"WE'RE RAPPING, NOT TRAPPING": HIP HOP AS A CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSION OF MÉTIS CULTURE AND A CONDUIT TO LITERACY

by

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Abstract

There exists a common essentialized discourse about Indigenous peoples in Canada that has communities frozen in time, leaving Métis culture represented through sashes, jigging, and the fur trade. However, across the country, Métis youth are expressing themselves through hip hop culture. This thesis explores the impacts that being involved in hip hop culture, particularly the creation of hip hop, can have for the Métis young adult participants and the implications for education. It asks how hip hop culture and hip hop pedagogies can have a stimulating effect on Métis students' educational experiences. The study uses an Indigenous métissage methodology (Donald 2009), and qualitative interview methods along with participants' hip hop creations – rapping, beatboxing, and graffiti art—to story their hip hop engagements. Three themes emerged: how hip hop can 1) be a vehicle for identity and identifying, 2) build relationships and community, and 3) connect students to school. This study demonstrates the value that hip hop creation and consumption can hold for Métis students, and contributes to the growing body of work surrounding Indigenous hip hop in Canada.

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Table of Contents

Key Terms

The following key terms appear within the body of this thesis. These descriptions explain how the terms, listed in alphabetical order, are used within the context of this research.

Cognitive imperialism: the belief that success comes from how well an individual assimilates to the dominant culture, including worldviews, languages and societal norms (Battiste, 2005b). Importantly, it is empowered through public education (Battiste, 1998, p. 198).

Culturally responsive education: education which reflects the cultures of its students and respects other ways of knowing and understanding the world by including them within the classroom as well as within official curricula and policy documents (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). Culturally responsive education also includes culturally responsive spaces, in which students see themselves reflected, valued, and heard, and culturally responsive curricula which reflect the many cultures, worldviews and stories our students bring to their education.

Curricula: typically defined as the policy documents created by various Ministries of Education to outline what knowledge teachers should imbue upon their students in each grade and subject. Curricula is also more broadly defined as what is taught within a school.

Hip hop pedagogies: models of teaching and learning that use hip hop cultures as meaningful sources of learning, which often include production, consumption and critical analysis (Adjapong & Emdin, 2015; Alim, 2009b; Ibrahim, 2009)

Indigenous métissage: an Indigenous research methodology that mixes Indigenous and non-Indigenous research methodologies. Métissage also involves the understanding that stories and research are relational (Donald, 2009; Lowan-Trudeau, 2012)

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Indigenous research methodologies: ways of doing research, which reflect and honour

Indigenous ways of being (Wilson, 2008)

Multiliteracies: a shift away from understanding traditional literacy as texts in standard English

to varied forms of literacy, which expands to include "…using language within other

languages, and an ability to understand technology and multimedia" (Biswas, 2014, para.

1) as examples of forms that are more culturally and regionally relevant to students

(Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; da Rosa, 2016).

Chapter One: Introduction

Personal Introduction

Before I begin, I would like to situate myself in the context of this research. Such situating is a crucial aspect of Indigenous research methodology, both to expose assumptions inherent in all research and to "resist colonial models of writing" (Absolon & Willett, 2005, p. 98). I am Lucy Fowler, a Métis woman from Winnipeg, Manitoba. I am writing from Thunder Bay, Ontario, a city resting on traditional Anishinaabe lands and historic Métis communities. My mother, also Métis, raised me and while I learned many details about my Métis ancestors, I knew little more than dates and names. My culture was separate from me and it was not until many years later that I was able to reconnect and relearn these cultural pathways.

Like many Métis across the country, I walked, and still walk, a line between colonized and colonizer (Lowan-Trudeau, 2012), with strong ties to Indigenous and non-Indigenous family alike. I endeavour to celebrate my traditions and share them with the public through participation in various Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, while recognizing that I may in fact simultaneously historicize myself in the eyes of the dominant public. Lowan-Trudeau (2012) asserts that part of the daily experience for Métis in Canada is perpetual relativism, "sometimes creating confusion for ourselves and others, but also offering great cultural richness and complexity" (p. 114). Navigation of this in-between state requires both action and repeated reflection, since "reality is really a *process*, undergoing constant transformation" (Freire, 2000, p. 75). I look to my peers, my elders and the youth of the Métis nation for guidance and ways to refresh my thinking.

I was raised to belong to many cultures. My grandfather was a professor at the University of Manitoba and taught me the culture of academia. I learned how to speak eloquently to my elders, and engage in conversation with anyone, regardless of how little we might have in common. He was an actor, too, and created a deep love for theatre and music in me. My grandmother was a scientist who taught me the culture of curiosity where unlimited adventures were only a thought away. She also taught me the culture of family, the unspoken agreement between relations to love and care for one another and the duty to put family above all else. My mother taught me a culture without limitations. No matter if I wanted to learn how to stage fight, or learn East Indian dance, or play tin whistle, she always encouraged me to live the life I wanted. No request was out of line and no dream was beyond my reach. My stepfather taught me his Dakota culture and gave me the name Wambdi to Wi, Blue Eagle Girl. He taught me patience and tolerance and the value of my voice.

These teachings created who I am, sending me to the University of Manitoba for my undergraduate degree in Classical Studies, then to Lakehead University for my Bachelor of Education. I stumbled on another home in Thunder Bay accidentally, and through a job with the Métis Nation of Ontario, found an extended Métis family throughout Ontario of which I am so honoured to be a part.

A large part of my reality for more than half of my life has been hip hop music. The first time I heard hip hop, I was almost ten and a friend and I were in a park near my house. We sat on the swings and tried to share the stiff plastic headphones attached to a portable cassette player. It played a song by Freak Nasty (1996) with the iconic lyrics, "I put my hand upon your hip, when I dip, you dip, we dip." I was hooked – the lyrics were funny, the beat made you want to dance, and it satisfied my tween desire to upset my parents. I quickly

graduated to other artists, and by middle school, I was listening to Ludacris, Mystikal, and Nelly among others. There were songs to reflect any feeling I had, and a good beat could pull me out of a bad mood faster than anything else. As I've grown, so too has my love of hip hop and my understanding of lyrics and meaning behind the songs. I was drawn to this area of research out of personal interest in hip hop and a firm belief in the redemptive qualities of hip hop and the potentiality of hip hop pedagogy (Akom, 2009; Alim, 2009b; Alim, 2011; Baszil, 2009; Ibrahim, 2009) to address literacy and connect Métis students to mainstream schools in relevant ways.

Background of the Problem

Hip hop is a broad term encompassing numerous cultural practices (Alim, 2009a; Stavrias, 2005). There is academic discord surrounding the term hip hop and its orthography. Alim (2009a) asserts that by using hip hop culture in the singular, there is a risk of losing context and complexity "across wide ranging and diverse scenes" (p. 4). While I use both "hip hop," "hip hop culture," and "hip hop cultures" throughout this text, I remind the reader that there are a multitude of expressions and understandings of hip hop. In mainstream media, the term hip hop is often used interchangeably with rap, but rapping (or MCing) is only a fraction of the body of hip hop practices. Other common practices are DJing (creating music for an MC to rap to), graffiti art, and breakdancing, but hip hop also ventures into the political, academic, and linguistic worlds (Alim, 2009a; KRS-One, 2013). Hip hop, as a "lived culture" (Stavrias, 2005, p. 45), is shaped by the work produced by its participants while simultaneously shaping participants themselves, who negotiate identity and "self-understandings" through the production and consumption of hip hop (Morgan & Warren, 2011, p. 940; see also, Ibrahim, 2009; Lashua & Fox, 2007).

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As a youth driven cultural expression, hip hop is becoming recognized as essential to educators in their ability to make school a meaningful reflection of students' lives. Hip hop culture both "informs and challenges the work of educators" (Rodríguez, 2009, p. 32) by providing avenues for students to express themselves and interact with those issues that speak strongly to them. Hip hop provides a space for discussion and disentangling the "politics of race, class, sexuality, gender, place, and generations … through the discourse of power, privilege, and oppression" (Baszile, 2009, p. 14). Hip hop is not just a space of resistance but also a method by which to negotiate cultural values upheld by mainstream curriculum as well as other values ignored or excluded from official curriculum (Baszile, 2009; Ibrahim, 2017). Hip hop practitioners who take a critical approach to hip hop can be described as participating in conscious, "alternative," or "progressive" hip hop "which stresses self-respect, social change, and anti-racism" (Buffam, 2011, p. 341). While there has been research done regarding the relationship between Indigenous youth and hip hop, including the varying experiences of Indigenous youth across Canada, the United States, and Australia in their creation of hip hop texts, I found no studies that exclusively examine Métis hip hop artists' experiences of cultural production. Scholars have talked about hip hop pedagogies as a response to an education system that does not reflect the experiences or knowleges that students (especially Indigenous students and/or students of colour) bring to the classroom.

However, before exploring the concept of hip hop pedagogies, I'd like to talk about Indigenous education. As I will demonstrate within the literature review, Indigenous education is an education that is created by and for Indigenous peoples, prioritizing Indigenous ways of knowing and being and holding traditional knowledge in high regard

(Battiste, 2009; Iseke-Barnes, 2003; Martineau & Ritskes, 2014). As well, Métis education remains an elusive term. There is no fixed definition. While Indigenous education can often be addressed through land and language-based education systems (Battiste, 2013; Dion, 2007; Metallic & Seiler, 2009), scholars are less clear as to what defines Métis education. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015a) does not offer a definition of Métis education, but necessitates that communities and parents must have ownership over it. Indeed, the inclusion of Métis peoples and perspectives is central to Métis students' identifications with schooling (Dion, 2000). Within informal learning contexts, Iseke-Barnes (2009) asserts the importance of storytelling for Métis community members, allowing Métis people to share their lived experiences and intergenerational knowledge. I found no studies that examine Métis education as it relates to hip hop literacies. Hip hop connects to education in that there is broad scholarship exploring the potential impact of hip hop pedagogies in the school system. These pedagogies place a value on knowledge found through or from within hip hop texts, and speaks to the lived experiences of youth.

Problem Statement

The potential significance of hip hop culture for Métis student education has not been sufficiently investigated and may not be understood or considered often by educators. While there are studies examining the globalization of hip hop (for example, Akom, 2009; Alim, 2011; Ibrahim, 2009), Australian Indigenous hip hop (Morgan & Warren, 2011; Stavrias, 2005), and, just as broadly, Indigenous hip hop in Canada (Buffam, 2011; Lashua, 2006; Wang, 2010), there is a gap in the literature concerning Métis hip hop in Canada. This gap includes a lack of studies as well as a lack of literature explicitly investigating the unique cultural and community-based experiences of Métis artists in relation to hip hop and its

implications for literacies and schooling**.** This thesis will fill the gap in the extant literature through a study with Métis hip hop artists from Ontario and Manitoba

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the impacts that being involved in hip hop culture, particularly the creation of hip hop, can have for the Métis young adult participants and the implications for education.

Research Questions

To explore any impacts that being involved in hip hop culture, particularly the creation of hip hop, can have for Métis young adult participants from Ontario and Manitoba, I asked three research questions:

1) What influences do hip hop culture and hip hop pedagogies offer Métis youth?

2) How might hip hop culture and pedagogy influence educational goals and paths for Métis youth?

3) In what ways can hip hop stimulate and rejuvenate Métis education?

Significance of the Study

As this research was conceptualised, the learning environment (especially with the strong colonial ties intrinsic to the education system in Canada) was at the forefront of my mind; I was drawn to exploring questions about how that system has effectively removed the significance of story in the learning process, thereby forcing linear, traditionally Western thinking patterns into a place of authority over Indigenous thought (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Donald, Glanfield, & Sterenberg, 2011; Metallic & Seiler, 2009; Simpson, 2001). In my work with the Métis Nation of Ontario, I found myself in classrooms educating young students on what we called *Métis 101*, a basic knowledge of Métis culture and heritage. More

often than not, questions from students would relegate to the margins of Canadian society my Métis culture: from a modern, thriving culture to a historic antiquity (Dion, 2000), extinct or frozen in the fur trade.

More specifically, my experiences with *Métis 101* in elementary and secondary classrooms in Ontario echoed research done by Dion (2012). This research study, commissioned by the Métis Nation of Ontario, examined inclusion of Métis content within Ontario teacher education programs, including what is being taught and learned about Métis history, language, and culture. Dion interviewed recent graduates from teacher education programs in Ontario and found that contemporary contributions by Métis peoples were not seen to be part of the official curriculum, were absent from students' and their teachers' discussions, and tended to be collapsed within "Indigenous peoples more broadly" (Dion, 2012, p. 6). This means that Métis students are unable to see their own perspectives and communities represented or they see them represented poorly. Educators thus are not creating culturally responsive spaces that allow those within them to feel valued and safe, feelings that are reinforced by the valuing of the background and experiences of those within them. Brayboy and Castagno (2009) place culturally responsive education in response to assimilative education for Indigenous youth. Culturally responsive education requires "a shift in teaching methods, curricular materials, teacher dispositions, and school–community relations" (p. 32) in order to center Indigenous worldviews. This shift allows students to see themselves reflected in the education system, both increasing their ability to deeply understand the material and addressing beliefs of inadequacy or not-belonging in the school system (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014).

Culturally responsive spaces are grounded within knowledge of community, of language, and of culture. Battiste (2005a) explains that misrepresenting experiences and knowledges is part of cognitive imperialism that "assumes superiority of knowledge and people" (p. 17) by prioritizing Western knowledge and thought processes, and does not require any cultural understandings or adjustments to be made by those in the dominant group. By disconnecting students from their identities, educators knowingly or unknowingly reinforce cognitive imperialism and guide students towards a lack of self-understanding instead of towards self-empowerment. Indigenous scholars respond to some of the challenges to cognitive imperialism with culturally responsive education and pedagogies, as do the Commissioners of Truth and Reconciliation report in their recommendations for educators. The concepts of cognitive imperialism and culturally responsive education are explored further in Chapter Two.

This qualitative study explores Métis young adult participants' experiences with hip hop creation and informs the use of hip hop pedagogies in Métis education. Hip hop scholars take inspiration from critical theorists like Freire (2000) to look to literacy as the expression of praxis, the way in which skills and ideas are learned and understood. An expression of praxis becomes a way for students of actively engaging in their own "liberation from oppressive ideologies" (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002, p. 89) by rejecting the idea of one dominant type of literacy and instead promoting multiple forms of literacy (Alim, 2011; Ibrahim, 2016). Through placing value on ways of knowing and seeing the world that are not expressed in the dominant educational structures, space is created for youth to share their worldviews. It is these other ways of knowing and seeing the world that participants shared

through this research, including a multitude of things they learned through hip hop, from specific hip hop skills to how to navigate identity.

When conducting research with youth, researchers typically examine the influence that a program or pedagogy has *on youth* and their learning and report those findings (see, for example, Lashua & Fox, 2007; Seidel, 2011; Wang, 2010), but we (as researchers and teachers) rarely take what the youth learn from their own experiences within schooling and apply it to what we can learn from their experiences (see, for example, Tuck, 2009). If educators are truly invested in the recent TRC recommendations toward reconciling the spaces of schooling, listening to youth voices can provide educators with insights into their connections and disconnections with schooling, and the possibilities for making changes to address the disconnections. What might we learn from youth about Métis education through hip hop pedagogies?

Methodology

My research uses an Indigenous métissage methodology. Indigenous métissage involves, to use Lowan-Trudeau's (2012) term, an "integration of Indigenous and interpretive methodologies to form a new methodological métissage (mix) representative of my own identity as a Métis scholar and educator" (pp. 115-116; see also Donald, 2009). Donald (2009) explains that, "as a research practice, métissage is focused on relationality and the curricular and pedagogical desire to treat texts—and lives—as relational and braided rather than isolated and independent" (p. 9). Métissage's focus on relationality appropriately reflects the participants in my study and my use of the metaphor of the sash. I use the sash to demonstrate the weaving together of the stories and experiences of the participants, a metaphor which I employed through my analysis of the data and the findings. The sash is an important artefact with strong ties to the

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Métis Nation. Often associated with voyageurs, the sash was a pivotal item with many uses, ranging from the practical (as a tumpline, a makeshift belt, an impromptu tourniquet) to the personal (with the patterns and colours representing communities). Each thread on its own is beautiful, but together the threads create something stronger, more beautiful, and more unique. To this day, Métis wearing the sash signals cultural pride.

Theoretical Framework

This research project operates with Indigenous theories and conceptualizations at its heart: Métis hip hop in Canada is a distinctive type of Indigenous hip hop that is worthy of scholarly investigation; hip hop pedagogy may positively influence Métis youth; Métis youth can make a contribution to hip hop practice and our understandings of hip hop pedagogy; and, work with Métis youth honours their stories in a way that is reflective of a desire-based framework, which is an Indigenous framework that focuses on the strengths in a community and positive outcomes instead of relying or focusing on a damage-centred or shortcomings narrative (Tuck, 2009). Through a desire-based framework, it is possible to "yield analyses that upend commonly held assumptions of responsibility, cohesiveness, ignorance, and paralysis within dispossessed and disenfranchised communities" (Tuck, p. 417) and allow for communities to visualize something *else*, which, within the contexts of this study, shows strengths and the pathways to positive outcomes for Métis youth. These Indigenous research principles are grounded in my own experience and inform my standpoint (positionality) that Métis youth voices, stories, and practices can contribute significantly to understandings of Métis people and Métis education in Canada as it connects to curricula (Baker & Baker, 2010; Donald, 2012) and the pedagogies that educators utilize in their classrooms (Dion, 2012; Pete, 2013).

Further, I follow a conceptual framework that makes this thesis an exercise in what Paulo Freire (2000) calls *praxis*: that is to say, focusing not solely on intellectualism or activism but also on reflection (p. 65). In orienting the thesis this way, I am making a conscious choice not to privilege one type of knowledge or one knowledge source over another. Freire (2000) explores two stages within this framework for a pedagogy of praxis and reflection; the first stage consists of the oppressed uncovering "the world of oppression and through the praxis commit[ing] themselves to its transformation" for themselves, and the second stage wherein the pedagogy cease to belong solely to the oppressed and it "becomes a pedagogy of all the people in the process of permanent liberation" (p. 54). The "trust" I place in my participants necessitates ongoing "dialogue, reflection, and communication" (p. 66) throughout the research and analysis processes.

