CIPHER5 AS METHOD FOR A CULTURAL STUDIES OF SENSIBILITY[1]

Aesthetic education, writes Gayatri Spivak (2012), is the preparation of imagination for epistemological work. I understand this as a potentially limitless archeology and genealogy (Foucault) of singularities (Rancière) formed at the crossroads of perception, signification, art technique, power (culture, institutions, politics), creativity/innovation, self, subject, and community. This very dense knot provides a one-sentence manifesto for arts educators willing to take up the epistemological and pedagogical challenges. And nowhere is this more necessary than in schools.

For complex historical reasons aesthetic engagement—engagement with sensuous knowledge—does not appear on most teaching and learning agendas. Critical Aesthetics pioneering educator Maxine Greene complained that: "I did not see this kind of passion in looking at young people from my adult vantage point. What I observed among adolescents was a pervasive sense of not-caring…I could find little enthusiasm for motivating students to engage in academic studies with little more relevance than the game of trivial pursuit." (1988, p. 25). Arts educators are not alone in this, but if we cannot get engagement in sensory knowledge figured out—in disciplines with aesthetics at the center—why should we expect success anywhere else?

Aesthetics experience is not limited to artistic practice, it is an important facet of general knowledge about the world as it has been in some schools of philosophy since ancient times. Epicurus, for instance, placed sensory experience at the center of his epistemology (Gordon, 2003; Klein, 2012). But as Foucault has pointed out, this lineage has been overshadowed by Platonic and idealist notions of aesthetics as concepts and ideas (2005). The sensory/empirical is almost always played down for the spiritual, or at least the metaphysical and, since Kant, Descarte and Bacon, in the name of Reason (Kincheloe, 2005). I wish to take another starting point, following the Epicurian line and place the study of, and teaching and learning in, sensory knowledge at the center of research of a critical pedagogy of aesthetics. This move returns aesthetics education to its ancient place as foundational knowledge, like literacy and numeracy, that gets transmitted by oral, aural, and visual sign systems and plays a core function in complex knowledge systems that include all registers of the human experience. As Greene notes: "Of course we need to introduce students to the symbol systems associated with the various arts, but we want to do so (or so I believe) to enhance their capacity to see, to hear, to read, and to imagine—not simply to conceptualize, or to join the great conversation going on over time." (Stinson,

1998, 227). Aesthetic education is distinct from the study of the history of specific arts practices and training in those expressive practices. It is "to help people to attend, to notice, to enter the particular state of consciousness that is aesthetic perception" (ibid., 224), to support the development of a rich and increasingly complex awareness of self. Aesthetic education is consciousness development of sensory experiences and the signification processes utilized to make sensory experiences meaningful.

But there is little space for students to engage in this type of learning. Aesthetic education is often reduced to Arts training and aesthetics equated with art appreciation (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2012, 42; MacDonald, 2013). Most alarming is that the consciousness that Greene and others worry after, what Michel Foucault calls "the self", is left unattended. Perhaps it is unsurprising that students are disassociated from classrooms that "anesthetize learning" their bodies numbed by learned exclusion of sense experience. Students are disciplined by a discourse of knowledge that ignores the development of techniques of body/sense attention. The consequence is a missed opportunity for youth to learn to understand the role of sensuous knowledge in their physical realities along with the attendant and complex processes of signification that connect these sensations to meanings. Youth and teachers alike are instructed to silence their bodies (hooks, 1994, 113). Should it then surprise educators that students, after being implicitly or explicitly told to ignore the most obvious knowledge tool, wonder why they are attending school at all?

Anestheticized learning is education numbed to sensuous knowledge. It is learning that ignores affect in any form be it excitement, tension, passion, frustration or libidinal energies, let alone the senses and sensory signification as a form of knowledge. Learning numbed to sensuous knowledge ignores a full spectrum of lived experience and misses an opportunity to engage with theories of knowledge formation. But recognizing a current state of numbness is not the same as un-numbing it. We need to find methods to undo the pervasive educational anesthetic being injected into student's imaginations at epidemic levels. Aesthetic education, learning that attends to the body in community as a central engine for knowledge creation, is the best way to fight this.

