harnessing their love of hip hop (Adjapong & Emdin, 2015).

Hip hop pedagogy has been used to teach students content, to inform teachers' pedagogical practices, and to celebrate students hip hop culture (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Emdin, 2016). Reality Pedagogy is a hip hop pedagogical model that uses rap elements to inform pedagogy (Emdin, 2016). This model suggest one ways teachers can center student perspective is having them take turns being a co-teacher, acting like a rap hype man emphasizing the points of the lesson and helping to ensure the rest of the class is engaged (Emdin, 2016; Adjapong & Emdin, 2015 ). In addition to informing pedagogical methods, reality pedagogy urges teachers to host co-generative dialogues where students give feedback on lessons. Teachers are to alter future units based on the students feedback (Emdin, 2016). Emdin found that Reality Pedagogy encouraged students to embrace the intellectualism and genius found in their hip hop culture, a celebration currently not found in traditional schools. While studies have found that sacrificing one's cultures is viewed as the price of success in schools, Reality Pedagogy challenges this idea and encourages educators to use hip hop learning models to directly oppose it (Dumas 2018; Emdin, 2016; Ladson Billings, 2009; Paris & Alim 2017).

### **Hip hop as social studies/civics classroom**

Hip hop as social studies and civics education has been used in different often contradictory ways (Love, 2016). Hip hop for social studies has been operationalized both to uphold the axiology of the current Eurocentric system of education, uncritically celebrating slave owners with Black music; as well as a means to directly challenge it (Love, 2016; Stovall, 2006) Flocabulary is an example of the former (Love, 2016). Flocabulary is an educational corporation, which provides common core aligned rap songs with accompanying lesson plans

that teach social studies content through rap music (<https://www.flocabulary.com>). While it can aid in memorization. Love (2019) describes this use as not being in line with the tenets of hip hop and went as far as calling it a hustle. Love claims that Flocabulary uses rap music to uncritically extol the heroics of slave owners and settler colonists. Flocabulary has uses in English, social studies, and math classrooms and functions to generate student interest and aid in memory of relevant content. However, it uses a Black created artform to uncritically praise slave owners for their role in fighting for freedom (Love, 2016). For example, Flocabulary has a lesson plan about the events leading to The American Revolution. The song routinely repeats the phrase ‘we want freedom’ and does not even mention the fact that the men rapping about freedom are currently enslaving other human beings (Love, 2019).

Love (2014) suggest an alternative more critical form of hip hop social studies/civics pedagogy where social studies should draw upon the counter narrative aspect of hip hop and challenge stereotypes about Black youth. The goal for this pedagogy should be for students to be able to develop a critical lens while honing various different forms of literacy and self-expression. Love’s hip hop civics website includes a collection of resources for hip hop educators to use that include songs about being queer, free, and civically minded.

Other studies have shown examples of hip-hop pedagogy for social justice learning (Dando, 2017; Kuttner, 2016; Stovall, 2006; Akom, 2009). Dando (2017) created programs for students to make hip hop artifacts that are connected to social issues they care about. He found that allowing students to bring in a rap song about class topics made them more engaged in the class and rooted learning in their generation of hip hop. Kuttner (2016) employed a comparable method in his program Project Hip Hop, an organization that teaches civic learning that is connected to the lived realities of the students in the program. Project Hip Hop adopts the music,

ritual, performance, and storytelling features of hip hop as a function of sociopolitical conscious development; having students write and perform rap songs about local issues in their community. Stovall (2006) utilized another method of hip-hop civics by pairing rap songs like Talib Kweli's 'Reflection Eternal' with Howard Zinn's 'A People's History' in order to provide a more authentic account of traditional United States history.

### **The 5<sup>th</sup> element of Hip Hop: Knowledge of Self and Community**

Hip hop models for social justice and critical consciousness speak to the fifth element of hip hop, which Afrika Bambaataa, a rapper, and founder of the Zulu Nation, calls knowledge of self and community (Kutner, 2016; Dando, 2017; Stovall, 2006; Love, 2016; Alim, 2006). Hip hop consists of break dancing, graffiti, dj'ing, and rapping. The legendary rapper KRS One, affectionately known as 'Tha Teacha,' describes the fifth element of hip hop as knowledge of self and community (Love, 2018). "Schooling deprives African American children of knowledge of their history, examples of self-determination, and a cultural knowledge base that illuminates and reawakens their African mindedness. Those key experiences are known in hip-hop culture as Knowledge of Self, the fifth element of hip-hop" (Hilliard, 1997, p. 39 as quoted in Love, 2018)." This knowledge refers to not only individual identities but knowledge of the intellectualism and nation building of Black people for the purpose of critical conscious development (Asante, 2017; Alim, 2006; Muhammed, 2019). Many hip hop educators have taken up this call to foster consciousness through hip hop pedagogical models (Emdin, 2016; Love, 2018; Kutner, 2016; Dando, 2017). Knowledge of self is in line with tenets of Afrocentricity and Genius Cultivation (Asante, 2017; Muhammad, 2019). Both point to consuming Black history as counter narratives to the psychic attacks of white supremacist education and understanding that Black students need historical confirmation of their intelligence

in order to counter the racism present in media and traditional schooling (Akom, 2009; Asante, 2017; Muhammad, 2019; Baldwin, 1953). Knowledge of self agrees with Afrocentricity that the lived experiences of Black men and women throughout time contain insight into how to interrupt present societal problems (Dixson, 2003; Collins, 1986; Akom, 2009). KRS One says that Black history should be constantly “pumped in” public schools (Love, 2018). Many educators agree with this idea and develop specific curricular aims around Black Kings like Imhotep, philosophers like Fanon, and the activist educators like The Black Literary Societies of 1828<sup>1</sup> (Asante, 2017; Dixson, 2003; Muhammed, 2019).

### **Theoretical Roots**

In this chapter, I outline the specific theories that guided this study’s design and implementation including CHHP. The terms critical civic learning, critical consciousness, and joy will be used throughout this study as I connect these theoretical concepts to my work. Critical civic learning I define as the necessary competencies to be an active engaged citizen, an aptitude that requires the ability critically analyze societal problems, understand their historical legacies, and examine them from multiple perspectives in order to create change (Hall, 2023; King, 2009). I defined critical consciousness as one gaining insight into intersectional social inequalities and how it relates to their lives (Ringsager, et. al. , 2022; Seider & Kelly, 2022). I rely on published research in the field of psychology, theology, and critical theories of learning for definitions of joy including naming ones reality, being unapologetically themselves, and feeling pride in ones’ cultural identities (Adams, 2017; Castillo- Montoya et. al., 2019; Cruz, 2017; Dunn & Love, 2020).

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<sup>1</sup> A society of fugitive literate slaves who educated other fugitive slaves.

## **Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy celebrates the culture of students in the classroom and encourages educators to teach in ways that allow students to develop critical lens' while centering joy (Aim & Wong, 2020). This study builds on that idea and endeavors to discover the possibilities that emerge when students are immersed in joy while engaged in critical conscious learning (Aim & Wong, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2014). This endeavor is guided by the following theories in my research design, interpretive techniques and data analysis: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Aim & Wong, 2020; Ratchedemic Pedagogy (Emdin, 2021), Arts Pedagogy (Halverson, 2021), Critical Civics (Hall, 2023; Lee, 2021), Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (Kelly, 2023), and Culturally Historical Responsive Education (CHRE) (Muhammed, 2023). These theories are the philosophical assumptions that guide this study and serve as interpretation techniques for the analysis of my data. My original goal was to look at hip hop's power to develop the critical consciousness of students, however taking up Alim & Wong's (2020) charge, I shifted my focus to look for the moments where critical consciousness is developed both with and through joy. Joy is essential to designing new visions of culturally sustaining learning environments (Aim & Wong, 2020; Love, 2019; Tuck, 2009). It is not enough to situate societal injustice to the lives of students, educators must create moments where students are experiencing joy while engaging with these issues (Aim & Wong, 2020; Tuck, 2009; Love, 2019). Applying a CSP lens to this study shifted the focus of the research questions in response to the charge for educators to develop learning projects that allow students to experience joy in places that usually make them feel pain. I use the aforementioned theories to think through the data and review ways joy and critical consciousness show up in the rap songs students create.

Theoretically, CSP points to ways students are developing critical consciousness both with and through joy using language and forms of expression they hold dear (Alim & Wong, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2017). The specific pillars of CSP that guide the intentionality of my research include taking up joy alongside pain, decentering the white gaze, (re)imagining spaces of learning, and (re)defining joy in ways that speak to students individually (Alim & Wong, 2020). As a theoretical frame, CSP provides the foundational understanding of liberatory joy and critical conscious learning and the need to create conditions for students to experience joy along with understandings of oppression. As an analytical technique, CSP helps me recognize data moments where the students are naming the world and taking up ‘joy alongside pain (Alim & Wong 2020; Tuck, 2009).’

As mentioned earlier, an example of this is the song Strange Fruit. Here anti-black violence and terror are named not just to teach a part of history rendered invisible, but to embolden and heal. Strange Fruit uses Black music to name tools of oppression and rob white supremacy of the power of invisibility. I use CSP in my analysis to track explicit and implicit moments where students' lyrics embody joy and critical consciousness (Alim & Wong, 2020). I use this frame to investigate how joy and critical consciousness are symbiotic and flow into one another. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, by addressing both criticality and joyfulness, reveal how a student’s developing critical consciousness and joy undergird each other. I used CSP to discover ways students are immersed in spaces of joy and critical consciousness.

While CSP urges educators not to focus on “damaged centered narratives,” twenty first century social studies educators cannot help but teach about difficult them in order to properly conducts historical education (Lee, 2021; Tuck, 2009). Instead of avoiding damaging and difficult history this study aims to discover ways students are engaging with joy while processing

difficult aspects of history using hip hop (Alim & Wong, 2020; Morgan, 1999; Tuck, 2009). This study seeks to discover where, when, and how students are taking up joy with pain and to attend to moments where students are engaged in this learning experience through the crafting of their rap songs which will serve as artistic representations of their learning (Alim & Wong 2020; Morgan, 1999; Tuck, 2009). This study reveals how students are both engaging with and conceiving of joy while they are studying difficult histories through hip hop literacy, a vehicle which sparks joy does, and not cater to the white gaze. I use CSP as a lens to see to what extent this hip hop curriculum revitalizes and reimagines learning for the purpose of liberatory joy and critical conscious learning. Hip Hop is a multi-generational art form that invites students to consider their ideas in historical contexts, allows space for expressing their multiple intersecting identities, and reclaims dignity by alchemizing pain and joy that students experience and witness. In this project, I consider the extent to which Trap Civics uses hip hop to center students' identities and experiences for joy and critical conscious learning. Trap is a subgenre of hip hop music that originated in the Southern United States in the 1990s. The genre gets its name from the Atlanta slang term 'trap house', a house used exclusively to sell drugs. While originating in the South, trap is a colloquial term that refers to rap lyrics which contain salacious topics while glorifying violence and hyper consumerism.

### **Culturally Historical Responsive Education**

Culturally Historical Responsive Education (CHRE) defines ideal learning as containing five pursuits: Intellectualism, Criticality, Identity, Skills, and Joy (Muhammed, 2023). I used CHRE both in the design of the project as well as in the analysis process. Joy is a complex emotion to both define and recognize in children. Joy can be culturally specific. I used CHRE to identify joy in students work and to notice when students are identifying joy in their raps. CHRE

shaped the focus and method of this study, as well as the curriculum design itself which aims to develop critical consciousness in students. Culturally Historical Responsive Education charges educators to redefine genius and joy and the ways schools and educators recognize it in children (Muhammed, 2022; 2023). It speaks to honoring cultural ways of knowing and being.

In CHRE joy is both the product and the process. Joy is one of the pursuits, the result of the other pursuits, as well as the catalyst for other pursuits. Joy occurs when students define and revise their own ideas of freedom while disconnecting their worldview from the imposed, Eurocentric education system. CHRE aims to unearth the brilliance and genius that students possess. In her earlier work, Muhammed uses the phrase “genius cultivation” to signal how exposing students to Black intellectuals of the past inspires Black students today and removes the faulty lens created by anti-Black racism (Muhammed, 2022). Examples are The Black Literary Society of 1828, Freedom Schools, and the work of scholars and activists like Septima Clark who fought hard to work towards liberation through literacy and education. Learning about the Black Literary Society of 1828 gives students evidence of Black communities legacy of commitment to education, literacy, and storytelling. When students learn about Freedom Schools, they are invited to critique the inadequacy of state-sponsored education and view themselves as capable of learning. They also deepen their understanding of knowledge as political. Septima Clark’s example of fighting hard to work towards liberation inspires students to fuse thought and action, and it connects modern day examples like Stacy Abrams and her Fair Fight to a long legacy of voter education and registration.

Criticality and joy are the components of CHRE that are most pertinent to this study (Muhammed, 2023). Criticality is defined as uncovering hidden truths. CHRE explains how uncovering hidden truths about one’s history is a pathway to joy. In the context of civics

education, criticality can take the form of normalizing conversations about racism and ending settler colonist valorization (Ladson-Billings, 2003; Hall, 2023; Muhammed, 2023). When Muhammed uses the word historical within CHRE, she underscores the importance of placing legacies of injustice properly in history to understand the various political and economic motivations behind them (Muhammed, 2023). This is an important component for developing a critical lens because the mechanisms that promoted racism in the past are still used today. Muhammed elaborates on the term criticality by saying it helps “students to name, understand, question, and disrupt oppression (hurt, pain, and harm) in the world and within the self, and to work to make the world a better place (p. 17).” Criticality requires uncovering truth. Hesitation to talk about race means normalizing and accepting settler colonist valorization and the racism that is built into narratives of the past (King, 2019). Criticality rejects whitewashed versions of history as they dehumanize communities of color. For example, Thomas Jefferson can only be a hero who said believed all men were created equal if enslaved Africans are dehumanized and not counted as people (Muhammed, 2023).

CHRE defines joy not just as sustained celebration but as calm and ease, which is an important distinction. Muhammed (2023) provides many definitions of joy. Joy is depicted as love of self, love of humanity, love of ones’ own culture, as wholeness, and as embracing ones’ many gifts and identities. Joy is defined as liberation and freedom, as disconnecting from the Eurocentric education that is mentally imprisoning. This study explores what centering joy looks like in a Critical Hip Hop Pedagogical model for critical civics education. In the public school classroom, which has historically been a site of white supremacy, can hip hop as a culturally relevant form of arts pedagogy still foster liberatory joy and critical consciousness? CHRE asserts that the arts have the ability to communicate emotions and ideas in ways other vehicles

cannot. Viewing the writing of rap lyrics as pursuits of joy and criticality, is a guiding principle that undergirds the development of my curricular design as well as the analysis of the data it produced.

### **Arts Pedagogy**

Muhammed (2023) discusses in her work the power of the arts in the development of joy and criticality. CHRE provides guiding principles for amalgamating joy and critical conscious learning. This is in agreement with researchers on Arts Pedagogy. Halverson (2022) writes “The arts offer possibilities for joy while also making space for the kinds of culturally sustaining experiences young folks crave (p. 42).” Researchers in arts based education ascribe to the notion that when students represent their learning using an arts based medium, it allows them to include their various identities into the learning process. Halverson developed a teaching model for this kind of learning she calls ‘Conceive-Represent-Share.’ This model is based on the idea that “the best way to learn something new is to take an idea or concept represent it through art and share it with an audience who has a reason to care about what you’re saying (Halverson, p.88, 2021).”

### **Ratchedemics**

This study was also guided by Ratchedemic Pedagogy (Emdin, 2022). The term ratchet refers to “the embodying of all negative characteristics associated with low brow culture. Identified by ways of talk, dress, and overall disposition outside of socially established norms (Emdin, 2022, p. 14).” It is most commonly used to refer to Black members of hip hop culture who do not code switch to white norms. Ratchedemic is a learning theory that encourages teachers and young people to not mask their most authentic natural selves. It is about creating spaces in schools where students can show up authentically as themselves. Emdin explains that in schools young people memorize scripts and do their best impression of a “bettered” other.

Ratchedemic Pedagogy critiques educational environments and methodologies that encourage this in students, as it is an attack on the very soul of a student and creates lasting soul wounds. Ratchedemic Pedagogy instead lauds teachers immersed in the hip hop community who allow their authentic identity to be on full display because it offers students an example of the marriage of intellectual and hip hop identities. Emdin (2022) writes that “walking into a classroom with ones’ hip hop identity on full display is a political act that tells the world that the teacher refuses to be defined by conventions that define intelligence and/or appropriateness narrowly (p. 81).” Hip Hop Pedagogues are not only self-healing by expressing their core self, they are modeling for students that it is okay for them to express their core selves. These ideas are in response to the way in which schools assimilate students of color to white culture through mannerisms and patterns of speech.

Ratchedemic Pedagogy responds to the assimilationist goals of schooling and ask the question what students lose by chasing concepts of appropriateness. Ratchedemic Pedagogy brings up the concept of ‘Educational Stockholm Syndrome,’ which is how people who have been assimilated by their schooling become someone who does the same to the students they teach. Replicating the script of appropriateness is likened to the colonization of the mind. Living in most educators imagination is a prototype for a perfect student and the ways teachers manage their classrooms and interact with their students encourage conformity to this ideal. This strips students of their individual essence and their unique *je ne sais quoi*. Ratchedemic pedagogy resists common classroom practices like the embrace of socioemotional learning and practices of mindfulness which focus on individual change and conformity on the part of the student, instead prioritizing social justice in how learning is facilitated by teachers.

The ideas of Ratchetdemic Pedagogy were present in my curriculum design, pedagogy, as well as analysis. I was guided by the principles of making space in classrooms for students to be themselves and engage in behavior and language other classes forbade. I let students use language that contained profanity and referred to sensational topics like sex, criminality and the dozens. The dozens are a part of Black history and culture, and refer to the insult of ones ancestors most commonly through the form of ‘yo mamma’ jokes (Smitherman, 2001). Students were also allowed to use their rap lyrics for signifying. Signifying refers to insults aimed at a particular individual, not their ancestry. Since rap traces its roots to African American Language practices; signifying, the dozens, and the use of vivid imagery are a part of it. This clashes with classroom norms, which enforce a code of linguistic conduct that forbade profanity and use of vulgar language.

In order to maintain the integrity and ratchetness of the hip hop space, I developed a general ‘Break Rules’ design principle for my curricula. This guiding principle speaks to James Baldwin’s educational paradox and his prediction that in order to fight against years of Eurocentric education one must ‘go for broke’ (Baldwin, 1968). The ideas of Ratchetdemic Pedagogy also were present in the analytical process as it allowed me to see the value of the ratchet lyrics students wrote. It helped me to make connections with the lyrics students wrote about anti racist themes with lyrics students wrote about attaining wealth and acting violent. Ratchedemic Pedagogy, CSP, and CHRE pointed me to strategies for recognizing joy and critical concious learning (Alim & Wong, 2021; Emdin 2022; Muhammed, 2023). I connect this design to the field of social studies using conceptualization of critical civics and critical consciousness.

### **Conceptualizations of Critical Concious and Critical Civic Learning**

Many theories of curriculum and instruction, education and schooling, and civil society address critical civic learning and the development of critical consciousness. Critical civic learning requires students to analyze societal problems and examine differing perspectives in order to be prepared for participation in society as active American citizens (Lee, 2021). Critical civic learning speaks to not only students naming the world, but also to students developing ideas about what type of world they want to see and how they can work together with others to achieve that world (Baldwin, 1968; Barton & Ho, 2021; Lee, 2021). Barton and Ho (2021) describe how civic learning should lead to the development of these competencies as they relate to issues of human rights, conflict, resource distribution, and achieving harmony. They posit that, in order to achieve harmony, students must research societal problems from all sides and work together to create change. They also assert that new research on civics education should focus on the *kinds of knowledge* students should wrestle with. These *kinds of knowledge* include understanding the racism, sexism, classism, and heteronormativity that guide American politics, as well as ways to work together across differences in order to have a healthy democratic society (Barton & Ho, 2021; Gutmann, 2014; Lee, 2021). Hall (2023) asserts that “critical civicness is a combination of civic identity, agency, and membership working together to disrupt the social studies curriculum (p.20).” One way this disruption occurs is by meaningfully adding Black history into a curriculum that otherwise renders the Black community invisible (Hall, 2023; King, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2003).

In her writing on using a Critical Race Theory lens for social studies education, Ladson-Billings (2003) discusses how the official social studies curriculum renders the history of African Americans and other marginalized groups invisible. The damage from this discourse of invisibility is compounded by what Ladson-Billings terms as the societal curriculum. Students

learn the societal curriculum when they see white people in all the positions of power in schools, like teachers, principals, and vice principals while other positions seen as less prestigious like janitors and teachers aids are held by Black people. The combination of these two curricula, the one that is explicitly taught and the one that is shown, causes students to believe that, “ people of color are relatively insignificant to the growth and development of our democracy and our nations and represent a drain on our resources” (Ladson-Billings, 2003, p. 4). Just as Ladson-Billings understands the classroom through critical race theory, tenets of CRT align with the critical pedagogies I use in the curriculum I designed and implemented for this study.

### **Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy for Critical Civic Learning**

Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (CHHP) is a curriculum meant to foster critical conscious learning (Akom, 2009; Kelly & Sawyer, 2019). Kelly defines the importance of CHHP:

*Engaging with critical Hip Hop literacies in school also supports students’ development of critical consciousness, or their ability to analyze, navigate, challenge, and transform structures of oppression and inequality in society. To this end, this book is designed to support secondary-level humanities teachers in utilizing popular texts in the classroom for discussion and reflection that can foster students’ critical, literacy, sociopolitical, and identity development (Kelly, 2023, p. 7).*

CHHP is an extension of Critical Pedagogy, which challenges teachers to root education in interrogating social problems (Karvelis, 2018; Giroux, 2020). Critical pedagogy works towards the development of critical consciousness in students and hip-hop pedagogy provides models for ways to do this work through culturally sustaining vehicles (Giroux, 2020; Ladson-

Billings, 2006; Halverson, 2021). Critical hip hop scholars have experienced mixed success in looking for ways to authentically bring hip hop into the classroom without taking away from its anti-establishment, counter hegemonic qualities (Kelly & Sawyer, 2019; Emdin, 2021; Love, 2019; Ringsager & Madsen, 2022). Some studies have found that even when students are allowed democratic spaces to choose their curriculum, years of restrictive classrooms takes a toll and hip-hop inclusion was “not enough to mitigate the effect that years of authoritarian based schooling has on students (Kelly & Sawyer, 2019, p. 11).” Others found that the settings of the school and the censorship regarding language and themes, undermined the effectiveness of critical hip hop learning models (Ringsager & Madsen, 2022). The ideological frame used to teach students how to write rap songs around morally just civic themes was in some cases met with resistance from students and alienated the very groups they were trying to reach. CHHP endeavors to center learning on student experience (Akom, 2009; Kelly & Sawyer, 2019).

Critical Hip Hop Pedagogical models base their definition of critical consciousness on Freire’s conscientization, which emphasizes action and critical reflection for social transformation (Akom, 2009; Kelly, 2019; Freire, 1970; Seider & Kelly, 2020). Freire’s conscientization consist of first identifying a social problem, analyzing that problem, developing a plan to address the problem, implementing the plan, and then evaluating the plan (Love, 2018; Freire, 1970). Freire believes that “students as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge (Freire, 1970, p. 81).” This is a model for elevating the critical conciousness of students. Akom builds on this model and uses hip hop to foreground race while engaging students in ways that celebrate and sustain their culture (Akom, 2009; Freire, 1970; Paris & Alim, 2007). Akom (2009) uses “hip hop as a tool for illuminating problems of poverty,

police brutality, patriarchy, misogyny, incarceration, racial discrimination, as well as love, hope, (and) joy (p. 54).” CHHP endeavors to facilitate spaces where students can engage in critical discussions and reflections about the forces that impact their lives (Kelly & Sawyer, 2019). It is also meant to provide an arena where students can think about societal depictions of their identities and “reimagine new possibilities of thinking, being, and knowing (Kelly, 2013, p. 53).” CHHP challenges white supremacist paradigms in order to validate marginalized communities (Villanueva, 2022; Paris, 2017).

Studies have also been done on ways CHHP takes an intersectional approach to analyses of oppression (Villanueva, 2022.) Critical hip hop pedagogues have applied feminist lens’ to hip hop in order to highlight sexist norms present in American culture. One way this is accomplished is by designing activities for young people to analyze the misogynistic and violent themes present in some mainstream hip hop and how they relate to the misogyny and violence present in America’s sociopolitical reality (Karvelis, 2018). The ultimate goal of CHHP is the awakening of critical consciousness in young people (Villanueva, 2022; Seider & Kelly, 2020; Karvelis, 2018). CHHP promotes civic reasoning and critical consciousness in students by using hip hop to interrogate both history and the present (Akom’s 2009; Ja'Bria, 2021).

### **Theoretical Connections**

The goals of critical civics are identical to the goals of Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (CHHP): to develop the critical consciousness of students (Akom, 2009; Kelly, 2019). Critical Hip Hop Pedagogical models traditionally base their definition of critical consciousness on Freire’s conscientization, which emphasizes action and critical reflection for social transformation (Akom, 2009; Kelly, 2019; Freire, 1972; Seider & Kelly, 2020). While a useful model, I believe pairing this learning model with CHRE (Muhammed, 2023) strengthens the

critical conscious learning by undergirding it with historical legacies of injustice and resistance. Black history is a powerful form of critical conscious learning by having students study how Black individuals and groups used a number of strategies to overcome oppression (Duncan, 2020). The Freedom Schools and The Black Panther School are historical examples of conscious elevating pedagogies, they directly taught critical conscious education by theorizing and teaching African Americans strategies on how they could work against oppressive structures (Duncan, 2020; Seider & Kelly, 2020; Seider et., al., 2017). I used these ideas to develop the content for my curricular design. I taught the students in the JET program about Septima Clark, Daisy Bates, Fannie Lou Hammer, and Ella Baker as examples of early radical civic educators and Civil Rights leaders.

Since, I use my hip hop curricular design to teach critical civics, I named it Trap Civics, a way to teach critical conscious learning with joy. I use the language critical consciousness to illustrate the way this curriculum could be housed in other subjects as well out of school learning environments, though I retain the word civics to express how I believe the social studies in the field best suited for this type of learning. Critical conscious learning is the largest ingredient for critical civics and represents the competencies needed for an educated citizenry that actively participates in society. I use the phrase critical conscious learning to illustrate the importance of this kind of learning for all subjects and how it extends beyond the social studies classroom.

