

IT'S IN THE MIX: CREATING EQUITABLE WRITING PRACTICES WITHIN A HIP
HOP PEDAGOGY

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a Major in Rhetoric and Composition
May 2023

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2023

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DEDICATION

This thesis would not exist without the strength of my family. My mother and father, Cynthia and Guillermo Soto, have been my biggest supporters throughout all of my academic and professional endeavors. When I felt there was nothing more I could give to what the world demanded of me, they offered themselves. Mom and Dad, I can never repay you for everything you have done for me, but your sacrifices and hard work live through me. I also dedicate this thesis to Karen Chuang who has invested as much time and energy into this process as I have. Every moment I have devoted to writing has been time spent apart from each other, and I know those moments have felt unbearable. Thank you for giving me the time and space to complete this work. Without your patience, resolve, and unselfishness, I could not have finished. I love you all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must first acknowledge Dr. Wilson who encouraged me to follow my passions when writing. Throughout the research process, there was never a moment when Dr. Wilson was not there to help and guide me. Dr. Jackson was the first professor whom I met within the MARC program at Texas State, and she helped me realize my scholarly potential as an educator. The impetus for this thesis emerged from Dr. Leake's History of Rhetoric course and inspired me to consider the rhetorical value of the Hip Hop deejay. Throughout my time in the MARC program, I spent several nights learning from these professors after teaching all day in my own classroom. They were always kind, welcoming, and generous with their time and knowledge. I am grateful to have them comprise my thesis committee.

As an educator, I must also acknowledge the teachers whom I have been honored to work with throughout my career thus far. To my co-conspirators: Dawn Houser, we have truly taught through immeasurable circumstances. Amid the most doubtful moments, your spirit has been my reassurance. Crystal Kelley, your passion for disruption strengthens my confidence to keep pushing the boundaries of what teaching and learning can be. To every student I have ever taught, thank you for teaching me how you learn.

Cory DeBoest, was it fate? I am thankful our paths crossed when they did. I imagine many students undergo this process alone. At times the work can feel isolating, but I am fortunate to have shared this experience with you. Each has a power. Each has a purpose, and together we faced the adventure!

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: Schools Where We Learn

Throughout the chorus of “What Goes Around,” NAS fires a sharp criticism at the public education system: “Schools where I learned they should be burned. It is poison” (2001). NAS then proceeds to weave together a broad criticism of America’s shortcomings, forcing listeners to weigh their experiences against his testimony. Although not the same word-for-word critique, I have encountered students who express similar feelings in classrooms where I’ve taught. NAS presents a scenario educators might consider more deeply. Are schools poisoning students? By what means? If we were to demolish the educational system, how would we reconstruct educational spaces to provide a more equitable system?

In my experiences, forcing students into standardized modes of thinking and writing creates a toxic environment, against which educators seek means to fight. Tests such as the STAAR, SAT, or TSI communicate to students that exemplary writing consists of a specific word, line, or paragraph count; a perfunctory thesis statement and conclusion; predictable elements of composition such as body paragraphs and page formatting that follow acronyms or formulas.

Adapting their instruction to meet standardized goals, educators risk communicating to students a narrow concept of exemplary writing and, significantly, a limiting idea of the writing process. Regulating student writing in this fashion risks student opportunities to grow as writers by restricting their creativity, media, and the processes that guide their inventiveness. It *is* poison. Yet instructional practices that favor standardized models of writing and formulaic thinking—such as five paragraph essays

that follow a straight path from thesis to conclusion—are common across multiple content areas.

As a twelfth-grade English teacher, I have felt the demands of standardization weigh down the processes I have imparted to my students. Over the years, I have come to recognize excessive reliance on teaching practices that cater to standardized composition can, unintentionally, jeopardize student learning. In *Pedagogy of The Oppressed*, Paulo Freire insists, “any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence” and “to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects” (85). Janet Emig also warns that formulaic processes leave little room for student decision-making throughout their writing. Moreover, she warns, “because [English Teachers] have no direct experience composing . . . they underconceptualize the process of composing” (98).

Although it is appropriate to consider the teacher as the expert writer in the classroom, Emig asks us to reflect on our practices. I do not mean to say English teachers have poor concepts of writing as the experts in their classrooms. But I do contend that writing challenges students face in our classrooms may result from the teacher’s concept and treatment of composition under the thumb of standardization. Educators tempt alienation, creating environments where students might willingly “accept their ignorance . . . justifying the teacher’s existence” (Freire72). Exploring new writing practices that move beyond linear models of thinking and writing, teachers can work to increase student success.

In this thesis, I am arguing that one of those new writing practices should involve treating performances of Hip Hop culture as a praxis from which we may frame our teaching, even when (or especially when) working within standardized education.

My research embraces the remix culture and multimodal landscape surrounding young people. I recognize the deejay as a composer within this culture who offers a collection of practices that warrants more consideration inside writing classrooms. Though in my experiences as a teacher, writing often devolves into formulaic processes that respond to standardization and ignore the creative potential of teachers and students. This rejection invites oppressive writing spaces and practices to form within the classroom. Tying the creative process solely to alphabetic composition turns writing into a static act. Teachers and students position their relationships and identities to this act as they understand, define, and display what writing is, what it means to be a writer, and what a writer is not.

Using action research in my own classroom, I investigate—to what degree—both teachers and students can disrupt these potentially oppressive contexts. Relying on compositional techniques of the deejay, I evaluate the instructional effectiveness of a re-imagined writing process. I offer this knowledge to educators who desire to break the banking model of education while also aligning my research to the growing field of Hip Hop Pedagogy. Freire insists: “To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation” (47). My research endeavors to bring about new situations inside writing classrooms that support equitable learning through transformative practices.

Critical pedagogy will be the lens through which I analyze and interpret my research findings. I recognize the remix culture of Hip Hop both provides an opportunity for the critical reflection a Freirean approach necessitates and places writing back into the hands of youthful practitioners who possess the skills and technology to redefine what successful writing processes include. Relying both on my experiences as a teacher and a deejay, I aspire to once more position young people as innovators who can express themselves in new ways throughout this research project.

Literature Review

Critical Pedagogy

Andrew Armitage explains, “for Freire, problematization is the first step of critical pedagogy using dialogue to demystify a problem in order to challenge taken for granted knowledge” (3). My research also originates with this first step as I problematize the instructional practices and learning spaces that have emerged within my classroom throughout my career. Heeding Armitage’s call, my interrogation aims “to destabilise and question deep rooted disciplinary knowledge” and to generate “disagreement, doubts, and discussion” that stimulate “a process of consciousness mobilization” (3).

Thus, Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* will shape my development of a critically disruptive writing practice rooted in Hip Hop culture. In particular, I consider the experiences I have encountered in my own classroom with Freirean pedagogy that “makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed” (48). Of special interest to my research is Freire’s banking concept of education wherein “the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (72). Freire tells us the realization of oppression “corresponds to the

dialectical relation between the subjective and the objective. Only in this interdependence is an authentic praxis possible, without which it is impossible” (51). Would students care more about their writing if they recognized how an educational system can work to suffocate their writing potential? How could educators alter their instructional practices to bring about this realization?

I do acknowledge the controversy attached to the liberatory thinking of critical pedagogy. Maxine Hairston describes the tendency of English classrooms to become “a vehicle for such social crusades” by “concentrating on issues rather than on craft or critical thinking” (185). Hairston further charges “all topics in a writing class should be serious ones that push students to think” while “students develop best as writers when they can write about something they care about” (189). I question what happens when matters such as craft, process, and writing instruction are the issues driving socially unjust systems that oppress students. Educators must problematize their instructional experiences to make possible the critical thinking Hairston petitions.

Henry Giroux offers a counterargument to Hairston, noting that “traditional writing instruction has been dominated by a number of powerful but misleading assumptions that have reduced the teaching of writing to a largely procedural, parochial, and namely, technocratic pedagogy” (291). Here Giroux illustrates the oppressive relationship between standardization and instruction which educators have been conditioned to accept and rarely question. I maintain the banking concept of education is a product of this relationship that educators must problematize to evolve their craft.

A.J. Tierney offers one way that teachers may implement a critical pedagogy by developing a *dialogical-based classroom*. Tierney explains that “within that frame, we

are responsible for creating a structure in which dialogical exchange can be productive and liberating” (89). Tierney continues, “I have re-shifted my approach with students with respect to negotiating the construction of syllabi and assignments, [and] have looked to the students in establishing class norms” (89). While I have practiced similar arrangements with my students, I aim to extend this dialogical exchange to include the practices and performances of Hip Hop culture as a means to reconsider assumptions about standardized knowledge and performance.

Hip Hop-Based Pedagogy

A. A. Akom coins the praxis that emerges when blending Critical Pedagogy and Hip Hop as Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (CHHP). According to Akom, CHHP “attempts to address deep-rooted ideologies to social inequalities” and theorizes “to what extent hip hop can be used as a tool for social justice in teacher education and beyond” (1).

Contemplating the emergence of oppression inside the classroom, Akom contends Freire provides the foundation for a theory of democratic, student-centered schooling. Where Tierney urges that “we must create spaces that encourage students to connect with the curriculum in ways that include their past and current experiences” (88), Akom bolsters such action: “transformative education for the poor and disempowered begins with the creation of pedagogic spaces where marginalized youth become aware of how their own experiences have been shaped by larger social institutions” (56).

The *problem posing method* figures heavily in Akom’s CHHP to bring about a critical consciousness. Freire claims we must pose the “present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response—not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action” (95-6). Akom uses this method in two ways. To promote

socio-political engagement, he poses students with Hip Hop-related issues. Second, students use Hip Hop to educate the general public about community issues. David Stovall also relies on the problem-posing method during instruction “based on critical inquiry” (48) while using “hip-hop as [a] text to be problematized, critiqued, and discussed” (47). Within a dialogical-based classroom, problem posing thus becomes a tool for the critical reflection of both teachers and students seeking to create equitable learning spaces.

Social Justice Education outlines the deeper implications of a Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy. A teacher’s decision to implement Hip Hop into any classroom should function more than a novelty or surface level compromise to merely keep students entertained before introducing the “real” learning students will engage. Doing so ignores the cultural significance of Hip Hop and its defiant spirit. Marcella Runell, therefore, offers educators three “layers” to consider when practicing Hip-Hop education. One, all Hip Hop education should be grounded and contextualized in the belief that our society is characterized by oppression. Two, using popular culture to reach students is Freirean in nature, and is in effect a critical pedagogy. Three, educators must comprehend the various uses of Hip-Hop in education (60).

She offers the reminder that oppression exists individually, culturally, and institutionally. My research recognizes that strict adherence to standardized writing practices is a catalyst for institutionalized oppression. Additionally, I follow Runell’s third suggestion that to further develop a Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy, educators must continue to reflect and comprehend the various uses of Hip Hop in education. My consideration of deejay performance within Hip Hop culture, as it relates to composition,

follows her charge.

Runell further admits, “Hip-Hop does not provide all the answers but is a place to start meeting the needs of students who long to be affirmed in a genuine way” (54).

Likewise, my research does not intend to solve all the problems existing within writing classrooms, yet I believe deejaying does provide a dynamic space both for teachers and students to learn and create while confronting the institutional oppression Runell acknowledges. Although deejaying, as one element of Hip Hop, has received little attention within the sphere of CHHP, I maintain that it provides a means for CHHP to approach writing more critically and sidestep the risk of becoming an educational cliché.

Remixing Composition

Caroline Bergvall questions “the range and scope of materials available to writing and how this range may affect the very idea of writing” (89). This consideration stems from the relationship of rhetoric and writing to new technologies. Whereas the nineteenth century saw a shift in attention regarding the delivery of rhetoric and writing—from the body and performance to text production—the evolution of new technologies during the twentieth century spurred the re-centering of the body and performance within writing.

Re-centering the body’s position in the writing process, Andrea Lunsford pushes for more expansive definitions of writing to include a secondary literacy that is “both highly inflected by oral forms, structures and rhythms . . . [while] understood as variously organized and mediated systems of signification” (7). Along with expanding the definitions of writing, Lunsford entreats “a flexible critical vocabulary” to accompany “a catalog of the writing” with the “rhetorical situations that call for amplified, performative, and embodied discourse of many different kinds” (8). From memeification to mashing

communicative modes in TikTok, this secondary literacy is characteristic of writing cultures students bring with them to the classroom.

Deejaying offers an extensive contribution to Lunsford's request. Accompanied by its own unique lexicon of techniques, the deejay invites an audience into a discursive act where constant feedback and communication shapes a composition. Responding to different situations, the deejay may favor one set of communicative techniques and technologies over others. The digital technologies (mixers, controllers, turntables) and processes that accompany deejay performances, moreover, contribute to a rhetoric of Hip Hop that includes reconfiguring the use of those technologies to transform language into new meanings through a physical performance.

Take for instance Mr. Switch's winning performance at the 2014 DMC World Championship (2014). Switch introduces himself by stitching together different samples before repurposing the line "I'm the king of rock" in a manner that suggests *he* is the king of the competition. Although this composition does not make it onto a page, Switch's performance responds to the moment (the final DMC battle). Just as a speaker would shape his or her syntax when responding to a rhetorical situation, the more complex Switch's delivery of the sample's language corresponds to demands of his setting and audience. For Adam Banks, "what was seen as the sign of a broken record or stylus, an unwelcome interruption in the continual march of a text, groove, history, became a purposeful interruption" (1).

As a protest against the socio-cultural hegemony affecting marginalized communities, the deejay was the original rhetor within Hip Hop culture who reimagined

the use of musical technology to communicate through a performance—the scratch—that relied on disruption. Geneva Smitherman adds:

Hiphop/rap culture is a resistance culture. Thus, rap music is not only a Black expressive cultural phenomenon; it is, at the same time, a resisting discourse, a set of communicative practices that constitute a text of resistance against White America's racism and its Eurocentric cultural dominance. (7)

With the same attitude, I treat deejaying: composition that develops meaning through a process that disrupts linear forms of communication to resist hegemonic discourse.

Therefore, I favor Lunsford's definition of writing as "a technology for creating conceptual frameworks and creating, sustaining, and *performing* lines of thought within those frameworks" (8). This interpretation asks educators to sample writing practices, such as deejaying, beyond the page.

Jason Palmeri's concept of writing aligns with Lunsford's, advocating for "a deeply multimodal thinking process that shares affinities with other forms of composing (visual, musical, spatial, gestural)" (25). Adding to this conversation, Sang describes New Literacies: writing that "extends beyond the conventional view of literacy as printed and written texts, and includes meaning making-practices using digital technologies" (16).