Design of Research

Indigenous métissage methodology extends to the research process. The participants for this study included a sample of youth who self-identified as Métis and as engaged in hip hop, and volunteered for this study. The participants are Métis young adults from Ontario and Manitoba who participate in creating hip hop, through either rapping, DJing, beatboxing, or graffiti art. All of the youth were male and over the age of 18. All had recently attended high school, but none were attending high school at the time of the study. One youth was enrolled in post-secondary studies at university.

Methods

Within the larger methodological frame of Indigenous métissage, for methods I used a guided interview approach with my participants with the interviews structured as chat or conversational (Kovach, 2009) to ensure that the discussions were friendly yet stayed on track.

The interview protocol was created to answer the research questions for this study (see Appendix IV: Interview Guide).

Data Analysis

I hand coded the data obtained for this thesis and did not set out with planned themes, but rather allowed the themes to emerge (Williams, 2012). I read through each transcribed interview without taking notes, and read through again with the other interviews in mind. If a phrase evoked a similar theme to another participant, I marked it off with a colour. I read all quotes marked with the same colour and wrote out the similarities, from which I derived the name of each theme. I used the metaphor of the sash to examine and share the data that has come from the conversational interviews with the participants. I brought back my findings to the participants to ensure that they felt they were being represented fairly and that there was nothing that they wanted to clarify.

Limitations

Three challenges arose while conducting this research. First, it was difficult to decide on the best way to represent all participants' work due to differences in form between the multiple media used in hip hop expression and traditional print-based theses. While the forms that hip hop takes will be different for each participant, I chose not to share their work in its entirety in this thesis given that they all used different media. Second, no female Métis hip hop artists self-selected for this study: ultimately all four participants in the study were male. Third, my study was restricted to Métis in Ontario and Manitoba and will not necessarily apply to Métis youth who are living in other provinces and/or connected to other Métis communities. As a qualitative study, it is bound within the context of a small sample of Métis young adults in two provinces. Thus, the research sample is contextualized rather than

generalizable. Further, as an Indigenous study, it is appropriate that it is bound within the contexts of community and place (Dion, 2000; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008).

The sample size of four participants could be considered small from a quantitative research perspective, but, as Miles and Huberman (1994) state, "acquiring more data does not necessarily lead to more information" in a qualitative research (p. 429) nor is a large sample size necessarily important within Indigenous research paradigms (Wilson, 2013) or for learning from the stories of Indigenous participants (Archibald, 2008; Dion, 2009; Kovach, 2008).

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter I began by introducing myself and my connections to Métis communities in Manitoba and Ontario. As an insider to these communities, I set out to explore the impacts that being involved in hip hop culture, particularly the creation of hip hop, can have for the Métis young adult participants. This topic is significant because of the gap in the literature: extant research on the relationship between Indigenous youth and hip hop has not yet examined Métis hip hop artists' experiences and the implications for education.

To answer the research questions, I used a Freirian (2000) framework of praxis and reflection, which he calls "concientization" (p. 35). The framework fits with Indigenous métissage, an Indigenous methodology that honours my own Métis identity and acknowledges Métis scholars who have gone before me. Among other things, Indigenous métissage "resist[s] the priority and authority given to official texts and cultural practices" (Donald, 2012, p. 537) and allows the examination of stories and experiences as related. As Tuck (2009) says, there is room within a desire-based framework to acknowledge pain but also to look towards creating something new. Through praxis, the new text that emerges is a stronger braid of self-aware

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stories. The methods of this study employ interview as chat with four Métis youth. This study is contextualized to Métis youth hip hop artists from Ontario and Manitoba. Their stories and practices mirror the reflective component of Freire, which educators may use to enhance their practices and to open up more spaces (and more culturally responsive spaces) for Métis youth within the education system. As discussed above, culturally responsive spaces require specific knowledge of community, language, and culture. Within schools, language and culture are addressed as literacies. An approach intended to prioritize culturally responsive literacies requires changes in "teaching methods, curricular materials, teacher dispositions, and school–community relations" (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 942) to be successful.

The literature surrounding hip hop, and Indigenous hip hop more specifically, is explored in Chapter Two. Additionally, I share literature on Indigenous education, including identity exploration, discuss the permeable idea of Métis education, and review the scholarship on hip hop pedagogies. In Chapter Three, I outline the research framework – the conceptual framework, the methodology of Indigenous métissage and the metaphor of the sash that guided the research, and provide details about how I conducted the study. In Chapter Four, I share the stories of the participants and explore the themes raised through our conversations and then I present the findings of this study. Chapter Five concludes the study by returning and responding to the research questions I posed in Chapter One, looking at implications of the research, and providing recommendations for further research needed to gain a deeper understanding of the potential impacts of hip hop literacies.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Within this literature review, I explore three related topics: hip hop ways of knowing, seeing and being, hip hop pedagogies, and Indigenous hip hop in Canada. Together these three areas ground my analysis of participants' hip hop practices in this study. Additionally, I examine Indigenous education, and Métis education more specifically, as well as the role of literacies within hip hop pedagogies to connect student's lived experience to their educational experience.

Hip Hop Ways of Knowing, Seeing, and Being

It's bigger than hip-hop
One thing 'bout music, when it hit you feel no pain
White folk say it controls your brain; I know better than that

from "Hip Hop," dead prez

The origin story of hip hop varies among scholars. Many place hip hop's ethnogenesis in the Bronx suburb of New York City in the 1970s, when city planning pushed over 100,000 residents out of their homes to create the Cross-Bronx Expressway (Buffam, 2011; Chang, 2006; Lashua, 2006). Others "trace the origins of hip hop back to Africa" (Akom, 2009, p. 52) or point to the tradition of toasting created by Jamaican DJs throughout the 1960s and 1970s, but simultaneously argue that hip hop has multiple origins and entry points, both chronologically and geographically (Akom, 2009; Ibrahim, 2009; Pennycook & Mitchell, 2009). Despite disagreement on origins, it is widely accepted that hip hop is permeated and shaped by the social, political, and cultural events in the community.

At the end of the 20th century, when Afrocentrism and Black nationalism were at the forefront in the United States, hip hop reflected that consciousness, with artists producing songs committed to validating "Blackness and push[ing] Whiteness to the periphery" (Alim, 2011, p.

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126). As will be demonstrated later in the literature review, Indigenous hip hop cultures too are politically and socially grounded, as well as being distinctly local and validating of Indigenous identities and concerns. This locality facilitates an easy connection for Indigenous youth to the "political history of oppression, marginalization and struggle" that is foundational to hip hop (Ibrahim, 2017, p. 104). The customization of hip hop to the local community, which allows youth to foster deep connections within the culture, does not make hip hop a chameleon culture, absorbing attributes of the local, but instead demonstrates the easy multiplication of entry points into hip hop cultures; instead of *becoming* local, hip hop "has always been local*"* (Pennycook & Mitchell, 2009, p. 30). By absorbing local influences, hip hop is in a constant state of evolution, and ideas and techniques are continuously exchanged between American and global hip hop cultures (Androutsopoulos, 2009).

Hip Hop's Spheres of Discourse

Androutsopoulos (2009) writes about hip hop "as a system of three interrelated 'spheres' of discourse," which he designates as primary ("artist expression"), secondary ("media discourse") and tertiary ("discourse among Hip Hop fans and activists") (p. 44). These boundaries are by no means static and the consumer of hip hop culture is often also a producer (Androutsopoulos, 2009).

Conflicts arise between artists themselves and the secondary sphere of media discourse, particularly with media that often dismisses hip hop as angry, violent, and "morally bankrupt" (Stavrias, 2005, p. 44; see also: Ibrahim, 2017), a condemnation that is also prevalent in education, pre-service teaching, and teacher education (Akom, 2009; Alim, 2011; Lashua & Fox, 2006; Love, 2015; Rodríguez, 2009). Violent and sometimes sexist and homophobic lyrics fuel media discourse against hip hop cultures, but Newman (2009) argues that there are actually two

ways to interpret the lyrics: as "transparent" or as "opaque." A transparent interpretation of lyrics would require that the lyrics be taken at face value; for example, in the song "Cop Killer" when Body Count's Ice-T rapped the lyrics, "I got this long-assed knife/And your neck looks just right" (Marrow & Cunnigan, 1992), he was recounting an actual experience with a police officer. As Ice-T has had more experience with the police while filming *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* than in his personal life, we are forced to look for additional interpretations. An opaque interpretation of the song would suggest it is the voice of a man who is frustrated with police brutality at that moment in time, citing former police chief Daryl Gates and Rodney King as examples. Newman (2009) cautions against using one method of understanding alone, and instead suggests using transparent and opaque interpretations simultaneously to create a rich understanding of the message behind a song. Newman cites the media's "assumption of transparency" (p. 204) in hip hop as the motivation behind the often overwhelming distaste for the culture. Are media assumptions a valid reason for dismissing hip hop cultures?

Baszile (2009) argues instead that the morality of hip hop is an irrelevant point as "in essence [hip hop] represents the struggle for freedom (even when acted out in negative ways)" (p. 16). Whether an MC is spitting rhymes about altercations with police or heralding avenues that lead away from the street life, both messages are inherently ones of change. This point is also taken up by participants later in the thesis. As Ibrahim (2009) notes, even youth who are not involved in these lifestyles identify with the violent rebellious lyrics, looking to these artists as a reflection of their community and acknowledgement that they are "not the only one[s] who [are] experiencing or talking about 'the issues that are important' to them" (p. 237). Alternatively, Newman (2009) argues that a person who strongly attaches to the thug rapper yet is determined to live a law-abiding life is "invoking the general archetype of the outlaw" (p. 205), an argument

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echoed by Dimitriadis (2001) who describes this archetype as embodying such typical "capitalist values as rugged individualism, rampant materialism, strength … and male domination. … [as] a romantic figure, a ready-made tool for teen rebellion" (p. 29). Through hip hop, youth can explore these archetypes and the potential that exists for the identities they value as they enter adulthood (Eckert, 1999, as cited in Newman, 2009). Youth are able to use hip hop as "a space and a language of critique as much as a language of hope" (Ibrahim, 2016, p. 2) and make sense of the world around them within this space.

Indigenous Hip Hop in Canada

"Why? Maybe because we haven't had a chance to be young, black and loud without being oppressed all the time and here are young black loud men making a lot of money…. and telling the white man where to go and what to do. And getting away with it. Man, that's some very attractive shit. Especially in a country like this."

MC Wire, on the attraction to gangsta rap
(Stavrias, 2005, p. 50)

These words from Indigenous Australian rapper MC Wire demonstrate the connection that Indigenous communities around the world see between themselves and the Black community as it relates to oppression. In large urban centres of Canada, areas with high Indigenous populations (such as Winnipeg's inner city) serve as "ghettos" (similar to those of Los Angeles and Chicago) "wherein 'undesirable' populations are confined to peripheral areas of the city" (Buffam, 2011, p. 340), leaving White spaces protected. Reece (n.d.), a spoken word poet from Sim-sea-ahn Territory and a curator of Beat Nation, an Indigenous hip hop exhibition, described being "drawn to the familiarity of the 'plight' of the poor Black communities who were singing, dancing and painting their way out of the system" (para. 6). The hypervisibility of Black hip hop artists provided a blueprint for Indigenous hip hop artists to follow.

Hip hop truly "resonat[es] with young people across the globe in … culture, social class, historical oppression, and youth rebellion" (Ibrahim, 2017, p. 107). Indeed, Indigenous peoples

all over the world have picked up the beats and rhythms of hip hop (Alim, 2009a; Mitchell, 1999; Stavrias, 2005). Embracing hip hop, Indigenous peoples blended their "clothing, dance, vocal styles, stances and movements" with "Hip Hop styles to form indigenized hybrids" (Pennycook & Mitchell, 2009, p. 30). Iveson (1997) explains that, in hip hop, Indigenous youth discovered a "means to fight back against the experiences of racism" including tools like "graffiti and hip hop style [which] provide the means to make space in segregated" spaces (as cited in Stavrias, 2005, p. 46). Some Indigenous rappers living in Australia speak entirely in their language without an English translation, becoming "a political and cultural statement about the legacy of British colonialism" (Pennycook & Mitchell, 2009, p. 35). Others like Tall Paul, a Leach Lake Anishinaabe man living in South Side Minneapolis, rap entire verses in their language (Riemenschneider, 2014). Alim (2009b) argues that, "by intentionally highlighting linguistic features associated with their home turf," rappers "[establish] their tenacity through language as if to say 'We here now!'" (p. 216). These Indigenous artists

> have taken hip hop influences and indigenized them to fit Aboriginal experiences:
> The roots of hip hop are there but they have been ghost-danced by young Native
> artists who use hip hop culture's artistic forms and combine them with Aboriginal
> story, experience and aesthetics. (Willard, n.d., p. 2)

Just as there are many varieties of Black hip hop, Indigenous hip hop is "not a singular form, but variegated in its political and social messages… rang[ing] from representations of declamatory and angry masculinity to music with gentle conformist messages stressing the importance of education, individual ambition and respect" (Morgan & Warren, 2011, p. 929).

No matter the style, Indigenous hip hop challenges public perceptions and discourses of what it means to be Indigenous. Predominant discourses among non-Indigenous Canadians

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reproduce beliefs that Indigenous peoples are of the past frozen from the advances of time, a romanticized people who can speak to animals and spend their evenings sleeping on leaves (Buffam, 2011; Lashua & Fox, 2006; Morgan & Warren, 2011; Reece, n.d.). These representations connect to essentialized identities, which are discussed later in this chapter.

To counter these discourses, Baszile (2009) states that hip hop shows youth creating their artefacts somewhere between "tradition and the possibility of transformation" (p. 15). The reality of a White dominated world means that the White point of view is "social-politically constituted as *the point of view on reality*," leaving non-White people to continually be confronted by an idea of themselves "that is not how he or she lives but is how he or she is *supposed to be*" (Gordon, 2005, p. 369, emphasis in original). It is of course important to preserve traditional Indigenous knowledges and ways of being and knowing, but "we must be open to sustaining [these knowledges] in both the traditional and evolving ways they are lived and used by young people" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 91).

Essentialized Identities

Whether Indigenous youth connect with progressive or more rebellious hip hop, Baszile (2009) assures us, "in both cases it works to dramatically shift … perspective[s] from identity as essentialized to identities as invented, performed, and negotiated" (p. 13), providing space for youth to explore and create their own culture. Restoule (2000) worked with urban Indigenous men in Toronto to explore Indigenous identities. He found that essentialized identities are often reflected in academic discussions of youth identity and imply "fixedness" and shared traits across those that share that identity (p. 103). With Indigenous youth, this often includes the assumption that "the 'things' that make one Indian remain the same and should be the same as those things associated with … the time of historical 'first' contact" (Restoule, 2000, p. 103).

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When thinking of Métis people in particular, and connecting to schooling, frequently the only Métis person to be brought up within the classroom is Louis Riel, leaving him to "[stand] as the only representative of the entire and diverse Métis nation in official school curricula" (Kearns & Anuik, 2015, p. 7). Donald (2009) writes that these essentialized discourses of Métis people "[leave] teachers and students with the unfortunate impression that Indians have not done much since the buffalo were killed off and the West was settled" (p. 5). By essentializing Métis identities as revolving around Riel (and often centering *that* discourse on his sanity), educators create an artificial barrier between Métis youth and their present-day identities. While essentialized identities are often created as fixed and historical, Restoule (2000) asserts that viewing identity as invented, performed, and negotiated shifts the terminology from identity to identifying, which he defines as "a process of being and becoming what one is in the moment" (p. 103). For some Indigenous youth, such identifying includes expressions via hip hop.

Identifying

By participating in Indigenous hip hop, artists are attempting to "contest the temporality of historicist racism that configure[s] aboriginality as irrelevant to the performance of the 'Canadian' present" (Buffam, 2011, p. 344). Indigenous youths seamlessly blend traditions relating to their community with hip hop techniques to create something that not only expresses frustration, but also expresses a unique identity (Buffam, 2011; Lashua, 2006; Lashua & Fox, 2006; Wang, 2010), which is congruent with Restoule's (2000) sense of identifying as performative and a process of being and becoming.

Thus, hip hop ways of knowing, seeing the world, and being reject those discourses that essentialize youth identities, particularly for Black and other oppressed communities such as the example of Indigenous youth described above. Paris and Alim (2014) urge that we recognize and

understand "the ways young people are enacting race, ethnicity, language, literacy, and cultural practices in both traditional and evolving ways" (p. 90). Members of these communities, particularly youth, seek commonalities in their experiences and relationships and speak out in ways that allow them to retake their identity. For this study, it is important to contextual these concepts of identity and identifying within the literature around Indigenous education and then Métis education more specifically.

Cognitive Imperialism and the Privileging of Knowledge

Scholars assert that educators within mainstream schools tend to privilege certain (i.e., Eurocentric/White) knowledges while excluding entire groups of students through curriculum and suppressing their cultural identities. This is a manifestation of cognitive imperialism, which Battiste (2005b) defines as a type of "manipulation used to disclaim other knowledge bases and values" in favour of upholding the White mainstream knowledge base and "maintaining the legitimacy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference" (p. 9). It is clear that "White middle-class norms of knowing and being … continue to dominate notions of educational achievement" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 86), leaving Indigenous youth at a disadvantage in a system that purports to be transferring knowledge without bias. Apple (1996) asserts that curriculum is never neutral and nor a straightforward gathering of knowledges, but rather, curricula are "representations of what powerful groups have defined as legitimate knowledge" (p. 129), which often serves to further alienate the very groups of students it claims to educate. For example, curricula frequently allows the past Jesuit "characterizations of First Nations societies and belief systems as primitive and brutal" to persist today and "perpetuat[es] the ignorance and injustice" that began centuries ago (Godlewska, Moore, & Bednasek, 2010, pp. 419-420).