As mentioned previously, African Americans are invisible in traditional social studies curriculum, yet Black culture is highly visible in hip hop by way of dress, speech, and affect (Ladson-Billings, 2003). While depictions of citizenship and community in broader culture are distorted by their exclusion of Black communities, hip hop centers Black narratives and the important roles of Black people in society (Hall, 2023). Narrow and restrictive definitions of

citizenship and who is able to tap in the power and benefits of American citizenry is challenged by hip hop. Hip hop is loud, in your face, and difficult to ignore. It says...we here! Membership to America's civic life has always precluded Blacks to varying degrees, hip hop can be seen as a critical civic response to this. Critical civic learning requires attention to the politics of belonging (Harris-Perry, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2006). "The politics of belonging argues that systemically marginalized communities deliberately seek to center their civic identity, agency, and membership in spaces so that they are felt, heard, and understood—or recognized (Hall, 2023 p.19)." Hip hop is one of those spaces. The voices of young people are an indispensable aspect of democratic education, and rap is a way they are able to find and hone their voices while challenging injustice, and without the requirement to translate their thoughts for the oppressor (Alim & Wong, 2020; Hall, 2023; Love, 2014).

Critical civics includes anti-racist learning (King, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2003). Anti-racist learning requires diverse Black perspectives and the impact of Black existence on the world (King, 2019). Anti-racist learning uses the comprehensive teaching of Black history from multiple perspectives to illustrate the global impact of Black existence on the world in order to counteract the ideas of racism inherited from the past, to celebrate Black excellence, and to inform how we build the world to come. Anti-racist learning models affirm the culture of Black students, while simultaneously providing critical conscious development for all students by teaching Black history through Black frames (King, 2019, Duncan, 2020, Kelly, 2019). It provides an accurate telling of history that includes both the struggles and successes of African Americans, in addition to their contributions to society both past and present (Duncan, 2020; Kelly, 2019; King, 2019).

This dissertation builds on the ideas of CSP and CHRE and seeks to transform classrooms into revitalizing spaces that interrogate anti blackness while allowing for joy and emotional nourishment. Black history was stolen from the memory of Americans through the intentional efforts of white supremacist textbook authors, educators, researchers, and lawmakers (Givens, 2021). Enacting CSP and CHRE means imagining a world beyond one where history is whitewashed, where history teachers and students can resemble griots, and Black history is a valued multifaceted topic of education (Alim & Wong, 2020; Muhammed, 2023). Griots are an example of early Black storytellers in West African communities who held the history, genealogy, and cultural knowledge of their people (Toliver, 2021). Toliver writes, “the griot was not only central to West African life, responsible for cultivating their verbal artistry, but also in charge of completing various tasks that fostered intergenerational connections and encouraged the remembrance of people’s histories, communities, and homelands (p. XIV)” These story tellers held not only the history, but the cultural memory of their people. Rappers are the griots of today using samples of the past and verbal artistry to store and share cultural history.

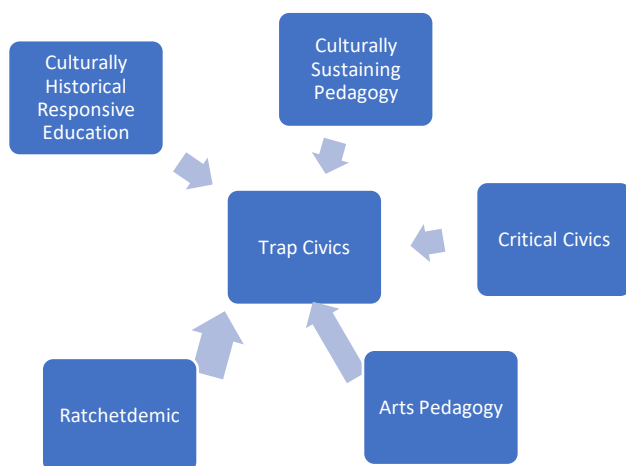
I use Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies to incorporate the essential virtue of joy into critical consciousness education. I use CHRE to focus my definition of joy and criticality. Ratchedemic and Arts Pedagogy influences the content and how I present it to the students. Critical civics defines the goals and aims of the student learning. Using the past as a roadmap to critical consciousness is a tenet of both CHRE and conceptualizations of critical civics. Ratchedemic Pedagogy refers to this type of understanding as knowledge of self.

*“A formal education without knowledge of self is dangerous and makes you a danger to yourself and your community because you become a pawn of the institutions that gave you the education....to know yourself is to engage in*

*committed conscientious self-reflection with the goals of stripping away what you are doing for validation from institutions or systems recognizing who you are, as you are, in the context where you are; not a title, a role, or a job but a person who is loved and who deserves love (Emdin, 2022, p. 20)."*

The Figure below represents the theories I use in Figure 1.

Figure 1



Joyful consciousness is the alchemizing quality in Black music which centers joy in the articulation of difficult to digest truths. These can be truths of the past found in the sometimes difficult histories of the Black community including chattel slavery and Jim Crow. These can be difficult to articulate truths found in the everyday lived experiences of people. This quality was present in the slave songs of the Antebellum South where hope and faith had to be so strong they were almost concrete. This quality can be found in the chariot that is swinging low to carry folks home. This quality can be found in blues when Billie Holiday is singing about the strange fruit producing death where there should be life. This quality has been passed onto the latest iteration of Black music, rap. I am theorizing joyful consciousness as having the capacity to be a

pedagogical tool of hip hop based education that can be used for anti-racist social studies education.

Trap is a subgenre of hip hop music that originated in the Southern United States in the 1990s. The genre gets its name from the Atlanta slang term "trap house", a house used exclusively to sell drugs. Specifically, it describes a style of instrumentation that incorporates 808 beats. Colloquially it is a modern term that describes rap songs that are ratchet, glorify violence, and contain salacious topics. It is a modern term for what was once called gangsta rap. CHHP uses conscious rap as an educational text with rappers like Tupac, Talib Kweli, and Lauren Hill. Trap is the more commercially successful rap that one is much more likely to hear on the radio. It is music people dance to but not teach with. The definition of critical consciousness I am ascribing to in this study is the ability to recognize injustice and harm in self and society while beginning to comprehend the historical legacy of that injustice.

### **Chapter 3: Methods and Curriculum Design**

Trap Civics is the critical civics curriculum I designed to facilitate critical conscious learning with joy. Trap Civics is a hip hop curriculum for anti-racist social studies education. It is a flexible design that can be altered and shifted depending on the needs of teachers and learning environments. This curricular design provides space for students to use rap to interrogate history. Trap Civics is a curricular design that uses rap as a vehicle for processing difficult history in addition to present day joys and frustrations. This study looks at how different iterations of this rap based curriculum can lead to critical conscious learning with joy and to discover what elements of using rap for critical civic literacy leads to joyful critical conscious learning. The goal of this project is to see ways students experience joy and critical conscious learning while in a critical hip-hop pedagogical model and what that can teach us about joyful critical conscious

learning both in and outside of the social studies classroom. I designed this study to generate new visions and tools for learning that can provide insight into developing equitable social studies learning. There is little research on the use of Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy for social studies education. In order to ensure that teachers can use hip hop as more than tools for memorizing social studies content I designed this learning model for educators to use in order to tap into the joyful and critical conscious elements of hip hop to counteract traditional social studies narratives steeped in a long tradition of anti-Blackness and Eurocentricity (Branch, 2003; Givens, 2021; Love, 2019; Howard, 2004).

Trap Civics heeds the call of our current democratic imperative to develop new visions of social studies education that prepare students for civic participation in America's multicultural society (King & Chandler, 2016; Tyson & Park, 2008). Trap Civics teaches students how to write rap songs in order to process complicated social studies topics. This curricular design is building on the work of emancipatory pedagogy, as well as anti-racist approaches to education (Duncan's, 2019; King & Chandler, 2016). Trap Civics is a rap based curriculum for social justice education (Tyson & Park, 2008). Trap Civics builds on the frameworks of anti-racist pedagogy and social justice social studies. While the term critical civic literacy does apply, I use the term critical consciousness as it situates Trap Civics in the larger field of critical hip hop pedagogy and highlights the aim of anti-racist learning as playing a crucial role on preparing students for civic participation in a racially diverse society (Lee, 2020). Researchers have argued that although critical conscious learning should occur in the field of social studies, other subjects like English have heeded the call due to the seeming disinterest of the social studies field to accomplish this form of learning (Ladson-Billings, 2003). This is why I designed this curriculum

to be of use for not just social studies teachers but any educators and teaching artist working towards anti racist learning.

While Trap Civics can be used in social studies classrooms and out of school anti-racist social justice learning environments, it was designed as intentional intervention in social studies classrooms where Black history is labeled as difficult and ignored, and some states are banning them altogether (Branch, 2003; Epstein, et, al., 2011; Loewen, 2007; Schwartz, 2021). I believe hip hop's ability to shed a light on discrimination in society will have a natural conscious building impact while evoking joy in students (Akom, 2009; Love, 2019). This curriculum is an attempt to operationalize joy and critical consciousness in the classroom while still addressing curricular needs governing classrooms for the purpose of culturally sustaining twenty first century social studies learning (Lee, 2021; Love, 2019; Paris & Alim, 2017). Teaching social justice social studies using hip hop as a vehicle for the radical pursuit of joy is essential for new visions of social studies education (Barton & Ho, 2021; Epstein & Peck, 2017; Love, 2019; Tyson & Park, 2008).

This study explores how Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy can foster critical civic learning through joy. That exploration requires attending to various definitions of joy and asking what joy and critical consciousness looks like in young people. For Baldwin it means being able to examine the world, for Freire it is connecting individual life experiences to socio-economic inequality and finding ways to interrupt the inequity (Baldwin, 1968; Frerie, 1972). However, what does this look like in young people with the complex multiple identities and cultures they enter into the classroom with? How are they defining meaningful learning experiences and what means are they using to articulate their learning? I attend to these questions as I collect and

analyze the data in order to discover implications for joyful critical conscious learning environments.

### **Section 3A: Design of the Trap Civics Curriculum**

Trap Civics was conducted through five iterations in two different geographical locations. This study is based on the assumption that real world situations are needed to better understand learning in the larger context which is why I designed, taught, and studied the curriculum (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012). Trap Civics is built from a series of design principles I developed using Arts Pedagogy (Halverson, 2023) and the writings and speeches of James Baldwin (1953). Baldwin claims the purpose of education is to learn to think for oneself, to critically examine, and transform society. Baldwin's ideas on the purpose of education to name the world in order to transform it, connects with Freire's concept of conscientization which is the foundation of Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (Akom, 2009; Baldwin, 1953; Freire, 1970). Freire (1970) describes conscientization as the ability to root lived experiences in the larger society, and to be able to deconstruct societal inequities and structures in order to transform that society. Despite the fact that this is also the goal of critical civics education very few people have used hip hop for critical civic learning. Which is developed a Critical Hip Hop curricular model based on four design principles that use rap for critical civic learning.

#### **Design Principle 1: Break Rules**

The first design principle is to break rules. James Baldwin warns teachers they should expect people and systems to work against them if their goal is teaching for a just world. Baldwin (1968) writes:

*To any citizen of this country who figures himself as responsible – and particularly those of you who deal with the minds and hearts of young people –*

*must be prepared to go for broke or to put it another way, you must understand that in the attempt to correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it is operating not only in the classroom but in society, you will meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance. There is no point in pretending that this won't happen.*

Here Baldwin warns teachers that society does not want to produce the type of citizen who challenges the status quo. If teachers want to develop students to have critical lens' then they should expect resistance. Resistance to educational equity shows up in the form of standardized testing, Eurocentric curriculum, and the insistence on assimilation to white cultural norms (Emdin, 2021; Love, 2019; Paris & Alim, 2017). This resistance shows up as school policies based on racist ideologies, whitewashed American history, and billion-dollar testing industries encouraging Eurocentric education (Baldwin, 1953; Love, 2019). This resistance shows up as controversy surrounding critical race theory and AP Black history classes (Schwartz, 2021).

Engaging and teaching with stories of teacher activist like Septima Clark provides powerful student learning experiences in addition to encouraging teachers enacting critical pedagogies' while facing fierce and bitter resistance (Givens, 2021; Nixon, 2013; Tyson & Park, 2008; Collins, 1986; Baldwin, 1953; Giroux, 2020). Figures like Frederick Douglass, Isaac Lane who founded the first Black colleges, Blane Bruce a US Senator from Mississippi who worked for just education under the greatest possible resistance can serve as models on how to enact critical pedagogy while in opposition to local laws and school policies (Givens, 2021; Nixon, 2013; Tyson & Park, 2008). The answer is to rebel. Rebel to correct the "generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it is operating...in the classroom" (Baldwin, 1968). Traditional social

studies curriculum that rationalizes the enslavement of African Americans, the genocide of Indigenous populations, and racial hierarchy are in service of white supremacy. Rebelling against this type of education is an important curricular intervention that moves away from Eurocentric learning (Paris & Alim, 2017). This at times requires breaking rules.

This design principle sanitizes the learning spaces from the poison of white supremacy. This requires at times ignoring the rules, curriculums, and guidelines of school environments. States are banning books they claim contain critical race theory and show America having negative race relations (Schwartz, 2021). The importance of breaking rules becomes evident when properly contextualized in today's state of education, which is why the first principle is to break rules as needed (Givens, 2021).

### **Design Principle 2: Use Black History for Criticality**

Baldwin believed White Americans needed to understand African American history in order to truly understand their own, to learn a history not steeped in myths and heroifications. He writes (1953),

*If... one managed to change the curriculum in all the schools so that Negroes learned more about themselves and their real contributions to this culture, you would be liberating not only Negroes, you'd be liberating white people who know nothing about their own history.*

The contradiction of America's claims of equality are clearer to no one more than those who were enslaved and made to suffer under Jim Crow, redlining, police brutality, medical experimentation, and America's economic policies of the 1980's (Givens, 2021; Baldwin, 1953). Baldwin (1962) writes that African Americans have "the great advantage of having never believed that collection of myths to which white Americans cling that they were born in the

greatest country the world has ever seen” (p. 2). This allows for a critical lens that is developed from the experience of living in a country that’s obsession with freedom is rivaled only by its oppression of African Americans (Baldwin, 1953). This is the critical lens that should be developed in social studies classes (Lee, 2021). Black history provides a blueprint for how to educate Americans to work to change society so it can live up to its principles of freedom and equality (Baldwin, 1953; Baldwin, 1968).

Teaching Black history from Black perspectives counter white supremacist narratives and aids in the conscious development of both Black and non-black students (Baldwin, 1953). For Black students it leads to increased academic self-concept and feelings of cultural pride and intellectualism, for white students it can facilitate anti-racist learning (Asante, 2017; Baldwin, 1953; Muhammad, 2020). Black history provides counter arguments that resist the master narrative of Black inferiority (Givens, 2021; King, 2019). This master narrative was supported by America’s earliest textbooks which denigrated Black culture and ignored Black accomplishments (Givens, 2021; Asante, 2017). The aim of these textbooks were to convince Americans; slavery, colonialism, and acts of genocide are sacrifices made so the white man could build a great civilization (Asante, 2017; Givens, 2021; Shockley, 2010; Shujaa, 1998). Lesson plans around Black history provide counter narratives which challenge those dominant damaging narratives (Baker-Bell, 2017; Muhammed, 2019). Black history is a mechanism for challenging anti-black epistemologies (McBride, 2010). This design principle uses Black history as a counter-narrative to the traditional Eurocentric curriculum and as a mechanism to develop criticality in students (Givens, 2021). Black history provides insight into the injustices present in America’s political systems and this insight is needed for new visions of social studies education (Baldwin, 1953; Givens, 2021; King, 2019; Lee, 2021).

### **Design Principle 3: Consume Black Art for Black History Content**

James Baldwin encourages teachers to be artists. Baldwin (1968) in his speech to teachers said “the role of the artist is exactly the same as the role of the lover. If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don’t see.” Baldwin’s ideas on the teacher being an artist connects with current research on the role of the arts for social justice education (Halverson, 2021). Using art for social justice has historical roots in Black communities (Bey, 2017). Black art created the first popularized counter narratives during the first post slave generation. Black art represented some of the earliest opportunities for Black people to rearticulate their public image on their own terms during the Jim Crow Era. Historically Black art scenes, like the Harlem Renaissance served as counter narratives to popular culture’s racist representations of blackness. The Harlem Renaissance produced art that disrupted harmful and pathologizing images of Black life.

This design principle is built on the idea that consuming and producing Black art, are powerful forms of social justice learning (Givens, 2021; Tyson & Park, 2008). Black art provides insight into Black perspectives throughout history. This principle requires seeking out Black art to provide needed historical perspective (Collins, 2014; Love, 2019). This design principle builds on Baldwin’s charge and uses Black art to reveal the Black perspective that is missing in traditional social studies education. What this actually looks like in lesson planning is endeavoring to find Black art, literature, and music that speaks to curricular aims to use in conjunction with other resources that include Black perspectives and insight into Black lived experiences. Black art contains Black perspectives and are valuable resources for social studies classrooms as they are filled with *the kinds of knowledge* students should be wrestling with (Barton & Ho, 2021; Collins, 1986; Crenshaw, 2017). The song, ‘Strange Fruit’ is an example of

Black art providing needed perspectives for anti-racist social studies learning (Baldwin, 1953). In addition to being a launching point for learning about the horror of lynching, the song also serves as a model for how to blend criticality and joy. Black music like Billie Holiday's rendition of 'Strange Fruit' are powerful learning tools (Dewhurst, 2017; Halverson, 2021). This design principle tells educators to develop learning activities around the Black counter narrative perspectives present in Black art in order for students to develop a critical lens to apply towards society. Centering learning activities around Black art teaches awareness of the racism that impacts and governs American society.

In addition to consuming Black art students are to use that Black art form that is rap, to reflect on their learning. This operationalizes the social justice potential of lyric writing and uses the production of art to create spaces for freedom dreaming (Love, 2019; Halverson, 2021; Crenshaw, 2017). Freedom dreams allow students to experience "joy, resistance, love, and an unwavering imagining of what is possible when dark folk matter (Love, 2019, p. 93)." The production of art around social justice topics amalgamates joy with critical conscious learning. This design principle uses students' lyric writing, as participation in a Black art form, as critical civic pedagogy (Clemons & Clemons, 2013). Rap represents both critical conscious development and a pursuit of joy (Emdin, 2021; Muhammed 2023). Whether it is drill, braggadocious, trap, or conscious; all rap represents pursuits of joy in places where it often does not exist. Consuming and producing Black art provides students a means of naming the world and connecting the content to their lived realities (Love, 2019).

#### **Design Principle 4: Use the Conceive Represent Share Model for Rap Based**

#### **Representations of Learning**

The Conceive Represent Share Model is a method for teaching students to represent learning in the form of art, in this case rap songs. Teaching students how to rap about topics is less about the sophistication of the rhyme than it is about providing a vehicle for students to process difficult ideas like intersectional racism. The Conceive-Represent-Share model sets the foundation for powerful learning environments and leads to the development of metarepresentational competence. Metarepresentational Competence refers to ways individuals learn to produce arts based representations of their learning (Halverson, 2023). This competence allows one to develop “the creation of a model or image that highlights certain features of a phenomenon or an experience in order to share a perspective (Halverson, 2023, p.32).” Through meterepresentations individuals can generate new knowledge by finding patterns and insights in their arts based representations that are difficult to recognize in the word (Dewhurst, 2014). Identity flows into the artmaking process and creating art can lead to the further development of ones identity as it elucidates their reflections on who they are. Creating art is a way for people to explore their various identites and experiment on which ones speak to their core selves (Emdin, 2022; Halverson, 2023).

**Conceive.** The Conceive step was originally designed for students to choose topics they could passionately write about (Halverson, 2021). It is different in a classroom where the content is already created by the teacher. In that context students are choosing which topic they would like to write about based on the content that spoke to them the most. It is important however that students brainstorm which topic or content they want to write about. Student choice is important especially if they are to relate the topics to their own lives. How do they feel about it? Have they experienced any similar struggles, how have we grown as a society? These are prompts I provide for students to reflect on which topic that will speak to them most as individuals. Students at

Franklin spend the beginning of class conceiving of topics to write about. This step is important to focus their lyrics and keep their bars consistent. This will serve to deepen the expression of their ideas and feelings since they are choosing what to write about.

**Represent.** Creating art involves transforming thoughts into artistic mediums, in this case rap lyrics (Halverson, 2021). I designed activities for students to create rap representational models of their learning which they will share with the class at the end of each week. I have developed a series of activities meant to scaffold the art of rapping to students. I created seven lessons with accompanying worksheets to elucidate the art of lyric writing. Each lesson added complexity and introduced techniques like metaphors, puns, slant rhymes, and how to stick to one coherent topic. I have included copies of these lessons and worksheets in the appendix section. This model was developed from my years as a self-produced rap artist, my time as a social studies teacher, and my experience as a teaching artist. Students summarized their learning in their rap lyrics. These lyrics were revised and turned into complete rap songs. Students were allowed to free-write using forms that felt natural to them. As students worked towards polished rap songs they made decisions about what content to include, while reflecting on a number of socio-historical issues connected to their lives (Akom, 2009; Dewhurst, 2017; Halverson, 2021).

**Share.** This study is built on the assumption that students learn best when creating art for an audience that has a reason to care about it (Halverson, 2021). Working towards a live performance ensures the integrity of the art pieces. Considering their audience and revising rap songs for a live performance deepens the learning experience and motivates students to craft the best raps possible. When students share their work with each other, they are provided an organic assessment. They want the ooh's and the ahh's. Rap is birthed from Black culture and contain call n response elements where students have audible reactions which communicate their

enjoyment of each performance (Smitherman, 1997). Students shared rap weekly and shared fully polished pieces at the end of the residencies.

### **Case 1: JET summer program**

The first case was a summer program, called JET, on the campus of top university. All the names of students, programs, and schools are pseudonyms including JET. The JET program consisted of eighteen Black high school seniors. The JET program is a partnership between the university and the two large, urban school districts adjacent to the university. The goal of this partnership is to prepare historically underrepresented students to become competitive for admission to other universities. Students in the JET program participate in two different five-week residential summer programs where they take two undergraduate courses and gain exposure to college life. As a result of my social justice work in Los Angeles I was afforded the opportunity to teach one of the college level courses. The curriculum I designed for this course was college level and students received one college credit for completion of the course.

During this program I taught an anti-racist social studies curriculum that centered on Black feminism and four Black women Civil Rights leaders. These women were Septima Clark, Daisy Bates, Ella Baker, and Fannie Lou Hamer. I chose these Black women based on the design principle of teaching what is missing. These Black women were instrumental leaders in The Civil Rights Movement and are missing not only from traditional social studies curricula but from many Black history curricula as well. In this course, students would reflect on topics like the feud between Septima Clark and Reverend Abernathy, a central figure in The Civil Rights movement who did not think women should be leaders in the movement. Students used rap lyrics as a technology to have a conversation with the past and engage with a history that although they may not have lived through, were implicated in.

I am an African American male from the area, and I felt an inside connection with this community. My identity as a hip hop artist and member of the community is highly visible by my pattern of speech, apparel, and general disposition. This disposition connected me culturally with the students and led to rapid rapport building. I drew on critical theories related to social justice education and employed an African centered epistemology, seeing myself as fulfilling the role of a griot teaching other griots (Toliver, 2019). The relationship between myself and students was not governed by the traditional teacher student dynamic. I had lunch with the students, we traded music recommendations, and I intentionally made space for discussions around how anti-Black racism impacts their life, which I responded to with my own stories. Based on my life experience and my positionality as a Black male from Southern Los Angeles, I assumed the African American students in this program had experienced racism firsthand and were knowledgeable of the racist foundations of America.

### **Case 2: Franklin Middle School**

The second case took place at Franklin Middle School in a mid-sized Midwestern City. I taught five classes each quarter over the course of four quarters each of which lasted six to eight weeks. This means I taught several hundred students during the Franklin residency. The study was conducted the year students returned from quarantine during Covid. The class was taught during the Music period as a part of the school districts' United Arts program, a required quarterly rotation of arts electives for all students. I co-taught the class with the music teacher. Based on observations and conversations I had with the teacher I could see that he struggled with behavior management. The plan to teach a social studies content and have students write rap lyrics reflecting on it proved difficult in this environment. As a result I had to pivot. Being responsive to the setting/students and guided by theory and research caused me to make several

adaptations. My approach was agile rather than entrenched so that the learning was more closely intertwined with existing research and theory, and more humanizing for the students involved. I shifted and altered the curriculum I taught to students at Franklin Middle School, instead of content I focused on rap literacy. Instead of rapping about content, students rapped about their life experiences, their feelings, and a range of other general topics. During free write activities students were often stuck on what to rap about so topics I suggested things that give them joy, as well as things they struggle with.

I spent eight years teaching middle school social studies. As a result of this I employed teaching methods and rapport building activities modeled after my classroom experiences. In this environment my positionality as a Black male teacher, with an assumption that students of color were knowledgeable of racism was not always correct. The students at Franklin had different concerns and habits than the students I taught in Harlem. The changes could be a result of geography as well as the impact of school closures and virtual learning. When students were asked to write about social issues they felt were important I was expecting them to discuss police brutality, climate change, and systematic racism. My time as middle school teacher in Harlem taught me that some middle school students are thinking about these issues on their own. However at Franklin the majority of issues depicted in their raps were associated with adolescent struggles, like feelings of loneliness and alienation.

