



**A Discussion on Using
Culturally Responsive Instructional Methods to
Engage Students Who Do Not Respond Well to
Traditional Teaching Practices**

The Benefits of Using Culturally Responsive Instructional Methods to Engage Students Who Do Not Respond Well to Traditional Teaching Practices

Prompting and maintaining student engagement in the classroom is a challenge most teachers encounter (Pytash & Kosko, 2021). Urban at-risk youth experience difficulty engaging in the classroom because often, these students do not have access to instructional practices to which they can relate and from which they can advance (Duncheon, 2021). In many instances, traditional instruction does not meet the learning needs of urban youth; therefore, alternative methods of instruction may need to be implemented (Basford et al., 2021). One particular method to increase engagement is embracing the cultural composition of students in the classroom (Basford et al., 2021). This may be achieved using a number of culturally responsive teaching practices, such as linking homelife experiences with school assignments (Hutchison & McAlister-Shields, 2020; Kim et al., 2021; Pang et al., 2021) or incorporating culturally relevant music in the classroom (Evans, 2019; Gay, 2018).

According to Pang et al. (2021), building instruction encompassing the immediate culture of students makes learning for the students more meaningful. Ladson-Billings (2021) suggested when providing a culturally relevant education, teachers should not only focus on the advancement of the students. They should concentrate on their cultural awareness in conjunction with whether or not they comprehend the economic, social, and political climate of the world in which they live. According to Shaw (2020), teachers need to participate in continuous

professional development regarding culturally relevant pedagogy. Teachers who stimulate students using non-traditional methods can motivate them to have an interest in their learning (Basford et al., 2021).

Today, there are many urban teachers who believe students' learning experience can be enhanced through culturally responsive teaching practices incorporating music (Evans, 2019). Teachers suggested classroom content can become more engaging by incorporating culturally relevant music in the classroom (Evans, 2019). Throughout American history, music has played a vital role in education. For many African Americans, music has provided historical facts and a sense of identity (Walton, 2020) not learned through traditional educational practices. From the pain conveyed in field hollers and slave songs to the hope and faith of the Negro Spiritual, early slave and gospel singers sang the narrative of an oppressed people (Evans, 2019). During the Reconstruction era through the period of the Great Depression of the 1930s, blues music reflected the economic hardships of that time. Similarly, soul music artists spoke against racial inequality during the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s (Mingo, 2019). According to Evans (2019), genres such as rap and hip-hop music can be used as tools to stimulate the interests of today's urban youth in the classroom.

Encouraging student engagement in the classroom can impact the development of learners. Stimulated students can govern their own progress and develop autonomous learning skills (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2020). Students who are not motivated to learn independently

experience educational impediments hindering their development (Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2020). Alternative teaching strategies, including culturally responsive teaching practices, may be necessary to prevent this outcome (Basford et al., 2021). Lessons including culturally relevant music in the classroom could make a positive difference. Classroom assignments may become more meaningful for the learners because music could connect them to the subject matter presented (Evans, 2019). Also, implementing music activities, lessons, and programs into assignments has the potential to enhance the learning experience by providing new outlooks and developing self-awareness (Chong & Yun, 2020). In addition, students creating music can stimulate academic growth (Evans, 2019) and produce other compelling learning activities as Basford et al. (2021) suggested.

Abstract

Oftentimes, student engagement in the classroom is a challenge. Traditional instruction does not meet the learning needs of many urban at-risk students because they cannot relate to the teaching practices. Studies show instructional practices rich in culture can be implemented to improve engagement. The problem in this study was the lack of student engagement in classrooms devoid of culturally responsive teaching practices impacting urban at-risk youth. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to understand teachers' perceptions of didactic classroom activities using culturally relevant music-based techniques as a strategy to increase student engagement of urban at-risk youth in the classroom. The questions addressed were "How do teachers perceive culturally responsive teaching strategies?" and "How do teachers perceive using culturally relevant music-based didactic activities as methods of increasing student engagement of urban, at-risk youth in the classroom?" Guided by the universal design for learning framework, this study consisted of 10 third-grade through eighth-grade teachers from an urban school in northern New Jersey. Data were gathered from interviews, observations, teachers' journals, and a focus group. Bloomberg's thematic analysis was applied to generate themes that address the research questions. The findings indicated teachers viewed culturally responsive teaching strategies and culturally relevant music-based didactic activities as methods of increasing student engagement favorably. The implications indicated that through differentiated instruction, culturally responsive teaching practices and culturally relevant music can increase student engagement of urban at-risk youth, by incorporating appealing lessons that meet their learning needs. This study contributes to future practice by providing culturally relevant music-based techniques for teachers and preservice teachers who instruct disengaged urban at-risk youth.

Bibliography

- Basford, L., Lewis, J., & Trout, M. (2021). It can be done: How one charter school combats the school-to-prison pipeline. *Urban Review*, 53(3), 540–562.
- Chong, H., & Yun, J. (2020). Music therapy for delinquency involved juveniles through tripartite collaboration: A mixed method study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11 Article 589431.
- Duncheon, J. C. (2021). Making sense of college readiness in a low-performing urban high school: Perspectives of high-achieving first generation youth. *Urban Education*, 56(8), 1360–1387.
- Evans, J. (2019). Deeper than rap: Cultivating racial identity and critical voices through hip-hop recording. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*. 11(3) 20–36.
- Gay, G. (2018). *Culturally responsive teaching* (3rd Ed.), Teachers College Press
- Hains, B.J., Salazar, J., & Hains, K. (2021). If you don't know, now you know: Utilizing hip-hop 89 pedagogy as a tool for promoting change in students and community. *Journal of Education*, 201(2) 116-125.
- Hutchison, L., & McAlister-Shields, L. (2020). Culturally responsive teaching: Its application in higher education environments. *Education Sciences*, 10(124), 12. EJ1255156.
- Kim, D., Kim, S., & Barnett, M. (2021). “That makes sense now! Bicultural middle school students learning in a culturally relevant science classroom. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 23(2), 145–172.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2021). I'm here for the hard re-set: Post pandemic pedagogy to preserve our culture. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 54(1), 68–78.

- Mingo, A. (2019). Transgressive leadership and theo-ethical texts of black protest music. *Black Theology: An International Journal*, 17(2), 91–113.
- Pang, V., Alvarado, J., Preciado, J., Schleicher, A. (2021). Culturally relevant education: Think local within a holistic orientation. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 23(1), 3–16.
- Pytash, K., & Kosko, K. (2021). Instruction matters: Pedagogical approaches to increase engagement in a juvenile detention center, *Journal for Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 26(1), 70-85.
- Shaw, J. (2020). Urban music educators perceived professional growth in a context-specific professional development program. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 67(4), 440– 464.
- Walton, C., (2020). It just made me want to do better for myself: Performing arts education and academic performance for African American male high school students. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 21(13) 42.