CULTURAL STUDIES OF SENSIBILITY

So far I have used definitions of aesthetics focused on the Greek notion "sense perception or sensation" (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2012, 43). But this is not the only game in town. In fact as Theodore Adorno and more recently Jacques Rancière have pointed out, the discourse of aesthetics is a political terrain. Aesthetics—not the study of signification but the word itself—becomes signified as a set of characteristics of expressive practices, the possession of decorous objects, and a branch of philosophy that studies Art. A cultural studies of aesthetics (MacDonald, 2014) must therefore begin with a meta-analysis or deconstruction of the term aesthetics, not to illustrate its lack of meaning but its excess of meanings that leads to confusion on the subject.

In popular usage the phrase "the aesthetic characteristics of…" is so common that it seems unnecessary or perhaps unnatural to think deeply about it. It is as if Art possesses a set of characteristics that the aesthetic philosopher, often simply called the critic, can enumerate. It is the surface of things except when one accounts for the magical gaze of the critic. The critic is the traditional authority over aesthetics, the individual endowed with the capacity to "see", account for, or at least make visible the aesthetic criteria that makes any piece of art meaningful and therefore valuable. In a discussion of the tension between Aesthetics and Cultural Studies Winfried Fluck notes that:

> It [cultural studies] breaks down the barrier between high culture and popular or mass culture and says that both—that all cultural practices—are worth studying. What distinguished post-World War II literary studies from philology was that it was based on certain aesthetics norms. Not all works qualified for serious professional consideration, and a crucial, if not the crucial, task of the critic was to determine what works were legitimate objects of study. (2002, 83)

Aesthetics in this sense is a discussion of hierarchies and value(s) in either, or both, the cultural or economic senses of the term. Aesthetic education has been used for the establishment of cultural hierarchies through arts education, simply arts appreciation. This method has been successful for disseminating culturally valuable works, at least as defined by critics. Often this is the work that is allowed into the curriculum.

With the rise of Popular Music the critic has been replaced with the marketplace. Valuation has shifted from a supposed disinterested determination by an expert critic to valuation determined almost completely on an arts marketplace. Critics in the lineage of Adorno have argued that this shift to the culture industries has had profoundly negative effects. While I am not as willing as many in the Frankfurt School to demonize art business there are some obvious downsides to marketplace history. For instance, History of Popular Music textbooks are a collection of successfully marketed products with a historic value determined by their economic success either at the point of creation/release or (as is often the case) by later market valuation as a historically significant product. The role of the critic and the marketplace are two expressions of the institutional mechanics for the creation of aesthetic value. But aesthetic value is not the only social process, people do not engage in aesthetics only as an exchange of value. To use a Marxist political economic language there is not only exchange value but also use value. The use value of aesthetics is its aesthetic function.

Aesthetic function is an experience often mistakenly situated inside the work of art:

> The capacity of any system of signification to draw attention to itself as a form of expression and refers to itself as a sign, thus drawing our attention to the organization and patterning principles by which the object is constituted. For

> this purpose, the object is temporarily depragmatized and dereferentialized…
> this temporary bracketing of reference is useful and often gives pleasure, not
> because it allows us to escape, if only temporarily, from reality but because
> it opens up the possibility of a new perspective on the object which we have
> missed in our exclusive concentration on the referential function. (Fluck, 2002,
> 87–88 emphasis added)