### **3B1. Critical Qualitative Inquiry**

For this study, I used Critical Qualitative Inquiry. CQI interrupts dominant research methods steeped in racism and colonialism (Canella, 2015; Denzin, 2017; Tunstall, et. al. 2022). Qualitative inquiry traces its roots to Eurocentricity, and by departing from traditional methods, CQI seeks to employ humanizing and culturally relevant methods instead. Qualitative methods

originated in the 1800's with the white man's attempt at understanding the 'less civilized,' primitive other (Denzin, 2017). From there, qualitative methods grew to the study of how the supposed less civilized others can be assimilated to the White European culture. In the late 1900's, the field grew from espousing the virtue of white supremacy to employing methods that attempt to expose racism and gender based discriminatory practices in society. Denzin explains that although Black authors and philosophers like Zora Neal Hurston, W.E.B. Dubois, and James Baldwin provide racialized insight on the human condition, their work is not as heavily used in education research as theorist like Vygotsky and Piaget. CQI understands that Black philosophers, like those previously mentioned are not credited for shaping social thought. Their ideas ought to be operationalized as methodological precedents informing decolonial perspectives in research with the same level of regularity as philosophers like Vygotsky and Piaget (Tunstall, et. al. 2022). For my curricular design, I center the philosophies of James Baldwin because they are instructive for best practices in education. Interrupting the Eurocentric lineage of academic research requires reflections and intentional rule-breaking as Baldwin discusses in his work (Baldwin, 1958; Canella, 2015). CQI challenges dominant methods and seeks knowledge which interrupts oppression across intersecting identities (Paris & Winn, 2014).

CQI asserts that critical research must interrupt discriminatory practices and actively work towards social justice aims (Denzin, 2017; Paris & Winn, 2014). In order to accomplish this, researchers must identify the normative power structures and subtle inequities that might be influencing their study. This requires closely attending to their study's design (Brayboy, 2016; Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). Researchers in the tradition of CQI view sensations and emotional responses as valuable data (Brayboy, 2016). CQI researchers assert that traditional inquiry and its "claims to objectivity or neutrality often absolve researchers from the need for careful and

intentional relationship building and decision making with regard to researchers' roles and positions" (Bang & Vossoughi 2016, p. 164). In response to traditional notions of objectivity, this study employs critical hermeneutics and encourages the researcher to use their personal and subjective skills and experiences as valuable tools for data collection and analysis (Keith & Endsley, 2021; Mobley, 2015). This study leans into the ideas of CQI and the need to alter traditional research methodologies in order to attend to cultural specific needs of the cultural data sets like rap songs. I use multiple senses to recognize the emotionality present in students responses and rap lyrics and embrace my subjective experiences as a human being conducting research (Brayboy, 2016; Denzin, 2017).

I conducted semi-structured interviews in the CQI tradition, in order to triangulate the findings of the study (Saldana, 2011). I modeled these interviews on the kind of check ins classroom teachers conduct in the normal course of their daily instruction. It was important to me that this study resembled real world situations and I collected data in the same manner I used to when I was a classroom teacher in Harlem. Classroom teachers do rapid fire data collection and make pedagogical shifts on a regular basis to ask essential questions and ensure students are following the lesson. As a teacher-researcher, this is the form of data collection I engaged in. I had students discuss in small groups what brought them joy in the class. I primed students by having them interview each other in order to mitigate power dynamics and foster a low stakes atmosphere. Having students working with each other allowed them to build both individual and social definitions of joy.

Amorphous concepts like joy require a more humanized form of inquiry. According to the theories and lens I applied to the study I defined joy as being related to connection: connection with self, connection with others, and connection to something bigger than self

(Emmons, 2020). Other definitions of joy drawn from the literature that I am applying to this study refer to Black joy and define joy as being authentically oneself and feeling connected to others and something bigger than oneself (Adams, 2017; Cruz, 2017). For the public performances of students raps, I looked at physical responses from the audience like clapping, laughter, smiling, patting someone on the back, co-signing, and voice elevation as indicators of collective joy (Sauter, et. al., 2014). These physical reactions inferred kinship, connection, and embodiments of cultural celebratory aesthetics. I also attended to moments and lyrics where students were speaking freely using language and vernacular they value while they intellectually contribute to the learning environment (Adams, 2017). These lenses on joy impacted how I observed students and reflected on both the lyrical and observational data.

In order to center student perspective, I relied on students individual interpretations of joy. I had students reflect on what gave them joy in small groups. Students then replied to my questions about when they experienced joy in the classroom and what activities they enjoyed the most. Circling the classroom, I asked students in their small groups to explain what made them feel joy in the classroom. I asked these questions in a variety of ways, attending to students personal barometer for and interpretation of joy. Due the personal nature of the topic, it was essential to foster an atmosphere of trust, comfort, and comradery in order to reflect on such vulnerable concepts. I chose to include both written and oral reflections as methods of data collection. This study is based on the assumption that building trust and fostering authentic relationships between researcher and participant is crucial to understanding deeply vulnerable truths. The interviews resembled informal conversations between teacher and student in order to foster a comfortable atmosphere in the interview space.

I primed students with small group discussions in order to borrow the trust they felt from peers (Tunstall et. al., 2022). By having students interview each other before talking to me I borrow trust that the students built with each other over time in order to encourage vulnerable truths. Analyzing how hip hop immerses learning in joy requires paying close attention to experiences not necessarily valued by traditional measures of learning. These include unexplained tears, chills down your body, feelings of warmth, and emotions that are hard to classify. Attending to these sensations as powerful tools for consciousness elevating and joyful learning required me to lean into new visions of data collection and analysis. While traditional qualitative research may overlook these sensations, these difficult to classify, joyful moments contain valuable insight into ideal learning experiences.

### **3B2. Comparative Case Study**

This study employed Case Study Research as a methodology in order to explore the question of how educators can best design for critical conscious learning immersed in joy (Creswell, 2015). Case Study was used to look at two different contexts, each with their own learning environment and different age and race of students. This was done in order to better define how hip hop education amalgamates joy and critical conscious learning. Since Black music over time has exposed racism while still leaving people feeling empowered and not dejected, this study aimed to deconstruct the way it can be harnessed for critical conscious learning with joy. In the literature review, I discuss the connection between joy, critical conscious learning, civic education, and hip hop pedagogy. Case study research is best suited for the exploration of this topic because learning happens in context, and looking at multiple contexts provides a broader view of how students define critical consciousness and joy. Looking at multiple learning sites allows me to integrate themes from a wider range of students with variations on student

background. In this study, I ask the questions of how critical hip hop pedagogy can be used for critical conscious learning immersed in joy and how we can tap into that as an essential feature of good learning.

Case Study allows researchers to adopt various plans for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995). I used a holistic approach to data analysis using cross-case analysis. I looked at the rap songs from the students at both Franklin and JET and summarized what I saw from the cases and how my interpretation of the data have changed as a result (Creswell, 2014). My view of critical conscious learning shifted greatly as a result of this study. I chose the cases based on the needs of the learning communities in the cities where I enacted the programs. The teachers at Franklin had attended my hip hop seminars and once they won a grant to build a music studio, they asked me to teach a hip hop class to the students. I believe in providing a meaningful arts based learning experience and in conducting a study in a real world situation. Trap Civics provided both in depth examples of learning and opportunities to explore joyful and critical conscious learning. While in one case students discuss real life racial and gender-based struggles and contextualize them in history, both cases provide present day examples of students' personal struggles and victories. Learning to navigate and name these experience speaks to theories of critical conscious and joyful learning ( Alim & Wong, 2020; Emdin, 2022; Muhammed, 2023).

Interpreting case study research often requires cross case synthesis where the investigator pulls apart data and puts it back together in meaningful ways (Creswell, 2014). I take this idea to the next step in my data analysis. In the arts based research methods I employed, I aggregated data into approximately twenty five categories and then combined those into six larger themes reflecting on emergent ideas. The results are presented as data raps and themes which connect

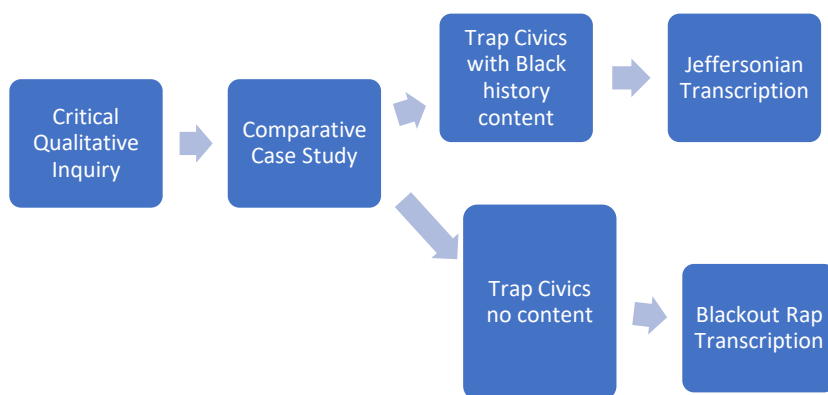
with existing research on CSP, Arts Pedagogy, Ratchedemic Pedagogy, CHHP, and CHRE (Alim & Wong, 2020; Emdin, 2022; Hall, 2023; Kelly, 2023; Muhammed, 2023).

While traditional Case Study emphasizes bounding the case, Comparative Case Study (CCS) takes issue with traditional forms of Case Study research and their oversimplifications of culture and the process of bounding a site (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016; Thomas, 2015). CCS takes a more nuanced approach to culture and sees it as a way participants experience sense making based on their shared values. The development of emerging ideas are central to CCS research, which is why my findings result in themes for using hip hop as critical civic learning with joy. As mentioned previously I sample methods from different qualitative research methodologies in order to attend to the culturally specific nature of rap based data sets. When the majority of these theories and methods for educational improvement were developed, African Americans, by law, were not allowed to be educated (Emdin, 2021). As a result of this limitation, I revise established forms of qualitative research methods in order to attend to culturally specific aspects of hip hop pedagogy and rap-based data sets that traditional methods were not designed to attend to.

This study draws on ideas from both traditional Case Study research and CCS, particularly in regard to flexible boundings and connection to critical theories (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). Even though I study two distinct sites, I am not conducting a compare/contrast study looking at the geographical or cultural features impacting the learning process. The purpose of looking at multiple cases is broadening the scope of study in regard to how students are experiencing and defining critical conscious learning through joy. This study included perspectives from all Black high school seniors in Los Angeles and students in a Wisconsin public school that included perspectives from Black, White, Asian, Arab, and Latinx middle school students. Despite age and geographic differences, students in Madison shared great

kinship with students in Los Angeles in how they defined joy and critical consciousness. The methods I used are depicted below in Figure 2.

Figure 2



At the JET program, I collected eight recorded rap/spoken word pieces from the eighteen students who participated in the program. At the second site, Franklin Middle School, I taught twenty classes spread over four quarters. I taught three classes the first quarter, four classes the second quarter, five classes the third quarter, and another five classes the fourth quarter. Each classes had approximately twenty three students. I left the Franklin residency with several hundred rap songs. From the hundreds of rap songs I had from Franklin I chose one hundred at random. I wanted to ensure a breadth of data, so I chose five raps from each class in order to get a variety of student voices represented. Some of the rap songs were written down and some were turned in online. I randomly selected two raps from the written pile and three raps from google classroom where the students turned them in. For the online rap songs, I chose from the top, middle, and end of each section. The written raps were divided by class, and I pulled two songs from the middle of each pile. This process was random to ensure that I was not subconsciously guided by the songs which fit a particular narrative.

Students used rap as a technology to have a conversation with heroes of the past who worked for their future. They analyzed complex ideas and wrote pieces that not only reflected on the content but were personal and about their racialized experiences. Since I recorded these pieces being performed live, I marked moments where the audience reacted strongly. These moments of strong audience reaction imply that the words resonated with the group (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013; Saldana, 2011; Smitherman, 2021). The call n response nature of hip hop performances comes from its birth from Black culture (Smitherman, 2021). In this context, certain audible responses can infer affinity with the message. Based on this understanding, I coded the lyrics for moments that induced laughter, applause, and audible reactions. I had a much larger sample size from Franklin Middle School than the JET program. That discrepancy is represented in the amount of time I spend on my written analysis of the two different sites. A table summarizing my data is represented below if Figure A.

Figure A

Site	Data Collected	Classes	Total number of students
Franklin	100 rap songs	20 classes	500 students
JET	8 recorded rap performances	1 class	18 students

Since one site produces written rap songs and the other recorded live performances of rap songs I use different methods for analyzing the different forms of data.

### **3B3. Jeffersonian Notation for the JET Program**

I used the methods that were appropriate for each site. For the JET Program, the students gave a final performance of their rap/spoken word pieces that I was able to record. I allowed the

students to partner up if they wanted and seven out of the eight pieces are partner pieces. The data is represented below in Figure B.

Figure B

Number of JET students	Partner pieces	Individual performances	Data Analysis Method	Total number of analyzed pieces
18 students	6	2	Jeffersonian Notation	8

I used Jeffersonian Notation, a method of conversation analysis in order to analyze their rap/spoken work pieces and attend to collective definitions of joy and critical consciousness (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013). Rap and spoken word were born from Black culture and contain the call n response attribute common in Afrodiasporic cultures, the audience verbally responds to lyrics that resonate with them (Smitherman, 2021). A rap and spoken word performance is a conversation between the artist and the audience, conversation analysis is an ideal method for analyzing this communicative social interaction (Raclaw & Ford, 2015). In addition to the social interaction among students, I paid particular attention to intonation, volume, pauses, tempo and other features of speech operationalized by the student performer, in order to attend to not only what is said, but how it is said (Wooffitt, 2005).

Jeffersonian Notation is a form of conversation analysis meant to facilitate an understanding of how interlocutors create meaning together (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013). This method of analysis attends to the subtle meaning found in talk that go beyond the words. What holds particularly true for hip performance is it is not just what someone says but how they say it. Jeffersonian Notation is a style of notation for analytic transcripts to capture the social interaction taking place when a student's performs a rap. This is accomplished by examining the

uttered words, the way they are uttered, and the response of the audience. I coded for intonation, the speed of speech, overlapping talk, when the audience had an audible reaction, volume, and physical motions accompanying certain lyrics (Wooffitt, 2001). This allowed me to attend to lyrics that were meaningful to each artist and resonated with the rest of the students.

As I listened to recordings of performances I used Jeffersonian Notation on the transcripts of the raps. This requires using symbols for rising and falling intonation. Falling intonation resembling a tenor sound, infers the student is making a statement they feel strongly about (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013). Rising intonation resembling the alto and soprano sounds infers a question or uncertainty. There were symbols for several ranges of intonation, and I used them as indicators of when in their rap performances students felt bold and empowered by the statements they were making. During one performance a young woman, Lynn, begins explaining why she hates white America and the audience comprised of all Black students and adults began cheering loudly. I marked this with a symbol for overlapping speech that is being emphasized by the artist as her strong assertive tone inferred the self-justification she felt in her lyrics. Lyrics which were supported by the audience evidenced by their audible responses lasting several seconds. The artist audience interactions represented shared truths and mutual understandings based on their shared racialized experiences.

I measured the length of audible audience reactions as longer reactions infer larger levels of assent. For a spoken word hip hop performance, the symbol for overlapping talk represent it was the audience reaction to certain lines they particularly empathize with. I measured the degree of audience assent by how long their response lasted ranging for .4 seconds to sometimes 3-5 seconds indicating a strong response. By marking moments when students' intonation both rise and fall I noticed that audience reaction always accompanied moments where the performer's

voice lowers in tone. I infer from this that the student feels a greater level of confidence in those statements. I include codes for laughter as well which are mixed in with reactions like ooohhh and ahhhhh. Since I am looking at both individual and collective definitions of joy and critical consciousness I paid close attention to moments of long audience laughter and found it occurred when students were naming truths. The laughter evidenced recognition and agreement. I include an example of a rap performance annotated using Jeffersonian Notation, as well as a breakdown of the meaning of the symbols in the appendix.

### **3B4. Blackout Rap Transcription**

To best analyze the written rap songs that I use as my primary data, I designed a qualitative research methodology I call Blackout Rap Transcription. I based this qualitative research method on Blackout Poetic Transcription which systematically layers over certain information in interviews in order to find the poem in the data (Keith & Endsley, 2020). Since I am analyzing data that is already in the form of poetry, I adapted this method to find truths and ideas that are expressed in the hip hop poetry students write. I do this to find what students are saying both individually and collectively. There are certain things that can only be expressed through art. Complex emotions are better and more fully understood through art, and art offers an opportunity to explore truths thought inappropriate in an interview a child has with an adult. Blackout Rap Transcription is a methodological tool designed to provide insight into the feelings, fears, desires, and understandings that students express in their art. This method has four steps: sample, layer, rupture, remix, and flow. This process takes individual rap lyrics students write, layers over extemporaneous information, highlight students perspective by disconnecting lyrics from their original verses, and then reconnects them to lyrics other students

wrote to generate a collective message. Through this process the researcher develops themes and categories that provide insight into students critical conscious and joyful learning experiences.

Blackout Rap Transcription speaks to my epistemological commitment to present academic ideas through public means and present research ideas in ways that are accessible. Rap music has been a history teacher to me over the years and picked up the slack where the classroom failed. This method is meant to harness rap's griotic power to decipher critical civic ideas and present it in ways that are accessible. This method honors the ancestors by using the griot tradition of enacting rhythmic style to share essential truths (Toliver, 2021). Things young people would not feel comfortable sharing with an adult can be shared in the form of a rap. There is a freedom that lives in rap lyrics, a freedom of language, a freedom of expression. I honor that by keeping student anonymity, even if there are lyrics that talk about violence, contain profanity, and mention a clear flouting of school rules. I do not look at student names, just the titles of their rap songs. The intent was for students to feel free enough to write with honesty. I designed this methodology to explore young people's collective definitions of joy, critical consciousness, and civic identity and literacy. Blackout Rap Transcription uses rap as a methodological tool to inductively analyze the hip hop poetry young people create and to develop themes that capture the emotion and covert meaning in the rap songs. The rap lyrics I connect are a method of analysis meant to explore the insights hidden in students' rap songs. Both poetry and qualitative inquiry are devices used to explore what the world is and how people fit into it (Leavy, 2020). Students are studying society by crafting rap lyrics to draw ideas and opinions from the reserves of their own mind.

No matter how cool and chill the adult is, the teacher/student dynamic is always at play since the teacher is an authority figure. There are certain things students would not share with an

adult, especially one they only knew for four to five weeks. However, the sometimes-fictional nature of hip hop allows rap to be a vehicle for expressing hidden truths. If a student writes about how some kids are smoking weed from a vape pen in the bathroom and a teacher decides to approach them about, they can always say it was a made up story for their rap song. Since rap songs contain both fact and fiction, students can pretend fact is fiction emboldening them to write vulnerable truths about their lives. In hip hop, the rapper is an unreliable narrator, and this quality creates a layer of protection for truths that transgress. The fantasy aspects of rap allows young people freedom to name both real and imagined problems. While the unreliable narrator nature of rap may make it difficult to understand the specifics of a particular situation, it provides a framework for free expression and allows young people to name broader and more personal truths without fear of repercussion. The nature of hip hop to obfuscate truth allows for the expression of truth by hiding it in an art that employs both fact and fantasy. Even and especially in fantastic tales told in rap verses, insight into the human condition and into a young person's thinking can be found.

Blackout Rap Transcription is a methodological innovation of Blackout Poetic Transcription (BPT). BPT is methodology that takes answers to interview questions and systematically layers over information with a black marker, blacking out certain information in order to create data poems (Keith & Endsley, 2020). BPT borrows methods from grounded theory, where codes are generated inductively by reviewing the data. The researcher develops themes inductively and finds the poem in the data. The poem the researcher produces from the data provides a public representation of the data that is accessible by laymen as it adds subtlety and contextualizes/ humanizes the data by adding emotion as well as intellectual understanding (Leavy, 2020; Davis, 2018). Data poems represents the perspective of the subject through the

lens of the researcher. Blackout Poetic Transcription (BPT) uses interviews from teachers and generates findings in the form of poems. BPT uses a process of:

*“1) sampling – sourcing methods from multiple methodologies; 2) layering – analyzing data within and across levels; 3) flow – organizing the data; 4) rupture – categorizing the data; and 5) affect, performance, and embodiment – discovering answers to research questions and presenting findings” (Keith & Endsley, 2021 p. 59).*

In true hip hop fashion, I am remixing the remix to attend to different kinds of data and to search for joyful and critical conscious learning. Since I am analyzing rap texts, I modified Blackout Poetic Transcription to analyze data that is already in the form of a poem. I began with student written raps and generated meaning by combining the individual voices into a collective one then reflected on what the process reveals about critical conscious learning both with, through and as joy. By applying this method of analysis I was able to gain broad insight into the collective ideas of the Franklin Middle School students. This study discovered truths that could be expressed in the rap songs students create and that interviews would not find. Music allows the expression of feelings and ideas that normal words cannot convey (Halverson, 2021).

I use Blackout Rap Transcription to think through a number of ideas and feelings students display in their rap songs. I approach this study with the knowledge that rap is a combination of fiction and nonfiction, with elements of truth even in the fictional rap songs. Fiction can provide insight into desires, aspirations, and interpretations of success and failure, which represent students understandings of various societal and cultural values (Love, 2019). Blackout Rap Transcription is a methodological tool designed to provide insight into the feelings, fears, desires, and understandings that students possess but can only articulate through

their art. Rap's power to speak truth also works to seek truth from within the hearts and minds of young people and this methodology is meant to give voice to that truth using the same method that sought it out: rap. The final data raps represent the collective voice made up of both the student body and the researcher (Keith & Endsley, 2021).

The decisions the researcher makes as they systematically dismantle, rearrange, and reassemble the rap lyrics are present in the final data rap. These decisions represent an initial analysis of the data. The choruses, which are based on themes generated from the lyrical data, are a function of inductive reasoning and serve as an analytical tool. Like BPT, BRT uses five steps:

- 1) Sampling from other qualitative methodologies
- 2) Layering to analyze the data and develop codes after several readings of the data, then repeating the process to systematically layer over certain lyrics
- 3) Rupturing students' raps to reorganize lyrics under researcher generated codes, weaving those codes into song titles and choruses
- 4) Remixing, pairing together the lyrics that have been recategorized and recontextualized as student perspectives representing students more broadly
- 5) Creating flow as I reorganize the lyrics under emergent themes.

### **1) Sample**

In addition to Blackout Poetic Transcription I sample and borrow methods from other qualitative methodologies which include Blackout Poetic Transcription (Keith & Endsley, 2020), Poetic Transcription (Glesne, 1997), Critical Hermeneutic Phenomenology (Moblely, 2015), and Grounded Theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 2017) for my data analysis. During the first cycle of analysis, I use inductive reasoning to develop themes based on several readings of the data

(Keith & Endsley, 2017; Saldana, 2011). During this cycle I use a more traditional grounded theory approach for analysis for the purpose of trustworthiness in the systematic analysis of students' rap songs. The first step during this stage was to copy the lyrics students wrote into MAXqda. I did this in order to have all the students' art pieces in one place to code the data. I then read over each of the rap songs and wrote memos summarizing each song. One of the first things I noticed after copying down all the rap songs and reflecting via memos were how extremely different they were. After copying all the raps, the topics seemed all over the place. I analyzed one hundred rap songs from the students at Franklin. The table below represented in Figure C summarizes the total data corpus.

Figure C

Number of Franklin students	Total number of raps analyzed	Total Number of classes	Raps collected from each class	Data Analysis Method
500 students	100	20	5	Blackout Rap Transcription

This method was created to take the individual voice present in the rap songs students created and generate a collective voice that captures a snapshot of the Franklin students. As I read over the randomly chosen rap songs, I created codes and subcodes based on ideas generated from the lyrical data.

Identity was a prevalent code, and I created several sub codes related to identity. Individual identity, imagined identity, school identity, and collective identity were all subcodes I ascribed to student lyrics. I also created the code feelings for students talking about their emotional state of being. I ascribed the individual identity code to lyrics where students

described themselves using adjectives like ‘smart’. I used the code feelings for lyrics that described temporary states of beings that were fleeting. For example, ‘I am dumb’ would be classified under identity and ‘I feel dumb’ would be classified as a feeling as it speaks to fleeting state. You can feel dumb in one moment and smart in the other.

‘School identity’ was affixed to lyrics where students talked about themselves as a collective, lyrics that began with ‘we are.’ The collective identity code was used for the ‘we are’ statements that referred to an outside of school community. Another code I developed was ‘collective school experiences.’ Under this code I generated the sub codes school likes, school dislikes, and frustrations with school. Frustrations with school was a code that came up a lot. I further refined these sub codes to distinguish between concrete issues with the school building, like low quality food and dirty water fountains, and abstract issues like teacher pedagogy and feelings of safety.

Other codes I generated through reading and coding students’ rap lyrics revolved around the nature of fictional lyrics. These codes were silly fantasy, ghetto fantasy, idyllic fantasy, and braggadocios. Lyrics that were coded silly fantasy and ghetto fantasy I put as sub codes under braggadocios because they are both in the braggadocios tradition. Braggadocios is style of rap where the rapper boast and ‘brags’ about themselves. These brags can be fact or fiction, which made distinguishing between braggadocios bars and fantasy bars difficult. Lyrics that were boast and brags that were fiction I affixed to the braggadocios code, while bars that did not specifically illustrate a boast were affixed to the fantasy code. Idyllic fantasy were lyrics that were aspirational in nature and talked about the type of aspirations schools traditionally encourage students to have. These lyrics were about community building, utopian societies, college enrollment, and high paying careers.

Additionally, I created codes and subcodes for joy that spoke to what psychologists, sociologists, Black activists, and theologians are saying about joy (Adams, 2017; Cruz, 2017; Johnson, 2015; Lu & Steele, 2019). The subcodes I created for joy were radical self-expression, affirmation, connection with peers, and connection with something bigger. These codes spoke to what the literature describes as joy and feelings that lead to joy (Adams, 2017; Lu & Steele, 2019). I engaged in several rounds of memo writing where I reflected on the codes and the lyrics the codes represented in order to generate overall themes.

## **2) Layering: The Blackout**

After the first cycle of data analysis using inductive reasoning I began to take a marker (figuratively speaking, it was on Microsoft word) and black out certain phrases to find the collective voice in the individual raps. The first words I blacked out were those that contained identifiable information. This is also the first step in Blackout Poetic Transcription's blackout process (Keith & Ensley, 2020). I removed any information that could identify the students including the name of the school. This was done not only to comply with Institutional Review Boards (IRB), but also to protect the privacy of the students I was working with. Next, I layered over lyrics that did not add new knowledge and only described existing information. For example there were lyrics that read "My fortress is big and holds a lot of tourist," the latter half of the phrase, which were lyrics that further illustrated the large size of the fortress was blacked out. Saying "my fortress is big" introduces a new idea, while "it holds a lot tourist" does not add a new idea it simply extends the existing one.