Western curriculum and teaching practices reflect a "motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable" reality to which students who experience life outside the mainstream culture cannot identify (Freire, 2000, p. 71). Without an understanding of the ways in which life and mainstream culture affects students, "non-Indigenous teachers often blame Indigenous students and their families for the ongoing discrepancies in academic achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Madden, Higgens, & Korteweg, 2013, p. 218). Alim (2011) refers to this gap between students and the education system as illiteracy on the part of schools whose tendency to "[misread] the cultural gap as an achievement gap" and inability to understand "culturally and linguistically complex classrooms" (p. 122) has been ongoing for generations.

Cognitive Imperialism within Research and Teacher Education

Academic scholarship is also prone to focus "implicitly or explicitly around the question of how to get working-class students of color to speak and write more like middle-class White ones" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 87). Kanu (2005) condemns "the tendency by the West to marginalize the worldviews of minorities and people of color, thus excluding them from selfhood and by definition political self-representation" as clear "*epistemological racism*" (p. 58, emphasis in original), where certain kinds of knowledge (generally Western knowledge) become accepted in the mainstream while the knowledge of other groups is reduced to cultural knowledge or personal beliefs. Teachers, especially teachers from dominant cultures, either have difficulty with or are incapable of recognizing the "ideology of linguistic supremacy" (Alim, 2009, p. 218) that they reproduce. The "narcissistic line (and its moral panic)" (Ibrahim, 2009, p. 239) between school literacy and the literacy of students is especially strong when educators necessitate a separation between curriculum and hip hop culture. By creating this arbitrary line,

educators consciously or unconsciously convey to students that their culture is incompatible with a literate or educated culture, causing students to "disidentify [with]– disengage [from] or devalue" the education system in order to "protect their own self-perceptions" (Baszile, 2009, p. 8). The creation of a moral line also underestimates the ability of the hip hop community to hold itself accountable. Hip hop cultures worldwide acknowledge the problematic nature of some artists' lyrics, whose themes of death and violence, materialism, and the devaluing of women sell millions of records. Pennycook and Mitchell (2009) explain that the ability of local artists to recognize and identify with some parts of hip hop culture while simultaneously "resist[ing] and chang[ing] parts of its message and style that they find appropriate to their local circumstances" (p. 32) demonstrates the analytic and conscious nature of hip hop. This critical reflection from within the culture demonstrates of valuable lessons to be learned from hip hop, were it accepted within the educational system. Without a re-examination of the overarching goals of education and provisions made to attribute value to non-curriculum standard knowledge, the cyclical alienation of students will continue (Alim, 2006).

Rodríguez (2009) hypothesizes that while educators advance professionally, they also "become increasingly detached from the cultural realities that impact students' lives" which in turn has a strong influence on the educational environment, including "what constitutes legitimate curriculum, what types of pedagogies are acceptable, and who and what define the purpose of education" (p. 28). Rodríguez (2009) came upon this realization through conducting a case study in 2007 when teaching a university-level research course to a group of high school students who attended a local high school with "pervasive failure rates, school violence, and high dropout rates" (p. 28) and who were engaging in a six-week college experience. The high school students were tasked with conducting research on school issues and presenting it to another

course that Rodríguez taught in the same period to undergraduate pre-service teachers. The research presented by these students to pre-service teachers was met with "the same disrespect and discrimination they experienced in school" when these pre-service teachers suggested the students "take some formal communication classes" (p. 31). These pre-service teachers were unable to see the great effort and depths of research the high school students had undertaken and focused on the areas of the research that they believed were not at an academic level.

Hill (2009) cautions against focusing on those elements of school life that can be quantified and compared and suggests instead examining the multifaceted "relationships and identity work that are forged between youth and hip-hop culture" (p. 355). Androutsopoulos (2009) also sees those relationships as important and points to the "fuzzy boundary between production and reception" (p. 56) that allows permeability between who is a consumer and who is a creator of hip hop. These literacy tensions, including underestimating the value of hip hop knowledges, live within schooling and beyond.

Indigenous Education

Indigenous educators and non-Indigenous educators with an interest in the field have been working for many decades to reclaim education from the colonial construct. These scholars and educators are moving the framework of Indigenous education away from assimilation through education towards an education system that values and upholds Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world. Within Canada, scholars like Battiste have been particularly influential in the field. Battiste (1998) reminds us that it is imperative that we do not "continue to allow Aboriginal students to be given a fragmented existence in a curriculum that does not mirror them, nor should they be denied understanding the historical context that has created that fragmentation" (p. 24). Battiste argues for a decolonization of the Canadian education system,

rebuilding it with Indigenous worldviews at the heart. From my own experience teaching non-Indigenous students in introductory native studies classes, they too may benefit from a system that addresses the historical contexts and allows deeper understandings of Indigenous peoples. Decolonized education, as I see it, is an education system that centres Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous worldviews. Decolonization within institutions such as education, as Tuck and Yang (2012) state, is literal, not metaphorical. It begins by critiquing of the current, colonizing education system; but, "front-loading of critical consciousness building can waylay decolonization" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 19) and trick educators into believing that calling out settler colonialism is equivalent to decolonizing. Nor is decolonizing education simply injecting Indigenous content in to the classroom; rather, it seeks to recreate education from an Indigenous worldview and values system. Madden (2015) asserts that the reconceptualising of education in such a way "positions and supports teachers to respond to the diverse educational needs, including learning styles, of Indigenous students and their communities" (p. 5). To begin to decolonize education, we must embrace "Indigenous people's renewing and reconstructing the principles underlying their own world view, environment, languages, and how these construct our humanity" (Battiste, 1998, p. 24).

With these principles understood and supported by the Indigenous community, there is then an opportunity to bring this approach into the classroom in meaningful ways. This community connection is integral as a balance of "academic, linguistic, and cultural interests requires direct accountability to Indigenous communities" (McCarty & Lee, 2014, p. 119). Not only is it important to ensure that knowledge is being transferred in a way that is relevant to students who identify with a community outside of mainstream White culture, but also to ensure that the "knowledge, norms, values, resources and epistemologies of local communities [are]

viewed as legitimate and valuable" within the education system itself (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009, p. 47). Just as Indigenous research should come from within the community, so too should Indigenous educational models, whether they be utilized within curricula or within the classroom, be driven by the community. Madden (2015) explores ways in which teacher education programs can decolonize, and provides the examples of "experiential storywork, residential school survivors' testimony, and revisionist histories of colonial productions" as methods which can begin to "challenge stereotypical, appropriated, and/or censored (mis)representations" (p. 9) of Indigenous peoples. While these examples help educators to see how decolonizing might be activated, Indigenous scholars address how decolonization in education contextualizes Indigenous education for both peoples and places (Battiste, 1998; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Iseke & Desmoulins, 2015). How might educators who seek to decolonize their classrooms take up Métis education and changing notions of literacies?

Métis Education

As stated in Chapter One, there is no fixed definition of what constitutes Métis education. As often happens with Métis issues in Canada, Métis education has largely been subsumed under the category of Indigenous education more broadly. In its summary, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015a) affirms that provincial or territorial schools are the only option available to Métis students, and states that the "Commission believes all levels of government should consult with Métis parents, communities, and national organizations to provide Métis-specific educational programming" (p. 150), but does not expand upon what that might look like. Indeed, the Commission includes only this one paragraph on Métis education within the summary. Within Volume 5, the section of the Commission's final report that shares the legacy of residential schools and the Calls to Action, there is a similarly short section on Métis education.

The recommendations endorsed by the Commission are from the Métis National Council, which contextualizes Métis education and advocates for an "integrated Métis early childhood system that [will] promote Métis language, culture, responsibilities, and values" and that the Métis National Council should collaborate with "provincial education authorities, including school boards, to develop Métis curricula and … improve the quality of education and to improve educational outcomes" for Métis students (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015b, p. 88). There is no exploration into what these curricula changes might look like nor into what falls under the definition of Métis responsibilities and values, two terms which are largely subjective. It is left to educators within public schools to take up these recommendations toward reconciliation in collaboration with local Métis communities, in ways that are culturally responsive to Métis communities and its members, particularly the youth within these schools.

When looking for studies done on Métis education specifically, the list is similarly short. Many studies "[subsume] Métis under a broad Aboriginal category or attach … Métis to First Nations people with the implication that their histories, knowledges, languages" are interchangeable (Kearns & Anuik, p. 12). This is reflected in Dion's (2012) study on inclusion of Métis content discussed in Chapter One. Dion interviewed 238 recent teacher education graduates and found that 206 expressed that they did not "feel confident and competent to teach Métis content" (p. 21) due to lack of exposure, limited resources, and insufficient knowledge. Madden (2015) reiterates this finding, sharing that often "teacher educators may not feel philosophically, professionally, and/or practically prepared to work with Indigenous knowledge" (p. 5). If these recent graduates and other new teachers do not feel comfortable presenting Métis worldviews to students, it is likely that they will fall back on Indigenous viewpoints that they are more comfortable with (like the often used totem pole, medicine wheel and Seven Sacred

Teachings) and can find in texts, and Métis worldviews and curricular content will continue to be underrepresented.

This research study was inspired by my love of hip hop as well as a desire to give a voice to Métis youth who may not have the opportunity to tell their stories otherwise, and to use their shared experiences to influence conversations about education in Canada. The conversations of Indigenous hip hop have excluded Métis youth, with no studies found that are dedicated to Métis experiences at the time of this writing. In discourses of Indigenous peoples in Canada, the Métis are often "left invisible." Lashua and Fox (2006) attribute three reasons to Métis peoples' invisibility: 1) they do not fit the discussions on status or treaty rights; 2) they are not considered to be "geographically located"; and 3) they are of "mixed blood" (p. 267). This invisibility is not simply discursive; it is also located firmly within the education system. Within the classroom, Métis students are not able to see their stories and their communities' stories told. Culture and language are important parts of literacy, and the absence of these stories and perspectives can lead to Métis students disconnecting from the education system. Additionally, Métis students do not see these stories told within larger discussions around Indigenous issues in Canada. As a Métis scholar myself, it is my responsibility to give back to my community and portray, as best I can, the multifaceted and diverse citizens of the Métis homeland.

Changing Literacies

Knowing what we do of new teachers' hesitancy to take up implementing Indigenous education, it is even more important to confront the "idea that being literate can only be defined in relation to certain dominant forms of literacy" (Ibrahim, 2016, p. 9). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015a) stated clearly that the "status quo [for Indigenous education] is unacceptable and that there is a need for a complete restructuring" including prioritizing a

"culturally relevant curriculum" (p. 148). Call to Action 10 explicitly outlines the need for new education legislation for Indigenous education, including "[d]eveloping culturally appropriate curricula" and "[e]nabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability" over that curricula (pp. 149-150). This necessitates the inclusion of culturally responsive literacies, which provide spaces for Indigenous students to both share the stories and knowledges that they bring from their communities and utilize literacies that have not previously been valued by the education system. For example, Brayboy and Castagno (2009) asked "how are teachers and policy makers (still) constructing Indigenous youth as "poor readers," "deficient in reading proficiency," "illiterate," and "at risk for reading failure"?" (p. 42). In a year when the Canadian government and its provincial education branches are placing such a high emphasis on reconciliation, we must continue to ask these questions and require meaningful changes.

There is a disconnect between what scholars have shown as successful Indigenous education models (Battiste, 2013; Dion, 2000, 2007; Gorlewski, & Porfilio, 2012; Kanu, 2005), including culturally responsive curricula, the valuation of Indigenous knowledge, and meeting students where they come from, and what is currently being taught in the classroom. For example, Brayboy and Castagno (2009) critique reading programs that are designed to close the reading gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students as they rely on tactics that were developed with the success of White students in mind and do not create spaces for culturally responsive pedagogies. Educators often approach their students' literacy by focusing on "grammar as opposed to creative, artistic and semiotic production" (Ibrahim, 2016, p. 9). By approaching literacy with a one-size-fits-all ideal, educators set students up against their own communities by naming these communities as "deficiencies to be overcome" if students are to succeed within the educational system (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 87). When Indigenous

knowledges are brought into the classroom, they are often "decontextualized … into pieces that teachers can "fit" into Eurocentric disciplines or subjects and curriculum competencies in an attempt to "fix" the problem of Indigenous student "under-achievement" without problematizing teachers' practices or systemic barriers" (Madden, Higgens, & Korteweg, 2013, p. 219) which are preventing the successful utilization of Indigenous ways of knowing and being within the classroom. As noted earlier, instead of putting a boundary between students and the communities they come from, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) suggest that literacy, particularly "making meaning of text," could focus on including texts that are "related to a world students can recognize … Language arts might also include stories from students' local communities; these stories can be collected … and written down by students as a way to create more culturally relevant literacy materials" (p. 968). This use of locality and knowledge and experiences that are relevant to Indigenous students "works towards expanding understandings, models, and practices of teaching and learning so that they better align with local Indigenous conceptions (Madden, 2015, p. 5).

By changing the definition of literacy within the educational system (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009), space is opened up for Indigenous students to participate in the system unapologetically and to connect with the lessons in ways they were previously unable. Instead of working with definitions of literacy that exclude Indigenous youth and youth of colour, we can instead begin "working with literacies that are intimate, lived and liberatory" (Ibrahim, 2016, p. 10). One means that scholars and educators use to expand literacies and employ culturally responsive pedagogies is through the use of hip hop.

Hip Hop Pedagogies

Hip hop pedagogies allow students to find the connection between their own "identity, politics, experience, pedagogical dis/engagement and the process of learning" (Ibrahim, 2009, p. 242). Hip hop pedagogies are also an example of a "culturally relevant pedagogy … driven by the desire to capitalize on cultural expertise and knowledge of historically marginalized groups" (Rodríguez, 2009, p. 21 – 22). What does this culturally relevant engagement look like? Adjapong and Emdin (2015) conceptualize hip hop pedagogies as ways of "authentically and practically incorporating the creative elements of Hip-Hop into teaching, and inviting students to have a connection with the content while meeting them on their cultural turf by teaching to, and through their realities and experiences" (p. 67). Alim (2009b) argues that hip hop provides an opening for educators as well as offering students a "current social and linguistic reality" (p. 214), especially to those students who are marginalized by the education system and its educators. Indeed, educators hold this responsibility as part of their duties as conveyors of knowledge and should not reproduce the dominant ideas of knowledge and literacy (Alim, 2009b) to the exclusion of others.

Gorlewski and Porfilio (2012) explain that hip hop culture "is a uniquely youth-oriented art form that does not merely allow for resistance; it embraces struggle as essential to existence" (p. 48). Whether through creating their own lyrics or beats, or listening to another artist address issues of common concern, hip hop literacy and expression offers youth a variety of avenues for self-expression and self-understanding. These avenues can be accessed through schooling, particularly within high school classrooms and curricula. In Ontario, multiliteracies for adolescents are intended to address the needs of learners, empowerment, self-advocacy, self-expression, and identity (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). Using hip hop pedagogies within

the secondary school system can "forge a common and critical discourse … centered upon the lives of the students … in ways that promot[e] academic literacy and critical consciousness" (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002, p. 88).

Hip hop pedagogies are not, however, limited to discussions of literacy or English Language Arts curriculum. Adjapong and Emdin (2015) explored the use of hip hop pedagogies in a middle school science classroom. The students responded strongly to hip hop pedagogies as they were used to reinforce learning and for classroom management. The two methods explored in Adjapong and Emdin's study were call-and-response and co-teaching, both of which will be familiar terms to many teachers. In practice and from a grounding in hip hop pedagogies, these methods became more relevant to the students because they were "rooted in the culture of the students, reflect[ed] their realities, and [put] the teaching and learning in their own hands" (p. 75). From focus group discussion, anonymous surveys, and videotaped segments, Adjapong and Emdin's study showed that students were "overwhelmingly positive" (p. 75) about the inclusion of hip hop pedagogies within the classroom.

Hip Hop Pedagogies as Culturally Responsive

Perhaps Indigenous youth and youth of colour are attracted to hip hop pedagogies because they necessitate that educators view hip hop as a legitimate discourse that disrupts the traditional privileging of Western knowledge (Adjapong & Emdin, 2015; Apple, 1996; Gorlewski & Porfilio, 2012; Hill, 2009; Ibrahim, 2009). Hip hop is a space of resistance as well as a creative generative space to negotiate those values that are upheld by the curriculum, as well as those that are excluded from it (Baszile, 2009). School must instead be "connected to students' lives, engaging, and collaborative in order to be effective and culturally responsive for Indigenous youth" (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009, p. 46). For Brayboy and Castagno (2009),

culturally responsive schooling involves the integration of "multiple epistemologies within our pedagogy, curricula, and educational policies" (p. 953), allowing youth to see their ways of knowing and understanding the world reflected in official school policies and curricula.

Hip hop pedagogies create space for this integration of multiple epistemologies. Alim (2009b) encourages hip hop pedagogies as a means to educate educators and to open the eyes and ears of students who are facing prejudices based on how well they are able to code switch[1] and blend into the dominant culture. By showing students "how language is used and, importantly, how language can be used against them" (Alim, 2009b, p. 220), they can be empowered to bring "student-based and student-produced knowledge into the classroom, not to be consumed but rather to be critically engaged, deconstructed" (Ibrahim, 2009, p. 238). This approach to hip hop pedagogies animates the student identity that literacy curricula privilege in policy documents (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012).

The goal is not simply to excite disconnected students by utilising a few sterilised hip-hop songs in the classroom. Baszile (2009) urges that engagement with hip hop has to go farther than that or else we continue to miss "the lessons the hip hop generation is trying to teach us about why school – as we have come to know and practice it – is itself disenfranchising young people" (p. 9). The idea that educators would miss these lessons is not farfetched. If educators do not come to the classroom with the knowledge that "their students may come to school with a very different worldview than they themselves have grown up with" (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 952), how can they connect meaningfully with students within the classroom?