But there are no systems of signification that draw "attention to itself", there is instead always a dynamic flow between a participating subject, a culture, and a sign systems within which a work is organized and from which knowledge, in the form of aesthetic experience, emerges as a singularity (Rancière; Foucault). The singularity is the aesthetic experience (Dewey, Berleant). Unfortunately, Fluck avoids recognizing the existence of aesthetic knowledge and yet cannot ignore that 'something' occurs. So instead of researching the complexity of aesthetic function some writers prefer an explanation that the work of art is endowed with special powers that allow 'it' to produce affect and in the process of doing 'it' establishes a special substance that only critics can make visible, the aesthetic. This approach needs to be resisted. A step in resistance is to recognize that the aesthetic function might be the affective impact of coming in contact with aesthetic knowledge. Following Joe Kincheloe's explanation of Blues aesthetic-knowledge as Blue Epistemology (2005), I suggest that what is required is not a reductivist or reified approach to aesthetic function but instead a more complex cultural investigation of aesthetics as a study of culturally produced and culturally shared knowledge formation, distribution and maintenance (epistemology). The result of this approach is the need for a cultural studies of aesthetics that I call, in short, Aesthetic Systems. Aesthetic education therefore is not just learning about art but is instead learning about and developing an awareness of the role of the senses and their signification in the production of knowledge within a cultural context. Aesthetic education takes two roads. Either it is a pedagogy of liberating knowledge production by inviting students to take their place as joint producers of aesthetic knowledge or alternatively, and all too regularly, aesthetic education used to dominate and discipline students' bodies by instructing students on how they should or aught to understand/signify their senses.

AESTHETIC SYSTEMS AND THE CULTURE CIRCLE

As bell hooks noted in Yearnings (1990) thinking deeply about aesthetics is not limited to philosophers and critics, but is rarely found in books. I was recently reminded of this in conversation with a senior ethnomusicologist at an academic conference. Trying to articulate my interest in aesthetic epistemology I used an example that I thought would be meaningful to him. Drawing from a geographical area he has been studying for more than two decades I asked where I might find a written discussion of a term found in the discourse of culture members. He admitted that although there is plenty written about how the music is made, little to nothing has

been written about the system of knowledge that supports the expressive practices. I understand this as an exclusion of aesthetic epistemology. Its exclusion occurs when aesthetic research remains at surface descriptions of practices without attention to knowledge that guides these techniques. The physical motion of dance, the notes sounded, the paint scratched or spread on medium silences, often unintentionally, a self that is busily carving out a new territory. This new space is subject-of-culture. While the same analytical discussion might suggest that agency is being enacted in the expressive practice, agency is cut down by surface descriptions. Aesthetic research methodology that does not include, in various registers, the voices of creative subjects limits and greatly simplifies knowledge contribution. Of course it is much easier to move towards knowledge reduction; to watch a performance, make a video document of it, make notes about it (even reflexive notes) and pose surface questions of participants. In fact you might resist what I am saying about the silencing of subjects by correctly pointing out that interviews provide an opportunity for creative subjects to voice their epistemological positions. But critical researchers have long been aware that discourse, because of its appearance as the common and the everyday, makes its functioning resistant to easy description even by participants. Aesthetic epistemology therefore requires the development of a method of research that provides a space for critical awareness, what might be called the development of cultural meta-analysis. For this I turn to Paulo Freire's Culture Circle.

In *Education for Critical Consciousness* (2005) Paulo Freire discusses the economic changes brought about in Brazil by the forces of rapid industrialization. Brazilian Educators were tasked with bringing literacy to illiterate communities to facilitate participation in industrialization. Freire realized however that teaching Portuguese to indigenous communities was not absent of politics, but instead was a continuation of colonization. Freire overturned the deficit of illiteracy by recognizing the powerful epistemologies embedded in non-literate cultures connected to complex cosmologies and grounded in environmental knowledge, now termed Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). Freire's method, the culture circle, brought community members together to discuss and make explicit community knowledge. To do this he worked with a visual artist to create visual situations that would provide a context for the conversation. A facilitator brought the situation to the circle and worked with the circle to articulate, to make visible, knowledge of each situation. At the end of these twelve situations members of the circle began to see that literacy in Portuguese is a cultural technology that can be used to do work. Instead of being disciplined by a colonial language, formerly non-literate community members became critically multicultural in that they could function within non-literate epistemological and literate epistemological contexts. One might be reminded that according to discourse theory, "discourses fix meaning by excluding all other meaning potentials. Two discourses can collide in an antagonistic relationship to one another when they try to define the same terrain in conflicting ways" (Jorgensen, 2002, 190). Freire saw this an other way. He used the situation of conflicting discourse as a way of making knowable both the discourse possessed by the community as well as the colonial