Next, I layered over rap lyrics that are what I call, 'convenience bars.' Convenience bar is a name I created to describe rap lyrics that are included in the song only to add a rhyme, rhymes of convenience. They are most likely found in the second line. Novice rappers will often have

rap lyrics that are forced into the song just so the verse can rhyme. Even though they make a rap verse rhyme, they do not add new information, so I layer over these kind of lyrics. Next, I blackout adjectives, adverbs, and metaphors because they exaggerate ideas rather than state new ones.

Metaphors are one of rap's most common techniques. Metaphors paint vivid pictures, and allow the audience to connect deeper with lyrics. However, they essentially are glorified adjectives and adverbs. Although they add deeper meaning to an action, event, idea, or phenomena that has already been stated, they do not introduce new information. In the lyrics "Get more bread than a baker," the baker metaphor only serves to illustrate the amount of money (which bread is slang for) that the author is receiving. While metaphors add style and context they do not introduce a new idea or action, therefore must be blacked out. These lyrics extend ideas but do not state new ones therefore they distract from the deeper meaning in the more deliberately written statements. They are fluff, which is a name I give to represent all the blacked-out lyrics. After I blackout 'the fluff', what is left are strong and deliberate statements that represent the ideas, feelings, desires, dreams, and fantasies of the students. I call these lyrics, lyrical statements. Below is an example of a poem that was layered over.

Figure D

- [REDACTED] enraged
- [REDACTED] i'm caged
- [REDACTED] outraged
- T [REDACTED] me deranged

- [REDACTED] being played
- [REDACTED] afraid
- Why is life so hard
- Why am I here
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] stuck in school years
- Wish I could disappear
- [REDACTED]
- Nothing I do is without fear

### 3) Rupture: Lyrical Statements

When the fluff is blacked out what is left are a collection of lyrical statements. Novice rappers often make a clear statement of fact or feeling in their first bar and then look for convenience bars. Both beginner and experienced rappers will add metaphors and similes. Once I blackout the fluff, what is left are the lyrics that truly reflect the students' feelings, ideas, and aspirations; I call these words lyrical statements. Lyrical statements are written with more intentionality and possess a greater meaning than fluff bars. Lyrical statements are concise yet packed with meaning. Geneva Smitherman (1997) refers to filling concise statements with large amounts of meaning as a feature of African American Vernacular English and asserts that it is a defining element of rap music. Cutting the fluff and using lyrical statements as data leans into that idea. Each lyrical statement consist of only a few words; however these concise phrases are thick with meaning.

During the rupture step the lyrical statements are broken down into separate documents. I did this by creating a separate Microsoft word document and copying all the words not blacked out into the document. Once the lyrical statements were typed into a word document the document becomes a poetic transcript (Keith & Endsley, 2020). By reading over the poetic transcript, one can familiarize themselves with the lyrics and begin to put them in general categories. This process resembles a first coding cycle (Saldana, 2011). Once the transcript was read over several times, I begin re-copying the lyrical statements into separate categorized poetic transcripts separating the lyrics into five different documents. After I copied the lyrical statements into these separate documents, I read them over several times generating and reflecting on themes that arise from the poetic transcript. During this step I re-arranged and re-categorized lyrics several times based on reflective memos. An example of this are lyrics that read 'being the student who teachers are good at teaching' which I originally labeled under the self-affirmation code. Yet, after the blackout I realized it showed the author to be a particular type of student, one who the school is geared towards teaching. This belongs under the school identity code. The lyrics suggested that there were certain types of students that teachers were good at teaching and there were certain type of students teachers were not good at teaching. After the lyrical statements are separated, I then think through the themes using the lens of joy and critical consciousness as defined by CHRE and CSP (Alim & Wong, 2020; Muhammed, 2023). Below is an example of ruptured lyrical statements.

Figure E

- kids smell
- kids are liars

- don't feel like myself
- school is a curse
- treat us like jail
- my beautiful creatures
- I just stop trying
- I'm so happy
- I love school
- I wish there was candy

#### **4) The Remix: Code Weaving**

This section expands upon the process by which five themes emerged from the data and the rationale behind the development of each theme (Creswell, 2015, Saldana, 2011). After several rounds of coding, the lyrical statements were re-organized based on larger themes that emerged from the coding process. Doing this generated pseudo rap verses which began to develop a narrative. During this step the lyrical statements left once the fluff is deleted, were removed them from their original songs, and recategorized based on themes that emerged from the data. I developed these themes through reflective journaling on ways the codes and subcodes were related and merged them into larger themes after several re/readings of the data. The larger themes that emerged were *braggadocious*, *fantasies*, *middle school hell*, *feelings*, *school love*, and *annoying messages from adults*.

The themes that emerged varied in frequency. The *frustrations* theme contained one hundred and sixty one different lyrical statements. This was the theme with the highest amount. The second largest amount was *braggadocious*. The *braggadocious* theme had one hundred and

forty eight different lyrical statements. The next highest number was *annoying messages from adults* which contained forty one lyrical statements. The *fantasy* theme had thirty nine lyrical statements and *school love* had twenty two lyrical statements. Finally, *feelings* contained thirty four lyrical statements. The thematic breakdown is represented below in Figure F.

Figure F

Themes	Lyrical Statements	Related codes
Frustrations with school	161	school environment, school culture, criticality, intellectual, school frustrations, classroom management, school culture
Feelings	34	frustrations, teen angst
Annoying messages from adults	41	student life, classroom management
Fantasy	39	silly fantast, idyllic fantasy, ghetto fantasy
Braggadocious	148	ghetto fantasy, transgression, ratchet, censorship, aspirational bars
School love	39	fun at school, teacher rapport, success at school

Case Study Research incorporates the method of separating and reattaching data in meaningful ways, this step builds on that technique (Creswell, 2015). It took several rounds of analysis and reflective memos on codes and code weaving decisions in order to generate these themes (Saldana, 2011). During the analysis of this data, I particularly struggled with separating the lyrical statements under the code ‘school frustrations’ with the code ‘feelings.’ While there were many lyrics that communicated the emotional responses of students to their learning environment, they were feelings connected to their participation within their school community. I eventually affixed these lyrics to the theme ‘school frustrations’ as well. I separated the feelings

students had as a result of their participation in their middle school society from lyrics that described the emotions related to students' various identities. Lyrics in one student's song stated, 'I'm not masculine enough, too emotional.' Even though these lyrics referred to why they do not fit in with peers at school it was an emotional response to a part of their identity. Although feelings about one's identity impacts their school experiences, identity is such a large part of someone's lived experience that it seemed reductive to connect it to school frustrations.

### **5) Flow: Pairing lyrical statements**

Crafting rap verses by combining students' lyrics allowed me to see beyond the teacher perspective. Teaching classes all day, building rapport with other teachers, and experiencing the everyday tensions and frustrations of teaching; potentially impacted my ability to see the student perspective. During the first round of coding and analysis most of what I could see was the students complaining. Based on my interaction with the teachers at Franklin I saw the teacher as caring and thoughtful, working hard to build relationships with students and deliver a quality education. As a teacher-researcher I could not ignore my experiences talking with teachers who care and put a lot of work in. I myself often became frustrated with students' behavior and defiance of classroom protocols. In my observation memos, I wrote about pedagogical struggles and possible shifts in my teaching and curriculum. Turning lyrical statements into data raps allowed me to divorce myself from that particular perspective and gain deeper insight into what the students are communicating in their rap lyrics. It allowed me to closely attend to when and how students are articulating their frustrations, desires, fantasies, and joys. Remixing, resorting, re-theming, and re-connecting students' lyrics allowed me to discover ways the lyrics told a story. It revealed how lyrics that referred to the smell of the bathroom were connected to lyrics

that talked about school fights, the lack of air conditioning, and visible police presence. A collective perspective emerged once I connected the lyrical statements.

During the flow stage I connect the lyrical statements into a narrative, so the data raps could provide a collective perspective. In the last stage I weaved codes together to develop themes, which I sorted the lyrical statements into (Creswell, 2015; Saldana, 2011). Although I carefully placed lyrical statements under emergent themes, the lyrics were still not yet in the form of a verse. Once the lyrics were sorted into themes and subcategories it was still in the shape of a list, not a rap. The flow stage of the data analysis leaned into my subjective skill set as both a researcher and rapper. During this stage I connected the individual lyrical statements that belonged to the same larger themes. In the tradition of critical hermeneutic phenomenology I leaned into my subjective skills as an artist/researcher (Keith & Ensley, 2020; Mobley, 2015). Although twenty years of rapping has given me experience in crafting lyrics, researchers with no song writing experience can also connect lyrical statements after they are classified under larger themes. This process involves reading over the lyrics and searching for natural pairings. This requires reciting lyrics out loud and listening to how they sound together. I printed out the lyrical statements separated by the larger themes and experimented with pairing by typing them out on a Word document and reading them aloud.

Since lyrical statements are short (some being only three words) I combined three to five different ones into a single rap bar. The data rap is meant to reveal a collective story by connecting lyrics from different students into order to generate a collective narrative. The researchers lyrical analyses, shape the lyrics and the final data raps represent the voice of both the students and the researcher (Keith & Endsley, 2020). When fluff is blacked out and rap lyrics are coded, categorized, and connected, the data rap emerges. While generating the data raps, I

add limited words and phrases in order to connect the lyrics, however I keep these words at a minimum. I marked my words in parenthesis in order to keep the integrity of the student voices. I endeavored never to add more than five words to each data rap as adding too many of my own words could compromise student perspective. Those minimal lyrical additions and the decisions on how to categorize the data represent further analysis of the data, as the decision process is guided by researcher perspective. Merging the varying lyrical statements into data raps are an essential stage for this method of analysis and reveals the collective ideas present in over one hundred students individual rap songs. The data rap is meant to be less of a polished product and more of a representational model of students' ideas.

I connected students' lyrics across five different classes and four different quarters. As I combined the lyrical statements together verses emerge. Each verse contained a collection of student voices since the rap songs were collected from hundreds of different students. As mentioned previously the lyrical statements which represented the spirit of the five larger themes formed the chorus of the data raps. I chose rap songs from each quarter to ensure an in depth collection of data. The choices behind which lyrics fit together reflected what messages I found in the rap lyrics of the Franklin middle school students. I conducted several rounds of data analysis through coding and analytical memos before fusing lyrical statements (Keith & Endsley 2020; Saldana, 2011).

Bridging lyrics using audio visual means is a way for researchers to incorporate this method of analysis. However, as a rapper I can see the lyrics vibrate. Once the lyrics were separated into themes, I read over them and saw which lyrical statements were vibrating at similar frequencies. Next, I read them over to discern if they flowed together. I added further analysis by adding a limited amount of my own lyrics when the connections needed a push. The

lyrics I added tapped into my instinctual voice and saw what the rapper in me could see that the researcher might miss. I connected the lyrical statements that fit together and intuitively add a very limited amount of lyrical statements or adlibs of my own, thereby adding artistic intuition to the process of data analysis (Leavy, 2020).

#### **Chapter 4: Findings for JET**

The students in the JET program were working and middle class African American students who were raised in a large urban setting. They went to charter and magnet schools, and it was clear their parents did work to navigate the public school system. I know this because this is what my parents did. These students like me came from middle class African American families. I felt a strong connection to these students and the rapport was built effortlessly. I ate lunch with the students and oftentimes after class a few would walk over with me to continue discussions we had in class. We discussed topics like hood feminism, intersectionality, and trap music. These students were aligned with me culturally and being a Black man hip hop artist was a form of capital in connecting with them. The design principles for this context was to reveal what's missing and use art to do it. I decided to focus on the experience of Black women in the Civil rights movement. Black history is a neglected part of social studies education, and the intersectional experiences of Black women is a neglected aspect of a neglected field. Hood feminism blends misogynoir, racism, respectability politics, and intersectionality (Anugral & Widyaningrum, 2022). I spent the majority of class time in these discussions and readings and the last twenty minutes I taught them rap lyrical writing skills. Though many of these students were already rappers. I begin each class with a performance of my own where I merge Black history with my everyday experiences. In order to set the stage for free artistic expression I did not censor my lyrics. The first poem I shared was called 'What if There Were No Niggas Only

Master Teachers.’ The poem covered Black history from early Egypt to Ella Baker and was rife with personal experiences and extreme language. This set the stage for the kind of unrepressed learning and expression that would be centered in the course.

After listening and reading over transcripts of the performances I reflected on the features of speech in the performances. I paid closest attention to audience reaction. Jeffersonian Notation refers to these moments as overlapping speech and annotates them with brackets. Overlapping speech present in the call in the response nature of rap performances show the affinity the audience feels with the message. I measured the length of reaction to measure the extent of their affinity with a statement. I also measured laughter and other audible reactions where the audience signals their agreement with the statements being made the artist. The reactions are measured in length for every tenth of a second.

### Dear White America

Lyn:: Dear White America (0.5) Listen to me.

(0.2)

Hawa: Wait listen to us.

L: Listen to our voices.

H: What voice,

L: The voices you and your oppressive friends sto: ^le, (0.2) you won't listen to me but you will listen to our music trends and culture,~

Hawa: Uh (hhhh)(0.5) you people swear you are so tortured\_

Lyn: How do I hate you.= Let me count the ways. I hate your lies, schemes and corruptions. Thoughts of our traumas = leaves me in a [haze].

Crowd: [mmmmm]

(0.7)

Hawa: I give you this. =I give you that. and this^? is how you treat me? ^>If you hate me so much then leave.

L: Le:ave I was the one stol:en. (0.2) colonized. I have no choice but to despise.(0.5) Left exploited and criminalized #yet i'm the one who's penalized#?,

H: The Lies you guys swear you'r s- you guys are- [oh fuck]

Crowd: [h a h a h a h a h]

H: You guys are craz- and have t-the nerve to turn around and complain about being marginalized, =yet you account for more than [50% of crimes.]

Crowd: [mmm...uhhhh]

The only other thing yall ^niggas know what to do is ball and rhyme?, You should be the ones facing time\_~



Laughs were marked and timed in Jeffersonian Notation. Certain statements were marked with brackets to illustrate that it represents overlapping speech. The first comment that displays this overlapping speech is in line 6 and reads “you will listen to our music, trends, and culture.” The all-Black students in the audience are showing their strong assent to this statement with claps cheers, and words like ‘yoooooooo’ colloquially communicating their agreement with the statement. Black culture is marketed across America however white people who emulate Black culture often experience more success. Elvis, Justin Timberlake, and the new wave of white rappers are examples of this. The loudest and longest moments of laughter occurred when a student named Lynn stated, “let me flip the script (line 22).” This phrase followed lyrics breaking down Black stereotypes of joining gangs and committing crimes. This phrase primed the audience for the next section where Lynn responded to white America’s stereotypical depictions of African Americans. In this section Lynn discusses how Blacks were never paid for slavery and how white America steals Black culture for their own entertainment and economic gain.

This poem illustrates an understanding of systematic racism and cultural appropriation. It speaks to the definition of Black joy as existing in the same space as Black pain. An example of this is in the lyrics “Bloods and crips those thugs and gangs were originally created to protect us those are our visual anties to fuck your uncle Toms (line, 40).” The students are showing the complexity of gangs which are harmful to the Black community but were originally build as revolutionary groups akin to the Panthers. Not only does the poem illustrate an understanding of the everyday racist ideas that white people have but the rationalization of these experiences. There are certain rhetorical phrases that are used so that people can maintain racist ideas and structures without feeling racist themselves (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). The phrase “don’t get me

wrong there are some good ones” is an example of such rhetoric meant so people can maintain racist ideals without feeling racist (line, 44). This performance utilizes this phrase as a launching point for a Black counternarrative voice. The poem illustrates the complex contradictory way that hip hop culture is both denigrated and commodified by white America. In the performance a student takes on the role of white America and states Black stereotypes like “sagging their pants and carrying around guns with all that that gangsta and thug stuff (line, 32).” The piece continues to illustrate how the slang and aesthetics of hip hop culture are then appropriated by White America. The piece depicts America’s hatred of Black people and obsession with Black culture a phenomenon that has existed since Black people first came to America and Black face minstrelsy became the first example of America popular culture. These are topics that when discussed in classes do not feel particularly joyful but do lead to the development of critical consciousness. Using the definition of critical consciousness that I am ascribing to this poem is a clear example of it. The students are demonstrating an understanding of racial injustice as it exist in both systems and in the minds of people and these students are exuding joy while doing it. Their joy is evidenced by their laughter and use of their individual style and personality displayed in their performances.

Hip hop pedagogy can potentially take the “difficult” out of difficult history/ies, since Black music alchemizes pain into joy. This was illustrated by the rap pieces from students in the JET program. Students in the JET program rapped about a range of social justice topics. Some raps discussed toxic masculinity and the patriarchal systems which work to dehumanize Black women while sympathizing with white women. For example, when two girls wrote *Voice of a Woman* we can see their critical analysis of white supremacist patriarchy when they say “I am the voice of a woman. Septima Clark...a woman who developed citizenship schools, that help

Blacks pass literacy test so that they can repossess the systems made to oppress and yet men still question my worth as if I'm not the best." The girls used the words 'I am' despite the fact that they go back and forth from taking on the persona of Septima Clark and other women Civic rights activist. They see their own experiences implicated in the stories of these women.

Another group of girls declared in *Dear White America*, "I was the one stolen colonized I have no choice but to despise. Left exploited and criminalized yet I'm the one who's penalized/the lies (line, 12)." In these lyrics the students are discussing the experiences being stereotyped by white America, using both Black history and their own lived experiences. Students in their raps, depicted history's cyclical nature and the constant threat of police to Black communities. These were lyrics the audience, comprised of other students, responded strongly to. Another set of lyrics in a piece written by Aniyah entitled *This is Me*, reads "I'm three things America hates/ Black, a women, and lesbian." When she delivered the lyrics however, she did not sound dejected or defeated. Her words radiated power and communicated a reproach of America's gender norms by naming and standing proudly in the utterance of her identities. This is a young girl screaming to a class how America hates who she is. America hates her because she is Black, a woman, and gay. Naming this hatred and delivering it with swag and energy empowered Aniyah and the audience verbally expressed their understanding of her feelings. While America hates and silos her identities her peers expressed connection with Aniyah through their audible reactions and co-signs. This reveals how the call and response aspect of Black culture is a quality of Black music which can center joy in discussions of difficult aspects of history and the present. Racism is hard to talk about particularly the consistent nature of it. Rap/spoken word performances about the hidden and highly visible forms of racism is a way to

remove some of the power it has over the students. This piece was not only a societal interrogation but a proclamation of empowerment.

Another piece 'I'm proud to be Black' explains how two Black male students are breaking stereotypes by being educated and "staying on track". They explain how when white America sees criminals, they just see people trying to survive. These lyrics, perhaps because of the explicit call to write about issues in the broader society, situate criminality in history and unjust racist economic policies. Without this prompting, students at Franklin did not explore criminality in the same way. The raps from the students at Franklin celebrate criminality but do not connect it to a history of racism and classism. In this JET rap, the students bring up redlining and easy gun access as reasons why some people become criminals. Students in the audience responded strongly to these lyrics and indicated their assent via cheers when specific issues like redlining was mentioned. Rigged elections and voter suppression are also contextualized within students raps about the censoring of Fannie Lou Hamer connecting it with voter issues of today. The rap pieces from JET students talk about how Black activists worked towards Black liberation, and the impact of this work on their lives today. The rap songs talk about acute examples of white violence like the Tulsa Massacre and subtle ones like economic policies and redlining.

Strong audience reaction also occurred when students physically punctuated their lyrics when they made particularly salient points. When Deron, a young Black male, in his piece said "(America is) killing niggas left and right they still believing white people some pacifist," he used his body to emphasize what he was saying (line, 17). When he says those words, Deron spins in a circle for emphasis and comes back to center stage pointing to the audience as he emphasizes his final point declaring "while they still hanging niggas from a tree." Deron makes a representative gesture by dragging his index finger across his neck in order to pantomime

lynching, before stomping hard on the ground as he spoke the last word. This was the loudest audience reaction of all performances. Despite the fact that he is talking about lynching and the pervasive nature of racism and anti-Black violence to American society, both the artist and audience felt empowered by his naming these realities. Deron, like other students changed the speed of his lyrics when making points he knew the audience would respond to. In the piece 'Voice of a Woman' two girls describe the resistance to sexism that Black women have engaged in overtime, and how they continue this legacy. When they spoke about celebrating victory against masculine forces, they sped up as well. The change in speed emphasize the point that garnered a strong reaction and represent liberatory joy and collective ideas of critical learning. These findings have implications for learning across a number of research fields and academic disciplines.

In their rap/spoken word pieces the students named various forms of racial oppression that exist in society both past and present. The students also brings up the forms of oppression that lives in the hearts and minds of people. The lines that evokes the strongest joyful reactions were lines that named forms of oppression. It was as if loudly proclaiming ones recognition of these forces removed some of its power. Closely attending to how these proclamations evoke empowerment reveals how using hip hop can take the difficult out of difficult history.

### **Chapter 5 Findings for Franklin**

I taught middle school for eight years, so I was very comfortable teaching students from sixth to eighth grade. The students at Franklin were multicultural. The majority of the students were white, there were comparable numbers of Black and Latin/x students, and there were Asian students as well. I worked as a regular teacher. I taught three classes in the morning and two in the afternoon. I attended meetings with other teachers in the United Arts program. These were

teachers who taught electives like gym and music. The UA teachers met weekly and discussed goals and issues. Classroom behavior was a persistent issue as it was clear these classes were not taken seriously by the students. Based on conversations with the head teachers and observations I determined within the first week that rapport and interest would be the best way to get students to buy into the course. After the first quarter I determined that I would not be able to teach content the same way I did with the JET program (see below). I did not have the same cultural connection with these students and its location within a school with co-teachers limited my pedagogy. I did not feel comfortable sharing my uncensored poetry with this age group and my rapport with them more closely resembled a traditional students teacher relationship than my rapport with the JET students. I altered the curriculum between the first and second quarter. I decided to focus on teaching students how to write rap songs first to build interest. I would then add content to teach the students later. However once I began reading what students wrote I discovered that their lyrics were already showing evidence of a civic content. Instead of reading text and listening to sources I chose, students would probe their mind for information they already possessed and use rap lyrics to process that information.

As mentioned previously in the description of Blackout Rap Transcription, the lyrical statements were divided into six themed poetic transcripts. The first theme that emerged from the data was *feelings*. Students talked about feeling alone and alienated because they do not fit the traditional societal mold of masculinity or femininity. These lyrical statements provided insight into the impact traditional notions of gender had on a student's feelings of isolation. Students used their rap lyrics to express how rigid structures of gender were harming them. Feelings of fear was prevalent in students' lyrics. Fear of being social, fear of taking the risk to talk to people, and fear of being alone. Many of the lyrics students wrote were articulating vulnerable

truths. This fear the students were expressing connect to conceptualizations of joy. In their lyrics students illustrate seeking joy through connection (Adams, 2017). Students were afraid that their inability to conform to social norms would disconnect them from others in their school community.

The second theme that emerged from the data was *frustrations with school*. I divided these frustrations into ones with the physical school building and ones with school culture. The former was for lyrical statements were critiques of physical features of the school building. The latter was for critiques on abstract features of the school like how safe they made students feel. Lyrics like “there are fights all the time...it’s overpoliced...the kids don’t listen to adults” illustrate these critiques. Students lyrics also bring up frustrations with school culture and policies, like the phone and bathroom policy. Franklin students feel they do not have enough time with the bathroom pass and that they should be able to use their phones. The lyrics are redressing the rules that govern the students in their microcosm of society and represent a type of civic literacy. Civic literacy not in memorizing rules or historical tales but in their opinions towards the rules that directly impact their everyday experiences. The lyrics “we burning up” “no AC” are clear enough complaints reminiscent of a student town hall or even PTA meeting. It’s specific inclusion in the rap song shows a civic participation in the microcosm of society that is the school. The lyrics are clear critiques from student perspectives.

The *frustrations with school* theme also referred to issues students had with their peers. The lyrics ‘can’t trust kids’ and “can they be vulnerable” illustrate the frustrations students experience when attempting to connect with peers. These lyrical lamentations once again illustrate the importance of connection to young people. Joy as connection shows up in both psychological and theological depictions of joy (Emmons, 2020). The fear of disconnection was

a primary reason behind many of the frustrations students at Franklin experienced. Other lyrics communicating student frustrations were “police here on a daily...like jail...(and)...ghetto.” Here the students are communicating that one of the reasons the school is ghetto is because of the police presence. These lyrical statements suggest students do not feel completely safe in the school because of policy decisions which lead to over policing. Police presence is not something you find at affluent schools only in schools that are as the students write “ghetto.” The lyrics infer the school is overpoliced and students do not feel safe because of this excess police presence, which suggest that the over policing is not working. Students express fear from their peers as well as the prevalence of fights is mentioned in several students’ lyrics.

The students not only demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the hyper police presence but explore the root causes of the fights, a need for attention and recognition. The lyrics “fights everyday...phones out...Instagram...kids going viral” demonstrate an insight and understanding of the modern social media laden society and its impact on students. Many young people engage in society through social media to the extent that they experience a virtual identity. Virtual identities are created and breaking school rules by fighting can give young people a celebrated online identity. Fight videos get lots of likes and there is potential for “going viral.” Students can get attention and virtual affirmation from engaging in recorded fights. During my initial codes I did not connect fights with fear. The words were lost in the rhymes, the need to add wordplay and force rhyming bars clouded the connection. But when I blacked out the convenience bars what was left was “fights” “scare” “they don’t care” the latter mentioned twice. Some students are gaining notoriety and attention for fighting and other students are not feeling safe, perhaps having to watch fights or fear being dragged into one of those videos against their will. The lyrics in another rap, “rumors secrets lies trolls” provide further insight into the online struggles

of young people. Trolls are people online who are known for being offensive, insulting, and even abusive at times. Here the students show a danger of social media, and a problem modern young people face with little to no solutions for them. I can't imagine a student telling me in an interview that they like to fight because they get affirmation from peers, however that is the message I got from their lyrical statements. These lyrics represent how the school community extends beyond the physical building and how the need for safety, connection, and recognition extend to the social media communities students are a part of.

