

An Exploratory Case Study of Teachers' Perceptions Using Culturally Music-Based Techniques to Increase Student Engagement of Urban At-Risk Youth

Dr. Darshell DuBose-Stone

National University, Sandford College of Education

ABSTRACT

- 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 universal design for learning guided this qualitative exploratory case study
- 10 third-grade through eighth-grade teachers from an urban school in northern New Jersey participated in the study.
- 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.

PROBLEM AND PURPOSE STATEMENT

Problem Statement: The problem addressed in this study was the lack of student engagement in classrooms devoid of culturally responsive teaching practices (Gay, 2018; Kim et al., 2021) impacting urban at-risk youth.

Purpose Statement: 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.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1

How do teachers perceive culturally responsive teaching strategies as a method of increasing student engagement of urban, at-risk youth in the classroom?

RQ2

How do teachers perceive using culturally relevant music-based didactic activities as a method of increasing student engagement of urban, at-risk youth in the classroom?



MATERIAL AND METHODS

Four Instruments

- In this qualitative exploratory case study, four instruments were used to gather data for the purpose of creating triangulation; the process used to corroborate information, and gain trustworthiness in a research study by gathering data using various methods (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Teachers' Interviews

- The 60-minute teachers' interviews were based on the research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).
- The responses to the questions were recorded and then transcribed in order to receive an accurate account of their views (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).
- All participants received copies of their transcripts and were asked to verify the accuracy of their responses.

Researcher Observations

- Guided by a rubric
- Took place while the teachers implemented the music-based lessons to their classes.
- The teachers were trained by me for 30 minutes on how to incorporate a music-based activity that was devised based on the teachers' responses to the interview questions.
- During the execution of the lesson to their students, I observed the teachers' demonstration, execution, and close of the lesson to make certain the activity was carried out correctly to avoid the study from becoming altered (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).
- If the activity was not implemented correctly, this information would have been recorded as a limitation.

Teachers' Selections of Music-Based Activities

Rhythmic Activity	Melodic Activity	Lyric Activity	Instrumentation Activity	Music History Activity
T5	T1, T2, T3, T6, T10	T8	Not Selected	T4, T7, T9,

- Teachers' Journals** Following the execution of the lesson, the teachers had 24 hours to journal their perceptions regarding the impacts the culturally relevant music-based activities had on the lesson to promote student engagement. The following are the set of predefined journal prompts that guided their perceptual findings:
 - What was the impact the music-based lesson had on the level of student engagement?
 - What elements of the culturally relevant music-based activities stimulated the lessons the most (rhythm, melody, lyrics, instrumentation or historical value)?
 - What was the positive impact (if any) the music had on the content of the lesson?
 - How did the music in the lesson contribute to the content comprehension?
- The Focus Group** The journals written by the teachers served as the teachers' notes to assist them in answering the following focus group questions:

Focus Group Questions

- State your identification number and discipline. Which music-based activity was implemented in your classroom? Because of your activity, has your perception of music-based lessons changed?
- What is your perception of how the music activity aligns with the lesson?
- What element of the music was the most stimulating (rhythm, melody lyrics/message, instrumentation, history)? Explain.
- In what way did the music make the lesson more appealing? Explain.
- Did you witness any positive impacts the music might have had on the lesson content? What evidence indicates what you witnessed?
- Did the music make the content more relatable? If so, how (rhythmically, melodically, lyrically, instrumentally, or historically)?
- What kind of evidence do you have to demonstrate that the music contributed to the improvement of content comprehension?
- Do you think that your music-based activity engaged the students more than if there was no music in your lesson? Why or why not?
- Would you use music in your lesson again? Why or why not?
- Based on the responses in this focus group, do you perceive music-based techniques increasing student engagement in specific disciplines over others? If so, which discipline(s) seemed to have the higher level of engagement? Why?

RESULTS

Research Questions and Themes

Research Questions	Themes That Address the Research Questions
RQ1: How do teachers perceive culturally responsive teaching strategies as a method of increasing student engagement of urban, at-risk youth in the classroom?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theme 1: Teachers' Existing Instructional Strategies to Connect Students with Classroom Content Theme 2: Teachers' Differentiated Instructional Approaches to Connect Students with Classroom Content
RQ2: How do teachers perceive using culturally relevant music-based didactic activities as a method of increasing student engagement of urban, at-risk youth in the classroom?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theme 3: Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Best Practices for Using Culturally Relevant Music to Connect Students with Classroom Content Theme 4: Teacher Perceptions of Music as a Strategy to Improve Engagement of Students

Theme 1: Teachers' Existing Instructional Strategies to Connect Students with Classroom Content

- Display of Cultural Artwork and Posters
- Display of Images of African American Historical Figures (Activists of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s)
- Display of African American Flag
- Display of African Masks
- Assignments Regarding Education, Health and Diet Statistics that Connected Students to Their Community
- Cultural Music - Rap Used for Phonics and Math

Theme 2: Teachers' Differentiated Instructional Approaches to Connect Students with Classroom Content

- Technological Approaches
 - Chrome Books and Promethean Boards
 - Educational Websites and Applications (YouTube, Prodigy, Khan Academy)
- Non-Technological Approaches
 - Anchor Charts and Posters
 - Legos and Stuffed Animals
 - Restorative Circles and Cooperative Learning Groups

Theme 3: Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Best Practices for Using Culturally Relevant Music to Connect Students with Classroom Content

- Culturally Relevant Music Could Promote Verbalization
- Culturally Relevant Music Could Promote Memorization
- Culturally Relevant Music Could Enhance the Message of Stories
- Culturally Relevant Music Could Make Learning More Fun

Theme 4: Teacher Perceptions of Music as a Strategy to Improve Engagement of Students

- More Than Half of the Teachers Perceived Culturally Relevant Music Improved Content Comprehension
- The Majority of the Teachers Perceived Culturally Relevant Music Increased the Level of Student Engagement
- Almost All of the Teachers Perceived Culturally Relevant Music Had a Positive Impact on the Content of the Lesson
- Even Though No Teacher Chose the Instrumentation Activity, Two Teachers, Who Chose the Melodic Activity, Perceived the Instrumentation As Having the Most Impact
- A few teachers had reservations about Incorporating Culturally Relevant Music in the classroom lessons. The following are their responses:
 - One teacher who implemented the melodic activity and teaches third through eighth-grade students expressed that the older students would benefit from the music, but her younger students would be distracted.
 - Another teacher who implemented the historical activity suggested that using the music in a presentation should be an option and guided by the teacher to make sure it's appropriate.

CONCLUSIONS

Four Implications for Practice

- Culturally responsive teaching practices can make a positive difference in the learning experience of urban at-risk students.
- Culturally relevant music can enhance learning for students who do not respond well to traditional instruction.
- Differentiated instruction can help meet the learning needs of students.
- Culturally relevant music can increase student engagement because it has the potential to make classroom lessons more appealing.

Four Recommendations for Practice

- Teachers should familiarize and even study the music to which the students in urban schools can relate.
- Teachers should use culturally relevant music-based activities to generate discussions or write about current events.
- Teachers should include culturally relevant music in American history lessons.
- Culturally relevant music can increase student engagement because it has the potential to make classroom lessons more appealing.

Three Recommendations for Future Research

- To conduct similar research at early times during the school.
- To include music teachers in future studies involving the integration of culturally relevant music-based activities.
- To conduct future research about integrating culturally relevant music-based activities using more technology and digital media.

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CONTACT

Dr. Darshell DuBose-Stone
D.S. Education Alliance, LLC
www.dseducationalalliance.com
darshell@dseducationalalliance.com
(201) 370-8664