In response to the continued marginalization of "hip hop as an academic field of inquiry" (Akom, 2009, p. 53), Akom suggests a critical hip hop pedagogy which asserts that "hip hop is

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[1] Code switching is the ability for an individual to switch back and forth between languages or different dialogues in the same language (for example, urban youth speaking to peers versus speaking to an educator) (Alim, 2011, p. 131)

an important lens for socio-political analysis and representation of marginalized communities, and that youth-driven research on hip hop and popular culture is an instantiation of reading and acting upon the world" (p. 55). Akom goes further and suggests that the foundation for any sort of "transformative education" for marginalized peoples necessitates the creation of educational spaces wherein youth can "gain a consciousness of how their own experiences have been shaped by larger social institutions" (p. 63). Transformative education has been explored at length by Mezirow (1997) who defines it as education which disrupts the students' "frame of reference [which] encompasses cognitive, conative, and emotional components, and is composed of two dimensions: habits of mind and a point of view" (p. 5). This includes changing students' understandings of themselves and the world around them, and addressing inherent bias, sometimes even against one's own community when it has been internalized.

Rodríguez (2009) envisions an educational environment that embraces hip hop and offers three suggestions for doing this: 1) for universities to evaluate the extent that curriculum addresses hip hop in teacher education; 2) for teachers within K-12 schools and universities to prioritize hip hop within classes as well as work together to develop ways to include hip hop in classes; and 3) to create a conversation between educators and youth involved in hip hop culture so that "youth who are historically marginalized or face resistance when introducing hip hop culture in the conventional classroom can be in a position to demonstrate their expertise to the world through dialogue" (p. 33). This approach serves to bring hip hop pedagogies into schools and classrooms.

Hip hop pedagogies allow for self-expression and critical discourse, an education of educators, and a valuation of knowledge outside mainstream academia or mainstream curriculum. Indigenous hip hop artists from Canada, the United States, Australia and New

Zealand (like JB the First Lady, Angel Haze, Frank Waln, A Tribe Called Red, MC Wire, and many others) have taken these messages and incorporated them into their art, using hip hop to launch a social movement.

Conclusion

This literature review explored hip hop ways of knowing, seeing, and being, including hip hop's origin stories and its ability to reflect local culture and the culture of the participants, and allow participants to select how their identities are represented. The exploration of Indigenous hip hop in Canada shows the ways in which hip hop culture allows personal stories to be told and challenges a historicized ideal of Indigenous peoples. Hip hop is a form of expression that is always political and Indigenous people can use the space created by hip hop culture, as this thesis shows, to take back and talk back to those that oppress their communities. Indigenous education, education by and for Indigenous peoples with an emphasis on Indigenous knowledge and ways of being, was examined and Métis education, a term that has no concrete definition, was also discussed. Lastly, this literature review addressed literacies, which often fall under language and culture within the education system, and the potential that hip hop pedagogies may have for enabling multiliteracies. I addressed some critiques of hip hop pedagogies and instead highlighted their ability to empower and engage their audience, especially Indigenous and other racialized youth.

Through the stories of the participants, educators can forge a path that acknowledges and respects Métis students' cultural identities within the contexts of their classrooms. As Freire (1985) said, teachers "must wet their bodies in the waters of children's culture first. Then they will see how to teach" (p. 18). The following chapter will explore the methodology that I used, including the conceptual framework and methods, to bring this research home.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In the previous chapter, I outlined the literature that guided my study regarding hip hop culture, Indigenous hip hop in Canada, Indigenous education, Métis education, culturally responsive education, and the connections to hip hop pedagogies and literacy. I utilized Indigenous and hip hop scholars to ultimately address the gap in scholarly attention to Métis youths' experiences within hip hop as it connects to the gap in experiential knowledge that participants express in this study. This chapter explores my understandings of how to respectfully research using an Indigenous approach through all parts of the methodology – the conceptual framework, the qualitative approach, and the methods – that informed this study. I begin by placing this study within a conceptual framework which also informs the Indigenous métissage methodology that I utilize. After discussing these larger contexts, I provide an overview of the study, the research participants, the research instruments, and the processes that I used for collecting and analyzing the data. As a reminder, I begin this chapter by reiterating the problem statement and research questions devised for this study.

Problem Statement

This study explored the potential significance of hip hop culture for Métis student education, which has not been sufficiently investigated and often may not be understood or considered by educators.

Research Questions

This problem statement led me to consider three questions as I embarked on my research:

1) What influences do hip hop culture and hip hop pedagogies offer Métis youth?

2) How might hip hop culture and pedagogy influence educational goals and paths for Métis youth?

3) In what ways can hip hop stimulate and rejuvenate Métis education?

Conceptual Framework

Hip hop is a "lived culture" (Stavrias, 2005, p. 45) hence a static definition of hip hop would not be fitting for this study. A scholar, activist, and educator particularly interested in lived cultures, Freire (2000), wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to give voice to the complex relationships present in oppressive socio-economic realities, which would include Indigenous communities. In Chapter Two, in the theoretical framework for this thesis, I introduced Freire's idea about praxis, which speaks to two stages of anti-oppressive work: first, the work must be done for and by those oppressed, and then, for and by those who were and are the oppressors. Indigenous youth are already doing their work. When we see youth talk about hip hop, we see the work being done. Hip hop provides a vehicle for actions, in line with Freirian education principles. Shaull (2000) goes so far as to state youth "perceive that their right to say their own word has been stolen from them, and that few things are more important than the struggle to win it back" (p. 34).

Hip hop scholars are shifting literacy discourses too "by viewing students not merely as members of marginalized social groups but as individuals with hopes, fears, anxieties, and complicated lives outside the classroom" (Alim, 2011, p. 136). Alim (2011) calls the inability of educators to realize the needs of students as the true deficiency. Alim (2011) argues that the reimagining of schools must not end there, but continue on to reconceptualise "school-based approaches to language and literacy" (p. 125) and perhaps even "call into question the very concept of 'illiteracy,' conceptualizing it as a socio-politically constructed notion defined with respect to only certain, dominant forms of literacy" (p. 122). The current school system places inherent value on the dominant form(s) of literacy; such a narrow approach does not create space

for student identities and voices nor address the needs of the learner. Literary discourses are inherently cultural discourses. As stated earlier by Freire, there is a need for educators to wet their feet in the culture of their students before engaging with them within an educational framework. How else might educators understand the culture and views of literacy with which students identify?

Educators must change from asking Indigenous youth to conform or assimilate to fit into the dominant image of literacy within the educational system to what Garcia and Shirley (2012) describe as a "sacred landscape" with education being "shaped by Indigenous knowledge systems" (p. 77). An educational system being shaped by Indigenous knowledges will better serve Indigenous students and address the requirements around Indigenous education that were outlined earlier in this chapter and more fully in Chapter Two. The Métis National Council acknowledged the importance of an educational system that Métis people have ownership over and that validates and utilizes Indigenous knowledges and ways of being. Additionally, I endeavour to explore the ways in which hip hop can influence and guide a sacred landscape for Métis students.

When examining Indigenous research approaches, Wilson's (2008) assertion is important, that it is not enough to adapt an Indigenous view, "but that Indigenous research must leave behind dominant paradigms and follow an Indigenous research paradigm" (p. 38). Wilson identifies several tenets of an Indigenous research paradigm. I adapt two of these: knowledge as "belonging to the cosmos of which we are a part and where researchers are only the interpreters of this knowledge" (p. 38) and the emphasis on "learning by watching and doing" (p. 40) in a way that connects the researcher to the participants, instead of observing from a distance and without personal connections. Engaging in an Indigenous research paradigm involves

relationally accountable research, which Wilson tells us requires "respect, reciprocity, and responsibility" (p. 99).

Methodology

Indigenous métissage was a fitting methodological framework for this study. I looked to Donald (2009, 2012) and Lowan-Trudeau (2012) to inform my use of Indigenous métissage. Donald (2009) sees Indigenous métissage as a weaving together of curriculum with teaching practices and pedagogies, with "purposeful juxtaposition of mythic historical perspectives (often framed as common-sense) with Aboriginal historical perspectives" (p. 5). Lowan-Trudeau (2012) similarly recalls "juxtaposing various Western philosophical traditions (e.g. Western science, deep ecology, and bioregionalism) with Indigenous approaches, as understood from my own perspective as a Métis Canadian" (p. 123). This juxtaposition of perspectives encourages self-reflection and examination of previously held beliefs, challenging Canadian myths about Indigenous peoples. Further, Lowan-Trudeau (2012) argues that it is not necessary to be Métis to adopt Indigenous métissage, but "it is critically important to note; however, the distinction between a person's identity and their philosophies and practices: adopting métissage as methodology does not mean misappropriating a Métis identity" (p. 125). Indigenous métissage examines the "complex, and conflictual" relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canadians "without the need to deny, assimilate, hybridize, or conclude" (Donald, 2012, p. 536). It is through critical engagement with these beliefs and the discourses that reproduce them that they can be considered critically and changed.

Indigenous métissage also allows an avenue for a "shift in thinking from … individual imagination and identity (intention) to an emphasis on group consciousness (relation)" (Dash, 1995 as cited in Donald, 2009, p. 8). Community is essential to an Indigenous learning structure

(Dion, 2007; Tanaka et al., 2007) and the inclusion of several or many voices can lend authority to Indigenous worldviews while mitigating the power of authoritative texts: in place of these authoritative texts, Donald (2009) suggests the "creation of texts and stories that emphasize human connectivity [to] complexify understandings of the significance of living together that traverse perceived frontiers of difference" (p. 8). Through an Indigenous métissage methodology, I honoured these requirements and worked with participants and the personal narratives that were shared.

This methodology aptly reflects the metaphor of the sash utilised within this project. Traditionally, the process used to make a sash is called finger-weaving, with the weaver using four or more strings to weave back and forth and create an item that is both stronger and more beautiful than its parts. Each participant and their work became a thread in this research, with understanding coming from looking at individual contributions as well as the braid as a whole. Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, and Leggo (2009) assert that the weaving together of métissage "becomes an interpretation of the narratives as well as a form of representation and reporting of the research, individual and collective" (p. 9). Métissage provides spaces to critically examine discourses and the continued use of them within systems (education and otherwise) that perpetuate this privileging (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009).

Methods

As stated in Chapter One, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the positive impacts that being involved in hip hop culture, particularly the creation of hip hop, can have for the young adult Métis participants from Ontario and Manitoba. The participants were found through connections and word of mouth; this use of mutual connections is an essential part of Indigenous research paradigms, as well as having "practical uses in establish rapport with

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research participants and placing the researcher with a circle of relations" (Wilson, 2008, p. 129).

Potential participants were also contacted through postings in social media groups for Métis

youth in which I already belonged. The posting read:

> Calling all Métis Hip Hop Artists!
>
> Are you a Métis rapper, DJ, graffiti artist, dancer or other hip hop artist?
>
> Lucy Fowler, a Métis masters student from Lakehead University is doing research
>
> on hip hop and education for Métis students. To learn more about the study or get
>
> involved, please send Lucy an email at lhfowler@lakeheadu.ca

If a hip hop artist contacted me, I provided him or her with more information about the study and

the letter of invitation. The methods used in this study were conversational interviews, researcher

journaling, and collection of artifacts such as photographs, music, and lyrics submitted by the

participants. Kovach (2009) explains that an "open-ended" conversational method fits well

within Indigenous research paradigms because it "shows respect for the participant's story and

allows research participants greater control over what they wish to share" (pp. 123-124). Doing

research from an Indigenous paradigm is not about discovering, but rather about fostering a

relationship with something that exists already and which will continue to exist whether or not a

researcher is there observing it (Wilson, 2008). Next, I will describe the data sources, participant

sample, data collection, and data analysis that I used in this study.

Data sources.

As noted, the main data source for this study was interviews, though I also utilized

photographs and song lyrics taken from music provided by participants, and my own research

journal. I used semi-structured interviews, with an interview guide (see Appendix A), to create an

environment where participants felt valued and part of a reciprocal process. I also used this

interview style to give participants the opportunity to talk about their involvement with hip hop, their constructions of personal success, and their school experiences.

Wilson (2008) explains that the interview process in "Indigenous research cannot really take place without … deep listening that leads to meaningful exchanges [and the] forming [of] a relationship that goes beyond the informant-researcher duality to becoming co-learners" (p. 113). To foster such a relationship, the interviews always began with the participant and I taking time to get to know one another through conversation and through the participant sharing their form(s) of hip hop. While this sharing was taking place, I was using a recording application (Recordium), with the participant's knowledge and consent, to record the conversation. The interview guide was available for both the participant and myself to look at if the conversation needed more direction. Semi-structured interviews may be conducted in person, through email, or on the phone (Creswell, 2013), but all interviews in this study were conducted in person.

My research was also informed by a research journal that I kept throughout the process. Lowan-Trudeau (2012) stresses the importance of a research journal to aid researchers in examining "their role in the research process, reflecting on their experiences throughout the research journey, the influence of their cultural and social positioning, and their interpersonal interactions with research participants" (p. 122). I kept records of my thoughts, struggles, and triumphs as the research was ongoing and throughout the transcribing and coding process. When data analysis began, I was able to look back at the research journal for themes that I had already considered throughout the process. While I intended to use this research journal within the data, its purpose was served not by contributing to the data, but by allowing a space to organize my thoughts and feelings about the research process and data. Additionally, all the participants provided examples of their own work, from photographs of their graffiti to lyrics of their songs,

for inclusion in the data. These examples were used to add context during analysis of the interviews.

Participants.

As noted above, the participants were sought through connections and word of mouth. When setting out to collect the data for this study, I wanted to ensure that I represented Métis voices from my homeland of Manitoba as well as from my community in Ontario. I reached out on Facebook through several Métis youth groups of which I am already part, utilizing my position as an insider to the community. I received several replies in Ontario and arranged meetings with two artists in southern Ontario. I was unable, however, to find any participants in Manitoba with that approach. I then contacted a friend in Winnipeg, Jeff Bromley, who has been a significant presence in the hip hop community. Jeff generously shared the research I was conducting with his network and both Winnipeg participants reached out through that Facebook post. I recruited seven artists, including two female hip hop artists, but three potential participants either declined to participate or chose to withdraw from the study. The participants were four Métis young adults over the age of 18 who participate in the creation of hip hop in some way. By purposefully sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) Métis youth who already participate in hip hop, I was able to engage more deeply on the influence(s) of hip hop and to obtain a varied glimpse into the world of hip hop productions due to the variety of hip hop forms of media that each of the participants worked with. One of the participants exclusively creates graffiti art, one participant creates graffiti as well as raps in a local collective, one participant is a beatboxer who also raps and produces, and the last participant raps. By collecting data from individuals across aspects of hip hop culture, this study was able to speak to Métis hip hop as a

varied culture with multiple dimensions of production, instead of solely speaking on one aspect, such as rapping.

Data Collection.

I travelled to meet with the four Métis artists to interview each of them in person. The first interviews took place in Ontario, in Brantford and Midland, with the last two interviews both taking place in Winnipeg. The interviews allowed participants to speak on many aspects of hip hop and their educational experiences, while a recording device was used with participant permission to ensure that the interviews felt more like a conversation by allowing my focus to remain on the research participant rather than on taking notes. As there was no script to the interviews, they varied in length with the shortest interview lasting 20 minutes and the longest taking 1 hour and 50 minutes. The average interview length was 51 minutes.

Data Analysis.

The audio files were then transferred from my secure, single-user iPad to my password protected personal laptop computer, maintaining confidentiality of participants. The files were transcribed verbatim and sent to participants for member checking. None of the participants requested changes to their transcripts.

Each transcript was coded by hand. As stated in the introduction, I read through each transcript several times without any particular ideas about what the themes might be. I had already conducted a portion of the literature review, so I knew that it was likely that community would come up within the transcripts, but I had no firm ideas. On my second reading of each transcript, I began to make coding notes throughout. I read each transcript a third time to collapse each coding note into themes, which I signified by using different colours for each theme. The following themes emerged: finding a path (or identity exploration through hip hop); helping

others find a path (or the community of hip hop); and hip hop as a connection to school. While reading and re-reading the transcripts, it was clear that the stories of the participants and their experiences were distinct yet held many remarkable similarities, allowing me to weave them together, like the sash, and create the story of the research. Wilson (2008) says that the process of analysing data with an Indigenous paradigm is ongoing:

> All of the pieces go in, until eventually the new idea comes out. You build relationships with the idea in various and multiple ways, until you reach a new understanding or higher state of awareness regarding whatever it is that you are studying. (pp. 116-117)

The themes from the data were also taken back to the participants as the "continuous feedback with all the research participants" is the basis for "authenticity or credibility" (Wilson, 2008, p. 121). All participants agreed with the suggested themes and it was with participant approval that I continued with these themes. This reciprocity is part of the data analysis process, but it is also an example of the sharing back of research that Wilson discusses. It allows participants to have input in the research process and ensures that the researcher is accountable to the knowledges held and shared by participants.

Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB) of Lakehead University. It is important to recognize the ethical considerations that should be valued when exploring change for Métis youth and learners. Freire (2000) stresses the importance of change coming from within the affected community, instead of from an outside group. Many Indigenous researchers echo the need for research to come from within the community (Battiste, 2013; Dion, 2000; Wilson, 2008) and advocate for Indigenous researchers using Indigenous methodologies.

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As a Métis youth myself, I am uniquely able to hold the roles of both researcher and peer. I also endeavoured to come to each interview without any preconceptions about what the stories or values of the participant would be, but rather let the participants' words stand on their own.