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discourse. Instead of one discourse dominating the other, two discourses could be held together in a tension that contributes to developing critical consciousness. Drawing from this awareness I, along with Andre Hamilton, used a cultural formation from Hiphop Kulture, the cypher, to see if we could create a Hiphop Culture Circle.

CIPHER5: HIP HOP CONSCIENTIZATION AND OVERSTANDING

Cypher is a Hiphop circle in which hiphoppas freestyle or drop writtens (deliver prewritten rhymes) one after the other. Cypher also refers to a circle that forms to share other substance, sometimes marijuana. But cypher can also refer to an engagement with the subconscious in a stream-of-conscious delivery in rhyme. This kind of freestyle flow is often taken as a sign of mastery of the Hiphop element of emceeing, something I have previously called epistemological flow (MacDonald, 2012). Cipher, spelled with an i, refers to cryptography and processes of encryption and decryption. In this sense Cipher is recognition of the processes of signification and deconstruction that take place. Related to the cryptographic spelling of Cipher is our use of the number five, Cipher5. Five refers to knowledge as the fifth element of Hiphop Kulture after emceeing, graffiti, b-boying/b-girling, and Djing. Cipher5 is a cypher that brings together hiphoppas, with students, and professional researchers to produce and share knowledge about Hiphop Kulture. Cipher5 takes place every Tuesday night at 7pm at a local café. We have an arrangement with the café owner where we can organize chairs in a circle and make use of the sound system, projector, and computer for sharing videos, songs, and other online content related to Hiphop Kulture.

As implied by the name and built on Freire's use of 'situations' in the Culture Circle, Cipher5 works to make Hiphop knowledge visible to members. I am using visibility in the sense that Cipher5 is a critical method for making explicit the often-subjugated knowledge of Hiphop Kulture. This is cultural aesthetics, a practice of publicly producing aesthetic epistemology. But following Freire's situations required a translation process. It would simply not work to blindly follow the Culture Circle method. While the purpose of our Culture Circle, Cipher5, is indeed conscientização, conscientizing, or the raising of critical consciousness, our method had to make sense to us. Taking what may seem like a rather traditional approach we formed Cipher5 as a reading group in the basement of a local independent bookstore. It was an opportunity for local hiphoppas to gather to read The Gospel of Hiphop, "presented by" KRS-ONE (2009).

AN EMANCIPATORY BOOK CLUB

My passion for a reading group did not spring from my experiences in grad school (as you may at first suppose), but from my first book club, a 3am independent sci-fi circle at a now long closed Tim Horton's coffee shop in Sydney, Cape Breton, Canada. This requires a bit of a story to illustrate the two lessons I learned from

the experience: First, youth need only an opportunity for critical engagement and rarely need to be introduced to the passion of learning (they simply need a space to unleash what they possess) and second, as Gramsci long ago noted, the critical revolutionary intellectual is not always found in a university classroom, but in the make-shift classrooms of the community.

I was a teenager working summer back-shift at a grocery store. Sometime in the middle of the summer my sleeping pattern had become flipped backwards, so that on my days off I had a hard time getting back to a daytime schedule. So instead of trying very hard I would often take a book and find an open coffee shop. I had no plan. I was not trying to read enough to get into graduate school. In fact no one in my family had attended graduate school so I did not yet know what the domestic practice of scholarship looked like, what the scholar does in their spare time. I have, what I now recognize to be, a long-term passion for knowledge and that this passion is a vital component of knowledge: "For Foucault, as for Plato after the symposium, knowledge must be seen as a genre of desire" (Steigler, 2010, 172). But at this point I had no words for this. All I knew was the pleasure of late night reading.