The *frustrations with school* theme also contained lyrics that depict students emotional responses to their school experiences. The lyrical statement that stood out the most were "we are all suffering from child neglect." This is powerful phrase and a conscious choice was made when the student wrote them. The student who wrote this does not feel as if their needs are being met. They feel neglected. This once again speak to a student naming what harms them and what gives them joy (Muhammed, 2023). Feeling attended to, feeling paid attention to. As a teacher at this school for almost the entire year my first instinct is to refute this claim. I saw the teachers work hard to connect with students as I did myself. However, this is not about the teachers or staff, or even my opinion; this method is about gaining insight through vulnerable truths shared in the art students created and shared with me. So I honor that by giving the credence to the words they deserve. The teacher perception in the context of this study is less relevant than the perception of the students. Lyrics that read "school is so depressing, and teachers make me mad" refer to teachers' pedagogical struggles, but are really about the students feelings about these struggles. Other lyrical statements paint a picture of the pressure students feel to make good grades. The lyrics "that feeling in my chest, that stress, whenever I do not get an A," really paints a clear picture of student anxiety. The struggle students have with performing well on exams and class

assignments. In these lyrics clearly there is a student that usually makes A's but is stressed when they do not. Other lyrics continue to explain how they get confused by math and specifically mention slope, range, and circumference as concepts that especially confuse them.

Young people reflecting on how they fit into the mini society of the school community represents civic learning as these insights can translate to the larger society as a whole. Learning to name the problems of the society one inhabits and how they relate to the individual speaks to Freire's problem posing education and is a central tenet of CHHP (Akom, 2009; Freire, 1970; Kelly & Sawyer, 2019). When students write about what makes the school environment feel "ghetto" and not a positive learning environment they are engaged in this type of critical learning by both naming the problem and theorizing solutions (Akom, 2009). The over policing of the school is depicted as having a deleterious effect on the learning environment. Students are naming that which is harmful to the learning environment and articulating it in their rap lyrics. This redress of their school culture is clearer when fluff is layered over and not lost in the rhymes.

Another theme that emerged from the data was *school love*. These lyrical statements showed an appreciation for the school whether it's the teachers, classmates, or field trips. Lyrics under this theme explained why students appreciated Franklin. Many of these lyrics show appreciation for the community the students have built at school. In this category students are not writing about what harms them but what gives them joy like community and connection (Adams, 2017). These are opposite lyrics from the ones in the *frustrations with school* theme, yet the same meaning can be gleaned from both. Students are seeking connection. This is in line with both how CHRE and researchers define joy (Adams, 20217; Emmons 2020; Muhammed, 2023). The lyrical statements appreciation for concrete things at Franklin like school food and access to

water fountains and filters. These depictions are contrary to lyrics like “burgers are rubber” and “water is nasty.” This shows that the students are not all aligned in their opinions and gives space for dissenting opinions.

Other lyrics in the *school love* theme refer to positive school memories students made at Franklin. Students discuss going on field trips and having fun with peers and teachers. Some of these lyrical statements are “teachers are amazing...love school...interactive staff,” these lyrics suggest an appreciation for teachers who make attempts at connecting with students. In the lyrics from this theme, students are naming why they experience joy at Franklin. These experiences include field trip activities, having teachers paying attention to them, as well as fun in school activities like the student v staff game basketball game. However, the most salient example of what students love about school is feeling connected to teachers, and feelings of homeplace and safety. Lyrics like “home” “warm” “cozy” and “Ms. Tasha” describe a teacher and the connection a student has with that teacher is what makes them enjoy school. Feelings of home represent feeling safe, which is the environment most productive for learning. Once again a student demonstrates naming what they need to be successful. This shows evidence of criticality by naming (Muhammed, 2023).

The lyrical statement “good at teaching me” is an appropriate in vivo explanation for the varied perceptions of life at Franklin. Some students felt like they had a caring staff who were good at teaching them and making connections. Others felt school was “ghetto” and overpoliced. In their lyrics they assert a need for attention and validation, which can lead to fights and an unsafe environment. The lyrics in Documents #2 and #3 paint a complicated and contradictory picture depicting the experiences students have at Franklin Middle School. These oppositional lyrics represent the complicated oppositional society we live in that works for some people and

not for others. These lyrics illustrate the different perceptions and opinions of the Franklin students. The lyrics “I don’t feel like myself at school” highlights an essential feature of an ideal learning environment. Students should be able to feel like themselves, this is a legitimate complaint and a problem whose exploration could provide insight into designing better learning environments where students can feel like themselves (Adams, 2017; Cruz, 2017). CHRE defines joy as when young people can feel like themselves (Muhammed, 2023). This is another example of a student naming what would enhance their learning and lead to them to joy. If recognizing harm is a form of critical consciousness than recognizing what gives one joy also is. This moves critical conscious learning past deficit based thinking to include not just describing what is wrong, but what can be right. In these lyrics the student describes not just what harms them, but they provides solutions. Feeling like themselves.

Another theme that emerged from the data was *fantasy*. This theme included the subcodes *silly fantasy*, *ghetto fantasy*, and *aspirational bars*. These latter aspirational fantasy contained lyrics which illustrated how students conceived of the American dream. Lyrics like “gon have money...where there’s a will there’s a way....not washing plates....there’s a way”, show how a student is determined not to work a menial labor job. They are naming the ways they conceive of success and how it is predicated on determination in order to achieve the American dream of financial prosperity. They name their path to joy as having money and being successful. The student does not name the job they want, but they name the job they do not want. The student wants to be a part of a middle/upper social class. They are naming their dreams and desires. They are naming the aspirations that will give them long term joy.

The *fantasy* theme emerged from lyrics that were imaginations of joy. Lyrics like “being piccachu,” “a fairy”, or “yo man is mine,” reveal the wide range of middle school fantasies.

Taking someone's man infers that the student is so beautiful and desirable that someone in a relationship could not resist their charms. It reveals inner held desires and imagined stories of joy. Feeling beautiful is a valuable affirmation for a middle school student. Feeling desirable is important to most adults, and adolescents are just beginning to process those complex emotions. These lyrics would be considered inappropriate by most school standards. I coded these lyrics with the code *censorship*, meaning most classes would find them to be inappropriate for school. These lyrics could lead to the unease of the teacher as it flies in the face of the school protocols regarding profanity and salacious topics. Lyrical statements that contained curse words were labeled inappropriate not by my standards but by school policies. Teachers regularly lectured students when they would curse in class and the hallway, I witnessed this firsthand at Franklin. It was evident by their daily reproach to students around profanity that teachers felt they were supposed to make sure students did not curse. However, the vast majority of rap songs contain curse words, and I told students to write freely in their first drafts.

Rap lyrics that are violent and celebrate criminal behavior were affixed with the codes 'ghetto fantasy' and 'ratchet.' *Ghetto fantasy* is a recurring topic in hip hop whether it's gangsta rap, trap, or drill. The most profitable rap songs often engage in this form of narrative storytelling. I use the word *ghetto* as an emic term, as a member of the hip hop community which valorizes redeems the concept of ghetto. Some lyrics student wrote read "I just stabbed a man dead", others read "I'm a registered criminal." Ghetto fantasy depicted transgressive lyrics. These lyrics demonstrate the rebellious spirit of hip hop. Rebellion against class protocols that asked for radio friendly versions of their rap songs. These lyrics demonstrate a clear flouting of class protocol.

After reading and re-reading the lyrical data and writing reflective memos the theme braggadocious emerged. I noticed that the lyrics labeled inappropriate and ghetto fantasy also depicted students' self-aggrandizement and fantasies about their idealized selves. These students were writing about their pathways to joy (Halverson, 2021; Love, 2019; Muhammed, 2021). I realized hip hop had already created a word for these type of lyrics, braggadocios. The students operationalized transgressive speech to write about imagined states of joy in language that flies in the face of school protocols meant to produce an idealized type of student (Emdin, 2022). While schools educate students to produce what Emdin calls "scripts of appropriateness," these students were literally writing scripts of inappropriateness embodying the spirit of ratchet pedagogy. The defining quality of braggadocious rap lyrics are being extremely boastful and countercultural, reveling in its transgression. During this step, I discovered that the lyrics that were transgressive also contained boast about real and imagined qualities of the students. They were engaged in self affirmation using both fact and fiction. The lyrics told a story of why each student was special. The lyrics that were labeled *ghetto fantasy*, *inappropriate*, *ensorship*, and *ratchet* were recategorized under the *braggadocious* theme, as it depicted the nature and rationale for the lyrics.

The braggadocios theme contained a large number of lyrical statements. Braggadocious is a style of rap that draws on rich African cultural traditions that reflect students' positive self-affirmation and ruminations on joy (Smitherman, 1997; Love, 2019). The braggadocios lyrical style denotes extreme boasting. This is a technique used heavily in commercial rap songs particularly trap music. Sub codes for braggadocios in the first rounds of analysis were originally under the codes *school rap*, *not school appropriate*, *ghetto fantasy*, *ensorship*, and *ratchet*. After many rounds of coding and memoing on code choices and connections, I found

that the common thread between these codes was braggadociousness. I used the lyrical statement, 'Shawty I'm Amazing', as the title and chorus of the data rap as they perfectly embodied the braggadocious theme and exemplified joyful ruminations. I struggled separating the lyrics between the *braggadocious* theme and the *fantasy* theme, since they both represented ruminations on joy. I separated the lyrics by drawing on my emic understanding of braggadocious rap lyrics as being radically self-affirming (Smitherman, 2021). Even when fictional the lyrics extol the 'amazingness' of the artist. I separated the lyrics which were largely boastful in nature and affixed them to the braggadocious theme. Determining which lyrical statements would be categorized as fantasy and which would be categorized as braggadocious was difficult. Lyrical statements that contained hyperbolic language that extolled the virtue and splendor of an individual I coded as braggadocious. More general lyrical statements that showed an imagined reality that does not self-aggrandize I left under fantasy. When lyrics directly mentioned a brag or an exhortation for why the student is special I put it under the braggadocious theme.

The lyrics which depicted ruminations on joy which were not overtly self-aggrandizing I put under the fantasy theme. Sub codes under this theme were age-appropriate fantasies, age-inappropriate fantasies, silly fantasy, and idyllic fantasy. Lyrics like "being a fairy.... having magical fortresses... and going to Harvard" are fantasies that do not rebel against school protocols around what topics are appropriate for adolescents. However, lyrics like 'imma take yo man' in a rap verse depicting how a middle school girl was going to steal someone's boyfriend was labeled alt fantasy. Fantasies about being fairies, seem more school appropriate than a twelve year old girl fantasizing about taking another girls boyfriend. However, these fantasies are all present in the lyrics students in the same seventh grade class wrote. Lyrics about going to

Harvard or getting a high paying jobs reproduced American values, and were coded as *age appropriate fantasies*.

The lyrical statements that depict fantasies deemed inappropriate by school standards were not labeled that way to judge appropriateness, but to highlight the complexity of students' imaginings of joy (Love, 2019). Fantasies reveal aspirations and desires of students as well as reflections of stories they see celebrated in society. I leaned into the variety of depictions of joy present in different students' lyrics, to ensure I attended to a variety of definitions of joy and represented them in the data raps. Fantasies being ruminations on joy, do not fit neatly into boxes because humans are complex and different (Muhammed, 2023). As I reflected on the rationale behind the codes, I determined that each of the fantasy lyrical statements were equally representative of the Franklin Middle School community. Each one was worthy, whether they were lyrics that talk about going to ivy league colleges or ones that affirm beauty and desirability. Whether considered appropriate or inappropriate by various metrics, all the fantasies were examples of students using lyrical writing to communicate their imagined states of joy (Love, 2017). I honored the worthiness of these communications by connecting them together into one data rap to equally represent the fantasies of the Franklin community. Whether the fantasies were ghetto, idyllic, silly, or appropriate they all reflected students' ruminations on joy. I collated all the lyrics under the fantasy related codes under one theme to show the range and depth of middle school fantasies. This theme contained lyrics that varied from students pretending to be criminals to pretending to be buffalos and fairies.

The chorus/theme *middle school hell*, was generated by reflecting on the lyrical statements under the codes *frustrations with the school environment*, *school quality*, *feelings about school culture*, *teen angst*, and *frustrations with peers*. School environment was a code

that referred to physical issues with the school building like the water in the fountain tasting nasty, the food being bad, and no air conditioning in the classrooms. These were frustrations students had with the physical school building of Franklin. These critiques also have clear fixes. Clean water, exciting teachers, better school lunch, and glad plug ins in every room can be a list of suggested solutions. For the lyrical statements which referenced abstract issues of the school like teacher effectiveness I used the code *school quality*. I also generated the codes *classroom management*, *pedagogical struggles*, *school policies*, and *teacher student rapport*. Lyrical statements like “don't respect teachers...don't check kids...school is loud...teachers are rude,” infer that the lack of respect some students have for teachers negatively impacts the learning experience of other students. These statements suggest that teachers have work to do in order to foster a more productive learning environment.

I generated the code ‘teen angst’ for lyrics which did not have direct roots in a students’ school experience. Gender conformity, bullying, and loneliness were codes I put under *teen angst*. These are developmental issues adolescents experience and struggles that even adults do not have clear fixes for. After several cycles of coding I realized these experiences are bounded by the struggles of middle school students. Although the struggles the students describe in their lyrics extend beyond school they impact how students interact and comport themselves in the school environment. One of the lyrical statements “middle school hell” captured the essence of the aforementioned codes. I collated the lyrics with the codes *school environment*, *school quality*, *feelings about school culture*, *teen angst*, and *frustrations with peers*, and even *pedagogical struggles* under the emergent theme *middle school hell*. This theme was directly taken from the lyrics of a student, and it was important to me to use students own words as much as possible. Although they referred to school frustrations I felt the phrase middle school hell was an in vivo

representation of the students' experiences captured in the lyrics under this theme. So I made middle school hell the only in vivo theme, as well as the chorus for the data rap.

The theme 'Middle School Hell' contained the largest number of lyrical statements. The theme aptly surmised and appropriately dramatized the struggles students were experiencing in their school community. The struggle to interact with peers, the fear of not fitting in, the perception of being ignored, and a learning environment that is ghetto, all fit under the theme *middle school hell*. I merged all the lyrics attached to the codes around the Franklin students' adolescent struggles and issues with the school into the *middle school hell* theme as well. 'Middle school hell,' serves as both the title of the data rap, and a powerful in vivo thematic analysis. *Middle school hell* is the emergent theme as well as the chorus and title of the data rap. During this stage of analysis as I reflected and memoed on the codes, I discovered that even though classroom management issues referred to the actions of teachers, the lyrics were depicting the impact it had on the students and their reaction to it (Saldana, 2011). They were lyrical descriptions depicting why middle school feels like hell to some students. The lack of classroom management impacted the learning experience of the students and is a frustration they have with their school. Which is why teachers inability to command the respect of students as well as larger classroom management issues that extend beyond the classroom were categorized under the theme *middle school hell*. The lyrics that read "kids roaming the hallways and not in class... kids hanging out in bathroom stalls and smoking weed in the bathroom from vape pens" communicate school wide management issues that students found frustrating and added to their malcontent with their learning environment. I separated lyrics that inferred student frustrations and reactions to school environment and culture from general rules and protocols that teachers gave them.

The *middle school hell* theme also included lyrics where students critiqued the end of the school day being 4:22. As a teacher in the school who went to department meetings I learned that this was a result of conflicting bus schedules. It was local governmental failing and not a policy based on student learning. This recognition to me shows an example of a student naming a district policy that harms them both collectively and as individually. In the microcosm of society that is school culture this is a step in the development of a critical lens (Muhammed, 2023). The teachers teaching methods as well as individual discipline methods are also in the lyrics under this theme. Teachers are depicted as boring and overly reliant on technology. This adds to the feeling that school is hell. The messages in this data rap reveal students critique of their school both the environmental and cultural.

*Annoying Messages from adults* was a theme that emerged from lyrics reflecting on the school rules students disagreed with and were annoyed by. This frustration was communicated through the sarcastic exaggerated nature of their lyrics. The lyrical statement “T-A-R-D-Y” repeated several times communicated students’ annoyance with the way teachers enforce class punctuality by repeating this in the halls. During passing bells teachers would stand in the halls and repeat that phrase for students to encourage them to hasten their pace and get to class. how quick passing bells. I chose this lyrical statement as the chorus and title of the data rap as it most closely reflected the spirit of *annoying messages from adults*. This lyrical statement communicated student complaints about the school rules and protocols they were tired of hearing. It serves as an apt representation of the theme, employing sarcasm to represent students’ annoyance with the school rules.

I struggled with separating lyrics under *annoying messages from teachers* from lyrics that were coded as *school frustrations* and *school environment*. The lyrics “T-A-R-D-Y” was present

in several of the rap songs I chose at random. All the teachers at Franklin used this slogan to encourage students to get to class on time. These lyrics were one example of students communicating annoyance with school protocols. When these lyrics were read the eye roll is almost audible. The eye roll communicates a counter cultural lens where students express their annoyance with the repetitive messages they hear in school. While the lyrics communicate student complaints about school protocols, they are less of a redress and more of an annoyance. Which is why these lyrics were put under a separate theme from *middle school hell*. The annoyance was not strong enough to be seen as a full on frustration. The tone of these lyrics are irritation, not anger. The theme *annoying messages from adults* coupled with the in vivo title of the data rap T-A-R-D-Y exemplifies the sarcasm of the lyrics representing students' annoyance with the repetitive messages they hear at school.

## **Data Raps**

### ***Middle School Hell Data Rap***

The lyrics in the 'Middle School Hell' data rap reflected school conditions that the students feel are unjust, restrict their freedom, and make students feel unsafe. These issues mirror problems in the larger society which cause barriers to building a healthy democratic nation (Hall, 2023). The necessary competencies needed to be learned to build a healthy democracy is an agreed upon definition on goals for civics education (Barton & Ho, 2021). 'Middle school Hell' summates what a lot of the lyrical statements infer. The lyrics I added were minimal and for the purpose of adding a rhyme in order to connect related lyrical statements. One lyrical statement I added was 'no stability.' These two words reflected my interpretation of the consequence of students having different substitute teachers who were leaving after only a few days. Students lyrics demonstrated a systematic analysis of harm and resolution. These are first steps for naming

and rewriting the world (Frerie, 1972). Being able to name what in the school is preventing them from having an ideal learning environment is a demonstration of critical conscious development (Akom, 2009; Muhammed, 2023). The students demonstrate an understanding of why the substitute teachers are leaving in the lyrics “cus they loud...the kids don't follow rules... that's why the subs quit.” Regardless of the reason the students still need a stable teacher, and that understanding is reflected in their lyrics.

In other lyrics in ‘Middle School Hell’ students’ demonstrated both their understanding and frustration with the schools’ bathroom policy. Students lyrics reveal an understanding of how because some students linger in the hallway, it makes the school adopt a strict bathroom policy restricting the time students are allotted for the restroom. The chorus for ‘Middle school Hell’ list a series of issues students have with the school from lack of air-conditioning to the poor quality of school lunches and classroom instruction. It speaks to the overall theme of the data rap and depicts the collective ire the students at Franklin had with their school experiences. All of the lyrics speak to critical concious learning as outlined by CHHP as students are naming polices that impact them and theorizing various rationale behind them (Akom, 2009; Frerie, 1972). Lyrics in the data rap Middle School Hell communicated social commentary as students reflected on their experiences at school.

In the lyrics in the final verse of the Middle School Hell, students wrote about feeling unsafe as a result of the constant fighting at school. This data rap displayed both the fear students felt from school fights, in addition to a comprehension of the appeal of fighting to students. The lyrics “fights everyday kids going viral on Instagram” represent students’ understanding of why fights are so popular. It provides insight into the importance of virtual identities to students. The lyrics "wanna be famous” and “crave attention" are my researcher additions. It succinctly

paraphrased my interpretation of the lyrics explaining the appeal of fights to young people who crave attention and approval. The data rap puts the onus on the teachers and the school in their ability to command the respect of the class in order to provide a healthy learning environment. The lyrics show that the lack of consistency, the environment of the school, and lack of classroom management are barriers to learning.

### ***Braggadocious Data Rap***

The central theme in the braggadocious style of rap is thriving in spite of adversity. This speaks to hip hop as joyful learning because it speaks to an emic definition of Black joy (Cruz, 2017). Joy in the face of adversity is one of the defining features of Black joy (Adams, 2017; Cruz, 2017). It stands to reason that rap lyrics would organically tap into this form of joy. When braggadocious lyrics are contextualized with adversity, their nobility is easier to observe. Despite the forces that work against them, students still feel hope and joy. The various forces that work against the dreams, desires, goals, and aspirations of the individual students are personified in the braggadocious tradition and they respond with a “fuck you.” The braggadocious lens recontextualizes lyrics like “I’m a bully.” During an interview if a student said they were a bully, it would come off as behavior that should be negated. However, the braggadocious lens of joy in the face of adversity illuminates and recontextualizes. It takes negative ideas, narratives, and experiences and alchemizes them into something beautiful. Adding the ‘I’m a bully’ lyrical statement to a verse that explains that racist/sexist/classist, forces are working against the students to stop them from achieving their dreams, provides a context where the bully is noble. The bully moniker now conveys strength. The vulnerability the mask the of the bully hides is visible when put in lyrical form.

The lyrics “going out on the frontlines” in the *braggadocious* data rap communicated the struggle and adversity students are facing head on. The lyrics “imma shine even with shots of pain in my veins” further illustrate how these young people will thrive in spite of the adversity. Connecting these lyrics show how a message from one student can support another. When students are writing braggadocious bars the imagined opposition can be real or representative of feelings within themselves. Sometimes it’s white supremacist heteronormative forces, other times its peers, and other times it is a voice in their own mind. Whether real or imagined braggadocious raps demonstrate the authors power over opposition. Even if not talking about any system of oppression specifically there is an omnipresent enemy in the vast majority of rap songs and even in the ones written by middle school students. The 'you' in “fuck you” represents both real and imagined people and forces that work against the dreams and aspirations of the students. Even if the ‘you’ does not show up, it is implied. I directly added the implied “you” to connect the lyrics “So much money (you) can't stop me from getting dough.” Moving forward despite the you. The implied “fuck you” in the students’ braggadocious rap lyrics illustrate their realization of opposition and moving forward despite the forces that work against them. Making a way despite adversity is a feature of Black culture and is heavily present in Black art, particularly hip hop. It's what adds joy to critical consciousness.

The lyrical statements categorized under the braggadocious theme connected organically. While the purpose of these methods were not to make a great sounding song, when lyrical statements are purposefully themed and connected, the verse will likely sound good. Being guided by the principles that make a good song allows the researcher to have a systematized approach to gaining insight into the deeper meaning of the students lyrics. Years of writing rap songs provided me a muscle memory and an instinct that allowed me to look at lyrics and asses

how they naturally fit together. Lyrics which resonated with each other. However by incorporating trial and error, saying lyrics out loud and listening to how they sound together, one may ascertain organic connections. This is especially true for braggadocious lyrics.

The chorus of the song are made up of lyrical statements that capture the essence of braggadocious hip hop. The lyrics “shawty I'm amazing” was a lyrical statement a student wrote that I felt captured the spirit of braggadociousness. I paired these lyrics with a number of other lyrical statements where students are self-aggrandizing. In students braggadocious bars students were imagining future success. Braggadocious bars contain affirmations and desires however they also recontextualize negativity. Lyrics about being a bully, being rude, and being scum are examples of this recontextualization and organically connect with the lyrics “shawty I'm amazing.” Other recontextualized lyrics were “shame made us.” This was a statement that conveyed a negative sentiment; however it was recontextualized by hip hop to illustrate pride. The braggadocious quality of thriving in places people say you should not, reveals deeper meaning in the lyrics. Even though “shame made us” we are still here and still strong. This is why I connected it to the lyrical statement “shawty I'm amazing.” It communicates shame as a boasts. Another lyrical statement that stood out and vibrated strongly was “hoodie up.” Hoodie up is a symbol for black youth identity. The hoodie is a symbol in today's society due to police and systems that enact police polices like schools prejudice towards seeing Black men in hoodies as criminals. Hoodies up represent an act of defiance and a reveling in counterculture. This is why I added it to the chorus.

I added lyrics to each verse, very sparingly. Since the data rap is a collection of raps from over one hundred students (since some collaborated on one rap) I wanted to keep my additions minimal. The goal was to see what students are saying. Although I aimed to add less than five

words per song, this was not a fixed number rather a general guideline. The individual lyrical statements along with my limited additions were forged into a verse that served as a testimony against the oppressive forces, and reflected a will to thrive despite opposition. In this data rap students identified real and imagined forces that work against them and boldly defy them using play, fun, and transgression. The fuck you attitude that effortlessly oozes from braggadocious bars serve as early indicators of joy and critical consciousness. Since naming what both helps and harms you is criticality, then braggadocious rap lyrics are salient examples of developing this criticality with joy (Muhammed, 2023). Honing a critical voice is an essential part of democratic education and lyrics that give language to joy and desire are essential aspects of critical conscious learning (Hall, 2023; Love, 2014; Muhammed, 2023).

Braggadocious raps are a less valued form of hip hop and are rarely drawn upon for Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (CHHP). However, this stage of lyrical analysis through flow reveal this style of rap to be a form of conscious elevating critical learning through its naming of joys in spite of opposition. Joy which allows for opposition, is a form of Black joy (Adams, 2017; Cruz, 2017). For African Americans writing about what brings one joy is an act of radical resistance (Cruz, 2017). Students writing about an idealized future reveals their aspirations and are concrete forms of freedom dreaming, by giving language to their imaginings of joy (Love, 2019). The hyper consumerism present in braggadocious rap is a critiqued part of rap, since it reflects capitalist values, however it also reflects radical self-affirmation in addition to real and imagined states of sustained happiness. Students writing about what makes them happy represent ideating pathways towards joy (Muhammed, 2023). Braggadocious bars are rich with joyful imaginings. Students using lyrics not to just write about what is harmful but naming what is joyful and

nurturing to them represents joyful and critical conscious learning (Baker-Bell, 2017; Love, 2019; Muhammed, 2023).

### ***Fantasy Data Rap***

The Fantasy theme contains both fantasies that can only occur in one's imagination like being a fairy, and fantasies that represent achievable dreams and aspirations. Being financially secure in one's life is an example of the latter. Some lyrics represented dark fantasies like stabbing a man dead. The violent narratives represented in those type of lyrics are common not only in hip hop but a multitude of stories that engage youth and adults. Cowboys, pirates, and mobsters all represent the outlaw mentality many find to be rich forms of entertainment. This data rap shows the vast diversity of middle school fantasies. The topics range from fairies, money launderers, and buffalos all the way to being financially free and being successful by traditional metrics. Fantasy lyrics also represent students' aspirations like going to college and getting high paying jobs.