Remixing is one such (un)conventional meaning-making practice that helps extend the definition of writing for teachers and students. David Gunkel defines remix as "the practice of recombining preexisting media content . . . to fabricate new work" (xvii). In "Performance Writing," this definition aligns with Ric Allsopp's discussion of Patrice Pavis' discussion on *meaning*: "it is the interaction of signifying systems within

performance . . . that is offered to the spectator and that produces meaning” (79).

Discussing Hip Hop as a culturally relevant pedagogy, Gloria Ladson Billings reaffirms that students “live in a culture that is a mash up where pulling from other artists is a regular occurrence” (91). How remixing—a process rooted in Hip Hop culture—might function to create teaching opportunities that challenge potentially oppressive writing instruction is one of my concerns in this project.

Banks not only recognizes the creative potential this understanding of composition embraces, but he also acknowledges the necessity for students to learn and write in such a fashion: “from K to PhD, technology access, print literacies, and verbal skill all collide as requirements for even basic participation in an information-based, technology dependent economy and society” (5). Adopting a fixed view of composition as exclusive to alphabetic texts limits the potential for student writing to only one possible mode and restricts the communicative opportunities that Banks stresses are vital. Ignoring this reality is to deadlock teachers and students into an educational system that, as Runell says, “will undoubtedly serve to reproduce oppressive behaviors, and ultimately duplicate the various conditions that created it in the first place” (61).

Each approach I have listed here speaks to Lunsford’s definition of writing, a definition that acknowledges “utilizing signs and symbols, incorporating materials drawn from multiple sources, and taking advantage of the resources of a full range of media” (8). Remixing the concept of composition functions to problematize the writing process.

Performance Writing

While writing that stems from standardization (e.g., using formulas, acronyms, outlines to develop five paragraph essays, short answer responses, or analysis paragraphs)

is commonplace in ELA classrooms, when we force students to produce fixed artifacts, there is potential for this type of writing to inauthentically capture a student's thoughts or understandings during the writing process.

Donald Murray argues, "meaning is made through a series of almost instantaneous interactions" as writers undergo a writing process (15). These interactions include *collecting*, *connecting*, *writing*, and *reading*, which he interprets as "forces interact[ing] so fast that we are often unaware of their interaction or even their distinct existence" (19). Writers make meaning as they gain control of these interactions through a process of *rehearsing*, *drafting*, and *revising*. Although Murray deals only with textual composition, he captures the spontaneous disorder that occurs as writers attempt to focus organic meaning-making into a communicative artifact.

In the same vein as Murray, Blaine Smith addresses the shortcomings of linear writing models: "digital composition today is often multimodal, nonlinear, and interactive" and involves "new relationships . . . and ways of communicating" (259). Similarly, Jason Ranker's study of digital video production within an ELA classroom reveals "this multimedia composing space as interactive and nonlinear" (225). Ranker further explains, "meaning-making processes use various *semiotic resources* that are available within the social context in an ongoing process of producing and communicating meanings" (200).

Through the event of performance, John Hall problematizes the existence of textual products. He cites Derrida's notion of "trace" as "something left over from an earlier process. Contemporary recording equipment can retain an archival trace, in a form that the particular technology permits, of any act of language whether thought of as

writing or not” (358). Hall further grants that “the acts of reading and writing are live, and without those acts the written is no more than archived potential for renewed liveliness” (359). I apply the same line of reasoning to the mixing and remixing a deejay performs: a real-time process on display, never finalized, temporary, an assemblage of meaning understood best within the momentary event of composition that the audience witnesses. In this thesis, I will explore what happens to the compositional process when educators extend these same affordances to student writers.

To begin answering these questions, I draw on elements of Performance Writing and theory. Hall describes “the designation of the page as a particular kind of performance space, comparable to a stage or screen” (360). For deejays, the dance floor is one page where processes unfold spontaneously through an exchange of energy between audience and performer, resulting in an ephemeral product. Yet additional compositional processes, such as crate digging, occur before the performed mix. Performance Writing asks me to contemplate how educators might treat processes that may be instinctive or not always planned on paper. Alaric Sumner interprets the appeal of compositional events, rather than finalized artifacts, more directly: “the event is the piece” (82) while “performance fixes the text in event; the text is the unfixed” (85). These are interpretations of processes that I consider when disrupting standardized performances of writing and learning.

In “Itinerant Pages: The Page as Performance Space,” Allsopp considers the role of the page within performance: “the page is no longer (only) a bound(ed) space but an interactive and transforming space” (4). Pageworks are “sites of performance which demand an interactive or reciprocal engagement” (3). Documents separated from their

performances become problematic, yet these artifacts are exclusively used to measure student achievement. Acknowledging the idea that the text is an unfixed archive reliant on performance, I question the ability of the physical page to capture compositional processes and how teaching practices adapt to writing processes beyond the page.

D. Soyini Madison also explains that “we write from our body and we write through our body” (195). She goes on to detail the nature of *body knowledge* within performance as interpretive meaning filtered through bodily sensations. “Because these knowledges of the body are embedded with meanings that filter and guide our experiences . . . they will obviously inform and influence what we write” (195). This reasoning applies to the performance of deejays, and I inquire how compositional acts in my classroom, such as literary analysis, may develop when writers are physically involved in the texts they read, produce, and perform. Each element of Hip Hop—deejaying, emceeing, breakdancing, graffiti art—is physical. The deejay can neither separate the body from process nor composition from technology.

Moreover, The New London Group’s concern with the use of writing resources as a semiotic activity, “including using language to produce or consume texts” (74), further guides my evaluation of the physical elements of performance that disrupt standardized composition. Considering this semiotic nature, Blaine Smith observes, “modes are shaped by sociocultural factors that influence how they are employed in communication” (262). Here, the physical action of performance cannot dissociate from process as the manipulation of semiotic resources is necessary. Once more, Bergvall contends performance writing “explore[s] the kinds of relationship text-based work entertains when developed in conjunction with other media and other discourses” (88). Offering

that performance writing investigates the “performance of language,” Allsop adds to Bergvall’s rationale: “textual events are produced . . . through the impact of its material treatments . . . highlighting the great diversity of artistic and writerly practices” (78). This expanse of diversity within the writing process, subsequently, is the work of disruption my research aims to experiment with inside my classroom.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide my research:

1. Hip Hop education is grounded in the belief that oppression characterizes society. What instructional practices develop oppressive writing processes within the community of secondary English classrooms and how so?
2. To what degree does a Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy that targets writing processes informed by deejaying disrupt these oppressive experiences?
3. What limitations materialize when implementing multimodal writing instruction and practices within a system that supports institutionalized writing standards?

Methodology

Norissa Williams defines autoethnography as “a qualitative research methodology in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore their personal experience situated within wider cultural, political, historical, and social contexts” (1). As an insider studying their own practice, I reflect on events that have occurred throughout my nine years teaching twelfth grade students, paired with my participation in Hip Hop culture as a deejay. Williams adds, “in autoethnography, the researcher is a part of the culture and these insights serve to inform the study” (6). As “the researcher [who] is the subject

positioned *within* the cultural context” of my study (6), I will draw upon components of autoethnography to guide my research.

Memory and Experience as Autoethnographic Data

Chang equates personal memory as data: “you . . . as an autoethnographer . . . often rely on memory when collecting data” and “utilize memories as the primary source of data” (71). Chang further explains, “personal memory is a building block of autoethnography because the past gives a context to the present self and memory opens a door to the richness of the past” (71). Thus, personal memory serves as a form of data within my research. Although Williams notes, “there is no one way to collect data for an autoethnography” (8), Chang offers valuable methods to facilitate the collection of “textual data” from my past so that I may reflect on the socio-cultural implications of my professional experiences.

I implemented what Chang defines as *chronicling*: “a useful strategy through which you give a sequential order to bits of information you collect from memory” (73). I do so by creating an autobiographical timeline, arranged into two categories. The first being my early experiences when entering the teaching profession as a new teacher. The second being the events and experiences that evolved later in my career when implementing a Hip Hop-based approach to the writing process in my classroom. I use this arrangement to present two models of teaching for comparison. The routines and practices I consider as part of my writing instruction as a new teacher model what I call *domesticated teaching*, grounded in Freire’s banking method. Against domesticated teaching, I compare the deejay model of composition.

Additionally, Chang notes the role of *self observation* and *self reflection* within autoethnographic data. “Self-observational data record your actual behaviors, thoughts, and emotions as they occur in their natural contexts,” says Chang (90). The conditions of my profession do not allow time to record immediate self observation. However, self observation is a daily practice that informs my teaching moves and decisions. For this project, I recorded my experiences into a field journal for self reflection. For Chang, self reflection “gathers introspective data representing your present perspectives” (89-90). Journaling therefore served as a means for me to reflect upon and evaluate the teaching practices I discuss throughout my research.

Journaling

I organize my journal entries into four categories: Instructional Overview, Observation, Reflection, Evaluation and Analysis (see Appendix B-E). For each entry, I indicate the TEKS, objectives, and materials I used during instruction. I include two journals that recount my earlier experiences as a teacher, as well as two journals I reference when discussing my implementation of deejay practices. Within my journals, I follow Murray’s position that “we can also interview . . . ourselves about what is happening when writing is happening,” for “if we attend to such available testimony, we may be able to speculate, with some authority, on how writing finds its own meaning” (15). My reflections offered me the means to understand what was happening when writing was happening in my classroom. For each reflection, I consider three questions:

- Why was the strategy selected to address the standard?
- Using the strategy, how did students perform their knowledge?
- What limitations or benefits did the strategy create?

Reflecting on such questions facilitated my examination of the events that transpired as students underwent meaning-making processes during specific lessons.

I also located instances in which concepts from Freire's critical pedagogy developed, such as the banking method. At the same time, I balanced these considerations with compositional events that disrupted “banking conditions” as students made meaning with their writing. Within these potential disruptions, I analyzed instances where my instructional practices succeeded, coupled with the moments when my instruction was ineffective. I did this in order to conceptualize how equitable writing experiences function within a Hip Hop-based pedagogy.

Lastly, I pinpointed the specific use of deejay concepts and techniques within my instruction as I taught the writing process. Reflecting on questions such as, “What limitations or benefits did the strategy create?” guided my analysis when determining the usefulness of certain deejay skills and techniques during writing processes. Moreover, I utilized the evidence of my analysis to determine which concepts and techniques lent themselves to practical use for other educators who may be unfamiliar with these approaches.

Research Limitations

Despite the dynamic occurrences possible when remixing composition, Emig poses a pivotal issue within my research: planning. Teachers find themselves in a fragile dilemma when planning writing assignments. “If the teacher’s part is extensive . . . the part a student plays in his own planning is diminished” or “If the teacher sets too many of the variables for a piece of writing . . . some students feel too confined by the limitations to write ‘well’” but “if the teacher does not specify enough variables . . . the task may

daunt at least some students by its ambiguity or by its degrees of freedom” (39).

Although she focuses on text-based composition, Emig underlines obstacles that the dynamism of multimodality could amplify. Too much influence on student writing may impede creativity.

Murray’s advancement that “the writing process is a process of writing finding its own meaning” (16) can also become problematic when students, who have been conditioned to compose textually, attempt to transfer those skills across other modalities. Jennifer S. Dail and Nick Thompson admit as much when asking students to create multimodal remixes of themes from books read in their classes. The pair write “that complexity is why we . . . gave students detailed help in planning to turn their intent into a product” (41). Additionally, I cannot completely remove alphabetic writing from my own teaching while still preparing my students for benchmarks and standardized writing my district mandates.

Chang also notes that, “Memory is not always a friend . . . it is sometimes a foe. It often reveals partial truth and is sometimes unreliable and unpredictable. Memory selects, shapes, limits, and distorts the past” (72). With these ideas in mind, I do recognize that reference to my earlier teaching experiences can potentially fall prey to similar circumstances. Yet my current teaching practices and the research I include within this project cannot be separate from my time spent as a new teacher. Without the memory of my earlier experiences, I would not currently have the informed decision to conceptualize and theorize on the practices I attempt as part of my thesis.

In Chapter Two, I will discuss my teaching experiences prior to introducing a Hip Hop pedagogy into my classroom. In Chapter Three, I will discuss my experiences after I

began using the practices and performances of the Hip Hop deejay as a model to inform writing instruction within ELA classrooms. Specifically, I combine the text-based writing process Murray defines with the creative processes of deejays to develop writing practices that educators may consider implementing in their own teaching. These practices include crate digging as rehearsal and mixing as drafting. During my discussion of these practices, I include examples of how I applied them in my own classroom. In Chapter Four, I reflect on my processes and practices, offer considerations for further research, and conclude with a discussion on where my instructional decisions leave teachers seeking a similar approach.

CHAPTER II

Oppressive Learning Spaces: That's The (Classroom) Culture!

The first week of a new school year is ritualistic. The tradition of welcome back speeches, reviewing the syllabus, and get-to-know-you activities is predictable. Heading into the 2022-2023 school year, I chose to disrupt my first week routines. After introducing myself to each class, I placed a Numark DJ2GO2 DJ controller in front of my students, queued up the instrumental of The Notorious B.I.G.'s "Gimme the Loot," and proceeded to move through a series of random scratch patterns. Sliding the crossfader back-and-forth between B.I.G. and a sample I was cutting up, I took note of my students' reactions. As expected, the room erupted in disbelief. Some students aimed their phones in my direction and pressed record. Others nudged their friends with smiles and laughter. But some students slept with their faces planted firmly in their desks or were swiping through whatever was more interesting on their phones. These were the students with whom I was most interested. By next week, I would ask them to begin writing college application essays, yet I was already unable to gain their attention in a classroom where the rhythms and grooves of The Notorious B.I.G. reverberated off the walls. I learned more about the spirit of my classes in that moment than I had during any first week activity.

Freire reasons that oppression is domesticating: "one of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness" (51). Was there a population in my classroom that had already been domesticated or oppressed? If so, was there any way to reverse these conditions? In this chapter, I consider a problematic ELA classroom culture

that develops from an American tradition of standardized knowledge. I examine the ways this culture domesticates English teachers, their attitudes about the subject they teach, and the influence standardization has over their instructional practices. I conclude this chapter by reflecting on my time spent with students and the oppressive realities that impact their learning experiences within a standardized educational system.