On one of these early morning adventures I walked into a coffee shop I had not yet visited. I purchased my coffee and, as was my habit, I headed for the corner where I would not be distracted by the activity at the counter. It was not long before I was interrupted by an increase in volume in the little shop. As was the case in all Tim Horton's of the time, there was a large square counter surrounded by stools that was called 'the island'. The island was full and was presided over by the very large security guard I passed when I walked into the shop. Now, however, he was transfigured. A large smile spread across his wide face softening the hard features of his large shaved head. He verbally poked the members of the group, pushing them to talk, coaxing them into debate. I guess I started to stare because it was not long before he was looking straight at me. I tried to break his gaze but he would have none of it. It was too late for me. He asked me what I was reading and shook his head with displeasure at my response. He called me over.

I was the youngest person at the table by at least fifteen years and I was not the focus of the conversation. I had unwittingly discovered an early morning book club—it was the Fight Club of book clubs really, but long before anyone would have that reference. Over that summer I was introduced to ideas and Nova Scotia sci-fi authors I had never heard of, and most importantly I learned in that circle what Culture Circle members likely learned with Freire, that the world of the mind is not out of reach, that knowledge is not owned or managed by an exclusive class of people. I also learned there is knowledge-of-self that can be gained in this rough community classroom, the one that you choose as the place to take a stand against a world constructed for you. It was in this coffee shop where I learned that making knowledge is an emancipatory act.

I now have more than 20 years distance on that classroom. Having had my first career in the music industry (and all of the classrooms that come with that life), and having also had the joys and pains of university seminars along the way on one's

journey to a PhD, I have gained perspective. There is no one single classroom that can teach all of the lessons that we will learn. And it seems that certain lessons come along with certain classrooms. With this in mind I partnered with Andre Hamilton to create a reading circle as situation or singularity that we call Cipher5.

Hamilton and I followed the lessons I learned at that coffee shop, and the ones he learned in a lifetime of Hiphop Kulture and we understood them through the lens of critical pedagogy and my newer teachers hooks, Steinberg, Kincheloe, Freire, Maclaren, and Giroux. The situation is the reading circle and the context, and the Gospel of Hip-Hop is often but perhaps not always, the subject. After the ritual introduction necessary so everyone in the circle hears their own voice and is heard by the subjects that form the circle, we may only read two lines. Where the conversation goes after these lines are spoken is unknown. We have no curriculum and no timeline. We have been meeting for eighteen months as of April 2014 and have yet to read the entire book. Some sections, like the Hiphop Declaration of Peace have been read more than a dozen times because it is a collection of eighteen principles that hiphoppas are encouraged to live by. The Fifth Overstanding: The Inner City and the Thirteenth Overstanding: The Hip Hop Activist have also been read a number of times. But even these sections have not been completely read within the circle. Sections are recited, sometimes cypher style, each paragraph read by a different member of the circle, with books getting passed around.

And often the Gospel of Hip Hop does not even get opened. Someone may come with a video or a section of lyrics for discussion. Perhaps a documentary such as the United States of Africa, or Ice T's The Art of Rap will be the focus. But whatever the focus, the process is the same; we come together to articulate our questions, forward our ideas, practice our critical thinking and leave the Cipher excited and engaged with a more fully realized passion for knowledge.

CIPHER5: METHOD FOR RESEARCH AND TEACHING

The practice of Cipher5 provides a way of practicing critical pedagogy as a model for critical research. At the root is a dismissal or a denial of the two sidedness of the project, or put another way, a denial of the distance between research and education. Research is learning. Arne De Boever (2011) takes the denial a step further by denying a distance between research and philosophy. It comes down to the statement "philosophy is education: that it was and has always been education, since its beginning in Ancient Greece" (34). The practice of generating knowledge in Cipher5 is philosophy practiced by hiphoppas, it is the work of articulating the practices/art of living that Michel Foucault identifies as culture. Philosophy in this view is the articulation and evaluation of a mode of life, not the professional practice of an intellectual elite. Cipher5 started as a way of generating research about hip-hop, hip-hop as the manifestation of Hiphop Kulture, and became the practice of articulating the practices of Kulture, and therefore a form of philosophy classroom. Through Cipher5 we rediscovered a practical philosophy, or at least a renegade philosophy