Lyrics in this data rap include a wide array of topics middle school students fantasize about. They varied from 'got scars on my face' to 'imma go to Harvard'. The lyrics at first glance appear to be starkly different, bordering on unrelated. Lyrics that refer to taking somebody's boyfriend from them were connected to lyrics where students talk about having a magical fortress. Lyrics about being a money launderer directly precede lyrics about getting a great college education or reaching financial freedom. These fantasies all represent different values and aspirations. They all represent dreams of joy. In these lyrics students are defining their individual interpretations of joy (Muhammed, 2023). By pairing these interpretations together I am reflecting the Franklin students' collective ideas on joy. The fantasy data rap represents the complexity and diversity of the adolescent mind, and the variety of ways students in the same

class ruminates on joy. In the mind of one student going to Harvard confirms their intelligence and could be a path to a happy life. For another student happiness is represented by imagining they were a great white buffalo, for another student it was being a fairy. Moving from an aspiration to go to a real college to a fantasy about being a fictional animal shows a number of joyful imaginings and illustrates real and imagined possibilities for joy. Going to Harvard provided a similar mythical status as being make believe creatures. Writing about financial prosperity represented still another form of mythical status, being wealthy. All of these fantasies are fictive stories where students are pretending to embody idealized selves and meditate on joy (Love, 2019).

All of the lyrical statements represented 'freedom dreaming' through fantasy (Love, 2019). Fantasy alludes to hidden desires. Even if they don't come true, they provide fleeting moments of joy right there in class. These lyrics provide insight into the dreams of students that would remain in the back of their minds if they did not use rap to give them shape and form. Creating rap songs provided vehicles for students to express and name their desires, once both known and hidden (Halverson, 2022). This is an opportunity schools do not often provide. Lyrical statements that referred to violent fantasies like "stabbing a man dead" paired effortlessly with lyrics about being Iron man or driving a Tesla. Lyrics about guns, cigars, and making money the illegal way were connected to lyrics talking about going to ivy league schools or being a magical creature. This was done to give equal weight to all the fantasies. Whether they were ones that reflected school values, or ones which were raunchy and ratchet. This data rap reveals a wide range of middle school students' fantasies.

### ***Annoying Messages From Adults Data Rap***

The annoying messages from adults data rap contained lyrics where students wrote about messages they were tired of hearing from teachers. The ‘frustrations with school’ code was affixed to lyrics where students talked about things that could be specifically addressed. I ascribed these lyrics to the *middle school hell theme*. These lyrics reflect students annoyance with the do this or else model of education. In their lyrics students are deconstructing the message teachers are giving if they follow their rules and do what they are told they will be successful. Lyrics "disappointed in the rules" accurately summarizes the students' feelings towards school rules. The lyrics in this data rap are a sarcastic reflection of students being annoyed with school rules and repetitive messages from teachers.

The lyrics in this data rap read like a laundry list of complaints. As a result of this they paired together quite easily. The central message was things that teachers say that annoy students. So I essentially let the students list them out in their lyrical form. The chorus T-A-R-D-Y came from lyrics several students had in their rap songs. Since so many students mentioned it I felt it represented a commonly held sentiment as naming one of the schools daily slogans that irk them. The lyrics “study for your classes-write an essay...all you need is a diploma,” express a modern day issue where a college degree does not always mean financial success. These lyrics are contextualized in this data rap with an overall tone of sarcasm and annoyance, which illustrate the deeper shade of meaning behind the complaints. An underlying belief that the students all do not believe that their teachers and school hold the key to their success.

I connected lyrical statements like “shut up” and “you need a hall pass” “try your best” and “listen and grow” to illustrate student distrust in the messages they frequently hear. The messages are presented as commands without explanation. Students’ lyrics suggested that school protocols like no cell phones in class, having to study, and waking up early for the bus may not

even result in lasting success. The refrain T-A-R-D-Y was meant to be mocking and the lyrics that follow fit neatly within that tone, as the students are questioning the value of the messages they receive regularly in school.

### ***School Love Data Rap***

The School Love theme had the fewest lyrical statements. However, there were students whose lyrics directly contradicted points made by other lyrics. Lyrics like "food is healthy" "tasty water" and "amazing teachers" directly contradict lyrics like "burgers are bad" and "water is nasty." In one lyrical statement a student says they like the school water, despite other lyrics that claimed it was nasty and disgusting. The data raps ability to reflect dissenting opinions illustrate how individual perspectives can co-exist in the same rap (Halverson, 2022). Lyrics in this theme show that some students are enjoying their time at Franklin and think teachers are doing a good job, conflicting with lyrics in the *middle school hell* theme. Students were specific in their lyrics when writing about what they liked to do at school.

When naming things they like about school many students refer to outside of class activities like playing sports after school, capture the flag at lunch, or the annual student versus staff basketball game. Students also mentioned the school store, student rapport, and a sense of community. This connects with literature on joy as connection (Adams, 2017). Some of the lyrical statements under this category were recategorized under the braggadocios theme since they represented positive school experiences using boastful self-aggrandizing, affirming words. The lyrics in this theme reflect the positive feelings students have about their learning environment.

I connected lyrical statements students where students name concrete activities to abstract things like feelings of community and treating each other with respect. By connecting

lyrics which depict different reasons why students enjoy school I am forging individual voices into a collective one. It gives equal value to the different reasons and does not prioritize one over another. Reasons students gave as to why they loved school varied from being treated with respect, feeling a sense of unity and comradery (often expressed by participation in team activities), as well as feeling like their teachers are invested in them as students. Students in their lyrics directly name what makes them happy at school (Muhammed, 2023).

The lyrics “so good at teaching me” reflect that certain students feel like their learning needs are being met. The lyrics suggest that there are only certain type of students the school is good at teaching. This can refer to race, gender, learning style, as well as personality. The lyrics suggest that the students who love school are responding positively because the environment works for them. I made the lyrics “good at teaching me” part of the chorus because it provides insight into how the school could work for some students better than others. I paired it with “be supportive... (and) unity” to illustrate another perspective of what make school enjoyable and to express this ideas in equal measure. This allows the data rap to represent a wide array of ideas as to what makes students happy at school (Muhammed, 2023).

***Feelings: School makes me feel harmed Data Rap***

Many lyrics under the feelings theme I originally classified under frustrations with school and later added to the ‘Middle School Hell’ data rap. The theme *feelings* emerged from lyrics that reflected emotions that transcended the school building. Lyrics that revealed students feelings related to who they are and not based solely on participation in the school community was also ascribed to this category. Many of the lyrics in the *feelings* theme were related to students’ identities. They expressed feelings like isolation and inadequacy as a result of not fitting in with peers. The lyrics radiated emotion, and while causes are mentioned the intent is the

expression of a feeling. This theme emerged as I intentionally attended to the emotions students represented in their lyrics. Reflecting on students feelings is equally important as investigating curriculum and learning environments.

I made the chorus for this data rap "school makes me feel harmed." This phrase vibrated violently and jumped off the page demanding attention. I originally added this lyrical statement school to the *middle school hell* theme since it directly refers to school. But after several rounds of reflective journaling and code weaving I discovered that that these lyrics in addition to representing the feelings a student had about school, was a depiction of harm. Harm leaves the school building and follows students home, and impacts their lives outside of school. While school can exacerbate students' feelings, strong feelings extend beyond the classroom into the lived experiences of students. Lyrics under this category depict the emotional struggle that occur outside of school, as well as the ones which may begin in school but extends to their other realities. The harm one feels in school follows them home. These lyrics do not depict frustrations with the school environment, but emotions and feelings students experience and struggle with that extend beyond school.

One prevalent feeling represented in these lyrics is fear. The lyrics "too scared to be social" expressed a student's understanding that their fear is a barrier to community participation. When paired with other lyrics around perceived barriers to community participation like "scared to be social/maybe I'm too emotional/and not masculine enough" a collective understanding of what is alienating students from connecting with their peers and achieving full participation in their school community is revealed. This is a highly individualized version of critical civic learning supporting the assumption that students are already engaged in civic lives (Hall, 2023).

These lyrics represent students naming what is harming them and preventing them from connecting with their peers, thereby blocking them from joy.

As mentioned several times in this dissertation, studies have shown that people experience joy through connection (Adams, 2017). This extends to connections with imagined communities. Connecting to imagined communities is an essential feature of critical civic learning. Researchers discovered ones imagined level of participation in these communities impact their civic engagement (Hall, 2023). The lyrics about a student not feeling masculine enough expresses the students' lamentations on societally prescribed gender roles, and how they do not fit them. Lyrics in this data rap, infer that some students feel their gender non-conformity is preventing them from connecting with their peers. The lyrics in this data rap illustrate students' recognition of harm, as they are naming their harmful feelings and reflecting on of their root causes, both social and societal (Hall, 2023; Muhammed, 2023).

Recognizing emotional harm is a feature of conscious elevating learning (Muhammed, 2023). Separating lyrics in the *feelings* and *frustrations with school* themes was difficult and took several revisions. Lyrics in this data rap reveal students feeling lost, unsure of themselves, afraid, lonely, and sad. I connected lyrics where students expressed strong feelings. As opposed to previous data raps where I connected different lyrical statements, I left these lyrics thematically connected. I connected lyrics where students are expressing things they wanted to change about themselves, I connected lyrics about shared fears, and the ones related to identity and isolation were bridged. I attached lyrics based on common themes. After connecting fears and negative feelings of the students, I connected the lyrics where students wrote about what made them feel happy. Lyrics about feeling nervous and unhappy led into lyrics reflecting aspirations to feeling happy and connected to others.

I connected lyrics about feeling inadequate with lyrics where students reflected on desires. All of the lyrics in the 'Feelings' data rap represent students searching for joy. In their lyrics the students are searching for joy by naming the feelings inside them that feel harmful. The lyrics illustrate aspirational quest, and wishes for change. The lyrics reveal the wishes of those who do not want to feel lost, unsure, alone, and angry. I added the (wish I) lyrical statement as a modest addition expressing the student desire reflected in the lyrics. I added it to several of the lyrical statements to demonstrate the aspirational nature of the students' words. Wishing they were brave enough to make friends represents abstract journeys towards joy. I paired lyrics that depicted complicated abstract wishes students had about things they wished they could change about themselves, with simple wishes like "I wish there was candy." Lyrics that simply state they wish they had candy represent a short journey towards joy while the former represent longer journeys.

The lyrics in the final section of the 'Feelings' data rap represent things students wanted to change about themselves. The lyrics represent students seeking connection and naming harmful feelings while wishing for change, all in a search for joy through connection (Adams, 2017; Muhammed, 2023). The lyrics "wish I could disappear...why am I alone," sound like a cry for help and answers. The lyrics illustrate students wanting to both stick out and be rendered invisible. The lyrics weigh the desire of wanting to experience the joy of feeling connected with the safety of isolation (Adams, 2017). I merged the lyrics "I think I'm a loser...don't wanna be scum..(and) happiness never last" to illustrate the students' desire to feel lasting joy through connection. Feeling fear and wanting candy both represent a student seeking joy through both micro and macro pursuits. The lyrics represented in this data rap reflect a hodgepodge of ideas on seeking joy.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

This curriculum, when implemented at the JET program, focused on teaching students to rap about the content from their civics education: historical moments, key social issues, and political leaders. When implemented at Franklin Middle School, the scope of what students rapped about was broad, starting first with their personal experiences and interests rather than starting with course content. During the JET program I taught an anti-racist social studies curriculum. As a result the rap/spoken word performances revolved around topics we discussed in class. When two Black girls wrote about Septima Clark and the issues she faced from Black Civil Rights leaders who did not think a woman could lead the movement, they understood the experience. In their performance the girls declared, 'I am the voice of a woman' and took on the role and voice of Septima Clark as it spoke to their lived experiences. Connecting the historical legacy of intersectionality to their lives provides a more obvious example of critical conscious learning. It speaks to the tenets of Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy and the students are deepening their understanding not only of injustice but the nature of fighting injustice. Since there was not any anti-racist content taught to Franklin students it does not clearly meet the litmus test of what critical conscious learning is considered to be. Creating content around issues students pose in their data raps is a way to remedy that in future studies. For example, students bring up leaving school at 4:22 as being deleterious to their learning. Creating civic lessons around why bus schedules leave at the time provides a clearer example of critical conscious learning.

The JET students were able to name specific historical injustices because we covered them in class. They were able to connect them to their lived experiences as young Black people. The JET students were able to connect their experiences as Black girls with struggles of Black women of the past. They named historical injustices and used their lyrics to illustrate how they

are still in play in today's society. Since the focus of Franklin was on learning rap literary skills their topic was usually their lives and daily experiences. By talking about what frustrates them and draws them to school they are chronicling their participation in their school community which is a microcosm of society. While students in the JET program were connecting their experiences with history the Franklin students were discussing ways they are connected and disconnected from their society. Joy as connection stretches into definitions of Black joy, psychological definitions of joy, and theological ones (Adams, 2017; Emmons, 2020).

JET students connected with their peers using audible responses to words which resonated with their lived experiences. While JET students were connecting with their peers over their shared connection with Black leaders of the past, Franklin students focused on the connections they had in the present. Most of their lyrics talked about ways they feel connected to their peers and their school community and other lyrics illustrated what disconnects them from their community. JET students did not mention feelings of loneliness and alienation, but wrote about shared experiences of Blackness. Having an all-Black class facilitated these racial and cultural connections. The students at Franklin were racially and culturally diverse and did not have this shared cultural experience. However, they were able to spend far more time writing about their feelings and aspirations. The nature of the two sites made it so that students at Franklin could explore their inner feelings more than their places in history. However, both sites produced examples of joyful consciousness and can instruct us as teachers and researchers about how to approach CHRE using hip hop as pedagogy (Muhammed, 2023).

Joyful Consciousness is a term I coined to represent the symbiotic nature of joy and critical conscious learning that occurs during the Trap Civics residencies. This study looks at several cases of students experiencing a Trap Civics curriculum I designed. The curriculum was

intended to engage students through arts, literacy and social studies for them to each create raps rooted in their personal experiences. This curriculum is an example of Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy, and as I analyzed students' work, many of the liberatory goals of CHHP showed in their writing. In particular, a phenomena I have termed "Joyful Consciousness" was integral to students experience. I put forward Joyful Consciousness as an essential concept for educators to consider as they teach painful and personal topics. Teachers who seek to develop their students' critical capacities can use Joyful Consciousness to explore both the joy and pain of the United States' history and present.

Joyful Consciousness represents that tingle, the chill, the intangible, emotional sensation. It can be achieved both by and through the learning and articulation of hidden truths. These truths that students learn on their way to joyful consciousness may come from studying and interrogating history or from expressing the thoughts and feelings that live in the reserves of their minds. Joyful Consciousness is achieved through counternarrative and unlearning of scripts of appropriateness (Emdin, 2022; Muhammed, 2023). It is a liberatory joy that allows space for students to be unapologetically, authentically themselves in their learning and reflections. Joy is both a tool and an outcome for critical conscious learning. For Black students in particular, developing a critical consciousness around Blackness led to joy as evidenced by laughter and loud audible reaction to truths articulated in the public presentation of their pieces. The result of this study will be presented as thematic ideas that define the space joyful consciousness. The two figures below illustrate how students learning represented in their rap songs led to an increased understanding for liberatory joy and critical conscious learning.

Figure 3

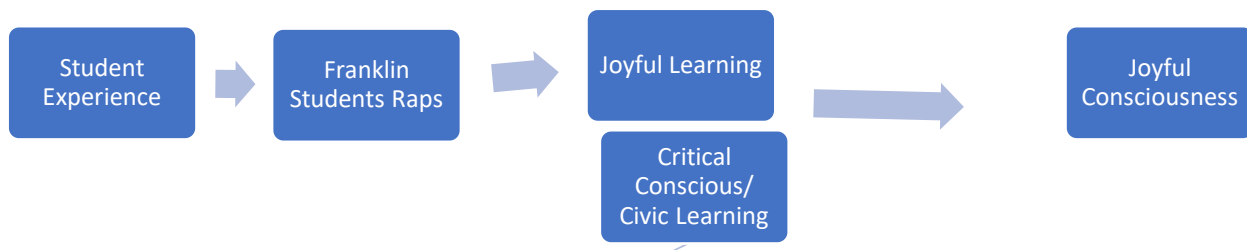
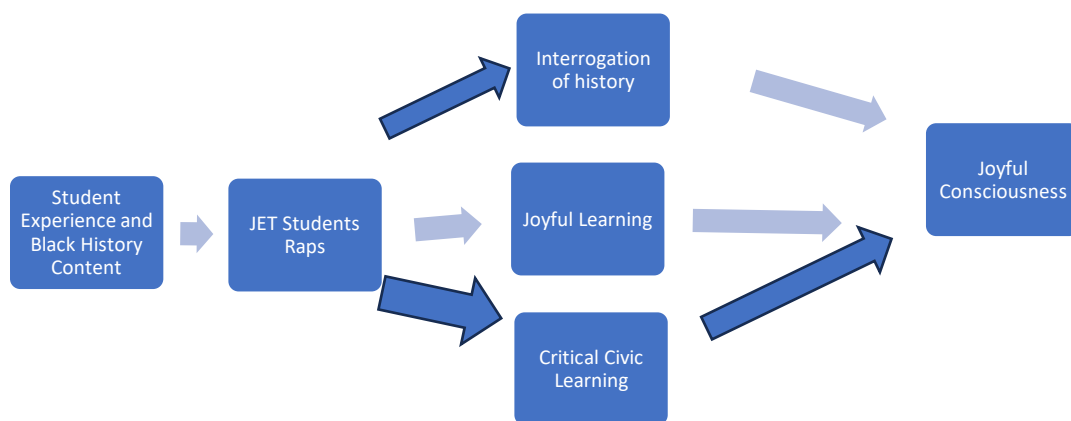


Figure 4



Designing for joyful consciousness means creating space for young people to process and express their lived experiences. Rap-based pedagogy is a powerful form of civic education. The original name of the hip hop curriculum I taught is Critical Civic Rap Pedagogy. It more accurately represents the learning at JET. Students wrote rap/spoken word pieces about critical civic topics meant to teach anti-racist learning. The students at Franklin had lyrics which more closely resembled Trap music. However, looking at the lyrics through the lens of joy and criticality allowed me to see a value I missed on the first few reads (Adams, 2017; Muhammed,

2023). Critical civic learning requires students to closely analyze societal problems, examining different perspectives and consider the influence of power and status in order to be prepared for meaningful participation in society as engaged citizens (Lee, 2021). In the rap songs students created at Franklin Middle School, the students were inspired to reflect on their aspirations, frustrations, perspectives of injustice, and essential truths from deep within their bones. In the data rap, Middle School Hell students reflected an analysis of their school community as they named problems which included food quality, teacher pedagogy, to over policing. Furthermore, students demonstrated an understanding of both the root causes of these issues and opposing perspectives. One student when writing about issues with the school, raps “kids don’t respect teachers/we aint never had a good sub/stay two days and then they quit/no stability I’m sick of this shit.” In these lyrics the students lament the lack of consistency due to having a different substitute teacher every few days. The lyrics referred to a ten week paternity leave their classroom teacher took. During this ten week period the students had thirteen different substitute teachers. Mr. Dalton, the teacher, told me the substitute teachers kept leaving because of student misbehavior. The students’ lyrics represented their take on why they kept having different substitute teachers and how it negatively impacted their learning. They also illustrate an understanding of how the behavior of certain students led to this. Regardless of the reason, students still need a consistent teacher, and these lyrics reflect that.

When young people give language to their fears, struggles, desires, and dreams, they discover hidden truths about themselves and insight into how people work together and interact in environments (Halverson, 2022). One can learn about society by deeply learning about the individuals that comprise a society (Desai & Marsh, 2005). When students write lyrics like “I’m a loser/scared to be social/maybe I’m too emotional...(and) maybe I’m not masculine enough”

they are expressing complicated ideas on gender conformity and social participation. Writing about the struggles in their daily lives provides insight into how students can process complicated sociopolitical ideas. Creating space for students to share their lived experiences works to democratize the classroom and prepare students to participate in a healthy democracy, which is the central goal of civic learning (Desai & Marsh, 2005; Hall, 2023; Keith & Endsley, 2020). In the JET program students were able to connect their lived experiences as young Black students with the struggles successes and joys and Black women in The Civil Rights movement. This provides a powerful form of history education and historicizes current social problems. In order to develop a critical lens learning historical legacies of social problems is necessary (Muhammed, 2023). Students in Franklin were not able to learn historical legacies of the problems they addressed however were able to dig deeper into their feelings and fantasies as a result of regular free writing prompts they completed. Both cases allowed students to write raps about how their fears, joys, and desires.

This study adds to a robust body of work on hip hop pedagogy. Many scholars have studied the use of hip hop pedagogy in classrooms where a specific content based curriculum was being implemented and hip hop was used to enhance the learning of that content. My work and the raps my students wrote were from their personal experiences. In this way, I expand Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy to include not just the stories of leaders and communities in other times and places. Instead, I expand the scope of CHHP to also include the civic experiences of kids themselves, in their schools and homes and communities where they are subject to all of the social forces they learn about in textbooks. This study discovered that even without a content, students, using rap as a vehicle to discuss the norms and rules that govern their daily lives, reflect critical civicness (Hall, 2023). Additionally it shows the value of rap as a tool adding joy to the

study of difficult history. Joy through connecting with Black leaders of the past as well as a with connecting with other Black students with shared struggles and joys (Emmons, 2020).

When students are crafting rap lyrics about their feelings, they are engaged in critical civic learning. This civic learning was clear with the JET students, yet harder to see with Franklin students. However, both groups of students had rap lyrics which showed a search for affirmation. In order for individuals to participate in society, they must first have affirmation of their humanity (Iser, 2019). People must feel as if they belong and have the ability to navigate the real and imagined communities that exist in society (Anderson, 1983; Hall, 2023). The struggles between navigating these borders are represented in the lyrics students wrote about their feelings. The lyrics in the 'Feelings' data rap from Franklin, reflect feelings of alienation, loneliness, and isolation. Students describe feeling as if they do not belong because they do not fit the mold. The students are searching for ways to gain membership to the real and imagined communities that exist in their local school community. Lyrics in the rap piece from the JET program, 'This is Me,' depict a students' feeling of gender nonconformity. In their piece a student discussed her experience of being seen as too masculine to fit the societal mold of femininity. Both of these pieces represent the complicated feelings of the students.

Adult citizens' perceived ability to navigate imagined community boundaries impact their feelings of agency, access, and membership to society (Hall, 2023; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Individuals develop a sense of citizenship based on feelings of membership and it impacts their feelings around their civic identity (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The lyrics in the rap pieces from both JET and Franklin represent a search for the affirmation of the students' humanity. An affirmation achieved through gaining access to membership to imagined school communities. Imagined school communities are the social circles that students perceive among their peers. Often these

are groups they feel others are a part of and they themselves are excluded from. Believing in an imagined, bounded school community can confirm a student's feelings of unbelonging. By giving language to their struggles of belonging, students demonstrate a strengthening of their civic efficacy as they name what disconnects them from feelings of membership.

Students rapping about general topics is critical civic learning because it allows them to reflect on their multiple identities as well as the things, people, and systems that harm them. Student rapping about their identity is social justice content. They are learning to know themselves, to identify their social worlds, and to advocate for what's important to them. This form of critical civics pushes back on the idea that civics starts with an idea beyond our own experiences. It pushes back on ways those people in power de-personalize politics and suggests that electoral politics are the issues and ideas that matters to a leader, a teacher, or even a textbook. This form of critical civics starts with the experiences of the kids, what they care about, and what impacts them. When students are writing rap songs about their frustrations, they organically reflect on the injustice that impacts their lives. Learning to name the injustices in their school community can lead to learning how to interpret injustice in society at large.

In the *Braggadocios* data rap, students reflect on their aspirations and name the dreams and fantasies that live in their subconscious mind. Students gave language to their aspirations, named the systems that work against them, and proclaimed that these systems can be stopped. This is another form of critical civic education. This form of critical civic education positions students as knowledge producers as opposed to consumers. Civics education is often about consuming content. Even if it is a social justice content curricula usually involves students gaining knowledge though reading, watching, or listening to a secondary source. Trap Civics lessons inspired ideas, feelings and opinions among students. This process is a powerful form of

civic learning that builds on the idea that young people are knowledge producers already engaged in civic lives (Hall, 2023). Critical civic learning is embedded in hip hop as rap music organically leads to reflections on society (Emdin, 2022).

Students writing braggadocios bars reflect building blocks for recognizing what is in the way of their dreams. The process by which these obstacles are exposed and given language to are steps for critical conscious learning (Halverson, 2022; Muhammed, 2023). The lyrics that oppose these forces are examples of joyful critical consciousness in the form of a rap. The lyrics “scum of the school...I’m a bully” followed by “I’m amazing,” show the deeper meaning of why students feel they need to be a bully. The connection repurposes the meaning of scum and bully. Recognizing what students mean by being a bully and scum and connecting it with lyrics that reflect that meaning demonstrate collective narratives on how one can thrive despite adversity.

When students write rap songs, they position themselves as civic beings who understand trust in institutions can be misplaced. They do not necessarily operate fairly toward all members of the community (Hall, 2023; Swalwell & Payne, 2019). When students choose which problems to write about and which aspects of the school to praise they are developing skills that allow them to conceive of and articulate models for a liberated society that leads towards harmony and justice (Barton & Ho, 2021; Muhammed, 2023; Swalwell & Payne, 2019). While civics often prepares students to be future citizens once they turn 18, this study shows rap literacy as a vehicle for students to analyze their local community as current citizens of a microcosmic society. It allows students to develop ideas of what they want to see in an idealized school environment and how to build that world. They get to develop ideas, critique reality, as well as create and advocate for a better reality (Hall, 2023). These skills can lead to developing critical insights in the larger world. Developing students ability to articulate their reality is a

steppingstone for articulating injustice in society at large, and it positions students as current citizens impacted by societal systems (Swalwell & Payne, 2019).

