



## Hip Hop Based Practices in Urban Schools



Hip Hop and Spoken Word Therapy (HHSWT) is a culturally responsive approach to counseling and pedagogy, developed by Dr. Ian P. Levy, where young people engage in the process of writing, recording, and performing hip-hop music. Rooted in a detailed understanding of hip hop culture HHSWT builds upon community defined practices for self-expression to create an expressive arts counseling tool that is not only culturally responsive, but grounded in empirically validated interventions. HHSWT contains the following components:

**Lyric Writing as Cognitive and Emotive Journaling:** Students are tasked with lyric-based journal entries, where they can process the emergence of specific thoughts, feelings, and emotions outside of class/session. When students return for a subsequent classes or sessions, they “checkin” and share their writings from the week. Educators are encouraged to actively listen to students’ lyrics for underlying emotions and cognitions and ask follow-up questions about particular lyrics to further explore thoughts and feelings (Levy, 2019; Levy & Keum, 2014).

**Collaboration as Role-Play:** In hip-hop culture, collaboration requires that artists share distinct stories about the same concept to complete a cohesive song. When collaborating in hip-hop culture, artists discuss the content of each of their verses, and how both individualized narratives can be used to construct a cohesive song. Through the use of role play as collaboration, students work in small groups or pairs to co-construct songs around emotional experiences in order to learn to analyze thoughts and feelings, and to develop solutions (Levy, 2019).

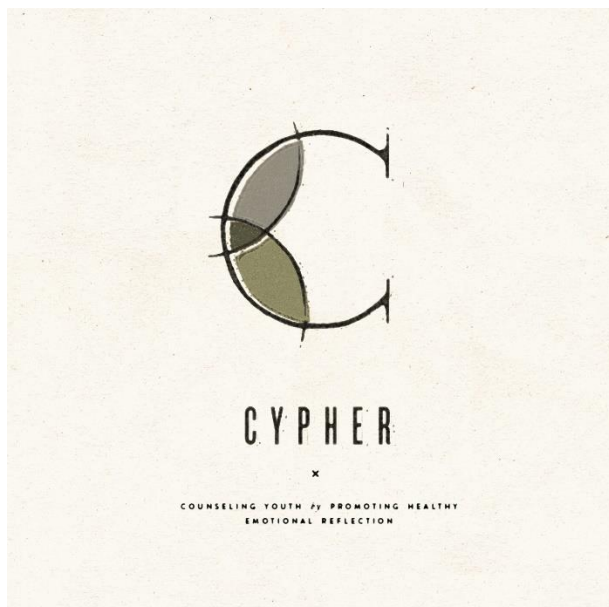
**Mixtapes:** Educators partner with students to identify emotional themes they wish to discuss on a hip hop mixtape (collection of songs). Once themes are identified, educators support students through researching, writing, and recording songs about their findings, with the ultimate aim of disseminating their work to the larger community through performance and/or an album release (Levy, Cook, & Emdin, 2018)

**The Hip-Hop Cypher:** Cyphers are defined as “highly codified yet unstructured practices where youth who identify with hip-hop culture exchange information in the form of raps or dance” (Levy, Emdin, & Adjapong, 2018, p. 2). Cypher can be used in classroom or group counseling practice to establish group norms supportive of group cohesion. The use of hip-hop cyphers in group work also enables students to enact a series of predefined norms and/or rules of engagement that support emotional expression.



## **References**

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## **Looking to use HHSWT in your school?**

CYPHERSCHOOL is a consulting organization that supports schools, their students, teachers, and school counselors in learning HHSWT facilitation skills, a youth-driven mixtape creation process, and the development of in-school recording studios.

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