Dehumanized Learning

In “The Heart Part 5,” Kendrick Lamar raps, “That’s the culture,” shortly followed by the lines “That’s the problem / Our foundation was trained to accept whatever follows / Dehumanized” (2022). The same can be said of the “English tradition” we present to students when we fail to validate diverse forms of thinking, learning, and expression. The traditions and foundations of our discipline is rarely—if ever—brought into discussions regarding the attitudes and interpretations we have about the subject we teach. Traditional literary systems, for Carolina Mirele and Werneque Jacomel, create an unequal distribution of power in society that restrain socially marginalized groups. Canonization, for example, works to standardize systems of values that uphold specific norms and ideas.

Livia Arndal Woods explains, “the Enlightenment period saw articulations of great literature as that which improves the reader morally” and the notion of the Great Tradition that “shape[d] the moral development of the modern individual” (3). For Charles Altieri, standardized literary systems fortify social roles that “play as selective memories of traditions or ideals” (37). Mirele and Jacomel continue to point out that in the 19th century, such a system would “have its meaning anchored in nationalism, promoting the works that best described the feeling for the nation” (4). The pair reach

further back into antiquity noting Alexandrian philologists selected literature for grammar schools that served as examples of “model writers” students should learn from.

“To Readers of CCC: Resolution on Language” recognizes this tradition. The Conference on College Composition and Communication traces the history of English studies back to colonial America. Settlers brought with them “social and political attitudes formed in the old world . . . so Americans sought to achieve linguistic marks of success as exemplified in what they regarded as proper, cultivated usage” (6). John Leonard adds to our educational history that “master[ing] the contents of the classical and vernacular texts, imitat[ing] the[ir] style, language and attitudes in them” was an enterprise that formed a “Christian gentleman’s” social persona (11).

John Warner further traces this history, explaining artifacts that display the mastery of these standards, such as the five-paragraph essay, “ha[ve] been linked to the Harvard entrance examinations of the late nineteenth century . . . [and] was a tool of convenience and standardization” (28). The Conference on College Composition and Communication further notes that “the dialect used by prestigious New England speakers early became the ‘standard’ the schools attempted to teach” and “during our own time, the dialect that style books encourage us to represent in writing” (6). Throughout my experiences, this foundation still thrives inside ELA classrooms.

The compositional works educators place before students, and ask them to (re)create, sustain ideals that reinforce a set of predetermined beliefs about student knowledge and performance. Standardized literary systems ignore diverse ways of thinking about education and the dynamic performance of student skills. Billings explains that we cannot reduce culture to tangible artifacts, for groups also create “cosmologies;

modes of thinking; world views and orientations towards knowledge, truth, and evidence.” (84) Educators must be keen on the system(s) in which they learned and now teach. To follow the homogenized traditions and history of “English” studies is to reinforce marginalization.

I have been to enough professional development and training to acknowledge that teachers understand “banking” is bad for students. We evade it, but as Freire notes, “the solution is not to ‘integrate’ them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become ‘beings for themselves’” (74). Too many educators—myself included—often stop short of this charge, unaware of our tendency towards structural integration. What good is adapting and reworking my approach to teaching an essay if I still demand my students write one, especially when I know a five-paragraph essay may not truly represent a student’s knowledge? While adapting my practices, I may have only achieved fitting a student into whatever model the educational structure deems correct.

Freire describes the overwhelming control oppression enacts: The banking concept of education is “based on a mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialized view of consciousness” and “it attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power” (77). Standardization is powerful and can work to augment the oppressive structure both students and teachers encounter at school. Within this space, Freire identifies a duality: oppression exists within a “dehumanizing totality affecting both the oppressors and those whom they oppress” (47). The oppressed are “at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized” (48).

I am suggesting that educators might also, unknowingly, be oppressed. I draw attention once more to the problems Billings and Lamar point out. Our educational foundation trains teachers to accept mechanistic orientations towards knowledge, truth, and evidence. These orientations intertwine with standards, creating an indistinguishable relationship. That's the culture. Consequently, teachers may "prefer the security of conformity with their state of unfreedom" (Freire 48).

Perhaps educators, too, have been so effectively domesticated by a static cosmology that we are unable to recognize the harmful effects of our praxis, its influences, and how it develops. Our attempt at rationalizing, or even dismissing the existence of such a narrative, Freire explains, creates a subjectivist perception: "a fact which is not denied but whose truths are rationalized loses its objective base. It . . . becomes a myth created in defense of the class perceiver" (52). Whether educators acknowledge or disregard these realities, the structures our discipline has assembled and reinforced over time can shape our perceptions regarding composition instruction.

In fact, I did not recognize my assimilation to an oppressive structure until I questioned the practices and educational experiences in my own classroom.

Domesticated Teachers

From the moment I began my path as a student intern, the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) informed my understanding of "successful" writing. Today, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) prescribes seven strands (units) for my English IV classes. Each strand addresses, to varying degrees, the interconnectedness of four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These domains inform the eleven TEKS that characterize the reading and writing happening at my grade level.

Within each TEK exists anywhere from one to ten skills teachers must address when planning instruction. New teacher candidates are left with a dizzying roadmap to follow.

My college professors made it clear that planning begins with standards, so we read from books that offered teachers best practices to reach any given TEK, and studied test guides that reviewed TEKS in sections to best prepare for licensure exams. Not once did I question the authorial agency of who was teaching me, the material I was learning, or the implementation of best practices.

As a student teacher, I was exposed to the neck-breaking speed at which teachers taught writing. What appeared most important was that students met standards using the quickest path to mastery within a fixed amount of time. Every student received the same lesson, the teacher assessed, and the class moved on to the next unit, repeating the same motions. In my first few years as an English teacher, this was the pattern I followed.

When I felt unsure about the content, models, and examples I would provide students, I relied on what I was taught in my classes as an undergraduate student. However, my university required me to complete a steady diet of canonized literature courses that followed the traditional literary systems aforementioned in this chapter's opening. I was domesticated, integrated into a structure of oppression, trained to accept whatever follows, and experiencing conflict in my classroom.

Sally Baker and Teresa Cremin examine the competing opposition teachers face when delivering writing instruction. The pair find that English teachers shift positions along a spectrum of two strands: the *institutional* and the *intrapersonal*. Their diagram outlines these concepts (See Figure 1):



Figure 1. “Baker and Cremin Diagram”

As their writing practices unfold, teachers experience varying degrees of emotional engagement, authorial agency, and personal authenticity. The institutional region of this spectrum is where academic expectations and tradition live. Standardization controls the performances occurring here. Educators who position their teaching in this region become, as Baker and Cremin label them, “products of the system” (20) and create classrooms that strengthen the mechanistic and static thinking of the banking method. This institutional space is also hegemonic territory, cultivating little opportunity for teacher experimentation with diverse approaches to composition—such as the practices existent within Hip Hop culture.

Leaving behind my pre-service experiences and entering teaching as a licensed professional, I was the “teacher-writer” who did not realize to what extent the institutionalized system of English studies had influenced me. Leaning heavily into my teacher-writer position, my approach to composition was stringent. I followed the hegemonic tradition that so many teachers before me relied upon to withstand the quick-paced, high-stakes environment in which they were also surviving.

I must acknowledge that the TEKS do acknowledge the recursive nature of writing. The Texas administration code indicates students should use “strategic organizational structures” as part of this process with the author’s craft consisting of specific steps: brainstorming, planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (2023). However, given the time limits, grading periods, and number of grades my school required me to follow, I was forced into the inauthentic teaching Baker and Cremin depict.

Deadlocked into an institutional writing practice, I sought out short-cuts and routines that scaffolded standards but not learning (see Appendix A-C). When writing, I would provide students with a designated time to list responses they might use to answer a prompt. In a linear fashion, I would then ask students to outline their responses, paralleling TEA’s call for strategic organizational structures. Students following the steps were now in a position to draft lifeless prose about an insignificant topic. Student writing looked just like their outlines with very little deviations, development, or growth.

To amend this situation, I performed write-alouds to model the writing process and help my students recognize that all writers struggle at one point or another. But due to an inability to move my teaching beyond an institutional position, I still faced the dilemma of writing to replicate an artifact that corresponded with a standardized model. My teaching became more dogmatic as I relied on pre-written drafts and writing samples that excluded process from the final product we studied.

Baker and Cremin explain that this type of practice “reduces the value of the demonstration, and allows the modeling of textual and linguistic features . . . to take precedence over modeling the complex recursive nature of writing or the pleasure in

making meaning” (3). Moreover, the two also find that “pressure to perform ‘set pieces’ is likely to further restrict teachers’ understanding of the process and experience of writing” (10). Thus, I became the discouraged teacher who cut corners and cultivated habits that disfigured my perception of writing. My frustration with writing centered more on why students could not demonstrate their ability to replicate the standards I was attempting to cover, instead of looking inward and questioning what I believed counted as evidence of their knowledge and the practices I used to extract it. That’s the culture.

Baker and Cremin’s study suggests, for teachers, “the accountability discourse which foregrounds the assessment of written products may have distorted professional understanding[s] of writing” (10). The pair also note that the pressures associated with performing “‘set pieces’ is likely to further restrict teachers’ understanding of the process and experience of writing and may hamper their expressions of identity and authentic involvement as writers, arguably reducing their efficacy in the classroom” (10). Here on display is the inhibition of creative power that Freire ascribes to the oppressed. Instead of addressing composition as an organic process, standardization works to domesticate teacher instruction

Adding to this discussion, Ros Fisher emphasizes rigid standards and formulaic writing creates environments in which schools value “correct but lifeless prose” (194). At the same time, Teresa Cremin notes, “the premium placed on tests and targets in the primary phase and the high levels of prescription have created short-cuts and inflexible routines that have constrained teacher creativity and reduced professional autonomy and artistry (416). Teachers find themselves struggling to make deposits on behalf of a mechanistic system. The teacher may be effective (or not) in cultivating practices that

generate favorable quantitative data but still fail students by perpetuating a standardized orientation of knowledge and evidence.

This atmosphere resembles my early experiences as a teacher. Rather than, as Murray describes, treating writing as “a process of interaction, not a series of logical steps” (5), my instruction adapted to an institutionalized position; a series of static practices that did not match my students’ needs.

Oppressed Students

What happens when students become trapped inside institutionalized learning spaces with their teachers? Giroux writes, “as an instrumental skill, writing is limited to a static concern with traditional rhetorical categories such as argument, exposition, narration, and grammar usage” (295). Giroux continues, “writing must be viewed as a dialectical process rather than an instrumental skill” as this “would not mean learning how to develop an instrumental delivery system, but . . . would mean learning how to think” (295). Thus, systems that place static measurements at the forefront of writing practices eliminate opportunities for students to realize and explore their intelligence.

The inability to recognize how I embodied the institutional ideology Giroux describes led to frustration with my classes. Students became apathetic, combative towards writing, and unable to focus for sustained periods of writing. Students believed they were not “good” writers; others passively submitted to formulaic scaffolds I pushed on them. I effectively suppressed any creative student potential that was brought into my classroom.

Reflecting on her time spent in school, Billings offers her experience: “For instance, when I began attending an integrated junior high school, I became less willing

to use my home language and mannerisms because it seemed to cause my middle-class, White classmates to exclude and sometimes ridicule me” (84). What Billings captures here are the circumstances and outcomes found within the dehumanizing totality of banking. Within such a structure, schools have the ability to limit access to the full range of student culture(s). Billings explains, “none of us have access to the full range of our culture(s), and we often are selective in when, where, and how we access it” (84).

Billings identifies two types of discourses students possess as culture-carriers. Primary discourse is a student’s home language. Secondary discourse is the language of school. I find Billings’ description of a secondary discourse similar to Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency—content specific, academic language. Although educators designate this term to emerging bilingual students, Billings compels us to reconsider how we interpret this concept and for which students. Exercising cultural competence within a culturally relevant pedagogy, Billings insists, students should have the ability “to be well grounded in their home culture(s) and fluent in at least one additional culture” (85). This grounding “includes knowledge of the history, traditions, values, and language of the home culture(s)” (85). When schools exclude a student’s primary discourse (culture) from the standards used to evaluate their knowledge, problem arise.

As an educator, I have often found the school system to be exclusively concerned with supporting students in their acquisition of the secondary discourse—the language of school. What we define as student success is merely how well students emulate academia’s standardized knowledge and truth. “For many urban students, fluency in

another culture typically refers to being able to access the dominant culture, but it does not mean relinquishing or denigrating one's home culture," argues Billings (85).

However, the more effective I am at having students adopt the academic language of school, while moving them away from their primary discourse, the better I am able to document their academic success and growth in relation to the TEKS. In fact, a student's primary discourse often serves as the baseline from which to measure assimilation. Once more, this scenario speaks to Freire's warning regarding integration into structures of oppression.

When educators do the work of assimilation, we can most likely expect a number of issues to proliferate within our classrooms. Take for example my insistence on pushing outlines and formulated lists onto my early classes (see Appendix A-C). The way I treated writing caused some students to struggle in their attempt at mimicking prescriptive assignments. They were unable to complete their assignments. Other students would admit that the way they normally write did not match the process I was asking them to perform. Some groups in my classroom would simply choose not to write at all. In other moments, students would become unsettled, leading to outbursts during class and shifting my focus to regaining their attention instead of helping them with problems that kept them from writing.

In their own ways, my students fought back against the structure in which I was trying to place them. Perhaps they sensed better than I did the oppressive nature of my classroom. Lakia M. Scott and Elena M. Venegas describe the reality educators create when we ignore the primary discourses of our students: "schools emit and reproduce detrimental messages about minoritized cultures and communities" (22). The pair also

contend, “minority students begin to become disinterested in school, are more apt to drop out or are frankly pushed out because of a lack of culturally sensitive curriculum, instruction and assessment,” provoking a nosedive: “Low performance from students equates to low achievement for the school. Oftentimes, the district’s response is to close the school, which is even more detrimental . . . in lower-income neighborhoods” (22).

Cremin T. and Locke T. bring attention to another consequence of culturally irresponsible teaching that works against students: the teacher as authoritarian. “The institutional force of the teacher’s role as helper/disciplinarian” can ruin lessons, “drawing teachers away from an authentic engagement with their compositions” (109). Such positioning works to transform the teacher into the oppressor “whose tranquility rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it” (Freire 76). During these types of moments, I too found myself more preoccupied with enforcing standards and student submission. The need to physically control student behavior can turn moments of instruction into oppressive acts.