Tuck (2009) wrote a letter imploring researchers to shift the focus of academic research away from what she calls "damage-centered" (p. 409) narratives of Indigenous peoples. Earlier in Chapter One, I introduced Tuck's letter as part of the theoretical framework for this study. It is important to revisit Tuck's approach as it relates to the ethics of this study. Damage-based frameworks are harmful to Indigenous communities, who deal with the dichotomy of both being subjected to research too often and also becoming "invisible" (p. 412) through or after the research, with outside researchers often entering a community and imposing a colonized view, sometimes without understanding or even engaging the community. Damage-based frameworks highlight what is lacking in an individual or community to explain an absence of success and this is an unethical approach to research. As an antidote, Tuck (2009) proposes desire-based frameworks that "are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (p. 416). The insufficiency of damage-centred narratives has made way for desire, which "accounts for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities" (p. 416). Tuck uses "hope" in the Freirian sense, not as wishful thinking, but rather measured planning that follows an awakening of knowledge and understanding. Paris and Alim (2014) point out that often, in practice, asset-based frameworks tend to "focus solely on the important ways racial and ethnic difference was enacted in the past without attending to the dynamic enactments of our equally important present or future" (pp. 91-92). I approach this research from a desire-based framework, conscious of the shifting nature of

culture and community, and discovering complex personhood (Tuck, 2009) among and within participants' stories.

Participants were asked at the beginning of the interview whether they wished to remain anonymous or whether names and identifying markers could be used (see Appendix III: Participant Consent Forms). Three of the participants gave me permission to use their names and identifiable art or lyrics. One participant chose to remain anonymous; a pseudonym was selected for him and he approved it. I felt it was important to provide real names if the participants wished so readers could seek out more of their work. While these outlines inform who they are, the participants were more interested in sharing their ideas about hip hop and about their own work, which are included in Chapter Four. Participants were advised at the outset of the research and reminded during the data analysis process that they were able to withdraw at any time. All physical data collected was stored in a locked cabinet, and all electronic data was stored only on a password-protected drive to which only I had access. The electronic and hard data will be stored in my supervisor's office in a password-protected file and a locked cabinet respectively for five years after this thesis has been completed.

In the following chapters, I will share these stories as well as the shared vision of hip hop and education that the participants conceptualized.

Chapter Four: Storying Hip Hop

This section will serve as the beginning of the sash I will weave together with the study's four participants, allowing a closer look at the individual strands that are making up our collective story. In this chapter, the themes will be presented and then discussed in relation to the available literature. Finally, the sash will be completed and the individual strands will emerge again, showing the lessons to be learned from the production and consumption of hip hop that each participant identified. Within this chapter, I intentionally chose not to use many sub-headings. While headings and sub-headings are useful for directing the reader to the topic at hand, they also act in opposition to the metaphor of the sash that I am using to weave these stories. The stories are brought together to create something larger and find deeper understandings as part of a larger whole.

I begin with the individual strands by introducing each of the four participants–Michael, Jac-O, Bond, and Zedone–and their description of what hip hop means, and photographs if participants provided them for use within this thesis. From their stories of their engagement with hip hop, I consider the themes that emerged as the braided sash. The Metis sash is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. A Métis sash on display.

Taken together, the youth tell a collective story with three themes: finding a path (hip hop as a vehicle for identity and identifying, including moving from youthful rebellion to an understanding of oneself); helping others find a path (hip hop to build relationships and community, the intergenerational nature of hip hop learning, and working against damage-centred hip hop culture); and hip hop to connect to school. This final theme connects their hip hop stories back to schooling and the implications for hip hop pedagogies as literacies that support Métis education in schools and classrooms. I end the chapter with the sash's tassels, where each of the participants share the lessons that we, as educators, can learn from their stories about the production and consumption of hip hop texts.

Michael

> *"... be willing to know where they're from and want to know those stories that other people don't and be brave about it"*

The first artist I met with was Michael. It was a cool January day in Brantford, Ontario, and I spent a few moments on the campus of Wilfred Laurier University before Michael found me. The first thing that struck me about Michael was the ease with which he connected with me and the kindness he exuded. Michael is an emerging rapper who rhymes mostly about nature and who intends to explore his newly discovered Métis heritage through his music. He has travelled all across North America visiting communes and briefly lived in Toronto's High Park neighbourhood. When we met, Michael had recently moved to Brantford to pursue a university education. After our conversation, Michael decided he was going to rap under the name "Mutt City" as a reference to his growing connection to his culture.

What is hip hop?

I began my conversation with Michael by asking him, "what is hip hop for you?" His

answer was thus:

Hip hop is hipping and hopping while the beat is popping and the soul is not stopping. It

is a flower that grows from a sidewalk. It's an expression of life and rhythm and if I

defined it too much I would kill its vibe. I've always had to use my voice some way and

my hip hop when I did it was a way to have a say in a crazy world, almost get a slice of
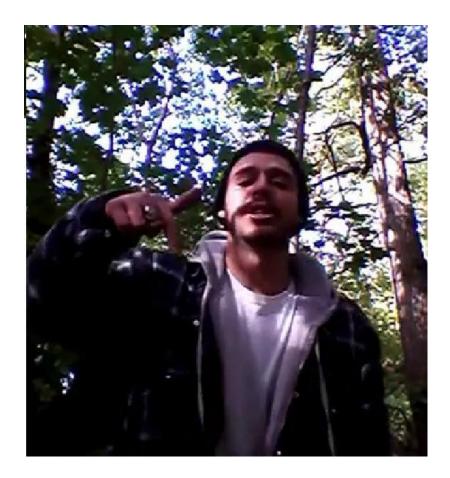
the pie without buying in.

Figure 2. Image captured from "Vagabond Waltz," by Michael.
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FpxpiEQpKM). Printed with permission.

Jac-O

"I would probably hate fame, but I enjoy being on stage, it's something that makes me happy. I'm a different person when I'm up there and it's just something I've loved to do."

The day after I spoke to Michael, I met with a second artist, Jac-O, in a space that the Midland Métis Nation of Ontario office kindly provided. It took only moments to see the passion for and thorough understanding of all aspects of hip hop culture that Jac-O possesses. Jac-O has been beatboxing for over a decade, and also is an active producer of his own work and the other local hip hop artists with whom he works. He is established in the hip hop community in Penetanguishene, a small community along the shores of Georgian Bay where he lives, as well as in nearby Barrie where well known artists are more likely to perform. He has already opened for some major artists including Machine Gun Kelly and Juicy J, and has plans to create an album and consider touring. Jac-O also comes from a Métis family very much connected to the community and traditional ways of life who are the proud owners of a 50 year-old fishing company. He has a strong connection with his Métis culture and his family is very involved in the Métis Nation of Ontario.

What is hip hop?

When asked what hip hop meant for him, Jac-O explained:

There's a lot about hip hop that people misunderstand. What people see is the media-generated view of trap music, gangster music, all drugs and drugs and violence … but what hip hop is – it was born from the ghetto … it was all about good vibes. … it's all about the beats and the flow and enjoying what you're doing, and that's what hip hop is. It's not about the money and all that stuff, it's about going and performing to a style that

you like and hip hop consists of jazz music, classical music, it's got all different

influences of music crushed into it – rock, guitar, everything. And that's the beauty of hip

hop… it's people that respect other kinds of music and want to make it into their own.

Figure 3. Jac-O. (n.d.). Selfie. Penetanguishene, ON. Printed with permission.

The last two participants were living in Winnipeg at the time of our conversations and I travelled there a few weeks later to meet with them.

Bond

"Things are a little better with colour. Little bit better."

I was to meet Bond[2] at a coffee shop close to where he was living; he joined me a few minutes after I arrived. He has been writing graffiti for twenty years and has travelled all over the country doing it. He chose his graffiti alias when he was a teenager while reading S. E. Hinton's (1967) *The Outsiders*. He came across a word in the beginning of the book, noticing that it encompassed the overall theme of the novel before he realized that it not only sounded cool but, with a few bent letters, looked very symmetrical. It became his tag name[3] and he has been using it since 1997.

What is hip hop?

"The only difference between art [namely hip hop] and vandalism is location," argues Bond. Hence I decided to include photographs of some of Bond's work in lieu of a definition of hip hop here. While I was able to connect with the other participants to ask this particular follow-up question if it had not come up within our interview, I lost contact with Bond after we spoke.

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[2] Pseudonym

[3] A tag name is a name that a graffiti artist uses to take ownership of art that they create (which is often illegally located) without using their real name.

Figures 4-7. Bond. (n.d.). Graffiti pieces. Winnipeg, MB. Printed with permission.

Zedone

"Hopefully it takes me somewhere.
If it doesn't whatever, no regrets, I love hip hop. That's what it's about."

I met with Zedone at his house in Winnipeg's North End. I met both Zed and Bond

through a mutual friend, Jeff "Broms" Bromley from Deepcave Records, after he promoted my

search for participants on his personal Facebook page. The conversation flowed easily. Like

Bond, Zed is a graffiti artist, although he also is part of a rap crew (or group) called Foreign

Objekts who have performed many times in Winnipeg and opened for some big name rappers,

from Master Ace, Wordsworth, and RA the Rugged Man to Raekwon and Mobb Deep. As a

graffiti artist, he is also widely recognized in his community and has recently been

commissioned to do several large mural pieces around the North End community of Winnipeg to

ensure that art is the focus in the area, instead of gang graffiti.

What is hip hop?

In answering the questions, "what is hop hop?," Zedone contends:

Hip hop's a very amazing culture, there's graffiti, you know what I mean, that's

the artists, DJing, MCing, you know, there's breakdancing for people who like to

dance, you know what I mean, and there's MCing. And people don't even know

the fifth element, the fifth element is knowledge, and that's another educational

part too with the hip hop culture. There's history, there's lots of history in hip

hop. … it's just amazing to be a part of, you know what I mean … every day I do

art, nowadays, and I sell it, I get opportunities to paint walls, I keep it real

painting trains sometime, you know what I mean, cause that's just what a writer's

got to do, but you know, I don't ever see myself quitting, you know, this is what I

live for. Sometimes I get paid to be a kid, and that just is what it is. Hip hop

makes me feel young, it makes me feel a part of something, you know, it's a good

feeling.

Figure 8. Zedone. (n.d.). Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle. Winnipeg, MB. Printed with

permission.

Figure 9. Zedone. (n.d.). Presentation of graffiti portrait of RA the Rugged Man.

Winnipeg, MB. Printed with permission.

From Stories Came Themes

Through analysis of interview data and lyrics provided by participants, three major themes emerged: 1) finding a path (or identity exploration through hip hop); 2) helping others find a path (or the community of hip hop); and 3) hip hop as a connection to school. Each theme is explored below.

Finding a path: Hip hop as a vehicle for identity and identifying.

Each of the artists came to hip hop culture in a different way, but there are similarities in their stories. All of the participants were either introduced to hip hop as part of a social or activity group or by a friend or family member. Zedone and Bond both started writing graffiti when they were pre-teens and tried to mimic artists who they respected. Michael and Jac-O were introduced to hip hop around the same age although it was the music that spoke to them first, namely G-Unit and Beastie Boys respectively.

As this section will show, all four participants found hip hop through searching for their own identities, by emulating those around them, and in most cases, through a desire to stay out of gang life and a refusal to emulate some others in their lives. Michael spoke twice about the strong "longing" he had to understand his identity, which he sought through finding a place in the structure of the army. Once Michael realized, "You can't really be free there," he knew the army was not the right fit, and he left still not knowing much more about who he was. Jac-O, Bond, and Zedone each sought to produce hip hop texts (rap lyrics, graffiti pieces, et cetera) in the style of someone they admired, whether it was a prominent New York graffiti artist or a fellow student at the high school who had a black book full of sketches. Participants' transition from mimicking to unique creation was not a quick one. Jac-O explained that, "it took a couple years to be able to be creative of my own and to really express myself through the art." Zedone

agreed, calling the first time that he picked up a spray can a "mess." Bond declared that his first

tag was "the most awful shit you've ever seen." Despite their initial challenges, each artist

continued to practice and improve their techniques until they had a product of which to be proud.

Interestingly, all four participants had experiences of getting into trouble in their youth.

Michael found that he had some underlying anger that he "couldn't figure out really where it

came from" that would come out in smart remarks to teachers or in altercations at parties once

alcohol was involved. Michael later was able to utilize the "interactive, mediated process" of hip

hop to develop stronger "solidarities and self-understandings" (Morgan & Warren, 2011, p. 940).

Like Michael, Jac-O did not do badly in school, but he found it was difficult to stay in that

environment with his Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), a sentiment that Bond

also echoed.

Due to the nature of graffiti art, both Bond and Zedone have found themselves in some

trouble with the law in the creation of their art; educators and those outside of the hip hop

community can struggle with understanding the draw to illegal creations of art. These youth were

uninterested in sports or other types of community or school activities, and, as Lashua and Fox

(2006) explain, simply "want opportunities to make their music and art, to dance, and be with

others who accept them. They would prefer a safe space but *not at the cost of giving up who they*

are" (p. 276, emphasis added). Bond stated that, while graffiti may have put him at odds with

what he calls archaic city bylaws designed to create "more bars, more guards, and more cells,"

graffiti has also kept him each out of more serious problems. Bond was vague at first when he

said that he thinks "without [graffiti], that I would've gone down a really wrong path," but he

soon explained that "in this day and age, if you're not careful, one wrong step, you're dead or in

jail, and that's just the way it is." For Bond, graffiti provided an outlet which kept his hands busy and kept him away from situations that were more precarious.

Zedone had a similar idea of what would have happened in his life if he had not become involved in hip hop. Zedone said, "Every youth thinks it's cool to be a gangster, you know what I mean, so ... they get all caught up in it and next thing you know that they're in jail" but, alternatively, "with hip hop and graffiti, know what I mean, you kind of have a goal" that provides a different path in life. After reflecting on the direction taken by several of his childhood friends, Zedone posited that without hip hop he would have been working a hard labour job to pay the bills or in jail because he "might've been sent that wrong direction." As many participants in hip hop culture do, Zedone "place[d himself] as witness to social oppression, marginalization and youth rebellion; and propose[d] a vision for a better future" (Ibrahim, 2017, p. 108). Zedone saw the impact that excessive tagging (using spray paint or markers to etch your name or a symbol representing your name onto a public surface) and gang graffiti had on himself, his family, and his community. Zedone said, "I go over a lot of the negative gang graffiti, like gang graffiti, crossing people out, threats and stuff, I go over that stuff" to remove the negative influence from his community. He made the conscious decision to move away from the illegal aspects of graffiti to instead work tirelessly to create a career out of hip hop, producing art pieces to benefit the community. Thus, "every day I do art, nowadays, and I sell it, I get opportunities to paint walls … I don't ever see myself quitting, you know, this is what I live for." Rodríguez (2009) asserts that "hip hop culture is a manifestation of the ways that young people reflect and act upon their world in order to find their place in it and, ultimately, to transform it" (p. 22). This sentiment is reinforced by Buffam (2011) who sees hip hop as a "site of … self-recreation" and a "resource to help affect … a process of self-

transformation" (p. 343). Through the art that Zedone creates, he is able to transform his community and himself.

Another aspect of identity and identifying is the ethos of hard work and dedication to their craft that runs through each participant's story. It was only through continued effort that Zedone and Bond were able to become the talented graffiti artists they are today. Zedone repeated the familiar adage "practice makes perfect," adding that, "You gotta paint and draw until it hurts, until you actually get better." Bond echoed this sentiment and explained that, "When you buy art off somebody, you're not just buying a canvas, you're buying years and years of labour and mistakes and heartache and joy and sadness." Each tag and canvas was not just an individual piece, then, but built off of that artist's journey. To become a successful hip hop artist requires putting "in a lot of time, effort, and money into yourself" according to Jac-O, and it is a careful balance between putting on too many free shows and not obtaining any exposure. For Jac-O, it comes down to knowing who you are, valuing your work, and "stay[ing] true to yourself at the same time." Such dedication contrasts strongly with the deficit view of allegedly underachieving Indigenous youth and/or youth of colour due to "individual pathology or cultural adaptations, [stemming] from social disorganization in their communities, or lack of individual effort" (Akom, 2009, p. 60). Clearly, individual effort abounds when it is directed towards an outcome or product that is significant to the individual.

Both the production and consumption of hip hop texts fit into the participants' journeys of identity exploration, whether it was Michael's search for his own identity within his social groups or Zedone, Bond, and Jac-O's search for identity through the emulation of prominent artists. The move to produce these texts helped each of the participants stay out of trouble, whether in school like Michael and Jac-O or in avoiding gangs and police involvement like

Zedone and Bond. Thus, hip hop knowledge provided the four participants a way to explore their own identities through testing boundaries and acting out different roles related to other artists. In the next section, participants describe how hip hop paved the way to creating a series of communities of producers and consumers of hip hop texts within neighbourhoods, cities, provinces, and across the country.

Helping others find a path: Hip hop to build relationships and community.

Being part of a community of producers and consumers of hip hop also necessitated the participants' need to demonstrate a better path for the younger generation coming up in hip hop and the larger community. The collaborative nature of hip hop makes it easy to use hip hop to facilitate new relationship and community-building.

Michael relayed two separate experiences wherein he was able to facilitate connecting with new people in his life through rapping together. When meeting someone through a church choir in another community and in getting to know his roommate at university, Michael utilized consuming hip hop music together and free-styling about mutually important topics to quickly create a bond. Michael recalled that when visiting the Ottawa Valley, he "had a buddy there that we would free-style together ... and again the rhymes were about nature, and farm life." As Lashua and Fox (2006) state, rap music "creates ripples, relationships, and movement within the performers" (p. 274). Jac-O had similar experiences and created a community of hip hop artists and appreciators around himself from an early age. Through this community, Jac-O received encouragement and inspiration and was able to give that back. In this community "most of us work well together and push each other … helping each other, and trying to create a business for everyone and a local scene" instead of fighting only for one's own success. Within the context of an Indigenous education model, this "development as caring and empathetic human beings"

could be examined as educational development, which includes looking at the "quality of relationships they have with one another" (McCarty & Lee, 2014, p. 109).