that occurs in the street, the kind of philosophy that Jacques Rancière calls political because it creates an opportunity for those without voice to learn to speak: "My vision of philosophy is first of all a vision of thought as a power of declassification, of the redistribution of territorial divisions among disciplines and competences. Philosophy says that thought belongs to all. It says this, though, at the very moment that it states division and exclusions" (2011, 23). Cipher5 calls our process creation of knowledge but stops short of naming ourselves philosophers or a philosophical community. Perhaps this is an expression of power that must be undone.

But we also do not call Cipher5 a classroom even though it does the work of education. Gert Biesta in "Toward a New "Logic" of Emancipation: Foucault and Rancière" writes that:

> The idea of emancipation plays a central role in modern education. To the extent that education is about more than the transmission of content and culture but involves an interest in fostering independence and autonomy, education can be said to be a process that aims at the emancipation of the child or the student. (169)

If education is defined this way and not defined by the institutionalization of learning then we are free to study organized learning or the practice of community philosophy in any environment equally. Cipher5—as my research assistants maintain in autoethnographic works I will draw from below—is a practice of philosophy and complex practice of self-knowledge and care-of-the-self points towards emancipation. It seems that cultural research-as-education works because it generates community knowledge of the forces of power that are experienced by members of the circle, who are free and encouraged by peers to speak their narratives. As Biesta notes: "The key idea is that emancipation can be brought about if people gain adequate insight into the power relations that constitute their situation – which is why the notion of demystification plays such a central role in critical pedagogies" (171) but as Freire pointed out if the pedagogue arrives to be savior then his very presence assures the learner will never be emancipated, but will fall under the authority of the teacher/critic, the one endowed with the magic power to de-mystify. But this practice leads to the emergence of another ideological power evident in Marxist notions of 'false consciousness' that has remained present in Critical Theory which Biesta calls the 'predicament of ideology':

> The "predicament of ideology" lies in the suggestion that it is precisely because of the way in which power works upon our consciousness, that we are unable to see how the power works upon our consciousness. This not only implies that in order to free ourselves from the working of power we need to expose how power works upon our consciousness. It also means that in order for us to achieve emancipation, someone else, whose consciousness is not subjected to the workings of power, needs to provide us with an account of our objective condition. (171)

But the critical consciousness in the Freirian mode calls forth something altogether different. It relies on community-produced knowledge, or more precisely on the effect of community-produced knowledge. In our formulation the collective act of philosophy-of-culture that we practice in Cipher5 places the development of consciousness in the center of an increasingly critical discussion. The effectiveness of this, as Freire also showed, is the simultaneous articulation of community knowledge and individual emancipation. Jacques Rancière, in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*: *Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, explains this process in another context.

Rancière tells the incredible story of a quiet teacher and former French revolutionary Deputy forced to flee to the Netherlands on the return of the monarchy and the pedagogical adventure he unexpectedly undertook. The adventure begins with the fact that Joseph Jacotot could not speak any Flemish and the students he was tasked to work with spoke no French. So instead of providing educational lessons he provided a book with a translation and let the students do the work. He expected little "he had believed what all conscientious professors believe: that the important business of the master is to transmit his knowledge to his students so as to bring them, by degrees, to his own level of expertise" (Rancière, 1991, 3). So it was with great surprise that the students learned to read and write French and "the logic of the explicative system had to be overturned. Explication is not necessary to remedy an incapacity to understand" (ibid. 6) and in fact "before being the act of the pedagogue, explication is the myth of pedagogy, the parable of a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones, ripe minds and immature ones, the capable and the incapable, the intelligent and the stupid" (Rancière, 1991, 6). Explication is not without power, according to Rancière (and Jacotot), "explication is not only the stultifying weapon of pedagogues but the very bond of the social order. Whoever says order says distribution into ranks. Putting into ranks presupposes explication, the distributory, justificatory fiction of an inequality that has no other reason for being" (ibid., 117).