Scott and Venegas indicate yet another obstacle students face in the classroom: assessment. They postulate that “too often, schools are more concerned with assessing students’ English language proficiency rather than authentically assessing their current levels of understanding” (22). For instance, “Black students are at an immediate disadvantage because of the inherent cultural bias within assessments” (22). Fisher, too, recognizes in his study of students who were successful at exemplifying writing standards that “they were able to produce pieces of writing that would help them achieve good levels in national assessments” but questions “the extent to which they were independent

writers” (204). Overall, students “were being taught successfully to write school writing” (204).

Again, these conditions nod to Billings’ concern regarding knowledge and evidence. Within such a prescriptive system, Freire criticizes, “the methods for evaluating ‘knowledge’” create “distance between the teacher and the taught” (76). Ultimately, “this ready-to-wear approach serves to obviate thinking,” he explains (76). Even if students meet the standard(s), we are left questioning what they have really learned from our instruction. Are successful students those who simply learn how to internalize and replicate the language standards our discipline has mythologized? To begin challenging such structural oppression, teachers must move away from the institutionalized regions of their craft towards the intrapersonal.

Disrupting the Banking Method

Discussing concerns about lack of creativity and over-prescriptiveness in classrooms, Fisher concludes:

The key to success is not about what children are asked to do but how they are asked to do it . . . different teachers can mediate tasks in different ways and . . . the teacher’s attitude to literacy and learning is all-important in what lessons children learn (196).

I take Fisher’s suggestions as a means to disrupt the banking method. One, English teachers must examine their attitudes about knowledge and skills the standards have come to prescribe. Two, teachers must evaluate the cultural relevance of the practices they use to teach those standards. Three, teachers must question how they are asking students to represent their thinking. Doing this work enables educators to approach an

intrapersonal relationship, as Baker and Cremin describe, with their craft, teaching and composing “products for self” (20). Equity emerges in this space because experimentation and creativity controls knowledge performance. Here is where teachers seek the guidance of histories and cultures—such as Hip Hop—outside the standardized traditions that have characterized English classes.

Reflecting on the previously mentioned experiences I confronted early in my career, the attitudes and beliefs I held about writing followed what Webster et al. describe as older models of writing, concerned with “rule-descriptions, stages or skills, which have in turn spawned a wealth of suggestions on how to teach the mechanics of literacy through attention to basic skills or rule-performance” (144). This group also explains:

Teachers are unused to thinking about literacy as a set of interlocking systems. In one sense, literacy is a system of symbols for moving between spoken and written language codes. In another sense, literacy enables individuals to represent their ideas and to develop disembedded forms of thinking. (144)

I cannot help but imagine alternative possibilities of my earlier teaching experiences if I were taught from such a perspective. I question if my former teachers were even aware of writing process that could develop through the work of scholars such as Bergvall, Allsopp, or Billings (see Chapter One). How might my attitude about writing take shape guided by Lunsford’s interpretation “of a new rhetoric and writing as epistemic, performative, multivocal, multimodal, and multimediated” (8)? At the very least, I would have had access to diverse modes of thinking Billings urges educators consult to enact a culturally relevant pedagogy.

Just as Webster et al. mention the unusualness of teachers thinking about their discipline as a set of interlocking systems, examining our attitudes about the knowledge and skills we teach may be an uncomfortable experience overall. However, this undertaking is the problematization Freire demands, which allows me to reflect upon my teaching. Take for example, Lunsford's definition of writing as "a technology for creating conceptual frameworks and creating, sustaining, and *performing* lines of thought within those frameworks" (8). This definition has helped reorient my understanding of composition by expanding the modes, materials, and techniques available from a wide range of frameworks existing within the traditions of cultures beyond a standardized hegemony.

Such inquiry I have applied to my instructional practices. Murray cautions that "some teachers present each part of the writing process to their students in a prescriptive, sequential order, creating a new kind of terrifying rhetoric which 'teaches' well but 'learns' poorly" (15). Murray depicts the reality I faced but could neither recognize nor articulate until problematizing the structural underpinnings of my classroom. Murray continues to stress a process that includes "rehearsing, drafting, and revising, looking back and looking forward, and acting upon what is seen and heard during the backward sensing and forward sensing" (7). Pairing these concepts with a broader and more inclusive understanding of composition made possible an increasingly equitable vision of how I might alter my instructional practices.

To disrupt the banking method, teachers must also evaluate the cultural relevance of the practices they use to address standards. For instance, Yuan Sang's discussion of New Literacies: "it extends beyond the conventional view of literacy as printed and

written texts, and includes meaning-making practices using digital technologies . . . and explores the changes of beliefs towards literacy in the process of practices” (16). The Group further ideates the meaning-making processes of writing as a semiotic activity which can be useful to teachers. Within this activity is the concept of *Design* “a creative application and combination of conventions” (74). These conventions include *Available Designs*, the resources for *Design* such as images, discourse, styles, music, gestures, genres; *Designing*, shaping meaning as it emerges through re-presentation and recontextualization; and *The Redesigned*, the unique product that evolves from Designing.

Problematizing my own practice has allowed me to conceptualize meaning-making practices to be the processes utilized during compositional acts beyond demonstrating rule-performance. The New London Group’s treatment of Design both extends this interpretation while supporting Murray’s assertion of process as instantaneous interactions through their admission: “meaning-making is an active and dynamic process, and not something governed by static rules” (74).

Couple these concepts with the modes, materials, and techniques available from a wide range of cultures, and I gained creativity in my practices. I acquired the agency to seek out a culture such as Hip Hop, consider more deeply the compositional practices existent within the culture, and experiment with those practices to inform how I might alter my instruction to match the primary discourses students brought into class.

Such introspection further demanded I evaluate both what students use to represent their thinking and *how* they represent their thinking. Billings reminds us no one has access to the full range of our culture and are selective when, where, and how we

access it. Offering students a wider scope of available designs (images, discourse, styles, music, gestures, genres) gives back access to a full range of communication standardization often limits. However, as an educator, granting this access further required that I relinquish traditional beliefs that alphabetic text was the primary mode reflecting academic excellence and reason with the notion that, in reality, my students may have more compositional knowledge than I do when writing with diverse materials and practices they frequently encounter outside of school.

Sang adds, “New Literacies are more ‘participatory, collaborative, and distributed’ in nature, comparing to the ‘published, individuated, author-centric, and expert-dominated’ forms of conventional literacies” (17). So much writing that I required students to perform early in my career was isolating work. Entering the profession, the idea of collaborative composition was never a thought. Yet educators, myself included, fail to recognize that a majority of student writing taking place outside the classroom develops within a collaborative environment online with a vast array of participants; similar to the performance within Hip Hop culture. Comparable to cutting off access to available designs, teachers can effectively remove communicative pathways from students by confining compositional processes to a solitary act.

In “Performance Writing” Allsopp discusses the materiality of writing and the performative quality of the materials of writing:

by acknowledging that textual events are produced not only through a syntactical and semantic exploration of language but also through the impact of its material treatments, Performance Writing is highlighting the great diversity of artistic and writerly practices, both within and outside

established literary traditions, which rely on the use of text and textual elements. (78)

Allsop brings attention to the meaning that emerges through re-presentation and recontextualization (Designing) of available designs as students create a unique product (The Redesigned). Compositional processes will appear differently when students are working with materials that perform differently than alphabetic text (e.g., images, music, gestures). But again, this is the work Lunsford urges we address; an expansive definition of writing with a flexible vocabulary that accounts for performative and embodied discourse of many different kinds (see Chapter One).

CHAPTER III

The Hip Hop Deejay in the Classroom: Pressing Record

Brian Mooney argues that classrooms cannot “continue to narrowly replicate the European wing of the museum if we expect our students to find their learning relevant and engaging in the twenty-first century” (9). Midway through my career, I intentionally sought ways to dismantle the oppressive learning experiences in my classroom and disrupt the potential for mechanistic and static practices. Specifically, I began incorporating Hip Hop into my classes.

Although there is no guarantee that every student will have an attraction to Hip Hop culture, the students I have taught frequently name Hip Hop as their music of choice. Students regularly walk the halls adorning the culture’s latest trends, and I often find myself discussing musical releases from past and current artists with students. Hip Hop terminology shapes their language.

Just as Emdin imagines Hip Hop as text, I have used the writing of Common and Devin The Dude to teach literary elements such as personification and extended metaphor. I have paired J. Cole’s work with Gabriel García Márquez to explore themes across genres. When considering issues regarding social injustice, I have paired 2Pac’s writing with the poetry of Danez Smith. I have explored with my students the writing of Ta-Nehisi Coates through perspectives found in the music of Childish Gambino and Kendrick Lamar. In a greater attempt to explore the potential of Hip Hop in my classroom, I have also replaced novel studies with album studies: Kendrick Lamar’s *To Pimp a Butterfly* and Tyler The Creator’s *Flower Boy*. Although these past attempts lean

towards Hip Hop as content, my efforts now turn to extending Hip Hop pedagogy within writing classrooms.

Janet Emig asks, “When, if ever, have our secondary school teachers painted, sung, or sculpted under any academic auspices?” (98). I add deejaying to this question, for the process a deejay undergoes to perform a successful composition draws parallels to the act of alphabetic writing: gathering and sampling material, generating ideas, mixing disparate details into an original piece, engaging with audience feedback to determine appropriate moves when composing. Even when a deejay presses “record” without planning much, going off the edge, a process still unfolds: a semiotic activity acting upon what is seen and heard during a backward and forward sensing while the composition finds its own meaning.

In this chapter, I consider my approach to the writing process using the deejay as a model. I first align my concept of process with Donald Murray’s interpretation. During this discussion, I consider two specific elements of the writing process: rehearsing and drafting. I then include an example of how I (re)approached these interactions in my own classroom. In Chapter Four, I conclude with a reflection and discussion on my instructional practice.

Murray in Rotation

As previously discussed, teachers enter their classrooms with preconceived definitions and orientations towards composition and knowledge. To redesign my treatment of the writing process, I consider the relationship between Murray’s principles and the compositional process associated with deejaying. Again, Murray understands writing as a process of interactions instead of a series of logical steps that involves

rehearsing, drafting, and revising. Through this process, writing finds its meaning, but he warns that “a student might get the dangerous misconception that writers know the form before they know the content, that students know what they have to say before they say it” (24).

With these ideas in mind, I must briefly address the potential of misinterpreting my efforts as simply applying Murray’s methods to Hip Hop. Jeff Rice speaks on a “whatever process” within Hip Hop: the “‘take whatever you find and use it’ principle acts as the dominant force in sampling” (454). Additionally, Banks interprets the “DJ as [an] important bearer of black survival technology” (32); a technology that Joel Dinerstein explains “creates a forum for existential affirmation . . . against the dominant society’s attempts to eviscerate one’s individuality and cultural heritage” (22). Murray’s concepts, therefore, are played back through a technological tradition that resists erasure and supports a specific cultural heritage—Hip Hop. Assuming the role of a deejay who uses this technology as a foundation for praxis, I slide Murray’s concepts into the rotation of my mix because they are useful to my overall purpose of creating equitable learning experiences.

Crate Digging: Rehearsal

To expand the use of a Hip Hop pedagogy within writing classrooms, I draw a connection between the process of crate digging and rehearsal. In an interview with *Murder Dog Magazine*, DJ Screw describes a process that is both spontaneous and flexible, feeling his way through the mix as meaning takes shape:

Whatever comes to mind. I might take a beat from another song and make it sound like a re-mix. It's all type of shit, I just go off the edge. Don't none

of my tapes never be planned, I don't plan nothing. I just push "record" and whatever I do happens. Whatever I feel-I push "record" and put on my earphones, slap the records on the turntable and take it from there. (27)

Although his process may sound carefree at first glance, Screw puts into practice what, for text-based composers, Murray labels as *rehearsing*:

During this stage of the writing process the writer in the mind and on the page prepares himself or herself for writing before knowing for sure that there will be writing. There is a special awareness, a taking in of the writer's raw material of information, before it is clear how it will be used. (16)

In some instances, a deejay may approach the mix with a specific idea in mind, attempting to shape a specific concept or respond to a particular moment. Take for instance DJ Slim K's *Chop Apocalypse VIII* (2020)—an annual series mixed specifically for Halloween but especially haunting as it targets the unease of spending the holiday in quarantine that year. Slim K's programming (song selection), mixing, and narration undoubtedly spring from his intent to develop a specific composition.

Before stitching these mixes together, though, a survey of the raw material and the evaluation of its usefulness is still necessary. For the deejay, rehearsal may involve a number of different practices, rituals, or traditions. Crate digging is one universally accepted practice. To crate dig is to quite literally dig through crates of records, but it is more than just shopping for records. In *Hip-Hop Evolution*, Pete Rock explains the purposefulness of this technique: "We're always curious about credits like, 'Who's playing on this album?' Then you start looking for certain instruments, like sounds you

want . . . anything that had excitement . . . there's something on everything" (2019).

Digging is the cultivation of Murray's special awareness before the writer clearly understands how he or she will use the raw, unearthed material.

Rock further grants, "it depends on how you hear it" (2019). Identifying and locating useful material is only one aspect of a healthy crate-digging practice. Digging also requires purposeful and thoughtful meditation and reflection. In the same interview, Lord Finesse reveals, "the key was to come up with the most obscure loop, and I think the more you become enlightened, the more you start digging even more. You want other artists you've never heard of" (2019). Pete Rock continues, "As you dig, you learn" (2019).

Similarly, text-based writers who become invested with such a reflective process, move to experiment with their raw materials. Murray notes,

When it seems there will be writing, this absorption [of material] continues, but now there is time for experiments in meaning and form, for trying out voices, for beginning the process of play which is vital to making effective meaning. The writer welcomes unexpected relationships between pieces of information from voices never before heard in the writer's head. (16)

To achieve this effect, deejays, assuming a reader-like role, dedicate extended periods of time to play with the materials they gather. From time spent with their seemingly disparate pieces, as Rock and Finesse comment, learning emerges. Deeply contemplating a collection of materials, the deejay may consider unexpected relationships between pieces of information in their mind and act upon their discoveries.

The process of this deep contemplation is exclusively physical. Take for example the “breakdown section” of a record. The breakdown “was the part of the song where the musicians literally ‘broke it down’ to just the drums, or drums and bass,” explains Charnas (27). Early deejays such as Grandmaster Flash, after collecting sounds, would physically mark the breakdowns with crayons to easily access this material when constructing a mix. This act would later become the practice of setting cue marks. DJ Kool Herc would discover a way to extend breakdowns playing with multiple copies of one record: “as soon as the break section ended on the first, he’d start the second . . . turning a fifteen–or thirty–second breakdown into a three-, five-, or ten minute beat-down” (29). Although these interactions are digital today, common practices still include setting cue marks, scanning tracks for their bpm’s and keys, setting and organizing this gathered material based on such discovery.