Bond had a similar experience, stating that he has "buddies that breakdance, buddies that scratch, buddies that rhyme, you know what I mean, but I hold my end down with the graffiti." His community comes together to help each other on projects or promote each other's work. This collaboration strengthens each individual's work as well as strengthening the community. A hip hop community can also be larger than just the neighbourhood or city. Zedone learned about artists in other communities as he watched their artwork progress on trains that travelled through Winnipeg. Occasionally, the opportunity to meet the artist would come up because "he might be hopping trains and painting, you might meet the guy and get the opportunity to paint with the guy" and learn new techniques while also passing along local knowledge. There is a distinct "dialogic space between dangers and possibilities" (Ibrahim, 2009, p. 242), which is unique to hip hop ways of learning and being. As artists come together to learn from each other, the community grows and strengthens.

For the participants, community-building does not end at gathering artists together but continues with mentoring other youth. Zedone and Bond, the two artists who have spent the most time in the hip hop community, both espoused the importance of showing a better path to the younger generation coming up and leading by that example. Bond spoke at length about the hip hop community being welcoming yet also not accepting those who are not good people at the core. At one point, he spoke of another artist in the city "who's super talented, one of the best writers in the city, but he's such – just so arrogant about things," which Bond felt was teaching the wrong things to youth "that just look up to this guy, he should be teaching them the right way." Bond makes the choice to combat these negative influences by:

paint[ing] with kids that nobody wants to paint with and I teach them … the rules

and stuff, because you can only follow a legacy as you've learned it. And if you

learn it the wrong way, it's going to show in your work, and people aren't going

to respect that.

Like Bond, Zedone assumed the role of educator with younger graffiti artists, sometimes

through rap lyrics that "educate them more about graffiti … what to do, what not to do … to

pretty much respect their elders." McCarty and Lee (2014) asked an Indigenous educator about

the traits he looks for in his students and the educator named "respect, compassion, and helpful

behavior with others" as the most important (p. 109). Zedone demonstrated compassion and

helpful behaviour through shaping and guiding younger artists. Respect too emerged multiple

times in discussions with the participants as being an integral ethic within the hip hop

community. A community that is so based on collaboration and supporting each other inherently

requires respect and trust. The musical product itself carries these lessons, with each element of

the music "carr[ying] meaning because of its *relation* to other *different* rhythms and voices" just

as the participants "learn about ourselves through our relations to what is different and similar to

us" (Lashua & Fox, 2006, p. 268). Through repeated exposure to alternative ways of thinking

and interacting in the world, youth are better able to understand and empathize with others.

Zedone explained that he feels a responsibility to educate and engage youth in the

community, not only to ensure they are better artists, but because "there's so many negative

opportunities out there, like there's so many gangs out there, it's so easy to get caught up in that

lifestyle." Having seen friends succumb to the gang life has motivated Zedone to show that the

hip hop lifestyle can be enjoyed without leading to dangerous situations. This desire to

demonstrate the positive aspects of hip hop accurately reflects the work done by the inner city

hip hop instructors interviewed by Buffam (2011) who "explicitly distanced their artistic craft from [gangsta] rap as they worked to disengage neighbourhood youth from their attachment to its putatively destructive outlook" (p. 341). Zedone actively made the decision to work towards a more positive community and move away from a destructive view.

Zedone also feels, as a father, that there is an obligation to keep threatening graffiti off the streets that children will be walking past. Often, the graffiti that he and his family sees is produced by local gang members who have bombed the streets (another term for tagging multiple locations or putting up larger graffiti pieces at one time) with symbols aimed at rival gangs. While in the past Zedone also bombed the streets of the North End of Winnipeg without much regard for the property owners, he has since shifted his focus to completing murals that are requested by those same business owners who have seen his work develop through the years and now respect him as a community member. Zedone does not credit this change to an increase in the prevalence of graffiti in Winnipeg because "the product was there, it was always there," but rather to a shift in perspective: "People just had to look at the other side" of the art instead of focusing on the idea of graffiti as destructive. This shift in understanding the art form is, according to Zedone, often predicated on meeting an artist and talking with him or her about what it is that graffiti is really about. In one instance, Zedone had covered up a piece of gang graffiti on a store near his home and was caught by the police. He took the time to speak with the shop owner about the previous graffiti and the meaning of the new piece, "trying to make a conversation with him, trying to get him to relate to me a little bit, he's like, 'You clean this stuff up, and I'll drop the charges.'" Once there was an understanding of the impact graffiti could have on the store and the community, the owner, an individual outside the hip hop community, began to appreciate the art form.

The collaborative nature of hip hop makes it easy to use in relationships and community-building. Neighbourhoods come together through the creation of these texts. Michael used hip hop to make friends in new places, and both he and Jac-O deepened their relationships with other artists by collaborating with them. More experienced artists, Zedone and Bond, used their positions within the hip hop community to pass on knowledge of the past and influence the future of hip hop with the next generation. Thus, participants engaged deeply with hip hop, with others, and with their community. The next section explores how these hip hop artists see these connections in relation to schooling.

Hip hop to connect to school.

As demonstrated in the literature review (Chapter Two), students who do not see themselves reflected within the school environment, curriculum, or courses have a tendency to disengage from the education system (Baszile, 2009). This holds particularly true for Indigenous students who have a difficult time finding their own path in the education system. As Indigenous scholars have demonstrated, the school environment, curriculum, and courses are not simply uninteresting to Indigenous students, but also serve as tools of ongoing colonization (Battiste, 2013). This feeling of disconnection and active avoidance of mainstream curriculum is reflected in the experiences of the participants as only one of them completed high school and since gone on to post-secondary education.

Each of the participants expressed unique difficulties experienced during their time in the education system. For Michael, who is currently in university, school itself has not been a problem but he finds himself at odds with the traditional paper-writing route that he has found himself in. He spoke of visualizing a day when he would feel more comfortable in the educational environment, where he would be able to say, "Look, I'm really proud of hip hop, I

really want to integrate this into my education" and advocate for the inclusion of alternative presentation styles for papers. It can be difficult for students to push for inclusion of their own learning and processing styles at any age as the current school system is Eurocentric and "grounds our very understanding of difference as inferior, whether that difference be raced, gendered, classed, or even generational" (Baszile, 2009, p. 12). The stated or unstated view of hip hop culture as inferior and separate from formal learning in school creates another barrier for Indigenous students to connect to the school environment.

Jac-O found it difficult to engage in the education system. Despite being an intelligent and curious person, he "didn't see a reason to learn anything [at school], I didn't see a goal or an end point to it all." This led him to disconnecting from the educational experience and ultimately leaving high school before completion. Bond and Zedone had similar experiences within the education system and both expressed regret at not completing high school. All three found that the subject matter and the way that it was presented was not appealing or engaging and the benefits to learning and absorbing the materials were not expressed. Morgan and Warren (2011) found that young Indigenous men "who resist formal educational settings often thrive in informal settings, particularly participating in communities of practice with their peers" (p. 936). It is within the power of educators to reconcile these two communities and create a more inclusive and engaging educational environment.

For many educators, it would seem as though the easiest solution would be to simply include hip hop within any class. After all, any educator with access to the internet could pull up the lyrics to "Changes" and have a discussion about what Tupac really meant when he said "misplaced hate makes disgrace to races" (Shakur, 1998). This parachuting in of hip hop culture, however, was described by the participants as disingenuous and ineffective, since the sanitization

of hip hop through "only allow[ing] students to bring in texts that are morally in line with progressive, middle class, even bourgeois politics and sensibilities" does nothing to examine the devaluing of Indigenous students' cultures (Alim, 2011, p. 138). Baszile (2009) also critiques the traditional school context for changing hip hop when it is simply brought in as the curriculum "forbids certain language, the expression of certain ideas, and so on" (p. 17). When Jac-O was in high school, there was some promotion of hip hop in this sanitized fashion, but it was clear to him that "they did appreciate what we did but also they looked down upon" non-traditional educational styles and hip hop as a true educational tool. Akom (2009) agrees, noting that the tendency of the education system to devalue hip hop academically "speaks volumes to just how 'mis-educated' our society has become" (p. 53).

Bond attempted to hand in a graffiti piece in a high school art class, only to have the teacher inform him that it was vandalism despite being drawn on a piece of paper. Rodríguez (2009) blames this type of reaction on a tendency for universities to create "educators who misserve an already marginalized segment of our population" (p. 32); these educators are often upper-middle class White people who are unable to navigate the cultures of their students or respond to their needs in culturally responsive ways (Paris, 2012). This also hearkens back to Freire's idea of educators wetting themselves in the culture of their students. Alim and Paris (2014) echo this idea, asking what education might look like if it was dedicated "not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle-class norms but to explore, honor, extend, and, at times, problematize their heritage and community practices" (p. 86). Participants identified a potential solution: provide context for students in terms of why particular assignments, or classes as a whole, were important, not only in terms of graduating high school but how it could be applicable to the participation in production of hip hop culture. This was

highlighted by participants as preferable to the simple addition of hip hop in courses and would constitute a reimagining of school, including a reconciliation between the types of "acceptable identities" presented within the curriculum and the "counter-representations reflected in hip hop culture" (Baszile, 2009, p. 8).

Bond and Jac-O provided additional ways that may have better connected them to formal education. Bond, who is an avid reader, spoke about graffiti as an entryway to literacy. In particular, Bond credited graffiti with allowing him to gain stronger linguistic skills as he began to be more cognizant of what words he chose once he began to create graffiti and felt encouraged to increase his vocabulary base. Thus the desire to better represent his intentions through graffiti encouraged Bond to pay greater attention to language. Had Bond's teachers been well versed in hip hop pedagogies, it might have been easier for them to use his "own words and expressions [as] a point of entry for critical dialogues" (Wang, 2010, p. 67) and an enhancement of his understanding of and engagement with critical literacy skills.

For Jac-O, receiving alternative contexts for the content materials presented in his high school courses would have been beneficial. He explained that, because he could not see himself in one of the traditional paths prescribed by the educational system, "it was a lot harder to see the end result of where all these different classes and things were going to take me." Some courses, such as drama and technology, have obvious transferable skills that Jac-O expressed regret over not learning as it would have enabled him to spend a lot less money creating videos to advertise his beatboxing. Other courses, however, simply are not marketed to students in a way that would allow them to see the benefits in alternative career streams. Skills like persuasive writing can be valuable in creating business plans or marketing strategies within the hip hop world, but the skills were presented in a more traditional context in high school.

Coming back to Chapter Two and talking about Métis education, we are reminded of

Battiste's concept of cognitive imperialism and the valuing of one type of knowledge over

another. By disregarding ways of learning and knowing that these Métis students value,

educators are limiting the access that Métis students have to the lessons other students are

receiving through the education system. Jac-O lamented that teachers "don't express that … just

this little tool may help you in a different style of job" thereby limiting student interest and their

personal investment in their own success. There is a distinction here that is important – the

participants are not necessarily suggesting that hip hop itself be used in every course, but that the

content be explored in a way that would be relevant to students who may pursue non-traditional

career paths. When the course content is "connected to student lives, engaging, and

collaborative" it can be "effective and culturally responsive for Indigenous youth" (Castagno &

Brayboy, 2008, p. 979).

One essential element of creating relevance is the involvement of educators who not only

accept the value of hip hop in education, but are intimately familiar with hip hop and able to

engage in one or more form of hip hop authentically. Bond emphasized the importance of a

teacher with legitimate knowledge of hip hop who has "been in it" and "felt it" rather than solely

possessing an intellectual understanding of hip hop culture. Hill (2009) explains that, "the ways

in which students negotiate hip-hop can be foreign to educators" (p. 373). The idea of

authenticity was reflected by other participants who shared that it was clear to students when an

educator was simply filling time by utilizing hip hop without authentic buy-in. Jac-O shared that

while his teachers in high school promoted hip hop out of the classroom, they were hesitant to

embrace any "alternative roots of education that aren't clean and proper and set by the

government," using hip hop only in a way to rouse school spirit or to fill time in class that did

not need to be dedicated to academics. Ibrahim (2009) credits such actions to the tendency of educators from the dominant culture to see "Hip Hop as useless verbal violence that has nothing to do with pedagogy and education" (p. 232) instead of seeing the potential within the culture.

Educators may not recognize their own complicity in the devaluing of youth culture if they do not "realize that they are inherently and consistently engaged in cultural production and reproduction" (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 960). Contrast the image of an educator who possesses only a cursory understanding of hip hop to the visual that Zedone painted of his own experience teaching youth in a school setting. After all, in "hip hop culture, the messenger is equally as significant as the message" (Rodríguez, 2009, p. 30). The excitement and passion are clear in Zedone's words when he shared his experience:

> I've actually taught graffiti classes and the kids, they really like it, they really get
>
> into it. Same with hip hop culture; hip hop is history, you pick up an old school
>
> rapper, you study him and you talk about it to the kids, you know, I think it's very
>
> educational. I think a lot of kids should get involved, especially if they want to get
>
> involved in music, you know, cause hip hop's another important part, just like …
>
> all these other beautiful elements of music.

The passion and appreciation of hip hop and a recognition of hip hop as an art form is essential for educators to successfully integrate hip hop in to the curriculum in a way that benefits students within a course itself, and within the larger contexts of their educational experience. It is "only through affect [that educators can] really make students love the material" (Ibrahim, 2009, p. 242), something that is not possible without understanding and immersion. Through the valuation of hip hop knowledge, the educational environment shifts to include "a pedagogy where learning may mean *investing into* hybrid cultural and linguistic practices" (Ibrahim, 2009,

p. 243) to create "an affective yet highly intellectual semiotic space for knowledge production" (p. 245) wherein students may find their identities and their values reflected.

Seidel (2011) describes one example of integration of hip hop (not only into the classroom but throughout the entire educational experience) at the High School for the Recording Arts (HSRA), a charter school in St. Paul, Minnesota. At HSRA, much of the student learning is built around the students producing hip hop music. Students project sales and profits of their albums, write persuasive letters to potential agents, and learn graphic design skills by creating album art. Those lessons that are not as easily translatable to the world of hip hop (such as biology) are what students use to earn studio time. For example, completing a test might earn thirty minutes in the recording studio. HSRA has been in existence since 1998 and successfully graduates students who did not succeed in other schools previously, including Indigenous students who make up 4% of the student body (High School for Recording Arts, 2017) despite being just over 1% of the population in Minnesota (United States Census Bureau, 2017). HSRA demonstrates clearly that "children's learning to 'do' school should not be an assimilative process; rather, it should happen by engaging culture" (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009, p. 31). HSRA makes a strong connection between culturally responsive education and hip hop pedagogies in a way that responds to the culture and interests of its students.

Collective Themes – A Summary.

In this chapter, when the participants spoke about hip hop, three themes were evident: finding a path (or identity exploration through hip hop), helping others find a path (or the community of hip hop), and hip hop as a connection to school. Participants also demonstrated that engagement with hip hop teaches them valuable skills that can be taken forward and applied in other areas of their lives. None of the participants saw themselves, their cultures, or their

language and practices of hip hop in their secondary schooling experiences. Yet, they are hopeful that other Métis students might not have the same experience and might instead have a secondary education experience that is meaningful and relevant to them.

The Sash's Ending Tassels

One of the most striking things about a sash is the way the artist has taken countless individual threads and woven them together to create an item that is both stronger and more beautiful than its parts. At times, threads come together and blend seamlessly, and at other times it is in the contrast that beauty is found. In all sashes, the individual pieces are the focus at both the beginning and the end. The participants became the focus at the front of this chapter, highlighting their stories and their individuality. By exploring the themes that emerged, the stories that each participant told were woven with the others, creating a rich account of the salient benefits of hip hop creation and consumption. This chapter concludes by re-focusing on individual participants yet again, this time as they share with us the lessons that we can learn from the production and consumption of hip hop texts. Many of these lessons are ones that the traditional education system aims to convey to students, in particular through increasing literacy. The participants demonstrate how these approaches to literacy and life-skills can be achieved in a way that is impactful and meaningful to the students themselves.

Michael.

It became evident through my conversation with Michael that being involved in hip hop as both a consumer and as a producer had provided him with additional skills. The following paragraphs will show how, through hip hop, Michael discovered his own storytelling voice and other ways to express himself, was provided a way to build self-confidence, and discovered different ways of connecting with others and building community.

The first rhymes that Michael wrote were about nature and about his brief stint living in High Park in Toronto. The rhymes began to encapsulate his story as well, and as he learned about his heritage, the lyrics began to engage with Indigenous issues. He saw rappers like J. Cole and Kendrick Lamar as role models because "they're not doing it [rapping] to get rich, you know, they're doing it because they're telling their stories." Suddenly stories of struggle and oppression became valuable in their own way, and Métis youth like Michael can see a path to sharing their own stories. In the song, "I've Been Told to be Elderless," Michael explores how singing and rapping help him process the difficulties he is facing in his own life:

> it's spring in these parts and i don't know where to start
>
> got a really busted heart and a lot of useful scars
>
> don't even got a car
>
> but all that ain't so hard when i'm singing like a bard

It is through the sharing of such stories that Michael built more self-confidence. Through rapping, he challenged himself to do things that he had not felt comfortable doing before, like putting up videos online, and he continued to issue challenges to himself, including pushing his own boundaries by going to an open mic night at the university. Continual growth and learning is a key component of education, and this growth has been facilitated strongly by hip hop culture for Michael.

An understanding of hip hop culture, rap in particular, created ways for Michael to connect with others and build a community in a number of different environments. When he worked with youth, rapping became a way to get to know each other better and bond. When travelling or relocating to different areas in Ontario, freestyling (rapping on the spot, without prepared lyrics) was frequently used as a way to connect with new friends or roommates. When

visualizing his future, Michael speaks about bringing marginalized youth together and doing hip hop together the way that prominent Indigenous rapper cum politician Wab Kinew[4] has done. Of Wab, Michael said, "He's so educated, but he's good at hip hop too, and he can reach the people that are in the shits, so I like those kind of guys, that can make the two worlds work." Hip hop and community-building are not two separate entities but complement each other, as shown by the strengthening of Michael's relationships through hip hop.