The nature of rap more easily leans into critique than compliment. One of its greatest tools is joy through release and naming what harms you (Muhammed, 2023). Rap writing is a method for the development of sociopolitical consciousness in students as they learn to attune and revise their recognition of what harms them. What harms them as individuals, harms the project of a healthy society. The nature of rap as providing joy through release allows it to be a frame for naming what is harmful to an idealized world (Adams, 2017; Lu & Steele, 2019; Muhammed, 2023). This is an ideal design feature for joyful conscious learning. Students writing about school polices that make school feel like hell represent critical civic learning as it explores their current civic realities (Hall, 2023). The lyrics “school feels like jail, “express a student’s anger at police showing up to the school to address behavior issues and infer that the students feel overpoliced. This illustrates students naming and ideating revisions for their current reality.

Designing for Joyful Consciousness means allowing for ratchet styles of behavior and rap lyrics. The rap song ‘Fuck the police,’ by NWA, is not a school appropriate rap (Young, 2019). Yet it articulates the fear and state of terror the Los Angeles Police Department was striking in African Americans during the 1990’s. The song teaches a critical civic content and connects that content to powerful emotions. Given the nature of hip hop regarding censorships, refusal, and rebellion I found that allowing for raw uncensored ratchet rap lyrics and behavior was a crucial component maintaining the integrity of the hip hop space and allowing for joyful conscious learning. This includes allowing for cursing, dissent, refusal, and rebellion.

Muhammed (2023) urges educators to allow for the rebellious bloom of students. While this sounds good in theory, in practice it can be difficult to know how much rebellion to afford

students. During each quarter at Franklin, some students refused to participate in the lyrical writing activities despite their love of hip hop evidenced by their speech, dress, and musical taste. These students preferred to freestyle rather than write their rap lyrics. Despite my insistence on them writing down their lyrics, they refused. Franklin had a music studio where students could record their raps. Due to my experience rapping, I understood the difficulty of recording a freestyle which is why I insisted on written raps. However, these students chose to spend the rap class only freestyling their lyrics. I struggled to convince them to participate in the class activities that I worked hard to make accessible, culturally relevant, and fun. One student remarked "I be trying to write, but I just don't feel it like that. It don't come out that way." When freestyling the student's lyrics could be more rebellious as there is no record of them. They often freestyled about violence, criminality, and other salacious topics which most classrooms would shut down immediately.

Knowing how much to censor was an issue. The focus on policing language and speech in rap music can limit unfiltered ideas, ideas which provide insight into human thinking and social philosophies. Sanitizing rap music preserves the illusion of childlike innocence, yet it can limit a student's growth by not affording them complete freedom of expression. Censorship can deleteriously impact the integrity of the creative space. This is particularly true in the classroom since school environments usually censor the language of students. However, most rap songs students listen to have curse words in them. Although I told students to write freely in their first drafts and turn in radio (school) friendly versions, most students still turned in rap songs that contained curse words and centered on violent topics. I allowed for the refusal. As a teaching artist using hip hop, I felt strongly about avoiding censorship. Curse words represent extreme

emotion and can really drive home a point. Many students employed this technique against class instructions.

Muhammed suggest teachers allow for a rebellious bloom and Emdin suggest that being ratchet is a strength for pedagogy, but how ratchet and rebellious should the bloom be (Emdin, 2022; Muhammed, 2023). This thematic idea suggest teachers lean into as much discomfort as possible, without completely breaking. I leaned into discomfort when I chose not to intervene when students freestyled using the dozens, and a seeming advanced version at that. The dozens has been well documented by scholars (Smitherman, 2001). It was a practice of enslaved Africans to talk about each other's' mothers in order to practice holding their anger so they do not lose their temper at the wrong time and face harsh racist penalties. The dozens has been described by Smitherman as a component of African American Vernacular English that has been passed on to rap music. However, modern iterations have evolved the original model of yo mamma is poor or yo mamma is ugly. Some of the lyrics in students freestyle raps detailed descriptive depictions of students having carnal relations with their opponents' mother articulating the experience using a number of literary devices. In one freestyle exchange a student rapped "I'm your stepfather/ you gone be home and imma be in your mammas room/ in yo mommas womb." These lyrics are an example of advanced dozens, and reveal the students creativity, literary skill, and effort. Advanced dozens is certainly not deemed school appropriate by traditional metrics, but signifying and the dozens are undeniably rap techniques. Censoring would alter the creative space and penalize students for rapping like so many other rappers do. I chose to listen without interference regardless of how salacious or profane the topic.

I realize that suggesting joyfully concious learning can mean allowing students to curse and rap about salacious topics, can appear controversial. However, this study reveals it is a

crucial aspect of hip hop pedagogy. The freedom and trust I extended to the students allowed for them to engage in the activity more authentically. Without this space for rebellion, the words in the raps students wrote would have been censored, corrupting my data before it was ever recorded. In their data raps students used cursing and inappropriateness to tap into the power of radical language rich with vivid imagery to communicate complex ideas and narratives. This was evidenced by the students' lyrics in the Middle School Hell and Braggadocious data raps. Even when the students rap lyrics were vulgar and inappropriate they still give shape and form to the thoughts and feelings of the students. These thought and feelings are then expressed in a vehicle designed for subversion and articulating truths in harsh, raw ways. Which is why in order to facilitate the liberatory joy and critical conscious learning of joyful consciousness I allowed the space to be as ratchet as it could be.

Designing for Joyful Consciousness means being fully student-centered and creating space for students to articulate their ruminations on joy. These ruminations include feeling connected, having space for humor, creating their own meaning, exploring possibilities and feelings of accomplishment. This study revealed that being student centered means students' rap songs reflect topics they want to write not topics the instructor chooses (Hall, 2023; Rose, 1991). When I asked students to reflect on their experiences, they shared that they experienced the most joy when writing about topics they found to be important. Many of these topics were making friends, looking good, getting money, and having fun. These were not topics that I would choose for them. I expected them to write about police brutality, unfair housing, and climate change. However, these were their truth and the issues they were struggling with. Students writing about what is currently important to them hones their ability to articulate what is helpful and harmful in society as well.

I started this research attempting a much more direct approach to teaching civics using rap. I assumed that critical conscious learning would occur when young people use rap lyrics to analyze social issues. The goal was for students to attain this critical consciousness by writing conscious rap songs that reflect social justice topics discussed in class. Student writing conscious rap songs that connect to history illustrates critical civic learning as students are using rap to interrogate history. The raps written by students in the JET program reflected these goals. Their rap/spoken word pieces revealed the complexities of a democratic society by naming past systems of inequity and how groups and individuals fought to change them, all while providing a modern context. In their rap/spoken word pieces students wrote lyrics that reflected legacies of resistance. These raps were aligned with the goals I had for using hip hop for critical civic literacy.

Students practicing their rebellion by writing about more personal topics using extreme language caused me to question my preconceived notions of critical conscious and culturally relevant learning. Culturally Historical Responsive Education (CHRE) claims that when the voices of young people are at the center of the learning and their truths are shared, they experience joy (Muhammed, 2023). In their data raps students express what gives them joy. Some wrote about playing football, others about being rich, others about driving fancy cars and having lots of money. In their rap lyrics, students are reflecting on what gives them joy, which made the penning of the lyrics a joyful activity. This is instructive to educators who work for critical conscious learning and provides a real life example for the criticality component of CHRE. In their data raps, students demonstrate criticality not just by naming and recognizing what harms them, but also by recognizing and reflecting on what gives them joy.

Students also wrote lyrics that demonstrated their recognition of harmful feelings. In lyrics like “school makes me feel harmed/makes me wanna scream” students are revealing personal narratives where they give language to what harms them and how they feel about it. These lyrics represent a form of joyful conscious learning as they express students’ search for joy. I previously explained how Black music transforms stories of pain into narratives of joy and empowerment. Hip hop, as a form of Black music and expression birthed from Black culture, is a part of this tradition. Students naming what keeps them from joy is also a representation of joy, as their lyrics illustrate a journey towards it. In this study the students at Franklin were allowed to write about whatever they wanted. This freedom created space for students to name what harms them and what gives them joy. CHRE would see this as this as the developing of criticality, the skill of naming what helps and what harms both oneself and one’s society (Muhammed, 2023). Looking at how criticality shows up in the rap songs of both the Franklin and JET students through the lens of CHRE, we can better understand critical conscious learning. They were able to recognize and interrupt harm (Muhammed, 2023). Evidence of critical consciousness learning showed up differently in the two sites. In the JET program students made connections between Black struggles of the past and present while connecting those struggles to their experiences as African Americans teenagers. At Franklin students write about their experiences, desires, fantasies, and aspirations. Both illuminated the ways joy and critical conscious learning work in tandem, whether they are naming systemic forces of oppression acting on their lives or what gives them joy.

Extreme bragging is a rap based literary device that affirms students. This is valuable for adolescents who are struggling with self-confidence. Despite that fact, there is no research on the of use of the braggadocios style of hip hop for learning. This study reveals how the self-

aggrandizement present in the braggadocious rap style represent ways students can affirm themselves. Seeing the data raps where students wrote about feelings of inadequacy right next to other students writing lyrics that reflected radical confidence revealed the use of braggadocious hip hop for radical self-affirmation. In one rap students write “I think I’m a loser...happiness never last...wish I could disappear” and in another rap students write “hoodie up shawty I’m amazing, Imma shine even with pain in my veins...imma be great.” Writing about what brings one joy is an act of radical resistance for students, and allowing space for student chosen rap topics fosters this resistance.

### **Chapter 7 - Implications and Conclusions**

This study reveals the academic merit of ratchetness. As mentioned earlier, ratchetness represents a cultural, linguistic and sartorial expression that is not valued by the metrics of society (Emdin, 2022). This study also contributes to research on using hip hop pedagogy critically. Findings of the study also contribute to the field of social education and has implications for the goals of civic learning. This study shows the interdisciplinary nature of hip hop pedagogy and the ability of critical hip hop civics to facilitate joy and critical consciousness. As a curricular outcome this study additionally, discovers ways organic forms of civics education can occur outside of the social studies classroom. The findings underscore the importance of resistance and refusal outlined in Culturally Historical Responsive Education and Ratchedemic Pedagogy and has implications for both research and practice (Emdin, 2022; Muhammed, 2023).

Researchers can use these innovations and methodologies in their own work and further explore the findings of this particular study. The development of Blackout Rap Transcription and the concept of Joyful Consciousness are particularly relevant to future research. Furthermore, educators in multiple disciplines and settings can implement similar curricula in their classroom

and use the concepts from this study to inform their practice. Bridging the gap between teachers and researchers was a goal of this study. During the near decade I spent as a teacher I read several theories of learning including CSP and Reality Pedagogy (Emdin 2011; Paris & Alim, 2017). However, I often struggled how to operationalize these ideas in my classroom. This study enacts critical theories of culturally relevant learning. It puts ideas into action with the curricular design and methods of data collection and analysis. Data was collected in ways that teachers can emulate. The interview methods resembled the quick conversations teachers have with their students as they walk throughout the classroom monitoring for questions and comprehension. The methods of this study can be replicated by teachers, researchers, and teaching-artist to design for joyful conscious elevating learning.

This study provides a frame that center students' individual culture and identities for a critical civic learning that amalgamates joy with critical consciousness. Trap Civics created space for a critical interrogation of both the past and the present. This space challenges traditional classroom culture and embraces ratchetness as cultural capital. In addition to ratchetness from students, the space embraces the trap and braggadociousness form of hip hop left out of other Critical Hip Hop Pedagogical models. Braggadocious hip hop is undertheorized in hip hop pedagogy as researchers and hip hop pedagogues use conscious hip hop like Talib Kweli, Tupac, or Mos Def to learn social justice content (Akom, 2009; Kelly & Sawyer, 2019; Love, 2019).

### **The Value of Ratchetness**

Students raps directly challenged what Emdin (2022) refers to as 'the script of appropriateness,' schools encourage for students to employ. This is Ratchet Pedagogy in action and can only be done by breaking rules. In their rap lyrics the students used transgressive

language to illustrate fantastical states of joy operationalizing language that flies in the face of school protocols. Studies have shown examples of CHHP that students responded to with suspicion and limited participation, even the students immersed in hip hop culture (Kelly, 2019). Researchers discovered this was due to the historically repressive nature of schools. Allowing for ratchet behavior and language can mitigate this distrust. Young people crave vehicles for processing their reality and feeling repressed can limit the vulnerability of students, which will negatively impact how personal their lyrics are. Students need to feel safe enough to be vulnerable, they need to feel as if they do not need to protect their core selves (Emdin, 2022). This is why teachers who want to incorporate the lived experience of students to enrich the civic learning of the class must revolt against normative class protocols. Teachers must choose what hill they will stand on and decide which rules they feel comfortable breaking. It's less about letting children curse and more about making students free to express themselves using whatever language they choose.

### **Using Hip Hop Pedagogy Critically**

There is a great need for critical understandings of hip hop pedagogy in social studies education research and practice. David Stovall wrote one article on the topic, and Bettina Love mentions it briefly in her work, but no one has done sustained work in the field (Stovall, 2006; Love 2016). Those who have used hip hop for social studies in the past have done it problematic ways (Love, 2016). In existing research, instead of incorporating the critical lens of hip hop, educators have used it to help students memorize Eurocentric content. This is problematic for multiple reasons. It celebrates the same powers that have harmed students and their communities, and the powers that hip hop speaks against. It upholds whiteness and reinforces inequitable power dynamics in the classroom and society as a whole. This form of hip hop civics is a

marketing tactic to get kids to care about what teachers and the state use for control. This use operationalizes a controlled narrative to manage student behavior by making oppressive education more interesting. It is culturally relevant in appearance only in, and uses a Black created art form to brainwash students with patriotism while celebrating white settler colonialist values. This use of hip hop civics contradicts the essential nature of hip hop as a creative space and a method of social commentary and critique, while maintaining the banking model of education where students receive the information the teacher wants them to know (Frere, 1972). This study, however, uses hip hop in the classroom for much more liberatory purposes, using critical methods.

In contrast to existing work, the curriculum I have used here, adapts the classroom and content to the students rather than forcing or manipulating the students to adapt. Trap Civics let kids dream of the world they want and deserve. This study recognized that kids are already participants in society who are experts and have unique perspectives (Hall, 2023). The findings of this study contribute to the field of social studies education by expanding our understandings of where civic knowledge comes from and how it is communicated. While many learning models use hip hop pedagogy for engagement and cultural relevance, it uses it to teach canonical content that is valued by traditional education like English or Science (Emdin 2021; Kelly & Sawyer, 2019). While culturally relevant it still uses hip hop to teach students about the traditional curriculum that serves to reinforce dominant narratives and knowledge. Hip hop is being used to teach a content that is valued, and the pedagogy does not always tap into critical aspects of hip hop. This study provides an example of using hip hop pedagogy for critical civic learning using the organic tools of criticality embedded in hip hop. In both sites students used rap as a device to process their civic realities. The findings of the study contributes to research on practical

application of theories on culturally relevant pedagogy (Alim & Wong, 2020; Muhammed, 2023).

Additional studies should explore how Black joy can exist in white spaces not designed for Black students. Schools are sites of anti-blackness that have ignored the contributions African Americans had made to American life with whitewashed history and cultural norms which speak to the culture of white students (Dumas, 2016; King, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2014). In addition to a comprehensive teaching of Black history schools must make space for students to feel like they can express themselves unapologetically (Cruz, 2017). Encouraging students to speak in language they feel comfortable using and letting them know they are knowledge producers making worthy contributions to the learning environment can facilitate those feelings (Adams, 2017; Emdin, 2022; Muhammed, 2023).

### **Implications for Social Studies Education**

Twenty first century social studies classes need to develop students who are critically conscious, particularly around race and gender (Barton & Ho, 2021, Hall, 2023). They also must teach students to feel as if they are members of American society with valuable insights to facilitate civic agency and participation (Hall, 2023). A healthy democracy needs the kind of citizens (Barton & Ho, 2021). In order teach these competencies, social studies educators must face American history head on. This means teaching difficult history (Epstein, et, al., 2011; Lee, 2021). Difficult history will include stories of violence and genocide. Black history can be seen as difficult history, since the pain of the attempted genocide of slavery and Jim Crow racism cannot be avoided as aspect of the African America story.

This is why black historical consciousness requires teaching Black history through Black frames, to avoid narratives that only reinforce pain (King, 2019). This study puts these ideas in

action. Hip hop pedagogy is a black frame that employs the quality of Black joy, to persist in places where it seemingly should not (Adams, 2017; Cruz, 2017). Trap Civic shows that cage bird how to sing. In the JET program Black students used rap to reflect on difficult aspects of history. In addition to learning about anti-Black racism, students also had to reflect on sexism within The Civil Rights Movement. It can be difficult to be critical of heroes who put their life on the line to fight for the rights of African Americans like them. However, for the learning to be critical conscious students must find ways to hold space for these conflicting ideas. This study uses critical conscious learning as an umbrella term and to illustrate its flexible uses, but it fits firmly in the social studies classrooms.

### **Hip Hop Pedagogy as Interdisciplinary**

While the findings of this study are particularly important for the critical social studies classroom, its relevance extends much further. Due to the lack research on using hip hop pedagogy for social studies education, I had to draw on several different disciplines. As a result, the findings of this study are interdisciplinary and relevant to a variety of learning contexts. This study is situated within social studies, music, arts, and English. Classroom teachers in these disciplines as well as educators in out-of-school learning environments can use my methods for hip hop or culturally relevant social justice learning. For example, an English teacher could pair this curricula with lessons about poetry, creative writing, and metaphorical language. A music teacher could implement this style of education when exploring rhythm and rhyme. An arts teacher could use it for a hip hop unit. Similarly, this study is pertinent to multiple bodies of research. It speaks to the field of hip hop pedagogy, antiracist learning, social and emotional learning, arts-based research methods, and social studies education. Researchers in each of these fields can incorporate Blackout Rap Transcriptions as meaningful analysis of hip hop artifacts

students create. This mitigates power dynamics which may arise in traditional interviews between an adult and a child by using rap lyrics, as existing data providing insight into how young people are depicting their insights and joys.

Research on Black joy in the classroom found that it was inspired by creative engagement on the part of teachers, commitment to cultural relevance, activities that lead to a positive associations with race, and an environment where Black students felt comfortable being unapologetically themselves (Adams, 2017; Cruz, 2017). This study provides a curricular model built on ideas of Black joy as a general principle. A rising tide lifts all boats, and I designed Trap Civics with the assumption that centering joy the way African Americans describe it will lead to joy for all students (Cruz, 2017). Centering Black joy is a worthy pursuit in itself, and we as educators need no other reason to do so than an unwavering belief in the dignity and mattering of our students. Still, this method can enrich students of any racial background. I designed Trap Civics with the assumption that centering joy the way African Americans describe it will lead to joy for all students. Non-Black students can benefit from this curriculum by seeing the resilience, resistance and joy that Black folks have cultivated and shared even while experiencing extreme oppression for generations. They can develop an understanding of how Black folks have shaped our world while being challenged to know in new ways.

### **Joyful Consciousness**

Both the JET and Franklin students engaged in deep reflection on difficult topics while still feeling joyful as evidenced in their lyrics, presentation, and audience responses. Looking at the art pieces of both sites led to my conceptualization of Joyful Consciousness. Joyful Consciousness is a response to the need to analyze and learn about America's past of racism in ways that are nourishing to students, both intellectually and emotionally. With Joyful

Consciousness as our true north, educators are able to acknowledge students' dignity and the forces in our world that deny it. They can introduce students to legacies of resistance, joy and creativity in ways that are relevant to their daily lives (Muhammed, 2023). Additionally, Joyful Consciousness creates space for students to process their present reality. Designing for Joyful Consciousness improves social studies education by immersing the analysis of difficult topics in Black joy, Black empowerment, and Black celebration. This provides a teaching method which joyfully elevates the consciousness of all students.

I intentionally do not create a rigid definition of Joyful Consciousness, but instead illustrate principles to design for its cultivation. Joy can be a sense of personal accomplishment, pride in one's culture, hope for a different future, or an unwavering belief in self (Muhammed, 2023; Watkins, 2020). Joy being apologetically oneself (Cruz, 2017). It can be connecting with ones cultures, connecting with other people and connecting with ideas and communities bigger than oneself (Adams, 2017; Emmons, 2020; Muhammed, 2023). Students experience this joy and connect it to their own critical consciousness in ways that are particular to their identities, perspectives, and context. Educators can help students make these connections and cultivate this joyful consciousness by framing hip hop as a way students can express their profound intelligence. They can do this by creating space for students' creativity allowing for and encouraging rebellion, empowering students to express pain, and by encouraging students to want and dream.

Continued theorization should be conducted on designing for Joyful Consciousness using other forms of arts based learning. This is particularly relevant for theatre and media based learning. Students can write and act out scripts in class and later act out and record them on their phones. This allows students to create mini shows that depict difficult aspect of history in ways

that allow space for emotional processing. Students can add music and emotion to express the emotions that arise as they reflect on difficult histories as well as their current realities. We live in a media driven society and critical civic learning can share space with art and entertainment. This country is so ashamed of its history that it punishes people for teaching that history. In some cases Hollywood has taken up the role of teaching difficult histories, like *The Tulsa Massacre* or Nat Turner's slave rebellion. The Tulsa Massacre led to the murder of three hundred African Americans. During the Tulsa Massacre forty square blocks of Black homes, hospitals, schools, and churches were burned and looted by deputized white citizens and members of the national guard. I like many student in American schools never learned that history in social studies classes. Many people learned about this for the first time from HBO, through the *Watchmen* and *Love Craft Country*, not a social studies class. Nat Turner led one of the most important rebellions against slavery in the history of our nation. Yet, Turner is represented through caricatured depictions showing him as mentally unstable and savage. The movie *Birth of a Nation* provided the earliest sympathetic view of Nat Turner. Watching movies and tv shows around these histories and having students create their own written and acted pieces holds potential for arts based learning that can connect joy and criticality.

### **Civics Inside and Outside the Civics Classroom**

This study reveals how critical civic learning occurred even in the absence of a civic content. At Franklin Middle School, students wrote raps that explored issues and social dynamics that impacted them personally, regardless of whether they were recognized as being civic issues in a textbook. These topics included social status and power, who gets to make decisions that impact them, when their voices are heard and unheard, and where they experienced and witnessed harm. Students were also writing about the world they want to create. A world where

they experience belonging, fairness, freedom, abundance and the esteem of their peers. All of these are civic issues, and by exploring these using the canon of their own experiences instead of the canon of traditional social studies curricula, students were able to practice their citizenship (Hall, 2023). Students tapped into subconscious thoughts and feelings and learning was centered on them and their individualized perspectives.

When specific civic topics including the painful history of our country are being explicitly taught, Trap Civics also serves an important role to integrate this history with students' joy. Rap literacy can be learned like all forms of poetry, and it provides a creative vehicle for capturing and processing complex emotion and lived experiences of students. This study provides a framework for immersing the teaching of BIPOC history in joy. Critical consciousness of interlocking systems of oppression is a prerequisite for civic reasoning and social studies learning (Lee, 2021). Producing an engaged active citizenry requires teaching both past and present inequities and necessitates deep dives into histories that may be difficult to process (Epstein, et. al., 2011). This education can be emotionally painful for students and difficult to process in a traditional classroom. This study provides a framework for social justice education that situates learning in joy. Educators can have students critically reflect on America's past of genocide, slavery, and colonialism while making meaning of their own experiences, celebrating their ancestors, and resisting the ways oppression is ongoing and impacting their lives today. The process of writing about the joys and pains of their lived experiences, as an ideal feature of critical civic learning is invaluable for students. Hip hop, joy and consciousness-elevating learning work in concert, undergirding each other and contributing to a cohesive joyful consciousness.

### **Trap Civics as Response to Banning Black History**

During a time when some states are banning BIPOC history in the classroom, rooting civics education in students' personal experiences can allow for honest, critical exploration of students' social worlds. Teachers can use Trap Civics to let students think for themselves and determine how to celebrate their own histories and critique the world around them. The use of Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy in social studies classes are underutilized as culturally sustaining forms of arts based anti-racist learning. This study demonstrates how joyful consciousness can be used to tackle hard histories while attending to students emotional needs. Trap Civics serves the needs of twenty-first century social studies classes by serving as a critical tool for analyzing U.S. History in truthful, culturally sustaining ways that cultivate Joyful Consciousness. Further research on this phenomenon can be used to counter arguments that Black history should be avoided because it induces guilt and shame in white students. Trap Civics allows space for non-Black students to also explore honest history, process their emotions, and find a sense of agency. Continued application and expansion of Trap Civics can illustrate the role of joyful consciousness as a pedagogical tool for twenty-first century social studies education.

### **The Importance of Resistance and Refusal**

Despite my best efforts refusal still showed in a pedagogical model designed to work against the Eurocentric practices and center joy and cultural relevance. Student refusal showed up in every quarter. Resistance is a defining feature of hip hop. I attempted to guide this resistance by having students write rap songs about who they are, what frustrated them and made them feel strongly. However, I was often unsuccessful, and planned for it in my lessons. Even though the curriculum is designed to work against the Eurocentric content and practices of traditional civic/arts /music classes, I still was an authority figure who gave them assignments

and enforced regulation of their behavior. Students who regularly struggled to complete assignments were hesitant to write rap songs as well.

I began this study by describing how Black music over time has been vehicles for critical conscious learning and provides a critical social analysis while still allowing for joy (Akorn, 2009; Kelly & Sawyer, 2019; Love, 2019). Next, I explained how CHHP links critical consciousness and civic reasoning by centering learning on understanding interlocking systems of oppression, which is needed in order to produce an educated citizenry that can work across differences and contribute to a healthy democracy (Barton & Ho, 2021; Guttman 2014; Lee, 2021; Seider & Graves, 2020). Critical civic reasoning requires students to wrestle with difficult histories in order to contextualize present oppressive structures (Epstein, et, al., 2011; Hess, 2008; Howard, 2004; Lee, 2021). This study revealed how Trap Civics provides a method for critical civic learning while still centering joy in the learning process. This study discovered methods for students to use rap as a vehicle for processing their lived experiences as well as a tool for analyzing difficult histories. Further research can explore the use of freestyle rap in articulating radical ratchet truths. The fleeting and unrecorded nature of freestyle rap allows for the expression of lyrics which are especially uncensored and unfiltered. It is possible that due to the unfiltered nature of freestyling that even deeper truths can be articulated. Future research should also look at the connection between socio-cultural definitions of joy as well as individual interpretations of joy. Finally, researchers should explore whether depictions of joy rooted in hyper consumerism can be liberatory, and to what extent educators can push back on individual definitions of joy and measure how impacted they are by social institutions.