Through their own digging, the progenitors of these practices took time to experiment with meanings and forms and would ultimately discover “a way to insert other voices in a text, to redirect one’s attention” (Banks 1-2). In doing so, deejays would create new spaces for marginalized voices to communicate their convictions, begetting additional forms of expression (e.g., emceeing, breakdancing). Moreover, a deejay such as Screw who “don’t plan nothing” and will “just push ‘record’” and “go off the edge” without doing any planning does not necessarily arise from nowhere. Because of the special awareness of his material, he can do “all type of shit” with confidence when composing.

In relation to Murray again, text-based writers must first establish a deep awareness for the materials they will use before experimenting with them to develop new

meaning in their writing. Unfortunately, teachers ask their students to show this type of process in graphic organizers or formulaic brainstorming—acts that are typically inseparable from the page. Bridging the relationship between crate digging and rehearsing works to create opportunities for students to become physical with the textual material a teacher asks them to consider as a means of performing the awareness that may unfold in the writer’s mind, while then moving to further explore potential relationships within material through play (discussed with more detail in subsequent sections below).

Mixing: Drafting

Adding to the use of a Hip Hop pedagogy within writing classrooms, I draw a connection between the process of mixing and drafting. For the deejay, mixing is drafting, and this performance can vary depending on purpose. Again, if I am creating a tangible artifact, such as a recorded mixtape that a listener will playback, the materials I use to mix may focus on developing a specific meaning, concepts, or ideas. I will rehearse, taking note of how effectively and creatively meaning spins out of my mix to achieve my final composition.

On the other hand, the purpose of my mixing will change when performing in front of a live audience where the goal will most likely be keeping bodies moving on the dancefloor. Explaining his early approach to mixing various drum solos from different records, Grandmaster Flash asked, “how can I take this 10-second part that I, personally, thought should be the whole entire record and . . . manually edit it and cut and paste it on time to the beat?” (Butler 2016). Explaining the purpose for his cutting and pasting, he comments that “the crowd would become more reactive” (Butler 2016) when extending

these 10-second drum solos. Here, the deejay responds to his physical environment and the energy reciprocating between himself and the audience.

For text-based writers, Murray finds that rehearsing, drafting, and revising “blend and overlap, but they are also distinct” (15). Murray distinguishes *drafting* as the central stage of the writing process, for “it implies the tentative nature of our written experiments in meaning. The writer drafts a piece of writing to find out what it might have to say. While the piece of writing is being drafted, that writing physically removes itself from the writer” (16). He further notes, during this act of separation, the writer is left yet again with new material, enabling “the most significant kind of rehearsal for the next draft” (16). This new rehearsal unfolds through *revising*: “The writer listens to see what is on the page, scans, moves in closely, uncaps the pen, slashes sections out, moves others around, adds new ones” (16).

Bridging the relationship between mixing and drafting asks educators to consider composition as a performative event that may occur off page (from rehearsal, to drafting, and revision). The overall event of the performance, as Sumner explains, becomes the piece (see Chapter One). The writing is live, ending with no perfect artifact. The blending of interactions Murray describes narrows the meaning-making process. Revision informs more rehearsal and drafting while writers shape their compositions. As the composition evolves, so do new discoveries, relationships, and meaning (discussed with more detail in subsequent sections below).

Crate Digging: Rehearsal in the Classroom

The first day of any writing unit, Murray says, “should begin with writing . . . [T]his beginning is . . . a symbolic gesture” (25). To begin writing, I would extend

students the opportunity to step behind the technology and try their hands at mixing and scratching (see Appendix D). After so many attempts, students would ask that I show them how to perform basic techniques. Murray suggests, “the teacher and student face the task of making meaning together” (24). Through my gesture, I entered the writing process with my students in a manner that was both lively and collaborative, which Freire deems necessary for the teacher: “His efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them” (75).

I was able to limit the initial stress I have witnessed over the years when students realize they will have to write. What students also did not recognize is that they were already engaging in the compositional process. The mode had just changed. In these moments, despite any anxiety that might unfold later, more students approached the writing process with a positive attitude. Much like a deejay responding to the crowd in the room, I directed their energy into the focus of our process. Just as for the deejay, this process begins with crate digging, before generating any ideas for writing, or working out what their writing might say, my students dug through the raw materials they would use to perform their writing process by considering our text more closely.

I implemented crate digging as a means to approach literary analysis. I first modeled the concept through technology. Take the following mix for example. By all appearances, A Tribe Called Quest and Toto have nothing in common. Yet nearly a minute into “Excursions” Q-Tip raps, “Listen to the rhymes, cuz its time to make gravy / If it moves your booty, then shake, shake it baby / All the way to Africa a.k.a. The Motherland / Stick out the left, then I’ll ask for the other hand” (1991). Displaying my

deejay software onto a touchscreen in my room, I marked a queue point in the track beginning at the line “All the way to Africa a.k.a. The Motherland” and proceeded to loop and scratch the line over the beat of Toto’s *Africa* before eventually mixing into lead singer David Paich’s iconic chorus.

The process required to perform this simple mix served as a teachable moment. In front of students was the digital crate I assembled before my lesson with the samples from Tribe and Toto I used to perform the mix. Reflecting on the samples, I asked my students a series of questions:

- What is the material saying?
- How is the material communicating ideas?
- How do the different materials connect?
- What ideas emerge when the materials are used together?

Students would later interact with these same questions throughout their process (primarily when drafting). The connection between these samples was obvious as I used them to ultimately achieve a simple play on words using the word “Africa.” However, to even recognize a connection between these pieces, I had to first collect my samples, reflect upon their intricacies, and then play with them to consider how they might work together. This was the process I then asked my students to perform to begin a literary analysis.

In my classroom, crate digging was not a free-for-all activity. In Table 1 (see Appendix F), I reference crate digging practices across ten different deejays from *Crate Diggers* interviews and develop what I call Guidelines for Crate Digging (see Appendix

G). On our classroom touchscreen, I displayed the following “guidelines” when searching for material:

1. Consider obvious material you can easily understand
2. Consider material you may not understand but makes you curious
3. Consider material that an audience may not believe is useful
4. Consider how the material is communicating ideas
5. Consider the amount of material needed to communicate an idea

To add focus to students’ crate digging, their goal was to identify details relating to characterization. In other lessons, I would change this directive to locating figurative language, setting, main ideas, concepts, or themes. Using these guidelines, students transitioned into their process, taking time to read closely and annotate for material that could potentially be useful later in their analysis. Having located their material, students then extracted and recorded these samples from the text into writers’ notebooks for further reflection (see Appendix D). As a teacher, my goal was to ensure students had enough material in their journals (crates) to reflect on as they moved forward in their writing processes, even if the material appeared ambiguous or was not robust at first.

To eliminate the threat of authoritarianism and alienating intellectualism that Freire warns against, I asked students to rely on their own inclinations and feelings when digging through a text because, as Pete Rock explains, it depends on how *you* understand it. At the same time, Murray claims “it is very hard for traditionally-trained teachers who are not writing themselves to believe that students can write without instruction from the teacher” (25). Similarly, students in my classroom were not committed to any specific written interpretation at this point in their process, but I believed students could make

their own conclusions about their writing materials when crate digging. In a sense, students were pressing “record” to see what would happen.

Students did not experience this interaction in complete isolation, either. Within multiliteracies theory, Jill M. Olthouse contends literacy is understood as “multimodal, situated, and having a social purpose” (247). Sang adds, “literacy is situated because literacy practices are different in different contexts” (17). Therefore, I sought to offer students as much interaction and collaboration during the rehearsal process. The jam session is one way I promoted this type of learning experience.

Jam Sessions: Rehearsal in the Classroom

Allowing students to collaborate in their search for material signaled what Murray sees as an integral part of the writing process: “that the information in the course will come from the student” (25). After gathering material, students had the opportunity to enter the productive dialogical exchange Tierney calls for (see Chapter One) and feel their way through a text before drafting. As mentioned, rehearsal–crate digging–makes way for additional performances, namely, the consideration of unexpected relationships between pieces of information. Exploring possible relationships from the material students gathered involved performances off page.

As previously discussed, early in my career, the majority of structuring and organizing ideas devolved into prescriptive outlines that adhered to a linear process. But now, just as deejays become physical with their gathered materials and take time to play, I introduced jam sessions once students gathered their material (see Appendix E).

Jamming, or the jam session, is a practice that gained notoriety as a process within jazz music and still exists within modern deejaying. In his examination of the jam

session, Ricardo F. Pinheiro classifies the jam session as a performative practice known for its informality. He acknowledges the concept of the jam session as “a way of experimenting with new musical ideas, [and] interacting with different musicians” (336). Jamming is instinctive and impulsive and adopts “behaviors that include disapproval expressions [that] can involve facial expressions or specific body movements” (337). Within these experimental sessions, Pinheiro explains, “jam sessions therefore encouraged techniques, procedures, attitudes . . . distinct from what was possible or acceptable in more public venues” (337). This is the “process of play” Murray describes during rehearsal.

Lawrence D. Nelson explains, “bringing one’s instrument to a jam session is a signal that indicates a willingness to perform; it also implies that the person is claiming to be capable of doing so competently” (98). This is the same gesture I sought to enable for my students. To enter a jam session, students had to come prepared with their crates in hand, and I accepted the role of a facilitator who trusts the creative power of their students.

Typically, this performance would take place in small groups (3-4 students). As a group, students would pull from their notebooks material they gathered from their digs. I would then give each student 2-4 notecards to record information they would contribute to the session. Once more, I displayed the remaining guidelines for crate digging:

6. Consider how different pieces of material might connect together
7. Consider different ways you can group and organize your material
8. Consider what ideas emerge when different material is used together
9. Consider combinations of material that might surprise an audience

10. Consider combinations of material that an audience might expect

From this point, students would work to organize their information into different meanings, concepts, themes or feelings they detected. As the teacher, I would set the purpose for what categories students would group and organize.

However, much as if in a jam session, students would add to a collaborative mix of meanings as they evolved through performance, discussion, and reflection. Just as quickly as students would connect materials to express some type of meaning, they would disconnect their material and sample new meanings, based on other connections they were able to make. This experience also created opportunities for students to communicate through their primary discourses, behaviors, and body movements within the collaborative social context Sang and Olthouse note during meaning-making processes.

The act of holding evidence in their hands, arranging the material, and reacting to their organizational patterns, made rehearsal a physical process. Students did not have to sit at their desks bound to a page where they had to document their process. Within these sessions, outlines did not exist. Prescription vanished. Other than setting general categories students considered, I did not force students into specific interpretations of their material.

As students settled on a general consensus of their efforts, I then reintroduced the guidelines for crate digging to discuss connections and discoveries they made in their sessions. To broaden the scope of jam sessions, I would take time for students to display their discoveries and interpretations around the class, similar to a gallery walk. The room became something like a dance floor. Students would make trips back and forth,

considering the work of other groups, making connections to their own work, and leaving their own commentary on the ideas of others.

Following these exchanges, I then asked students to write about the connections they pieced together. Here again is what Murray names a “process of play” as students tried out new voices to make meaning when considering a possible text. Through the textual relationships students formed with their material, they were able to make, consider, and interpret new meanings and ideas. Students brought their own rhythm to their writing.

Mixing: Drafting in the Classroom

Getting into the mix, without much planning, is like pressing “record” and listening to what unfolds. The mix finds its own meaning as deejays make connections across their collected material. Through crate digging, deejays approach the mix having developed an awareness of how their material could be used to communicate ideas, messages, and feelings when joined together but do not know for certain until putting them into rotation. This is the same attitude I imparted to my classes when drafting. Similar to Murray, I treated drafting as a tentative written experiment in meaning. Students brought the ideas emerging from the explorations, discoveries, and interpretations in their jam sessions to the drafting process. But before getting into the mix, I refer back to the decks.

DJ Candelstick’s *The Revolution Will Be Chopped* (2020) is an exemplary portrait of experimental meaning through performance. Confronting the tragedy of George Floyd’s passing, Candlestick pulls from a vast collection of materials that include speeches from Angela Davis, Dave Chapelle’s 8:46 performance denouncing Floyd’s

murder, audio samples from a eulogy given at Floyd's funeral, and narration by OG Ron C who speaks on social injustices. Encompassing both creative arrangement and the use of diverse material, the performance is masterful. Nowhere in the mix, though, does an officially explicit argument appear. Instead, the mix presents and explores a history of social unrest existing across the nation, before and after Floyd's passing, while also navigating a global pandemic.

Pat C. Hoy explains that we allow "students to get waylaid by theses and topic sentences instead of pausing to savor the twists and turns of the essayist's mind playing over rich material" (353). He adds, "a thesis keeps us on safer ground . . . but student writers usually situate themselves so far away from those subjects their essays sound like reports dispatched from other planets" (355). Instead, Hoy argues abandoning fixed theses and predictable writing, and recentering our focus on "good ideas, deeply grounded in curiosity and discovery" (355). Using Candelstick's mix as an example of how a composition can present and explore ideas through different materials, rather than following a thesis from introduction to conclusion, I rooted drafting in my classroom to multiple modes.

Students now possessed a healthy amount of considered material with a clearer understanding of how they might use that material to explore an *idea*. Again, I controlled the stimulus. Depending on the learning objective, though, the teacher may ask students to focus their analysis on the development of other concepts such as figurative language or themes.

Drafting was, as Hoy describes, "a playground where a free-wheeling mind could tame itself" (356). I asked students to write using the materials and considerations they

had collected through their process thus far and to follow the strength of ideas when they appeared. Just as Murray mentions, writing physically removes itself from the writer when drafting, making way for a new type of rehearsal (revising). Students now had original work available for their consideration. This occurrence made new opportunities to create additional jam sessions for revision, editing, leading to more focused drafting.

Remixing: Digital Composition in the Classroom

Nowhere in the writing process did I tell students they would develop an essay or that they were essaying. Instead, students engaged in a process that involved the consideration and reflection of material to generate and explore an idea, which included the use of alphabetic writing. However, the process in my classroom also involved remixing, so the textual artifact students produced when drafting turned into yet another piece of material to inform their compositional process. Erik Ellis proposes:

By blending such qualities of the print essay as its spirit of exploration and its embrace of ambivalence with new media such as digital video and audio, students can create complex, compelling multimedia essays that challenge and transcend conventional academic discourses. (38)

The “multimedia essay” Ellis describes follows the concepts Lunsford, Bergvall, Palmeri, and other scholars discuss regarding the definition of writing (see Chapter One). Much like Ellis’ suggestion, the written text is transformed from page to screen.