Towards the end of our interview, Michael spoke about his disconnection from the Métis community at his school. When I asked Michael what he hoped the Métis community could do for him, Michael shared that he wanted:

> for people to step up and to say their stories and to be proud of it and to gather
> together and talk. You don't have to do, you know, all this old school Métis stuff,
> like you can do hip hop and you can share modern stories too.

Métis culture, for Michael, does not have to be restricted to "old school" examples of culture like jigging or fiddle-playing, but can be modern retelling of culture as well. Michael shows us that the common thread between old school Métis cultural productions and hip hop productions is the power of stories. Iseke-Barnes (2009) emphasizes these stories are needed "if we as Métis peoples are to understand fully ourselves, our culture, and our histories" (p. 70) and "share Aboriginal knowledges" (p. 79). Through hip hop, it is possible for "Indigenous youth to experience cultural reconciliation between their ancestral heritage and their contemporary urban world" (Gorlewski & Porfilio, 2012, p. 48). Michael's vision of Métis stories being shared through hip hop allow for culture, histories and knowledges to be learned and understood by more Métis youth.

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[4] Wab Kinew is a Manitoba MLA with the New Democratic Party who is also known for his broadcasting career on the CBC. Wab first rose to Winnipeg fame as a member of the rap group, Dead Indians.

Jac-O.

The passion that Jac-O shared about hip hop culture was infectious, but what really came across was the way in which hip hop has allowed him to build collaborative skills like networking and compromising, and other skills that could be deemed entrepreneurial skills such as time management, dedication, and perseverance.

Networking was identified by Jac-O as being integral to success within the hip hop community. It is through networking that he met other artists who could introduce him to promoters and provide opportunities to open for larger acts. Networking also allows for connections in other cities to be made, growing the fan base that will come out to support an artist in an environment in which they do not typically perform. Collaborative skills involve not only reaching out and connecting with others, but also maintaining those relationships through compromise and mutually beneficial work, ranging from simply hyping (promoting) other acts in the area to creating beats and helping with recording sessions for free. Jac-O mentioned several friends who all create hip hop texts and work together to push each other and create an environment conducive to mutual success. For Jac-O, this often links back to Métis culture, where he believes core tenets are "supporting each other and living together off the land and keeping peace." Hip hop can be created without a community, of course, but Jac-O asserts that "without your local community's help or your culture's help, then you're really lacking a depth of integrity or a real belief system that you're bringing to it."

Networking, integrity, and collaboration are skills that would fall under the entrepreneurial umbrella along with skills like time management and dedication. Jac-O started beatboxing at fourteen. He started doing a few shows per year as he got older and has now been doing approximately one show per month, with up to four performances in one night. Jac-O

balances this busy performance schedule with a full-time job that starts at 5:00 a.m. every day from spring to fall. He does not limit his production of hip hop to beatboxing, but also raps and produces for himself and for others, juggling a lot of different projects and demonstrating that "you gotta put in a lot of time, effort, and money into yourself to make it anywhere." He has learned how to value his own time and his product while also understanding that exposure can be just as valuable as a financial incentive. This belief in himself and his work and his dedication to consistent improvement are skills that will benefit him regardless of the path Jac-O finds himself on in the future.

Bond.

Like other participants, Bond acquired many collaborative skills from hip hop, including making and maintaining working relationships. Two other skills that stood out were self-improvement in the form of being/becoming a good/better person and engaging in continuous learning.

Within the graffiti world, train cars are an essential element and allow art to be showcased to a wide audience across the country. Bond spoke about beginning relationships with other artists through their art before even meeting them by getting to know one another's styles and techniques on the sides of trains. New artists see these tags and begin their graffiti careers through mimicking established artists and eventually develop their own style, which they communicate and promote on the sides of these same trains. The graffiti community co-exists with the larger hip hop community, supporting each other through attendance at art or music shows, to providing beats or album artwork for each other as needed. The hip hop community is not anchored in one place either, as many artists travel and collaborate with artists in other cities and bring back new techniques to the home community.

This collaborative relationship relies very heavily on mutual feelings of respect. Established artists go out of their way to teach the younger generation the right way to participate in the community, which Bond says is important because "you can only follow a legacy as you've learned it." Modeling positive behaviour for upcoming artists is as important as making choices that are personally beneficial and staying out of trouble. Speaking of the part of himself that creates graffiti as an alter ego, Bond explained that, through the creation of art, he is able to "take his pain and paint it so that somebody else could see it" and process those feelings in a healthy way.

Zedone.

The life skills learned from involvement in the hip hop community for both of the more established artists, Zedone and Bond, were very similar. Zedone also spoke about learning collaborative skills, including using friendly rivalries to push all participants, and the importance of building and strengthening the community from within. Where Bond spoke about being a good person, Zedone focused on a constant effort to improve himself, both in terms of art skills and personal conduct, and put a strong emphasis on personal integrity.

For inner city youth, there are so many opportunities to be involved in negative situations that put them at risk physically or legally, and Zedone spoke about finding the community and family relationship through a crew instead of a gang. He and his friends discovered graffiti together and continued to grow as artists together, from tagging to putting on art shows. This community came out of both formal institutions like the Graffiti Gallery in Winnipeg and informal meetings with like-minded individuals at shows or parties around the city. The meeting itself was less important than how the community was built and grew from that point onward,

with artists continually supporting each other's work and supporting the improvement of everyone in the crew, "cause you ain't nothing without a team."

That improvement can be learning different techniques from visiting artists or showing ways to engage in art forms like graffiti without breaking any laws. Educating the "younger circle" of artists about respect towards their elders, towards women, and demonstrating positive ways to engage with the community are values that Zedone lives by every day. Zedone firmly believes that an established artist in the community has a:

> responsibility to … the younger people in your community or … just because, you know what I mean, there's so many … other negative opportunities out there, like there's so many gangs out there, it's so easy to get caught up in that lifestyle.

This is a reflection of the purpose of stories told by Métis Elders, which are meant to "express these interrelationships and teach them to the next generation" (Iseke, 2013, p. 561). Each member of the community must set an example and teach the upcoming generations the right way to engage in hip hop and the right way to engage the other members of the community.

Summing up.

These ending tassels of the interwoven sash illuminate the possibilities within hip hop pedagogies for Métis students. Each of the participants came to hip hop with a unique perspective and set of experiences, and has come away with different, yet equally important, knowledges. All four participants expressed the importance of relationship and collaboration, and shared stories of culture that illustrate alternative access points to literacy that could be taken up within the educational system. None of the participants began participating in hip hop culture to become more literate or to engage in Métis education, but each of them engaged with literacy and Métis education in their own meaningful ways. Through encouraging Métis students to

connect to hip hop culture, utilizing hip hop pedagogies in a meaningful way within the classroom, and engaging with Métis community members to teach in a way that reinforces Métis language, culture, histories, and knowledges, educators can create culturally responsive educational spaces that reflect youth experiences and understandings.

This chapter was a journey into the influences of hip hop culture through the stories of Michael, Jac-O, Bond, and Zedone. Using the metaphor of the sash, I began by sharing individual stories of each participant and their thoughts on the meaning of hip hop. The main body of the sash (and the main body of the chapter) explored the three themes that emerged in the research: finding a path (or identity exploration through hip hop), helping others find a path (or the community of hip hop), and hip hop as a connection to school. I wove the words of each participant together with supporting literature to demonstrate their connection to a larger body of scholarly work. All participants expressed how they felt excluded from their secondary school education and most participants did not complete their schooling despite having goals and dreams that would have benefited from a secondary diploma. They expressed the wish that schools could have connected them in more significant ways to their love of hip hop as a way to engage them and make school more meaningful. Other programs such as the High School for the Recording Arts have found ways to connect learners to their cultures and engage with schooling so that they can experience success.

What can educators learn from these youths' engagement? We can take away deeper understandings of the multiple ways in which hip hop culture impacts the lives of youth, and potential it has for increased engagement within education. The following final chapter presents my conclusions, and my recommendations for further research.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

I start thinking, how many souls hip-hop has affected
How many dead folks this art resurrected
How many nations this culture connected
Who am I to judge one's perspective?

from "The 6ᵗʰ Sense (Something You Feel)," (Common, 2000)

In this final chapter, I provide a summary of the study by reiterating the research

questions, theoretical framework, and methods that guided this work. I discuss métissage as a

methodology for exploring the significance of hip hop culture for Métis student education, share

the conclusions that I drew from the findings of this study, and finally offer recommendations for

further research.

Summary of the Study

In doing this study, I set out to explore the impacts that being involved in hip hop culture,

particularly the creation of hip hop, can have for the Métis young adult participants from Ontario

and Manitoba. My purpose was guided by gaps in the research literature on the use of hip hop for

education and identity exploration, in particular in regards to Métis youth as hip hop artists in

Canada. To explore Métis youth artists' engagement with hip hop and what they gained from it

and extend to how it might connect to schooling, I asked the following research questions:

1. What influences do hip hop culture and hip hop pedagogies offer Métis youth?

2. How might hip hop culture and pedagogy influence educational goals and paths for Métis
   youth?

3. In what ways can hip hop stimulate and rejuvenate Métis education?

To explore these questions, I used a Freirean theoretical frame and approached my thesis

research as an exercise in praxis, with a focus on open communication with the participants

throughout the gathering and analyzing of data. I combined this theoretical framework with a

methodology of Indigenous métissage, which requires the integration of stories and data and exploration of these texts relationally (Donald, 2009).

Indigenous métissage enabled me to use the metaphor of the sash to braid together the stories of my participants to come to new understandings and challenge long held beliefs about Indigenous peoples in Canada, particularly Métis (Donald, 2009; Lowan-Trudeau, 2012). One central tenet of Indigenous métissage is that of "collaboration and collective authorship" (Donald, 2009, p. 9), which mirrors both my stylistic intentions as well as the nature of hip hop. Regardless of whether someone is mixing beats, creating graffiti art, beatboxing or rapping, collaboration between artists is a driving force of hip hop.

Many artists are inspired by works that have come before and pay homage to these through sampling songs or adapting the style of someone who has come before (Alim, 2009a; Stavrias, 2005). Through rap battles, artists build off one another and create an experience for the audience that would not be the same as other artist collaborations (Wang, 2010). Rap battles call for collaboration not just between the artists but also create "ripples, relationships, and movement within the performers and an audience" (Lashua & Fox, 2006, p. 274). The culture of hip hop "encourages its constituents to reflect and act upon their realities" (Rodríguez, 2009, p. 22). This collaboration is not linked only to the expression of style, but the cultural context as well. Hip hop is "boundary-less" and has its own way of communicating, "including the spoken word, the body, the dance, the gesture, the music, graffiti, and all forms of linguistic and extra-linguistic expressions" (Ibrahim, 2017, p. 103). In this way, I extend the boundaries and expressive literacies of hip hop to schooling and its literacies, as participants suggested how the mainstream learning environment of schooling might acknowledge their Métis identities and their connections to hip hop.

Indeed, Donald (2009) explains that métissage has come to "denote cultural mixing or the hybridization of identities as a result of colonialism and transcultural influences" (p. 7). The inclusion of influences from across the hip hop diaspora and the intrinsic locality of hip hop culture can be accounted for within this hybridization of identities. Indigenous métissage recognizes that there is often "specific cultural, spiritual, and social significance" attached to place for Indigenous peoples, which other Canadians "in those place[s] do not and cannot have those same connections" (Donald, 2009, p. 10). It is fitting that Métis and other Indigenous folks would see potential within hip hop to express themselves, as hip hop originated from Black culture which was also strongly affected by colonialism, slavery, and racism.

The participants were selected through purposeful sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) by posting in Facebook groups and reaching out to hip hop artists who I knew. This sampling was also done as part of an Indigenous métissage framework by connecting to participants through relationships and community. I reached out to Métis community members I knew, from the president of the Métis Nation of Ontario Youth Council to others closer to home who shared my intent with individuals they knew. I also owe a great debt to Jeff Bromley who shared my research intent with his large hip hop network in Winnipeg. Two of the participants, Zedone and Bond, came from Jeff's post. They are both graffiti artists and Zedone also creates hip hop music. Jac-O is a beatboxer from Ontario who I was able to reach through my participation in Métis Nation of Ontario youth Facebook groups. The final, and youngest, participant was Michael, a budding rapper and youth exploring his Métis identity in Ontario. Data was collected through interviews with participants; most participants also shared photographs, songs, and lyrics, some of which have also been included in Chapter Four above. It was important to me that the interviews were conversational instead of scripted, both to facilitate a mutual understanding

of the research as well as create a relational learning environment (Donald, 2009; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). I recorded and transcribed the interviews before sending them back to each participant to allow them to check for accuracy and add any thoughts that may have come up after the fact. I coded the transcripts manually and determined the themes discussed. These themes also were brought back to the participants who then gave feedback as to the relevancy of the themes.

Another pillar of intention in this research was to maintain the integrity of the shared stories in the research. Due to some remaining tendencies in academe to privilege quantitative or scientific Western thought and ongoing colonial logics, personal stories are often distilled or segregated as transcript excerpts into themes, losing the individual voice, tone, embodiment, or intention (Donald, Glanfield, & Sterenberg, 2011; Metallic & Seiler, 2009; Simpson, 2001). The excerpts were often short, but they were kept with the person who shared them instead of being integrated within the theme and lost from the participants' contexts. I intentionally used a braid to ensure that I could always see each individual's story. Throughout my Métis research process, individual voices were maintained and honoured and participants were given multiple opportunities to examine the words being attributed to them and request changes if desired. I also endeavoured to use lyrics and photographs as well as the participants' own words in order to more accurately or authentically show what the participants meant instead of solely presenting my own interpretations. Personal integrity is deeply important to hip hop as it is important in Indigenous research, and I hope that my participants will feel their voices were heard and amplified authentically in this thesis.

I introduced the four participants by sharing a little about their background and their own descriptions of what hip hop was, along with images they shared. In my writing, I used the

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metaphor of the sash to blend the stories of my participants together with my own interpretive lens in order to create a shared, braided understanding. Through the analysis of the data, three themes emerged. The first theme was finding a path (or identity exploration through hip hop). Significantly, all participants identified with hip hop. As I noted earlier, Restoule (2000) describes identifying as "a process of being and becoming what one is in the moment" (p. 103). For these young Metis men, identifying includes acknowledging relational traditions from their communities (trappin') while forging contemporary relational expressions through hip hop techniques (rappin') that expresses a unique identity (Buffam, 2011; Lashua, 2006; Lashua & Fox, 2006; Wang, 2010). The participants each shared his story of getting into trouble at a younger age but coming to find themselves and their identifications at least in part through their participation in hip hop culture. They each gained an ethos of hard work and dedication to the craft, which is transferable to many areas of their lives.

The second theme was helping others find a path or the community of hip hop. The participants shared stories of building community through hip hop culture engagement. Hip hop gave them an entry point to facilitate creating relationships and connections with others, whether new acquaintances or others involved in the hip hop community in their city or province. Community-building for the participants did not end at joining people together, but also included the need to mentor and help shape younger artists within the community and encouraging a move away from damage-centred hip hop texts towards ones that uplift and benefit the community.

The last theme that emerged was using hip hop to connect to school. The participants did not find themselves reflected in their own classrooms and struggled to connect with the material and their educators. When one of the participants attempted to utilize hip hop texts via hand drawn graffiti on paper, for example, his teacher did not allow him to submit it for the

assignment. Participants did not suggest that hip hop be involved in every class, but they did envision ways in which educators could have included hip hop, from being able to submit rap lyrics in lieu of other assignments or simply providing context to skills that were being taught to show that they would be applicable in other areas of their lives outside of schooling.

As the ending tassels of the sash, the participants shared individual examples of skills that had been learned through engagement in hip hop culture. These skills are ones that, as educators, we hope to pass to our students, but perhaps hip hop pedagogies were not the way that many of we educators initially envision. Michael shared how he gained self-confidence and a deeper understanding of how to tell stories as well as built community for himself through hip hop. Jac-O highlighted the collaborative skills that he obtained through hip hop culture, including learning how to work with a variety of different people and trying to build each of them up as they, in turn, helped to build him up as well. He also learned many skills that would be beneficial in an entrepreneurial endeavour. Bond echoed these thoughts, and shared his journey towards seeking consistent self-improvement and growth. Zedone gained similar skills from his experiences within hip hop culture and placed a strong emphasis on self-improvement and integrity. Through speaking with these hip hop heads and conducting this research, I have come to the conclusion that hip hop has had a positive and productive influence and outcome on their lives.

Conclusions: Answering the Research Questions

In these final paragraphs, I will address the research questions that inspired this study. The first research question asked: What influences do hip hop culture and hip hop pedagogies offer Métis youth? It is evident from discussions with all four participants that hip hop culture offered new ways to increase their self-esteem, build community, and strengthen relationships. Hip hop is a "critical cultural movement" that contributes to "supporting cultural and spiritual

connectedness; resisting and critiquing peoples, spaces, and systems that promote fragmentation and divisiveness; and fighting (literally) for a peaceful, restorative, and humanizing existence – a movement towards self-actualization" (Bridges, 2011, p. 327). Hip hop offers a language for self-expression, and a medium with which to express and work through emotion, positive and negative, safely. It makes sense, then, that hip hop pedagogies also provide culturally responsive spaces in which to explore emotion, self-expression, and literacies.

At their core, hip hop pedagogies run counter to the mainstream acceptance of the formal education system and, by extension, Western knowledge, as the pinnacle of intellectual achievement. By validating the lived experiences of students, hip hop pedagogies do more than encourage engagement in education. Hip hop pedagogies are driven by youth and allow students to see their reality as valued and valuable and as a valid form of literacy with which to critically engage. Compare the level of engagement in students at the High School for the Recording Arts to that of the participants in this study whose experiences in school call to mind Freire's (2000) concept of the banking model of education, with students seen as empty and waiting to be filled with knowledge by the teacher with little thought given to the knowledge and experiences that they bring to the classroom. The banking model is another example of cognitive imperialism at work by expecting students to abandon their experiences and knowledges in favour of assimilating to the dominant experiences and knowledges (Battiste, 2005a).