### **Limitations**

One of the limitations of this study was due to the discrepancy in the amount of students. There were far fewer students in California than in Wisconsin. I adjusted for this by choosing a random assortment of poems that averaged to about ten students per class so that you had a similar amount of students' raps from each time you implemented the curriculum. Despite the fact that I taught in two geographic areas I did not attend to how environment could impact the learning. Locations are diverse, and yet there are many settings and contexts that might impact students differently. It is unknown what this study would look like in the rural south, in a Dominican neighborhood in New York City, or in Atlanta where Trap music is most popular. This study creates an invitation to other researchers to continue exploring Trap Civics, Blackout Rap Transcription, and Joyful Consciousness in their own spaces.

This study involved racially diverse students, and different things are possible in affinity spaces. Researchers can explore what this looks like in an all-Black space, among Afro-Latinos, as well as other racial/ethnic groups. Students have intersecting identities that all impact their civic participation. Asking students to specifically focus on particular parts of their experience in future studies may provide more details about how and why joyful consciousness is necessary and what it does for students. In this study, this limitation was needed in order to get a sample that was grounded in students' experiences instead of in prescribed categories. New research can explore more specific topics. While this study was conducted in English, a multilingual space may create new opportunities for lyricism and the exploration of how language and civic issues interact which can be another area for research.

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## Appendix A: Data Raps

### Middle School Hell Data Rap

#### **Chorus:**

summer we burning up  
plus teachers mad boring we don't learn enough  
no AC and the lunch is stale  
School sucks this is middle school hell  
Middle School hell Middle School hell Middle School hell  
(repeat)

#### **Verse 1:**

Walls is crusty and the class too bright  
kids aint acting right  
in the bathroom getting high  
hallways so crowded( I can barely walk by)  
I'm sick of this shit  
I hate middle school ...it's cruel  
nobody can sit in place'...teachers are annoying (everywhere)  
class feels like doom.....School is a nightmare  
40 min holds 3 min with the pass  
lack of fairness cops outside (waiting in the grass)  
school feels like jail...test are a pain  
I don't like school...it's so cruel  
Never had a fire sub

(those) we get rid of

(look around) can't you tell

this is middle school hell

### **Chorus**

#### **Verse two:**

kids don't respect the teachers (they be running wild)

We aint never had a good sub (a least not in a while)

Stay two days and then they quit

( No stability....I'm sick of this shit)

We so loud it's hard for them to show us love

WE here till 4:22...rules don't exist school is a curse

Middle school drama can it get any worse

School so boring (wish that I was home)

Teachers play favorites and everyday is good chrome (ad lib: switch it up)

Classes way to hard ...the hallway (is not large)

Better do work and put your phone away

detention or suspension (if you break the rules today)

Cops outside and we got 40 minute holds

this school so ghetto we got kids here on parole

teachers always yelling but the (kids just ignore)

Teacher mad obnoxious and the lessons are a bore

no one follows rules and I'm bout to fall asleep

Barely concious (this aint where I wanna be)

**Chorus****Verse 3:**

Fight, fight, fight, fight, fight, fight,  
Fights on a daily it's a regular occasion  
Kids the recording fights and someone goes viral  
All over Instagram (middle school American idol)  
Fist fight everyday fights in the hallway  
fights everywhere ...someone started a fight  
(watch out or) they'll beat you up  
don't give us enough time for eating now I see wassup  
I get in trouble parents get a call  
then throw a fit we're stuck this boring not fun at all  
always in trouble but I can't sit in place  
so much homework school so depressing  
so much dram in Franklin (no question)  
Missing books missing computer, missing book binder  
teachers make us mad (but I just can't find em)  
dirty musty kids not washing their hair  
Smelly children it's a stench in the air  
School sucks people.....Two-faced kids always telling lies  
Rumor rumors rumors fake friends in disguise  
Water taste bad and the burgers are disgust  
the classrooms smell like trash, kids got lice (what)

they think basketball for boys but girls keep playing  
teachers check these kids (know what I'm saying)

**Braggadocios Data Rap: Shawty I'm amazing**

**Instrumental:** (music: Gabb feat Janelle Monae)

**Chorus:**

Hoodie up, shawty I'm amazing  
Scum of the school, shawty I'm amazing  
I'm a bully ,shawty I'm amazing  
Hoodie up, shawty I'm amazing  
(repeat)

**Verse 1**

Get out the way break them ankles  
Shawty I'm amazing  
I'm a bully get out the way  
Shawty I'm amazing  
All the school wanna be us  
Shawty I'm amazing  
I rise beneath your fall  
Shawty I'm amazing  
making threats someone will pay  
Shawty I'm amazing  
racking up dough turn you into a bum (you blunderin' fool)  
Shawty I'm amazing

the rudest the cruelest the scum of the school

Racking up dough I'm a baddies

Shawty I'm amazing

your names a disgrace don't play shawty I'm amazing

### **Chorus**

### **Verse 2**

I go out to frontlines

(right in the face of those that want mine)

I'm hot shake the spot with the spot with my presence

your names a disgrace yall suck (I'm a blessing)

I like talk smack (and) Find ways to make money

Bust you wide open bulldoze your land (sonny)

trynna send a message

I open doors to success

many scars (yet I'm blessed)

I'm a bully get out the way

Strong, cool, run this show (all day)

(I swear) I'm a shine

shots of pain in my veins

still coming in hot at the top

(Then one day the world will know) I'm hot

that's why (Imma be great)

**Chorus****Verse 3**

Can't use our phones (yeah right?)

(Naw) I won't fix my tone (wanna fight)

Imma baddie I get I get what I want

put my hoodie up (and I stunt)

I'm amazing run the show take notes

I got what you lack while you choke

I come strong with a crew

betta hope we don't catch you lacking

(or you will wonder what happened)

We too strong many scars... still better than you

We take the crown We win you lose

thinking I'm playing with you

turn you into a bum, break yo ankles shawty hoodie up

racked up doe (too) cool rude hoodie up

Always take the W I rise beneath your fall

we have no money

You better hope (better hope) I don't catch you lacking (chorus?)

(fight that bish) betta hope I don't catch you lacking

I'm a baddie betta hope I don't catch you lacking

I get what I want betta hope I don't catch you lacking

Chorus

**Verse 4**

Rumors always floating fill us with emotion  
 But we're still great need to collaborate  
 Got all the answers, got all the brains  
 Superstars that can lead the lame  
 We' so great yeah I Get a lot of flattery  
 so smart yead I Get a lot of flattery  
 I'm the best you a clown Yeah I get a lot of flattery  
 You lazy I'm cool (you don't get a lot of flattery)  
 got a big grin when I walk around the school  
 eat with salad forks and steak knives, (a lot of cutlers)  
 Imma open doors I'm Lebron (what you want from me)  
 You can't be me We the best yo the rest are trash  
 names a disgrace I'm not a fraud (shawty know your place you last)  
 (Need to be erased at least replace)  
 We aint no frauds

**Fantasy Data Rap: Faries and Buffalos****Chorus**

NBA fairies and buffaloes  
 Life is scary (but I love the fantasy flow)  
 (Close my eyes and I'm anywhere  
 Life is scary (but this world is fair)  
 (repeat)

**Verse 1:**

My hands are blood red  
and the authorities are after me  
kidnapping dogs( in a tesla getting fed)  
I drive the best cars  
Smoking on cigars  
.....like my face is full of scars  
More money than a bank  
doing it my way  
Never washing plates  
Making plays like I'm in the NBA  
Young Tony Stark  
The fire (in the dark)  
Outside in my fortress (in the middle of the Park) (Go head)  
Yo man is my man  
We stay getting dough  
breaking laws stealing cars  
We the Franklin superstars

**Chorus****Verse 2:**

Imma go to Harvard.... the great white buffalo  
so much money can't stop me from getting dough  
Making plays like I'm in the NBA

not washing plates imma do it my way  
 Got guns like an assassin (baby) I am an animal  
 kidnapping dogs (like some kinda cannibal)  
 Caught red handed the authorities are after me  
 (Ironman) Tony Stark (no way they will capture me)  
 I drive the best cars  
 Smoking on cigars  
 .....like my face is full of scars  
 More money than a bank  
 I'm a Toki Superstar

**Annoying Messages From Adults Data Rap :T-A-R-D-Y**

**Chorus**

T-A-R-D-Y: pay attention

T-A-R-D-Y: go to class

T-A-R-D-Y: pay attention

T-A-R-D-Y: go to class

T-A-R-D-Y

(repeat)

**Verse 1:**

Study for your classes-write an essay

(Tell me why your backpack is so messy)

Pay attention -go to class

shut your mouth-(you)need a hall pass

try your best-listen and grow

(what college you going to go)

pay attention-(and don't be )seconds late

Get to a big college-(and you'll be great)

A diploma is all you need

focus on academic skills-let school take the lead

if a dude start something walk away

Don't turn to the dark side-you can change today

Hurry up-don't miss your bus

OMG this kids (really) suck

wake up in the morning -don't be late

Ya'll kids annoying-the end of the day (I just can't wait)

### **Chorus**

### **Verse 2:**

Get out the hallway-where is your pass

(you bad ass kids)-get to class

Phone in the pocket take a seat

remember your materials (why must I repeat)

I know you disappointed in the rules

(But) sit (down) try and win and I'll show how not to be fools

(You need) good grades (avoid the zeros)

(Then I will teach) you who can be a hero

Teachers go T-A-R-D-Y

(don't know why I even try)

A diploma is all you need

Studying for the class we will take the lead

**Chorus**

**School Love Data Rap: Dear Franklin**

**Instrumental:** Jay-Z Dear Summer Instrumental

**Chorus:**

(Dear Franklin know imma miss thee

We go tother like white Nikes and crips tees)

We treat each other with respect

Be supportive ...unity

Franklin: So good at teaching me

**Verse 1:**

Good thing is the school store

We like to ball

sports

capture the flag get the flag.....

my base a fortress.....

we play music chairs

healthy food

chilling in my house nothing to do

(but this) food is really cool

interactive staff amazing teachers

students v staff (is a feature)

good kids open gym ... sports are fun

like the school water (like)being smart we are a community

We treat each other with respect

Be supportive ...unity

**Chorus:**

*(Dear Franklin know imma miss thee*

*We go tother like white Nikes and crips tees)*

We treat each other with respect

Be supportive ...unity

**Feelings Data Rap : I wanna go home**

**Instrumental:** Trap beat spit it fast (Shimmy by Logic Beat)

**Chorus:**

I wanna go home

School makes me feel harmed (I)winna go home

makes me wanna scream (Feel like I'm alone)

School makes me feel harmed (I)winna go home

makes me wanna scream (Feel like I'm alone)

**Verse 1**

(I'm) a loser-scared to be social

(I think I'm) too emotional

this school I hate it all (don't get the promotional)

Disappointment (after disappointment)l-I just stop trying

Why is life so hard (feels like my soul is dying)

Wish I could disappear

Nothing I do is without fear

I'm caged -enraged -I think I'm a loser

happiness never lasts -(don't know what to do cus)

(I'm) unknown and afraid -unhappy -(don't know)-if I'll be here

don't wanna be scum-(all I know is fear)

all my dreams down (will)tomorrow will be better

(will I be) winning (will I get it together)

I(feel) nervous -(like) my friends passed me

(I wanna catch up) so I can feel happy

(like I'm nowhere near Branden, Kelly or Ashley)

Wish I was a champion-wish there was candy

(Wish I was )the best -cus that would be handy

(Wish I) could be a hero -(cus that would be dandy)

-(Wish it was my modus operandi)

I like to look at the stars (to) think who we are (Stars)

## Appendix B : How to Rap Lesson Plans

### Lesson 1: Learning to Think in Rhyme

- I. Ice Breaker: Go around the room everyone say their name and something they like to do for fun
- II. Play the music video Grow food video
- III. Introduce the Rhyme Chart A to teach basic rhymes. Next Chart B for slant rhymes. Finally Chart C for multisyllabic rhymes. Each chart requires students to write 4-8 bars at the bottom

#### Rhyme Chart A

Play
A
B
C
D
E
F
G
H
I
J
K
L

M

N

O

P

Q

R

S

T

U

V

W

X

Y

Z

Rhyme Chart B: Stretch Rhymes

Stretch

A

B

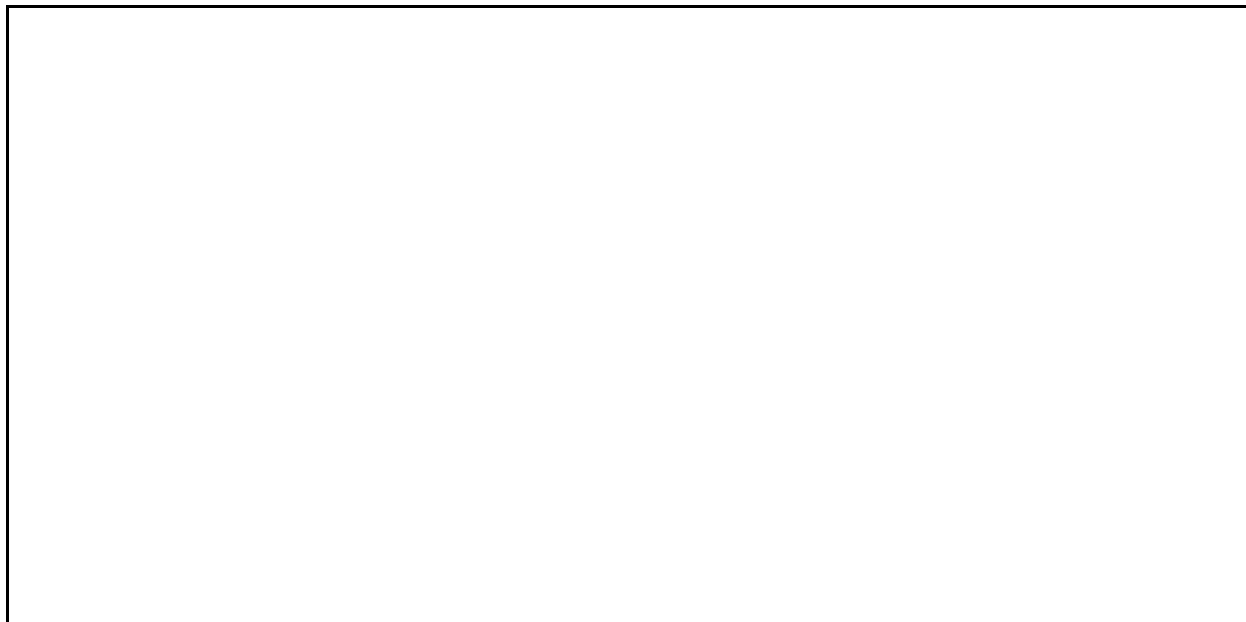
C

D

E

F  
G  
H  
I  
J  
K  
L  
M  
N  
O  
P  
Q  
R  
S  
T  
U  
V  
W  
X  
Y  
Z

Bars



Rhyme Chart C: Multiple Syllabic Rhymes

<b>Man</b>	<b>Flows</b>
A	A
B	B
C	C
D	D
E	E
F	F
G	G
H	H
I	I
J	J

K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z	K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
	<b><u>Bars</u></b>  1.  2.  3.



### Lesson 3: Metaphors Getting OOH's and Ah's and the art of being clever.

Directions: Follow the steps below to practice using metaphors and similes in your rap song.

Explain Metaphors, Puns, and Similes

(Similes example: get more press like a keypad- Nicki Minaj)

Step 1: Think of things you can compare yourself to. You are hotter than.....You are flier than..... Write as many as you can.

Step 2: Choose one of your answers and place the final word in the sentence in your rhyme chart.

Step 3: Once you get to 4 bars choose another metaphor

Step 4: now write 16 bars

#### Chart D

Task/Question	Answer	8 Bars
<p>1. Master rappers main metaphors hot, cold, sick, fly, got bread. Choose one or two and write them in the next section.</p> <p>Example: I'm hot like Or I'm hotter than</p> <p>2. What are slang words that have other meanings? Example bread, dough, bars are rhymes or like candy bars hint: Think of double meanings.</p>	<p>I'm hotter than....</p> <p>I'm colder than.....</p>	

What do people do with bread or dough? Who works with bread?	I'm flyer than.....	
--	------------------------	--

#### Lesson 4: The art of 16 bars

Directions: Use the worksheet to turn individual bars into complete coherent rap verses.

I) Choose a topic:

- 1) release things that frustrate you (please not people) (release thru rap)
- 2) braggadocious why you are so amazing, why your opponent real or imagine is not
- 3) story rap : events that happen to you and others

II) 4 Bar method: Write 4 bars at a time to organize your thoughts and not be overwhelmed. It's also a good time to switch your rhyme up.

- a) Bars 1-4 Images/descriptions: images about the frustrating circumstance you chose
  - a. metaphors and similes to paint the picture

- b) Bars 4-8 Others Tell us about other people in your circumstance. People around you.  
How do your friends feel about this situation? What is their experience with it. (Empathy)
  - a. Example: other classes are not sociable
- c) Bars 8-12 Changes/Continuance How will you change it? How will you overcome? Real or imagined. (Freedom dreaming, critical conscious metric 2 AND 3) BSW bridge contradiction?
  - a. Example: this class stays sociable
- d) Bars 12-16 Success How will success feel? You told me how it feels, how your friends feel about it. How will success feel?
  - a. Example: It feels great
  - b. Example It feels right

Chart E

questions	answers	bars
Description: What makes you amazing? -different/unique -likes/dislikes		
Others: What makes your friends or family amazing		

Rhyme Chart

Task	Facts	Bars
------	-------	------

### **Lesson 5**

Braggadocious : What makes you amazing? Why are you so fly?

Step 1: Look at the questions in the left column. Answer the questions in the next column. In this example it means write a bunch of facts about yourself that show you in a positive light.

Step 2: Look at your answers and find the simplest word to rhyme in them and write the line so that word is at the end.

Step 3: Put together the rhyming lines in ways that make sense and Punch! Use your newly acquired punchline skills. Remember puns, metaphors/similes, and the double entendre.

### **Lesson 6: Rap battles**

Directions: Choose a side and use bars to support it.

- I) Dog v Cats: Which is better?
- II) Anime v Cartoons: Which is better?
- III) PlayStation v X Box: Which is better?

### **Chart F**

Topic: Write down one of the above topics in the space below.	Answers: Brainstorm at least 4 reasons to support your topic.	Bars: Use the rhyme sheet or your rap skills to turn your points into rhyming couplets.

### Lesson 7: How to rap social consciousness

Directions: Follow the steps to write socially conscious lyrics

Step 1: Look at the questions in the left column. Answer the questions in the next column. In this example explain an issue that you care about..

Step 2: Look at your answers and find the simplest word to rhyme in them and write the line so that word is at the end.

Step 3: Put together the rhyming lines in ways that make sense

1)Questions/Task	2)Answers/Information	3)Rhymes
1.Name an issue you really care about and describe it using plain language	1.	

<p>2. Why do you care about this issue?</p> <p>3. How does it impact other people?</p> <p>4. What can be done to change it?</p>	<p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>	
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### **Lesson 8: How to Flow: Learning ways to deliver your lyrics**

I) Explain various styles of rapping and strategies to ensure your words stay on beat.

a) There are eight counts used regardless of the beat. Your type of flow depends on how you hit the beat.

#### Method 1: Bar by Bar method:

I) -The Lil Wayne

You record 1-2, 2-4 bars at a time (punchlines, one liners)

Method 2: Record, Revise, and Remember

- a. Listen to your freestyle
- b. What are your norms

II) Activity: Go over the 4 count and use the Kodak Black beat *Gremlin*. Use the phrase Live King Buy Castle to show the various styles of rapping by adding lyrics in between the words. Practice by going back and forth between numbers and vowels to get used to riding the beat.

1 filler 2 filler 3 filler 4 filler

A      B      C      D

Live King Buy Castle

Live *like a king buy myself a castle*

*Sample Bars: I live like a King bought myself a castle*

*No sweat girl aint no hassle*

*I'm the goat with a mote and I'm served by my vessels*

*When I roll up other royals unravel*

### **Appendix C: Semi Structured Interview Protocol**

1. What does joy mean?
2. Think of a time when you felt joy in class. In life. Can you tell me about it?
3. What was your most enjoyable or some top enjoyable moments you experiences in the social studies class? What made it like that?

**Appendix D: Code Book**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>criticality</b>	lyrics where students name oppression, hurt, and harm as they see it in their lives or society or	when students represent an understanding of justice and how they exist in the world
<b>intellectual</b>	knowledge that connects to the context of the world where they can apply skills and standards	when students talk about being successful in the future
<b>frustrations</b>	lyrics about things that make the student angry	students talking about bullying
<b>silly fantasy</b>	a made up story that is funny or meant to be light	Pretending to be a buffalo
<b>ghetto fantasy</b>	a made up story about something hood like being in a gang, doing a crime even though it is not true	Saying they are a money launderer
<b>idyllic fantasy</b>	a fantasy or statement aspiring to something seen as good by traditional metrics like community, peace, or social justice	Being smart and going to a good college
<b>transgression</b>	lyrics that take a great departure from my comfort zone	Students depicting explicit topics
<b>ensorship</b>	school raps versus how they would rap outside of school with their friends	Students using curse words
<b>feelings</b>	lyrics that depict a student's emotional state	When a student's share vulnerable truths

<b>school frustrations</b>	when students share something that makes them angry	The food is nasty at lunch or teachers are mean
<b>school environment</b>	when students discuss a problem with their school building	The water fountain is dirty
<b>aspirational bars</b>	these lyrics illustrate how students conceive of the American dream	When students talk about getting a good job
<b>fantasy</b>	imaginations of joy	When students externalize their imagination
<b>school rap</b>	students pride in their school	When they say they are a community
<b>ratchet</b>	lyrics that celebrate so called ghetto behavior and challenge scripts of appropriateness	When students use ghetto as a positive
<b>classroom management</b>	when students discuss poor teacher pedagogy and disruptive student behavior	When students discuss teachers not being respected by their peers
<b>teen angst</b>	lyrics which denotes identity based struggles gender conformity, bullying, and loneliness	When lyrics talked about ways they had fun at school
<b>student life</b>	lyrics where students talk about their experiences at school	When students write about their daily activities at school
<b>braggadocios</b>	when lyrics denote extreme boasting	When students talk about how amazing they are
<b>school culture</b>	students referring to issues they have at school not related to physical building	When they talk about the constant police presence at school

<b>teacher rapport</b>	lyrics that discuss teachers connecting with students	When students say the teacher does a good job educating them
<b>success at school</b>	when students have feelings of accomplishment at school	Making good grades

### Appendix E: Jeffersonian notation symbols/choices.

#### Timing

Latching: =

Means no pause. The normal pause is not there

Pauses: Go none one thousand and so on and put the time of pauses (.2)

#### Intonation

(.) Falling intonation (tenor). Means you are making a statement (not necessarily an assertion)

(?) Rising Intonation (Soprano). Means you are asking a question or displaying uncertainty

(,) Rising intonation slightly (Alto). Not quite as unsure

(?,) Rising intonation in between comma and period

(\_) level intonation

Underlining: Means emphasis by pitch or volume. Consider what normal emphasis is put on the word.

UPPER CASE LETTERS: denotes especially loud talk

Degree signs denote quiet talk

↑↓ denote rise and falling intonation mid-sentence

>< : Means speech is sped up or rushed (sped up may indicate superfluous speech)

< > : Means speech is slowed down (slowed down may indicate emphasis)

: Degree sign : means the word is stretched out, put in between letters

Double parentheses: (( )) is a description of something. A cough if you will. Or if an explanation is needed. Double parentheses can also be used to describe physical gestures as they play a role in communication.

#### Types of Voices

- Smiley voice, enclosed by the British pound sign (£).
- Creaky voice (#)
- Tremulous voice (~) can signal upset,

### Laughing and Signifying

Jeffersonian Notation does not have a code for signifying so I use the one for laughing to denote audience reaction like Ooooo's and yoooooo's.

Audible aspirations are denoted with hhhhhhhh

-Laughter uses vowels in between depending on the sound it can be huh/hah/heh/hih

### **Sample: Voice of a Woman (annotated with Jeffersonian Notation)**

Me: The W group give it up for the W group

Crowd: whoooooooo

**Shanice:**[ I am the voice of a woman.]

**Nicole** : [ I am the voice of a woman.]

**Kendra** : [ I am the voice of a woman.]

**Nicole:** A woman who is left out of every civil rights movement.

**Shanice:**[ I am the voice of a woman.]

**Nicole** : [I am the voice of a woman.]

**Kendra** : [I am the voice of a woman.]

**Kendra:** > Who doesn't pass a paper bag test < so I'm left to deal with the mess=The mess that allow the white patriarchy to continually oppress,

**Shanice:**[ I am the voice of a woman.]

**Nicole** : [I am the voice of a woman.]

**Kendra** :[I am the voice of a woman.]

**Shanice:** A woman who↑ developed citizenship schools, that help Blacks pass literacy test= so that ↑they can repossess the systems made to oppress\_

**Shanice:** [Septima Clark.]

**Nicole:** [Septima Clark.]

**Kendra:** [Septima Clark.]

**Nicole:** And yet men still question my worth as if I'm not the best.

**Kendra:** As if ↑we cannot pass that silly test.

**Shanice:** the test meant to separate and depreciate.

**Shanice:**[ I am the voice of a woman.]

**Nicole** : [I am the voice of a woman.]

**Kendra** :[I am the voice of a woman.]

**Kendra:**< I carry the poise that translates to societal poison= in the eyes of the tainted that

[mmm]

see my mere existence as a bad omen. I pick up the pen with the purpose of

[hhhhhhh]

addressing the demoted

Audience: [hhhhmmmmmm]

**Shanice:** [Daisy Bates.]

**Kendra** [Daisy Bates.]

**Nicole** [Daisy Bates.]

**Nicole:** She is the voice of us women whose next call to action. was voting. to break this trash down into something better.= We call it freedom.

**Shanice:** [Ella Baker]

**Kendra** [Ella Baker.]

**Nicole** [Ella Baker.]

**Nicole:** We are women.

**Kendra:** with voices.

**Nicole:** choices.

**Shanice:** > Calling for our communal rejoices in celebration against the masculine forces. <

**Kendra:** > Calling for our communal rejoices in celebration against the masculine forces. <

**Nicole:** > Calling for our communal rejoices in celebration against the masculine forces. <