For their final composition, I gave students the following prompt: “Create a multimodal representation of the meaning and ideas explored in your writing.” This prompt seemed fairly general. I wanted students, again, to take control of their knowledge and determine how I should evaluate their work. To achieve this goal, I continued to rely

on a dialogical based classroom wherein the students and teacher work together to negotiate, create, and structure expectations.

Two sources supported our discussion. The first was Kirby Ferguson's *YouTube* series *Everything is a Remix* (2022) and Ferguson's description of the remix process wherein the creator copies, transforms, and (re)combines existing material. The second source was the "Remix Continuum" that Dail and Thompson developed when remixing with their own students (see Figure 2).

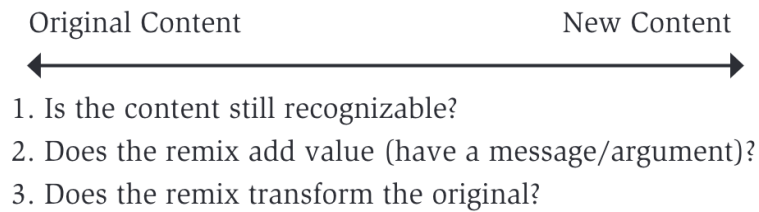


Figure 2. Remix Continuum

As a class, we agreed that remixed compositions should land somewhere in the middle of this continuum. Original content should be somewhat recognizable but used in a way that resembles creative effort. We defined "effort" as being partially explained through Dail and Thompson's second question: Does the remix add value?

We extended the ideas within this question due to my own issues as their teacher. I expressed my concern that I might be unable to discern connections they made in their digital compositions and their overall intent when using selected materials. It would be easy enough for someone to say "A equals B" and throw any type of material onto the screen. Therefore, we included two modifications to the assignment. One, students had to explain their decision-making process when selecting materials. Two, students had to explain how they transformed materials to communicate ideas from their original material. Students would provide these explanations in conversations with me about their remixes.

Students used *Canva* to create their remixes. I selected *Canva* based on Rice's Hip Hop approach of taking whatever you can find and using it—much like the approach of the deejay gathering whatever materials best fit the mix. The templates *Canva* offers are performative spaces in which a variety of available designs are at students' fingertips. Users have the option to embed audio, online videos, personal recordings and photos, text, playlists, links to other writing, and websites, to name a few. Additionally, the concept of reflecting on materials and considering how their relationships work to create meaning was not a foreign concept at this point in the writing process. Although students already had experience using *Canva*, I did need to review how some of the platform's basic settings worked.

Once more, students found themselves in a type of jam session. In this instance, however, nearly every type of material was at their disposal within a few keystrokes—swapping materials in and out of the screen, rehearsing, drafting, and revising blended and overlapped instantaneously. I gave students one week of full class periods to follow their creativity to see whatever happened, whatever came to mind, what they felt.

In Chapter Four, I reflect on the practices described here and my evaluation of student work that evolved from this compositional experience.

CHAPTER IV

Conclusion: If I Ruled the World

Throughout the course of “If I Ruled The World,” NAS asks listeners to imagine life if he ruled the world: “If I ruled the world, and everything in it, sky’s the limit” (1996). The irony is that he doesn’t. The schools and systems he admonishes in “What Goes Around” still exist despite his ambitions. There is no book, program, or class that supplies educators with strategies and lesson plans to take hold of their instruction as a deejay. I sampled from my experiences and participation in Hip Hop culture, my experiences as a teacher and deejay, and my knowledge of the compositional process when making this attempt. Much like a deejay, I gathered what I thought was the most useful material, put it into the mix, and pressed “record” to see what would happen. If I ruled the world, and everything in it, I would have every student behind their own dj controller, loaded with music, and they would spend entire class periods learning the technology, playing with samples, and forming a deeper relationship with the practice from which I was borrowing.

I cannot imagine, unfortunately, a school having funds for that type of learning experience. Nor can I imagine a system in which a school is able to completely eliminate all traces of standardization. Even though these shortcomings may exist, I still found moments of success when implementing writing practices informed by the Hip Hop deejay. This chapter includes my reflection on those practices and processes discussed in Chapter Three, considerations for further research, concluding with a discussion on where my instructional decisions leave teachers seeking a similar approach.

Reflection on Process and Practice

Addressing instruction from the cultural perspective of a Hip Hop deejay, for myself, feels comfortable. Long before I was a teacher, my passion to deejay followed me from the bedroom, to house parties, to local venues. For other teachers, my approach may be discomforting. I would remind teachers that “DJs must be intimately connected with their community, no matter what other communities they might have access to” (Banks 29). To teach is to rely on these connections in your own classroom, but teaching is never perfect.

Throughout my attempts at sampling from different deejay practices and techniques into a writing process, I cannot stress enough the importance of Billings’ discussion on culture and scholars such as Lunsford who call for more expansive definitions of writing. My approach asks educators to reorient their views and thinking regarding their subject and craft.

During my time researching this project, a teacher approached me, asking what I was doing in my classroom. Clarifying the explanation I provided, the teacher mocked deejay movements, asked how long I had been teaching, and said I was “cute” for what I was pursuing. The attitude of this teacher is why self-reflection is so important. The potential for any genuine use of Hip Hop in the classroom has little chance of survival without introspection because the tradition of fixed attitudes towards the “English tradition” are, unfortunately, so far embedded within the DNA of the subject we teach that we often fail to recognize our own domesticated practices.

Admittedly, I am passionate about both writing and deejaying, and I find the relationship between the two intriguing. For other teachers, though, packing a dj

controller into their bags as they prepare for work may be too far of a stretch. And to properly use the technology in front of any classroom would require hours of practice. However, educators can achieve much of the hands-on demonstrations I performed in front of my students through online videos. *YouTube* hosts a wide range of accounts dedicated to professional and amateur deejays who perform remixes, routines, and sets that educators can use as teaching material. In fact, because sometimes the technology I used in my classroom was not advanced enough to fully capture the ideas I wanted my students to absorb, I also used videos for practice demonstrations. Videos also served as an additional source for teaching inspiration as the Tribe and Toto mix originated from a Jazzy Jeff performance. Considering this reality that most educators find themselves in, I chose what I believed to be more practical approaches to teaching using the deejay as a model.

Implementing deejay technology into my classroom was an overall positive experience. Students were genuinely intrigued by what was happening. Anytime I brought my controller to class, I invited students to step up and give it a spin. In these moments, learning became less threatening and more fun. That said, there were always a few students who never looked up and were disinterested no matter what I did. I could not help but wonder if this collection of students had spent so much time alienated from the educational system that they believed school could be nothing other than oppressive. These were also seniors. They had already spent twelve or more years conditioned by a system that, more likely than not, followed a mechanistic, static, tradition of writing. I am still unsure how, by the time we met in their final year of school, how much of that consciousness I could truly help amend. Time and history were not on my side.

Framing lessons within the context of Hip Hop performances, such as crate digging, created opportunities to bring in materials I normally would have not considered during the earlier years of my teaching: videos of Pete Rock explaining the process and purpose of crate digging, footage from DMC winning deejays, and technology for example. These opportunities also created a space in which traditionally marginalized voices now became the writing experts. The gathering and reflection of materials is a process that extends beyond literary analysis as well. Billings, again, reminds us that students live in a mash up culture where pulling from diverse sources is commonplace.

Jam sessions were a pleasant surprise. The more I relied on these sessions, the more we were able to step outside a linear model of writing, and an organic alternative to the generation and structuring of ideas evolved. The exchange of ideas and moments around the classroom went beyond the practices I followed early in my career. Throughout the writing process, jam sessions created a space in which students did their most critical work. These sessions inspired all the conditions educators want to see in their classrooms: students were collaborating, sharing ideas, considering texts, manipulating text, deriving meaning, and developing their interpretation of materials.

Not all students thrived in these moments, though. Instances when jam sessions unraveled stemmed from students not having considered their material when crate digging, leaving them with little for their sessions. Other times, students struggled to simply lift material from a text. For example, my co-teach classes required additional support as many of these students experienced reading disabilities when working with larger texts. To accommodate these students, I would chunk material onto task cards that asked them to consider specific aspects of the text in order to alleviate the stress of

combing through a large body of work. From there, students would then be able to enter a jam session with informed contemplations about the material. In other instances, I provided additional support by entering students' small groups and discussing with them connections they were making amid their interpretations. Added benefits of this process included my ability to ask probing questions and have extended conversations under more manageable circumstances while checking for understanding as a formative assessment.

Remixing student compositions was an interaction that drifted farthest away from the security of "traditional" writing. This moment is where I believe teachers must deeply consider how they apply the term "remix" to assignments, and why they are asking students to remix. When putting technology into the hands of students, R. Lyle Skains indicates they "must develop explicit knowledge of their own new media and internalize this explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge in order to fully realize the narrative possibilities inherent in multimodal forms" (107).

Developing students' explicit knowledge to remix their writing proved to be somewhat troublesome. I chose to use *Canva* for "remixing" drafts because I knew many students were familiar with the platform. I also wanted students to use *Canva* because all students on my campus have access to the full suite as part of their school accounts. My district also issues laptops to every student. Of course, this is not true for every school or district. Teachers will find themselves facing equity issues when asking students to rework their writing using media that they cannot access. When remixing with their students, access became an issue for Dail and Thompson as students were essentially let loose to use any technology when composing final artifacts. Granted, the pair spent time

studying and analyzing the concept of remix to develop student knowledge and experience.

Initially, I believed students would have a better hand at remixing than alphabetic writing, but many students did not look forward to using *Canva*. Unfortunately, for some students, navigating *Canva* was difficult. The templates and media options the platform offers are staggering to new users. Additionally, I needed the ability to support students throughout their process and troubleshoot when they encountered technology issues. In a room of thirty students all using different forms of technology, my ability to help becomes limited.

At times I felt that I should have dedicated a similar amount of class time reviewing the creative potential of *Canva* as I did when rehearsing and drafting. Then again, teachers should question why they are asking their students to remix: is remixing an extension activity to compliment previous writing, or is it the actual process students are learning? The answer will vary depending on the teacher and writing assignment, but I find value in both uses of the remix in writing classrooms. My treatment of remixing leaned more towards process. I would also argue from the perspective of the deejay that it depends on how you use what you have.

When discussing the final remixes they made as part of their assessments, many students admitted they could not have remixed without writing first. Another recurring comment was that some students believed they could not communicate every idea in their alphabetic composition that they did in their digital composition. Either way, I believe some type of writing has to happen for students to deeply understand the communicative value and malleability of their materials. Teachers cannot supply students with images,

video, and audio, and expect students to instantaneously repurpose them in a cleverly meaningful way. Just as deejays need to sit with samples, listen deeply for what they might have to say, so do students with their materials. Consequently, I partially follow Ellis' reasoning that "the secret behind the compelling, idea-driven multimedia essays that my students often compose . . . is their knowledge of and experience writing the essay" (39).

I say partially because remix can only exist because some type of material anticipates the process. Remixable content and material must therefore be available to the remixer. In the case of English classrooms, that material is the alphabetic writing students initially develop, but that "something" does not necessarily have to be an essay. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, I did not call what we were doing in my class essaying, nor did I tell students that we were going to write essays. We simply wrote about what meanings we believed emerged when considering the relationships of our material. Students were writing to explore and make discoveries.

After drafting documents that functioned to shape an original idea, students "remixed" *that* piece of writing. However, I would use caution describing the writing that informed their remix as an essay. Murray would simply call this process drafting. In my classroom, I could interpret this writing as an outline for their true product, their remix (a multimedia essay). But I never specifically named their final artifact a "multimedia essay," as if attaching the word "essay" to their work would make it more powerful or meaningful. Ultimately, I asked students to create a multimodal *representation* of the meaning and ideas explored in their writing (drafting).

Assessment was also a legitimate concern when reaching the end of the composition process. Despite any effort I could ever employ to make my classroom practices equitable, the educational system requires that I formulate a numerical grade that represents a student's learning. I follow Murray's insistence that product cannot be inferred from process, and the process my students underwent was rich. Even though not all students' products could effectively capture the moments leading up to their remix, Murray, again, mentions that "we can also interview . . . our students and ourselves about what is happening when writing is happening" (14-15). Attending to these testimonies offers a means to speculate how a piece of writing finds its own meaning.

Thus, I navigated this issue by referencing Freire, and specifically through the use of a dialogical-based classroom. I communicated my concern to students regarding final grades, and we decided to discuss the remixes they created as part of a dialogical exchange. In doing so, I met with students on the day of their submissions, and I asked them to show me the decisions they made when constructing their remix. Much like the relationship between the deejay and a crowd, we entered the exchange. During these meetings, students had the opportunity to further clarify their decisions lest their products did not communicate the ideas they attempted to express with their materials. As the teacher, I was better able to assess their work and gain deeper insight into their remixed composition. Together, we negotiated what we believed was a fair grade based on the record of their process that was inscribed into their writing throughout the entirety of the compositional process.

Finalizing this experience, I question what is most important, the remix or the writing preceding the remix. The answer, I believe, is all of it. Regardless of how some

students struggled to create a final remixed product of their writing, they had considered their material more deeply, and produced a record of their process that captured the generation, experimentation, and exploration of ideas. They were also able to discuss their writing and reason with their efforts through a final performance. To refer back to Sumner, the event was the piece. The writing performances of students helped fix their texts within a series of events.

Some educators might say that my attempts were just good teaching practices. Yes, I made space for students to reflect on their material and consider how meaning took shape as their writing unfolded. Picturing a jam session as something like a writer's workshop is also a fair interpretation. The process was social and collaborative as students made meaning together, receiving feedback, and comparing their ideas against those of their peers. I also created opportunities for students to play a role in their final assessment. However, Hip Hop framed our learning experiences. We were not learning "English" through traditions that alienate students from meaning-making processes. We sought our answers and informed our practices through a culture that values youthful innovation and alternative means to develop and express ideas.

Considerations for Further Research

Runell is honest when discussing the use of Hip Hop in the classroom. Hip Hop "wasn't created to be neatly packaged for the educational system, so it is messy and often hard to work with" (61). True, there is not one correct way to approach the classroom through Hip Hop, but this condition is what continues to make Hip Hop a diverse foundation from which to inform teaching.