Cipher5 is not however built on Jacotot's nor Rancière model. It developed from my book club adventure and from of our practice of Hiphop Kulture (MacDonald, 2012, 2014). It was the impact of the socially produced knowledge at Cipher5 that left me looking for answers and explications that led me to intellectual emancipation, Foucault, Rancière, and Jacotot. And while I resisted drawing from these sources to explain my experience at Cipher5 it occurred to me that enforcing this separation maintained the divisions between philosophy (including aesthetics), education, and cultural practice. This chapter is an act of tearing down these walls and confirming that living Hiphop Kulture is the act of living aesthetically, philosophically.

CIPHER5 AS LEARNING MODEL IN STUDENT'S OWN WORDS

One of the joys of running a Participatory Action Research circle is that you have a constant engagement in knowledge production. This year I began a new position

as an assistant professor at a new university in a faculty of fine arts with no legacy of social science research. This was the first time that students from this department worked as research assistants and I was very interested what kind of impact their participation would have on their intellectual and scholarly development. I was cautious to choose RAs knowing that their level of engagement would, in some ways, lay the foundation for the near future. I decided to wait to see which students would attend the Hiphop Kulture symposium I organized in the first semester. As it turned out, two students volunteered and showed up for everything. They made the decision easy. Soon after the symposium I began the process of hiring them as research assistants to support Cipher5. Their assignment was to attend Cipher5 and to take notes over the semester. At the end of the semester they were asked to provide an autoethnography of their experience. Once the autoethnography was written and submitted the three of us sat down and discussed their experience. I only then mentioned that I was interested in exploring Cipher5 as a form of classroom and that they, in fact, were the first students. I asked them to go back over their autoethnographies to produce another layer of analysis, this time identifying the connection between events and their own learning. What follows is a series of examples of their work. It is necessary to include their voice because it provides the evidence of the functioning of Cipher5 as both a research circle and as a form of emancipatory pedagogy.

Student 1:

- The open nature (circle) of the Cipher works to break down the idea that there is one all-knowing teacher who speaks to students who are inferior. I love this learning model, because what I'm experiencing is that good communication is a great tool for more thorough learning.
- I feel the circle has helped build my own confidence. I don't feel it gives me an ego boost; rather, exploring abstract topics that have many sides (spirituality, sexuality, religion, mainstream music) or points of view is a great opportunity to allow yourself to be scared and state your opinion anyway. I think it's important for members of the circle to remain open-minded, to be patient as listeners and not always feel the need to be right.
- The circle really gives its members a chance to share their own personal history and experience, which may be essential to the healthy development of our identities. It seems to be a therapeutic place where there is compassion for everyone's stories, which I think allows for healing.
- I had some really positive feelings tonight. For me, the community/welcoming aspect of the cipher keeps developing. It's starting to feel like a soccer team you join half-heartedly simply because your friend invited you and you committed to the first game. Before you know it you wouldn't even dream of missing a practice, let alone a game. This is the feeling of community. I don't necessarily yet know my role or the extent of my contribution to the Cipher, but I feel like my role and contribution not only exists, but is a stepping stone to further awareness and

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education around social issues. I have a place and when I look around the circle, everyone has a place. We are working towards a common vision, and there are so many facets to that vision (so many different backgrounds, motives, experiences that blend together beautifully). Each time I take part in the Cipher, I think more and more about identity—both of others and my own. The sense of direction (or misdirection) an identity brings impacts our lives every day. Who we think we are, the kinds of things we believe in or don't believe in, the habits we form, etc. I feel like maybe my sense of identity hasn't been true to what I actually WANT and aspire to have in my life. This circle (through reflection) is helping me to form a more solid identity of myself. I don't know yet know what that identity consists of.