Educators must instead allow students "to recognize [them]selves in an educational context where what is taught becomes relevant; to name [their] world" and feel ownership and investment in the world they live in (Ibrahim, 2017, p. 109). We can begin by encouraging the "linguistic, literacy, and liberatory potential evident in youth … [through] centralizing students' lives in an effort to reconceptualise the purposes and possibilities of public education" (Alim,

2011, p. 134). Through their own execution of hip hop pedagogies, the participants safely explored parts of themselves they were discovering and developed skills that offer benefits in areas beyond hip hop. These skills and discoveries were made with a community of like-minded artists, and hip hop allowed strong, healthy relationships to be built in unfamiliar places.

Métis scholars, though, have not said much about Métis education and hip hop. It is clear from the stories and experiences shared by the participants that we can make a strong connection between Métis education and hip hop pedagogies. While not all Métis students may connect with it, hip hop culture provides a culturally responsive space for students to explore their identities and their literacies. Michael envisioned being able to submit rap lyrics in lieu of a paper in university as a genre he more deeply connected. Zedone used hip hop culture to share his knowledge and experiences with younger artists and to encourage them to share their own stories in return. Bond likened graffiti to literature and saw the value of words selected for their impact and strategic placement. Jac-O could not find his place within the school system, but demonstrated exceptional skill and perseverance in his pursuit of success in beatboxing. These are just a few examples from the study, but it is clear that extending hip hop pedagogies in to the educational system would have provided more opportunities for these Métis youths to thrive in academic settings, and presumably this would hold true for other Métis youth.

This observation, then, leads me to the second research question: How might hip hop culture and pedagogy influence educational goals and paths for Métis youth? It would be hard to argue that a positive self-image and connection to others would not have a positive effect on educational goals. Recall that three of the participants did not feel a connection to school and did not complete high school at all, while the fourth participant did not enjoy it. Youth like Michael, Jac-O, Zedone, and Bond do not easily buy in to the education system, seeing the only benefit to

engaging with mainstream educational discourses as "making the rest of us less uncomfortable with them" (Raspberry, 2005, p. A17) by sacrificing their culture and identity in favour of an identity that is more easily consumable. When Bond tried to engage his love of graffiti in a school art assignment by submitting graffiti designs on paper, he was quickly dismissed by his teacher and had to abandon advocating for that part of his identity in favour of producing more traditional educational assignments. Providing a connection to the educational experience that allowed students to explore hip hop and spend time learning through creation and dissemination of their own hip hop texts may have allowed Jac-O, Bond, and Zedone to see a purpose for high school that suited their learning.

Without seeing their own identities reflected in the educational system, the participants had a difficult time finding meaning in the system. It was not just their interest in hip hop that was not reflected, but Métis voices and stories as well. It is important in Métis education to hear Métis stories and to hear them often. Through this repeated hearing of stories, the listener "learns different things each time the story is told … Through this process of living and hearing sacred stories listeners learn who they are so they can become all they were meant to be" (Iseke-Barnes, 2003, p. 219). Dion's (2012) findings that teachers are uncomfortable presenting Métis worldviews to students and that these views are under-represented contradicts the idea of Métis students having the opportunity to become all they were meant to be. Teachers' discomfort is compounded by "a lack of awareness of Métis history and no real engagement with contemporary Métis people or culture" (Kearns & Anuik, 2015, p. 7). A lack of comfort leads to educators turning teaching of Indigenous issues over to Indigenous colleagues or, conversely, assuming the role of expert and attempting to teach cultures and histories they do not understand (Kearns & Anuik, 2015).

A shift in the dominant narrative of the educational system away from privileging Western knowledge could only positively influence Métis students as well as other Indigenous or marginalized students throughout the country. In Chapter Two, I discussed the appeal that hip hop has to multiple marginalized communities. While there may be differences in experiences between Métis youth and First Nations youth, or even differences amongst Métis youth because of where people come from and their connections to place, culture, and identity, all of these experiences are part of the larger body of Indigenous hip hop and have connections to Black hip hop as a form of resistance or talk back to repression. The participants came from different places and had different levels of connection to their Métis roots, but found commonality within the realm of hip hop culture.

The final research question asked: In what ways can hip hop stimulate and rejuvenate Métis education? While most curriculum re-embeds and re-centres White values at the forefront of all educational experience – curriculum content, teaching methods, school structures, and success measures (Alim, 2009b; Baszile, 2009; Rodríguez, 2009) – hip hop rejects the centring and dominance of Whiteness and privileges non-Whiteness instead (Potter, 1995). By involving hip hop creation and consumption in a substantial way within the education system, such as in the way that schools like HSRA have done, there is potential to reach Métis youth who struggle to connect to or thrive within mainstream education systems. The creation of educational spaces where Métis students can engage critically with the cultural context of mainstream schooling would be a means of achieving, as Akom (2009) said earlier, a space for "transformative education" (p. 63), which I described in this thesis as an educational experience that disrupts internalized bias and challenges students with alternative points of view. Indigenous students

who find it difficult to succeed within the mainstream education system often excel in alternative educational environments (Morgan & Warren, 2011).

The Métis young adult participants of this study exemplify this idea of excelling in alternative educational environments. They showed their dedication to their craft and might have shown the same dedication to an educational experience that had better represented them. Curriculum that responds to Métis youth and their lived experience can better serve these students (Akom, 2009; Baszile, 2009; Ibrahim, 2016). There is also potential through curriculum for educators to connect to youth identity and identifying, particularly those youth who struggle to connect to their Métis community since they cannot see themselves reflected in the jigging and fiddle playing that often symbolize Métis culture, as Michael mentioned.

In discussing Indigenous place-based learning, Friedel (2011) asserts that it is time to "move beyond the colonially-imposed binaries of rural/urban, past/future, nature/society, primitive/modern" (p. 537) that are imposed on Indigenous youth. It is important to acknowledge all youth expressions of Métis culture as valid and true, instead of only accepting those that fit with a colonial narrative. By maintaining the notion that there is one authentic way to be a Métis person, we effectively alienate youth from their communities and themselves (Friedel, 2011; Parent, 2011). This separation from community and culture creates a false barrier between Métis students and literacies that are meaningful to them.

To re-iterate, Ibrahim (2017) states, "literacy must be Intimate, Lived, and Liberatory" (p. 109), which I connect to spaces created for Métis youth to explore their world and create their own understandings of literacy and educational success. We, as Métis people, can use hip hop culture through the framework of Indigenous métissage to "more deeply understand how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other" (Donald, 2009, p. 6) and

come to shared understandings about not only our community but about the ongoing and lasting impacts of imperialism and colonial growth in what is now Canada.

Lastly, there is room within the context of how we teach and value literacy to include hip hop pedagogies. Through dismantling the systems that uphold White, Eurocentric literacy as the pinnacle of achievement and instead choosing to integrate other worldviews and other types of literacy, we will create a learning environment that is a place for Indigenous youth to thrive (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

Recommendations for Practice and Further Research

This research has shown me the potential to contribute new findings or demonstrate areas that are lacking within the existing literature on education. Research done by Indigenous researchers with and for (not on) Indigenous hip hop artists is still needed. There are scholars like Jarrett Martineau who explore decolonization through Indigenous art, including at times Indigenous hip hop, but a larger body of work is needed. There are a limited number of existing studies (Adjapong & Emdin, 2015; Gorlewski & Porfilio, 2012; Lashua and Fox, 2007; Seidel, 2011), that have contributed to our understandings of what hip hop pedagogies can look like in practice, including sharing success stories from institutions like HSRA. Rodríguez (2009) has explored hip hop pedagogies in teacher education programs and shown that there is potential for great connections to be made between students and their teachers if the teachers participate authentically in hip hop culture.

Yet, there is virtually no application of hip hop knowledge for Métis students at either the secondary or the post-secondary level. KRS-One said in the song "Why": "Tell me why all the schools they fallin' apart and why the youth not taking no musical art, why the professionals really don't know where to start, no one really cares about why" (2001). When we re-imagine

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education systems without all the relevant information and without asking *why*, the solutions will never be sufficient, as solutions without context cannot adequately respond to community and individual needs. As the participants suggested, the solution is not for every teacher to pick up a hip hop text and attempt to convince students the material matters as much to them as it does to the students. A starting point might be the facilitation of interactions in educational settings with authentic creators of hip hop texts rather than dropping in a lesson about a rap verse as poetry, and allowing the creation or consumption of hip hop texts to take a meaningful place in curriculum. The inclusion of hip hop pedagogies may have provided these four young Métis men with a connection to learning and community that they did not find in the school system.

Hip hop pedagogies are also important because of the ongoing debate surrounding what literacy (and illiteracy) means. Educators must shift the value that is placed on Western ideas of literacy and school success and instead choose to value other ways of knowing and being in the world. Educators can achieve this in several ways, including the exploring, understanding, and implementing of Métis education, the upholding of a desire-based framework of education, and meeting students with the literacies that they already bring to the classroom. Such changes could have made a huge difference for these, and likely other, Métis students.

My research explored the stories of four young Métis men who identify with hip hop and helped to form communities through their passion for hip hop. Participants mostly eschewed their secondary schooling experiences, instead gaining skills more informally, through a life long learning approach that allowed them to thrive in the world of hip hop. In turn, they offer a gift from their own learning: they recommend how educators might foster forms of literacy that are not often validated within the traditional education system. Their stories remind us that there is not one homogenous Métis identity and that if we are to better serve Métis students, alternative

discourses must be explored and considered. Again, this does not mean that every teacher should attempt to learn how to rap and introduce a morning cipher before class begins in an attempt to inject hip hop into the classroom. Instead, I suggest that educators facilitate the inclusion of perspectives and community members with whom their students would connect and learn from, and to accept Métis students' ways of knowing and being as valid within the context of the classroom.

I also recommend that researchers expand on my exploratory research to further investigate the potentiality of hip hop pedagogies in schools and the benefits that a school designed around critical engagement with hip hop creation and consumptions could offer Métis students. The experiences of these four young Métis men will not be representative of the experience of all Métis men across the country, nor of Métis women (whether in the same locations or not). If this study were extended to other regions and included the purposeful sampling of Métis women, it would have added further depth and breadth. Women within the hip hop industry (like women in all fields) often have a different experience and have more complex relationships with hip hop due to the misogyny that exists throughout the country and indeed throughout the world.

No matter how many participants and locations are involved, there will always be Métis community members whose experiences do not fit within this paradigm as there is no singular, essentialized Métis identity, as shown earlier in the literature review. Collectively, the participants highlighted the importance of relationship and collaboration, and shared stories of culture. Understanding some of the multiple identities and ways of identifying that these men expressed will help educators to serve Métis youth in ways that emerge from their identities and identifications. This study serves as a starting point for bringing our understandings of hip hop

and Métis culture and education together to discover the "whys" so we together we can shift the conversation forward to creating more equitable and relevant solutions for Métis students in our lives, schools and classrooms.

Coming Full Circle

Just as I started this thesis with my own story, I will end my research with my own story. As I explained earlier, I have been an avid hip hop fan for most of my life. I did not experience the same disconnection from or difficulties with the education system. While I was very lucky and attended an elementary school that brought in elders, including my stepfather, to speak on Indigenous issues, in middle and high school, my feelings started to shift. I was not comfortable expressing my Métis identity and often only publicly identified with my father's Irish side. Many of my peers had ideas about Indigenous peoples that were based in racist stereotypes and the only lesson I can recall even mentioning Métis people was a discussion about Louis Riel and whether or not he was sane. Despite these barriers, I was fairly successful in school and have gone on to do well in university.

Even if my participants and I do not share the same disconnection from the education system, I nonetheless find it easy to empathize with their experiences and visualize alternative solutions. I credit this ability to my understandings of hip hop culture, which has shaped my views of legitimate knowledge from a very early age. I have had years of practice defending hip hop from naysaying family members and, later, peers and colleagues. There may be flaws in hip hop as a whole, but no genre of music is entirely without patriarchal overtones, misogyny, and homophobia. I choose to focus instead on the vivid storytelling, contagious rhythms, and stark honesty that imbue hip hop music and hip hop culture. In my work as an academic, as an educator, as a curriculum developer, and most importantly, as a community member, I carry the

lesson from hip hop culture that reminds us that all ways of learning and knowing are valid, valuable, and important. I urge other educators to take this same lesson to heart and both apply it in their work with Métis youth as well as let the valuing of other knowledge systems permeate all aspects of teaching. Marsi.

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Appendix I: Letter of Support from President of MNOYC

October 31, 2014

To the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board,

I am writing to give my enthusiastic support of the thesis research regarding hip hop and Metis youth proposed by Lucy Fowler.

Lucy Fowler approached me with her research concept at the end of September. I am the elected Youth Representative on the Provisional Council of the Metis Nation of Ontario (PCMNO) and I sit on the Metis Nation of Ontario Youth Council (MNOYC). I have worked with Lucy over the past few years in her paid and volunteer positions at the Metis Nation of Ontario and she is a valued member of our community.

The youth of the Metis Nation have always been a priority for the PCMNO and MNOYC. I believe Lucy's proposed research will greatly benefit our Metis youth and lend credibility to a newer form of Metis art practiced by these youth. Additionally, Lucy has offered to create, as an act of reciprocity, a document for the MNO highlighting the achievements of any MNO youth that choose to participate in this research and in this document.

In conclusion, I whole heartedly support Lucy's research and I will offer support to her throughout her research in any way I can.

Sincerely,

Mitchell Case- President- Metis Nation of Ontario Youth Council

[signature]

Appendix II: Invitation to Participate

Lakehead
UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Education

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Lucy Fowler and I am a Métis graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University. I would like to invite you to participate in my thesis research project called "Breaking down the walls: Hip hop culture for Metis youths' educational engagement. It asks how can Métis Hip Hop influence Education? I will be examining the works of Métis hip hop artists (rappers, DJs, graffiti artists, et cetera). The purpose of this project is to learn whether there are lessons we can take from hip hop to enhance the educational experiences for Métis students.

If you choose to participate in this project, I will arrange a time and place that are convenient for you for an audio-recorded interview, which will last about an hour. During the interview, I would like to learn about the type of hip hop that you create. The interview will be open-ended, guided by some main ideas, with plenty of room for the conversation to be guided by your thoughts. The Youth Representative on the Provisional Council of the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) is aware of and supports this research study. MNO will receive a summary of the research, and you may request a copy as well.

I do not foresee any risks to you as a participant in this study. All research will be confidential, with participants' identities anonymous, unless you prefer to use your name. You have the ability to withdraw your consent at any time, without penalty and you may choose not to answer any question during the interview. There is a potential, perceived conflict of interest, as I am a Métis student myself. I see this as a chance to

work with other Métis young adults and adults. All data collected will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office and that only I can access while the research is being completed. If I need guidance, the only person with whom I will share your data is my supervisor. The electronic and hard data will be stored in my supervisor's office in a password-protected file and a locked cabinet respectively for five years after my thesis has been completed.

Please feel free to contact me by telephone (204---------) or by email (lhfowler@lakeheadu.ca). You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Leisa Desmoulins, by telephone (807-----------) or email (ldesmoul@lakeheadu.ca). The Lakehead University Research Ethics Board has approved this study. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team please contact Rebecca Scott at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8933 or research@lakeheadu.ca.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,
Lucy Fowler

Appendix III: Participant Consent Form

Lakehead
UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Education

Participant Consent Form

I have read the cover letter outlining Lucy Fowler's Master's in Education research study and I understand and agree with the following:

- This research study has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board and is consistent with Lakehead University's Ethics Procedures.
- I have the right to withdraw from this research project at any time.
- If I wish, my contributions will remain anonymous and confidential, with pseudonyms used in all transcriptions, other data collected and the report.
- There are no foreseen risks to the community or to myself.
- The benefits to you may include: showing your work to other Metis young adults through Metis Nation of Ontario (MNO) communications such as newsletters and contributing to hip hop ways of knowing for other young adults.
- The data will be securely stored at all times; by myself during the study and by my supervisor, Leisa Desmoulins, for five years after the study is completed.
- I will receive a transcript of my interview to check for errors or omissions.
- The data provided will be stored securely at Lakehead University for a minimum of five years after research is completed.
- There will be a report of the research results available to all participants and available in the Faculty of Education Library at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay.

I, _____,

☐ agree   or   ☐ do not agree

to participate in this study (please check one).

I would like to remain anonymous in this study.

☐ Yes, I would like to be anonymous.

☐ No, my name and potentially identifying markers may be used.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Appendix IV: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Main Research Questions

1)   What influences do hip hop culture offer Métis students?

2)   Can hip hop culture and pedagogy positively influence educational goals and aspirations for Métis students?

3)   In what ways can hip hop stimulate Métis education?

The interviews will be semi-structured, covering three broad themes with participants: 1) hip hop culture and influences identified by the participant, 2) personal goals and aspirations and construction of success, and 3) experiences with education as well as suggestions for making schooling more relevant for the participant in particular and Métis students in general.

Hip Hop

1. Tell me about when you were first introduced to hip hop (music, art, dance, etc).
2. When and how did you first start creating your own hip hop (music, art, etc)?
3. How do you see yourself continuing to create hip hop texts in the future?
4. What influences has hip hop had on your life (specific artists, themes, creation of hip hop, connections to self/school/community, etc)?

Personal Success

1. Could you tell me the story of an achievement in your life that you are proud of?
2. Has anyone in your life helped you to achieve success?
          If yes: Who is that person? How did they help you to achieve
          success? If no: where did the inspiration come from?
3. Tell me about what you see yourself succeeding in in the future. What does that

look like?

Educational Experiences

1. How was your school experience?
2. If there was anything you could change about school, what would it be?
3. Imagine that you could connect your hip hop experiences to your school experiences. Can you tell me how you might do that?