Although students had physical interactions with texts they analyzed, and they walked me through their remix decisions, there remains an opportunity to dig even deeper into the physical performance of analysis and understanding. Just as students followed guidelines for crate digging that I sourced from the work of real deejays, there is room to develop guidelines for jam sessions beyond connecting material. Deejay battles do exist, and I find the idea of pulling from such social interactions to develop an approach for reinforcing student analysis compelling.

Regardless of any attempt I made throughout my research, I was still unable to completely avoid the TEKS. To make a clean break from standardization would mean to eliminate standards completely. I do not imagine a setting in public education where this reality is possible. If standards must exist, how academic institutions develop those standards and determine what standards are absolutely necessary for students to meet is worth researching more deeply. On a much smaller scale, I briefly sampled this idea with crate digging guidelines. By pulling from additional experiences, and practices that stem from non-eurocentric traditions, schools raise the likelihood of creating standards that are more equitable.

The rhetorical nature of deejaying is also a topic I frequently contemplated throughout my research process. Deejays cannot communicate without technology, and that technology becomes rhetorical in their hands. The technology modern deejays use, though, does not stop at turntables, mixers, or controllers. Some incorporate drum pads, FX pads, synthesizers, or even live instrumentation into their technological repertoire. Each selection of technology creates new opportunities to manipulate material. In doing so, deejays may develop their own style and signature sounds that become identifiable

among audiences. A Jazzy Jeff mix may communicate differently than a Screw mix. Scholars therefore have the opportunity to investigate and explore how these different composers use their technology differently to argue, respond, and comment on current and past events.

There is opportunity to research the deejay beyond the individual who performs. How does the rhetoric of the deejay influence an audience? How do deejays transform the public places a mix infiltrates? Within those places, what spaces emerge, and how do audience members navigate those spaces and form relationships amongst each other? Banks and other scholars further recount how current deejay practice follows a tradition of survival technology that has developed over time. Might the rhetoric of Hip Hop be one of survival, especially when Hip Hop performances evolved as a way to protest the oppressive realities of urban communities? At the same time turning knobs, sliding the crossfader, applying fx, monitoring audio in different channels on a mixer, or even silence all affect meaning within the communicative practices of the deejay.

Scholars with an interest in conceptualizing and researching the rhetoric of Hip Hop would need to consider the performances of the deejay as well as other rhetors (i.e., breakdancers, emcees, graffiti artists). Moreover, I considered crate digging and mixing to inform writing practices in this project. But these same practices could possibly lend themselves as a research methodology as deejays are specific in their selection, evaluation, and use of material. They undergo a research process to arrive at a final project.

The deejay is thus a fruitful source we can return to when investigating a diverse set of topics within rhetoric and composition. My time spent implementing the practices I

discuss throughout my research does not begin and end with this thesis. I quite frequently returned to crate digging and jamming when the standards I follow required students to develop larger textual artifacts. Lastly, using these practices in conjunction with Hip Hop content, such as song lyrics, complements the instructional potential of the culture in classrooms, thereby enhancing the pedagogy of Hip Hop as a whole.

Conclusion

For teachers, our praxis becomes liberatory when we enable opportunities for students to work outside of standardized practices and performances; To accept as a teacher that these interactions retain the same communicative power as standardized composition. These realities are the result of reoriented minds, reimagined learning spaces, and practices.

The communicative discourse that rests within the foundational elements of Hip Hop culture—deejaying, emceeing, break dancing, graffiti—rely on disruption. Originally, the deejay was the spokesperson of this movement through a physical disruption of linear time: the scratch. The scratch disrupts expectation(s). To perform such a disruption, teachers must dig through their crates, search for the breaks within the texts, grooves, and histories that exist inside their classrooms, and purposely interrupt these rhythms by deciding what is worth extending, drawing attention to, or discarding. This work requires teachers to reflect deeply on both their orientations towards knowledge, evidence, and truth, as well as how educational standards influence these same orientations. The purposeful interruption of such expectations engenders new possibilities for teacher instruction and communicative practices: the possibility for freedom, access, creativity to think, wonder, experiment, fail, recover, and flourish.

By disrupting normative beliefs and expectations about the content they teach, educators can act as agents of resistance. Deejaying is more than music. It is a compositional process existing within a culture that responds to systemic oppression. We often coerce students into relinquishing their cultural fluency when assimilating to standards. Rooting pedagogical practices within a culture such as Hip Hop, educators can create opportunities for students to sample a multitude of communicative discourses when learning rather than strictly adhering to one interpretation of standards. Moreover, this freedom should be considered during assessment as there may be more than one way to assess a given standard.

Freire stresses that to no longer be the prey of oppression, “one must emerge from it and turn upon it” (51). By disrupting mythologized expectations woven into the fabric of English classrooms, and resisting standardized forms of knowledge, teachers and students create opportunities to transform our understanding of composition and how we compose. Furthermore, the efforts within this partnership facilitate the authentic reflection necessary for the individual’s critical awakening from an oppressed reality. As Freire notes, “the more people unveil this challenging reality which is to be the object of their transforming action, the more critically they enter that reality” (53). The deejay reflects such a transformative approach to teaching writing. Dismantling oppressive structures that sustain composition instruction, reflecting upon, and then altering them through a performance to communicate new thought, is the reflection and action Freire demands.

Approaching composition from the transformative position of a deejay thus leaves both students and teachers with opportunities for reflection. Students might reconsider

their writer identities when weighing the modes writing assumes and how they are able to perform their knowledge aside from standardized definitions of mastery.

Reflecting on their practices and beliefs about the subject they teach, educators can be more critical of the writing standards they push their students to achieve. Rather than someone who monitors writing standards, educators have the ability to deeply consider their role as someone who guides students through the composition process and develop practices that create equitable learning experiences in their classrooms.

Unfortunately, standardization is not concerned about such performances, events, and moments because they are harder to measure and quantify, and yet these instances are where learning happened in my classroom.

APPENDIX A

Character Bone Structure		
Traits	Protagonist	Antagonist
<p><u>Physiology</u></p> <p>1. Gender</p> <p>2. Age</p> <p>3. Height and weight</p> <p>4. Color of hair, eyes, skin</p> <p>5. Posture</p> <p>6. Appearance: good-looking, over or underweight, clean, neat, pleasant, untidy. Shape of head, face, limbs.</p> <p>7. Defects: deformities, abnormalities, birthmarks. Diseases.</p> <p>8. Heredity</p> <p><u>Sociology</u></p> <p>9. Class: lower, middle, upper</p> <p>10. Occupation: type of work, hours of work, income, condition of work, union/nonunion, attitude toward organization, stability</p> <p>11. Education: amount, kind of schools, grades, favorite subjects, poorest subjects, aptitudes</p> <p>12. Home life: parents, earning power, orphan, parents separated/divorced, habits, mental development, vices, neglect. Character's marital status.</p>		

13. Religion 14. Race, nationality 15. Place in community: leader among friends, clubs, sports 16. Political affiliations 17. Amusements, hobbies: books, newspapers, magazines he/she reads <u>Psychology</u> 18. Moral standards 19. Personal ambition 20. Frustrations, chief disappointments 21. Temperament: choleric, easygoing, pessimistic, optimistic 22. Attitude toward life: resigned, militant, defeatist 23. Complexes: obsessions, inhibitions, superstitions, phobias 24. Extrovert, introvert, ambivert 25. Abilities: languages, talents 26. Qualities: judgments, imagination, taste, poise 27. I.Q.		
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APPENDIX B

<p>TEK (Pre TEA revision): (8) The student analyzes and applies the author's craft purposefully in order to develop his or her own products and performances. The students is expected to (D) evaluate the use of literary devices . . . to achieve specific purposes</p> <p>OBJECTIVE: We will use evidence from the text to analyze the author's development of characters.</p> <p>MATERIALS: Character Bone Structure (graphic organizer)</p>
INSTRUCTIONAL OVERVIEW
<p>(1) Students will practice close reading with classroom text. Teacher will frequently pause to check for understanding. (2) Concluding reading, students will complete character bone structure (3) Using one piece of textual evidence from graphic organizer, students will write a dialectical response to explain the author's use of characterization.</p>
OBSERVATION
<p>For this lesson, I read the text out loud while class followed along. Students were tasked with marking text for any evidence that revealed character traits. Suggested character traits to consider were projected onto board. During reading, majority of students stayed on task, though some students did not mark the text due distractions such as their phones and side conversations. After reading, students used the graphic organizer to compile textual evidence. A majority of students struggled to complete the entirety of the graphic organizer. As a whole, most students managed to complete around half of the character traits listed on their organizers. Students also asked clarifying questions about category traits (i.e., What do you mean by physiology/sociology?). While students worked, I rotated the room, answering questions and keeping students on task who struggled to complete assignment. When writing dialectical response, the majority of students could only generate around 3-4 sentences to explain the development of a character. Not every student wrote a response.</p>
REFLECTION
<p>Why was the strategy selected to address the standard? I used this strategy to help students focus the process of gathering material to use in their own writing. I observed that students tend to struggle with gathering evidence to use in their writing, and the graphic organizer provided students with direction. I also used this graphic organizer within my lesson because other teachers were using it as part of lessons they were teaching in their own classrooms. The decision to write a dialectical response as part of this lesson was intended to serve as a means for students to synthesize their evidence and explore how the author developed meaning. Dialectical responses were also meant to later serve as a reference for a literary analysis essay students would write.</p> <p>Using the strategy, how did students perform their knowledge? Students gathered information into a list and wrote a response (paragraph to half a page).</p> <p>What limitations or benefits did the strategy create? Although the graphic organizer did provide a specific focus to follow when students collected evidence for their writing, students did not have time to immerse themselves in thorough rehearsal. Students moved directly from identifying and gathering information to writing a response. I did intend for the dialectical response to act as a way for students to examine and analyze textual evidence, but I included no time for students to play with their material. Students did not necessarily have the opportunity to deeply consider relationships existing within their collection of information. I also counted the response as a grade that I used to evaluate their ability to compare and analyze evidence. The response was ultimately the product that mattered most. The amount of information, I think, intimidated students as well. These activities provided me with artifacts to evaluate and use as data for my gradebook, but they did not generate deep thinking.</p>
EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS

This instructional moment captured fragments of potentially useful practices that I could have further expanded into deep rehearsal to prepare for student drafting. I also treated student responses as a finalized piece of writing that reflected their knowledge even though this response was the first time I offered students the opportunity to explore relationships between the material they gathered in their own writing. I asked students to only write about one piece of evidence as well because I believed anything more than that was too much for them to handle. In contradiction to that belief, I asked students to locate nearly 30 pieces of textual evidence before writing. This did prove to be too much! The majority of my students struggled to complete the entirety of this document. In some instances, students asked if some of the evidence they gathered could fit multiple categories. I comprised with this request, partially because I believed the amount of material students collected exhibited a greater breadth of knowledge, and partially because I thought full completion of assignments took priority over the process a student underwent. To a degree, this is true. But excessive listing deteriorates into banking. Students were also working individually and not collaboratively. This was a problem because I believed one of the best ways to assess a student's knowledge was to evaluate what they can achieve individually, rather than collaboratively. For a new teacher, though, this lesson was practical to a fault. I walked away with documents I believed that I needed to authentically assess understanding, instead of allowing students time to breath and write about how they thought the material potentially informed their knowledge. I was not pleased with student responses because I felt they lacked depth. If I had allowed more time for play, the likelihood of students crafting more thorough responses could have increased. This lesson also preceded an eventual literary analysis essay. My belief that essays represented ultimate student mastery at this point in time proved to be problematic because I was more concerned with students' ability to follow "steps" in pursuit of crafting a specific artifact, rather than discovering what their writing might say after exploring ideas and connections as they undergo a process.

APPENDIX C

<p>TEK (Pre TEA revision): (9) The student uses the writing process recursively to compose multiple texts that are legible and use appropriate conventions. The student is expected to (A) plan a piece of writing appropriate for various purposes and audiences by generating ideas through a range of strategies such as brainstorming, journaling, reading or discussing.</p> <p>OBJECTIVE: We will plan a rough draft</p> <p>MATERIALS: Outline document, sentence stems, Character Bone Structure (graphic organizer)</p>
INSTRUCTIONAL OVERVIEW
<p>(1) Students will brainstorm for 20 minutes using any brainstorm method (looping, cubing, attacking the prompt, etc.) (2) Students will review brainstorms and locate idea(s) they can potentially narrow into an argument (3) Students will then use outline to structure the use of evidence for an essay and briefly explain how they will use evidence. (4) Students who complete a general outline will begin a draft.</p>
OBSERVATION
<p>This lesson follows shorter rounds of writing from previously gathered reading. Preparing to outline their essay, I requested students refer back to dialectical responses and evidence they had previously considered. Some students had their materials. Other students did not. When brainstorming, I set a timer for 20 minutes but staggered the time in increments of 5 minutes so that students could reflect on ideas they brainstormed and narrow down one idea they felt was emerging within their brainstorm. Some students struggled to put any ideas down on paper and complained about the timer creating pressure. Students who were more successful during their brainstorming relied on ideas that already existed in previous responses and did not explore multiple arguments. After time had passed, students who struggled when brainstorming said they needed more time to develop an argument. Students who needed more time were allowed to continue brainstorming. Students who had finished transitioning into outlining. Some students argued that they didn't do well when outlining their writing; they do better when they can <i>just write</i> because they already know what they want to say. I did not allow students to skip this step in our writing process. Every student submitted an outline for a grade. Students worked at their own pace to eventually complete an outline. During this time, I rotated the room and worked with students who needed additional help either locating ideas to write about, or clarifying questions about their outline. With time remaining in class, students who completed their outline began writing their essay (using the outline as a reference).</p>
REFLECTION
<p>Why was the strategy selected to address the standard? I chose to have students reference prior writing because they all should have had a collection of ideas to pull from and expand them into a larger piece of work. This was a natural transition in the writing process. I put students on a timer because I wanted students to feel as if they could not hold side conversations or afford to become distracted. In this way, the timer served as a form of classroom management. The decision to have students fill out a predesigned outline resulted from my own experiences as a student. As far back as middle school, I was taught to outline and this practice followed me all the way through college. I perceived outlining to be a natural strategy for all writers. Additionally, the outline was a way for me to, once again, get artifacts from students so that I could gather the amount of grades I needed for my gradebook (the amount being 12). Likewise, I used these artifacts as formative assessments to determine how students were progressing through the writing process.</p> <p>Using the strategy, how did students perform their knowledge? Students filled out outlines, briefly explaining how selected evidence would be used.</p>

What limitations or benefits did the strategy create? During this writing experience, I did not believe writing could unfold in any other way. My approach here was linear. I was fearful that students may become off task when writing. My use of a timer did create a sense of urgency, but I did not mind that some students felt stressed when placed under this restraint because I was not convinced that students would need more time if they were on task. I did allow students to take more time if they needed to brainstorm and generate ideas, but I wanted to keep other students moving along in their process if they were ready to outline. I kept students from engaging with a writing process that was more comfortable when they made comments about not writing their best with outlines.

EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS

Essentially, I forced students to use a process I thought was easiest to grade and personally familiar. Another problem evolved from student outlines. By the time I received “drafts” of their writing, the essays read just like their outlines. Through this instructional choice, I led students to believe that essays should look like their outlines. In some instances, students would simply copy the material from their outlines over to their “drafts” with little to no expansion of ideas that I originally asked students to briefly explain in their outlines. This situation created a new set of problems. Yes, students followed the structure I told them to follow, but I know had to go back and determine how I would help students elaborate on what they had submitted. I could have minimized this issue by spending more time helping students consider relationships amid material they originally located. The expectation that all students would work towards writing an essay, and that this was the only form of writing that showed mastery, further kept students disinterested in the writing process by heaping rules and unnatural structuring to what should have been their own unique composition. Here is where I believe students became most alienated during my instruction. They were performing their knowledge in a manner that I saw fit. Their writing was not really their own because they had little command in their own performance. At the same time, I wanted control in my classroom and sought it by favoring instructional choices that alleviated my own insecurities as a teacher. Inevitably, I ended up creating the problems I did not want to see in student work by positioning myself as an authority on student writing.

APPENDIX D

<p>TEK (After 2021 TEA revision): (8) The student analyzes and applies the author’s craft purposefully in order to develop his or her own products and performances. The students is expected to (E) evaluate the use of literary devices . . . to achieve specific purposes</p> <p>OBJECTIVE: We will use evidence from the text to analyze the author’s development of characters.</p> <p>MATERIALS: Journals, reading passages, reflective questions, guidelines for crate digging, youtube videos</p>
<p>INSTRUCTIONAL OVERVIEW</p>
<p>(1) Teacher will introduce the concept of crate digging for material by presenting a deejay mix, identifying samples that were used, and referencing guidelines for crate digging. (2) Students will practice close reading by marking classroom text during reading for character traits. Teacher will frequently pause to check for understanding. (3) Students will consider their evidence more deeply using reflective questions to write about evidence identified during their reading.</p>
<p>OBSERVATION</p>
<p>After introducing technology, I allow students to play with controller. Those who volunteer are enthusiastic. I began this lesson by performing a brief mix in front of the class. Students considered samples used in the mix using reflective questions derived from guidelines for crate digging. Majority of students were engaged during this demonstration and willingly offered their interpretation of how samples were used in the mix. Co-teacher helped manage off-task behavior when reading text students would use for a literary analysis, resulting in only 1-2 students having no evidence marked on their passage. Once initial reading was complete, I gave students five minutes to briefly go back through text and mark any other portion of the text they believed warranted further consideration. After identifying initial evidence, I paused to show brief interviews from Fuse’s <i>Crate Diggers</i>. These videos prefaced the attitudes and tendencies deejays exhibit when working with material they gather. Students then recorded evidence from their reading and wrote reflections on 2-3 samples in journals they would use for a later class period.</p>
<p>REFLECTION</p>
<p>Why was the strategy selected to address the standard? To guide the gathering of student material, the inclusion of focused questions created from the experiences of crate-digging deejays was meant to spark deeper reflection earlier in the writing process. Not placing a limit on the material gathered was my attempt at not overwhelming students with the demand for large amounts of textual evidence they might struggle to locate. Showing videos of iconic Hip Hop deejays describing their process was also my attempt at communicating to students that deep consideration of materials is a practice that stretches across multiple forms of the composition process.</p> <p>Using the strategy, how did students perform their knowledge? Students located useful material in reading passages. Students wrote about their evidence to gain a deeper understanding of how it was being used in the text.</p> <p>What limitations or benefits did the strategy create? The rate of completion increased when more emphasis was placed on reflection and deep thought of gathered material as opposed to the quantity of material considered. Delivering the process we would use in class through voices in Hip Hop was more engaging for students who expressed they normally don’t like “English” class. As a result, students were more willing to participate in the lesson. The same Hip Hop voices—such as Jazzy Jeff, Kid Capri, Young Guru—became the experts of the process students were practicing. Consequently, my role as a type of authoritarian figure lessened as I too referred back to the deejays we observed as a class. I was able to recall this new resource of information (the guidelines derived from crate digging) to remind students how these composers approached their compositional practice, and that there was no one right way that exhibited compositional excellence.</p>

EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS

At one point a student said, “you should teach a whole class like this,” rather than one lesson. This experience, from beginning to end, was more engaging than any way I had previously read a text and facilitated the gathering of information students would use for writing. As a teacher, though, it was challenging to develop, position, and justify how I wanted students to approach this portion of the writing process and still stay within the parameters of the TEK. The interviews from *Crate Diggers* helped build this foundation. Yet a seasoned academic entrenched within the educational system and argue the foundation of voices and experiences I was pulling from garnered little academic integrity. Still, we were able to successfully analyze author’s craft and how character was developed. As a teacher who also feels the pressure to show how much work students were able to complete, allowing students to identify one or two pieces of material for their own writing was somewhat unnerving. I questioned the beliefs of the deejays who expressed, on multiple occasions, that it doesn’t matter how much material you have. What matters most is how you use what you have. We went through the rehearsal process because students would later have to create a much larger composition. I felt trapped between giving students the benefit of the doubt that they may be more thorough when developing a literary analysis using one or two pieces of evidence, instead of a large quantity of material. To a degree, I felt as if I was still fighting off traces of my own domestication. However, I knew students were going to have the opportunity to collaborate with their peers during a jam session, so I trusted the process and beliefs extracted from crate digging.

APPENDIX E

<p>TEK (After 2021 TEA revision): (9) The student uses the writing process recursively to compose multiple texts that are legible and use appropriate conventions (A) plan a piece of writing appropriate for various purposes and audiences by generating ideas through a range of strategies such as brainstorming, journaling, or discussing</p> <p>OBJECTIVE: We will use evidence from the text to analyze the author’s development of characters.</p> <p>MATERIALS: Journals with previously gathered evidence and reflections, note cards</p>
<p>INSTRUCTIONAL OVERVIEW</p> <p>(1) Students will take time to re-read previously gathered material and reflections (2) Students will choose what they believe are their best reflections and record their evidence onto separate notecards. (3) Students will then enter small groups (no more than four students) and combine and discuss their textual evidence with their peers. (4) After time has passed, students will sort and organize evidence cards according to meaning they believe emerges amid relationships they discover. (5) Students will end by writing about these relationships in their journals.</p>
<p>OBSERVATION</p> <p>For this lesson students transitioned from independent to collaborative work. Using work, from previous class period students recorded their information onto notecards to use during their jam session. Some students were concerned that their materials and reflections were not “good enough.” However, I encouraged students to continue moving forward so that they had something to contribute within their groups. Despite student anxieties, group discussions were healthy. Students shared their evidence and interpretive reflections anywhere from 20-30 minutes depending on the richness of discussions. Even if some students only had one solid offering, the combined materials of the group amounted to a robust amount of material each student could consider. Some groups, though, did not share as much as other groups, and I needed to push groups to extend their conversations instead of just sitting in silence. During group discussions, some students directed questions at me regarding the accuracy of their interpretations; however, I redirected them back to the feedback and interpretation of the overall group. During the physical movement of organizing and grouping information, some students argued (playfully) about relationships between textual evidence, raising their voices and becoming overly animated. In other instances, students used their own slang and language when talking about the text. By the time students completed the activity and began writing about the relationships and connections they discovered in their groups, the room was silent. Nearly all students were writing in their journals.</p>
<p>REFLECTION</p> <p>Why was the strategy selected to address the standard? Analysis can be challenging when performed in isolation. I wanted students to have a different interaction with the text during this lesson. The previous work students had done in their journals prepared them to hold discussion and extend their earlier reflections with a group. I also wanted students out of their seats and becoming physical with the text, using note cards with evidence that students could rearrange and organize at their tables served this purpose. I also did not want analysis occurring on the physical page, I wanted it to evolve among student discussion with materials they could grab, point to, and reorganize according to the opinions of those around them.</p> <p>Using the strategy, how did students perform their knowledge? Students physically handled, grouped, and organized their information as part of their representing meaning that emerged along with discussion of their interpretations. Students then wrote about the findings of their group.</p> <p>What limitations or benefits did the strategy create? Students were not working in isolation. Overall, this was beneficial because there was less space to hide from their task. At the same time, this lesson was dependent on student responsibility. Students took more care to bring at least one piece of</p>

information into their session. On the other hand, some students were not “big talkers” and at times I had to repeatedly encourage them to speak and share their ideas. Still, a majority of students became the facilitators of their own discussions with little direction from me. In return, the discussions students were having amongst themselves gave me the opportunity to move in and out of groups to develop an awareness of how students were interpreting the information they gathered as a formative assessment.

EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS

This lesson is where I believe the linear concept of writing met the most disruptive intervention. Although students were working with portions of a text, the ability to move their samples around generated diverse pairings of the material away from the page. Students were not simply outlining their ideas. They were quite literally picking up the material, passing it around, considering its communicative meaning and value, and putting it back down on their tables. Surprisingly, some students took material at their table, walked it to other groups for additional conversation and returned back to their original group members. Moreover, students were free to talk about the material using the language they saw fit. With their partners they were able to make associations and describe their understanding using slang and comments you would not normally find in a “academic” analysis. Still, I gathered the sense that some students wanted to have the “correct” interpretations of the text, for they believed that there was one right way to understand the text. Here is where twelve plus years of the educational system was working against students. There was still an expectation or perhaps even looming anxiety that they would make a mistake. I could not dismantle this ideology in one (or multiple) lesson(s). The work students did during their sessions, I believe, paid off. By the time students returned to the pages in their journals, they appeared more focused. When asked to write about the discoveries that emerged from their collaboration, students needed less help than I had experienced in previous lessons I had taught. In a sense, this instructional experience functioned as a brainstorming practice. But students had the benefit of not developing their ideas in isolation, they had more time and interactions to weigh their original ideas against, which eventually functioned as a means to support the new writing they would include when journaling.

APPENDIX F

Table 1. Crate Digging Practices

Practice	DJ	Quote from Interview	Guideline(s)
Organization of Material	Babu (2023)	“Just a hot mess. I know where things are at. I’m not very organized.”	Consider different ways you can group and organize your material
	Chief Excel (2014)	“I kind of split up everything alphabetically.”	Consider how different pieces of material might connect together
	Jazzy Jeff (2012)	“There’s no real method to it. It’s almost like I’ve always kept my records where I knew they were.”	
	Kid Capri (2013)	“These are all drums. Right here is all my soundtracks . . . all these are 45s . . . over here is like grooves and stuff like that.”	
	Lord Finesse (2013)	“From here . . . it’s all soundtracks. Jazz is all around here . . . rare joints in here. These are like kicks and snares.”	
	Pete Rock (2012)	“I know where my shit is . . . all I gotta do is see one record out the pack and [I] know where I’m digging.”	
	Young Guru (2013)	“The way I organize it is just alphabetically . . . I just kind of know where everything is.”	
Quantity of Material	Afrika Bambaataa (2014)	“I had more grooves than anybody out there.”	Consider the amount of material needed to communicate an idea
	Chief Excel (2014)	“The more you have, the bigger your vocab, the bigger your knowledge is, the bigger your musical intelligence becomes.”	
	Jazzy Jeff (2012)	“I never counted.”	
	Scratch (2013)	“I never really counted.”	

	J. Rocc (2012)	“If I just listened to Hip Hop, I wouldn’t have half this shit.”	
	Kid Capri (2013)	“If I spend \$10,000 on a record, and I sample one record that cost a dollar, even if that record don’t hit, I make the beat, and I sell it to whatever producer for \$10,000, I made that \$10,000 back with one record.”	
Selection of Material	Afrika Bambaataa (2014)	“The audience will let you know if they like what they hear.”	Consider material that an audience may not believe is useful
	Babu (2023)	“Early on, I liked everything.”	Consider obvious material you can easily understand
	Chief Excel (2014)	“[My] pops’ collection was really diverse.”	Consider material you may not understand but makes you curious
	Jazzy Jeff (2012)	“You’re always finding something.”	
	Kid Capri (2013)	“You can’t really judge a book by it’s cover. You look at this cover and say, ‘You know, ain’t nothing on there,’ and the craziest shit is on there.”	
	Pete Rock (2012)	“What I know about all three of these is that they’re dope.”	
	Scratch (2013)	“Something to you might be rare, but might be basic to me. It’s like beauty. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”	
	Young Guru	“I just grab stuff that I think people would like to hear.”	
Use of Material	Afrika Bambaataa (2014)	“I was crazy and I would swing something on there. And even if they didn’t like it, I always knew how to come back in and play with another song.”	Consider combinations of material that an audience might expect

	Kid Capri (2013)	“You know their so dope you want to get everything they did, even the shit that ain’t really hot, you’re bound to find something you can at least sample from.”	Consider how the material is communicating ideas
	Lord Finesse (2013)	“If you touched something somebody else used, you had to do something creatively different with it to the point where a person would respect your work.”	Consider combinations of material that might surprise an audience
	Young Guru (2013)	“I’m always thinking about the room. So just in case that doesn’t hit, I had that [other record] ready.”	Consider what ideas emerge when different material is used together
	J. Rocc (2012)	“I don’t think of it like that: “Like I must find that one record that’s elusive. Where is that record at? I haven’t seen it yet.”	
	Scratch (2013)	“Crate digging is supposed to be when you go to your records, you gotta pull out something that nobody’s never seen and make them go ‘Wow!’”	

APPENDIX G

Guidelines for Crate Digging

1. Consider obvious material you can easily understand
2. Consider material you may not understand but makes you curious
3. Consider material that an audience may not believe is useful
4. Consider how the material is communicating ideas
5. Consider the amount of material needed to communicate an idea
6. Consider how different pieces of material might connect together
7. Consider different ways you can group and organize your material
8. Consider what ideas emerge when different material is used together
9. Consider combinations of material that might surprise an audience
10. Consider combinations of material that an audience might expect

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