- Tonight a First Nations hiphoppa told us that when he was growing up as a first nations youth, he felt society already looked upon him as scum so he felt like being poor and dealing drugs was of no further shame to him or his identity, whereas with middle-class (white) society they would never want to be caught dead selling drugs. But once Hiphop glamorized it, suddenly it became "cool" and "badass" to do drugs. I think this argument and image of drug use has been around for years, if not centuries. That was a sad story for me to hear. I feel angry hearing about the racist mindset towards First Nations people (and any race). Often when a First Nations Canadian tells me a story about the injustice of their struggles, I am filled with rage and want to pursue this story of furthered colonialism. This thought brought me to the appreciation of our path in life. Six months ago, I never would have guessed I'd be attending weekly Hip Hop community circles discussing social and political and racial issues. This is amazing. My mother told me that going to school is never a waste of money. I was questioning whether that was true, but in this moment I am not necessarily thankful that I study music every day. I am thankful that I'm in the position where I am becoming exposed to higher levels of thinking, philosophy, and desire for social change. That's what I want to be a part of my life.

Student 2:

- Each time I attend, I always feel like I have so much to learn but instead of being discouraged with how much information there is in the world (which I often do at school/in a classroom environment), I feel inspired to continue listening to peoples' stories and to absorb as much as I can through this community.
- Through this reflection process I have developed a deeper understanding of myself: my social, political, musical, and religious positions, as well as a critical evaluation of these beliefs. This has been both a learning opportunity and a challenge as I am dissecting my preconceived ideas of identity and challenging certain aspects that I do not like, such as those beliefs that do not fit into this new cultural group, or those that I no longer value and am struggling to let go of. There is a personal identity crisis going on: I am evaluating who I have become, what

environmental elements have contributed to that formulation of self and whether or not that is somebody I want to continue to be. These questions and concerns are a direct result of the unique personal, transformative qualities of engaging in this method. This ties into the challenge and conflict of racial identity and prejudice. A huge challenge for me has been confronting prejudices I was not previously aware of, that were in my subconscious mind affecting my conscious behavior.

• Through this process, my ignorance of the cultural, political and social history of a marginalized group of people has been exposed. A unique element of this method is the development of relationship-based learning to generate this knowledge and awareness.

• This is a completely different model of education. It is an exchange and sharing of personal stories where the self is not divorced from the learning, it is an integral component. This brings up a unique set of challenges in the learning environment: trust between participants, a willingness and openness to share, express vulnerability, to be challenged, and potentially exposed in one's lack of knowledge and/or difference of opinion. The relationships formed provide the opportunity for the creation of a deeper level of understanding, acknowledging the emotional, physical, spiritual, social, economic ingredients that make up a community and a culture.

CONCLUSIONS

So while there are a variety of levels of success in this method, there are some challenges presenting themselves as well. The realization of Cipher5 as youth activism, research and pedagogical space requires a more thorough investigation of my practices. What role have I played in preparing the research assistants for their participation, and how might I fit this role into the model? The RAs were certainly not left alone to deal with their process, in fact the research practice required, or at least provided a context for, the development of strong ties between RAs and myself as principle investigator. Further elaboration of these dynamics is required before too much more can be said about the value of Cipher5 as a teaching environment. Relatedly, it is necessary to evaluate how the rest of the community members of Cipher5 feel about contributing to student learning; what is the reciprocal contribution to the community? In my opening example of the security guards at the Tim Horton's coffee shop, it seems like he was making community by sharing knowledge and sharing the creation of knowledge. But of course he was also getting paid to be there and the draw of the reading circle made certain that there were bodies in the coffee shop late at night keeping him company. Likely, the mechanics of community are much more complex than we have yet addressed. Therefore, and in these directions, the research will continue. We will continue to publish articles about Hiphop Kulture in our city but we will now also publish about alternative learning environments, new approaches to community philosophy, and emancipation.

NOTE

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