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**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Proposal**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this research will be to explore culturally relevant pedagogy and how teachers can be educated in its’ proper implementation by which to affect the way African American students learn in middle school. The term ‘culturallyrelevant’ describes education which is compatible to the demographic being taught. Research has shown a proliferate need for curriculum design to be parallel to the students’ home life, community and language, especially in African American communities. In spite of the eradication of school segregation laws, American schools continue to be separate and unequal. In addition, children continue to be instructed in a Eurocentric educational system by white teachers who do not understand African American children, their communities or culture. Pedagogy that is culturally relevant will validate students’ natal background thereby developing cultural competence and the empowerment to make sociopolitical change.

**Key words**: Eurocentric, sociopolitical cultural competence, culturally relevant pedagogy

This study will be designed to address the following questions:

* How can teachers be trained to implement culturally relevant pedagogies into their curriculum?
* How can teachers unfamiliar with the culture of their teaching demographic become more connected with the students they teach?
* What can administrators do to support the implementation of this technique?

**Introduction**

Schools are institutions which usually reflect the architecture of the society (Asante, 1991). If schools mirror their societies, the reflection of the American educational system is grossly distorted. We live in a Eurocentric society whose perspectives and assumptions are generated by White privilege (Bernal, 2002). The purpose of education is to help students find cultural relevance within society by which they can learn how to be open-minded regarding other cultures (Asante, 1991). Unfortunately, Eurocentric curriculums laud the accomplishments and contributions of white society and decimate the contributions made by other cultures (Milner, 2012).

The strategy of culturally relevant pedagogy requires teachers to construct lessons that connect with the child’s natal environment; thus validating the child’s culture. When a child feels validated the ability to focus on new academic material becomes easier which alleviates classroom management difficulties (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant pedagogy also exposes racist epistemologies insidiously imbedded in Eurocentric curriculum taught in classrooms daily, which stifles the potential and power of African American children to excel academically and socially (Milner, 2012).

**Previous Research**

There is an immense amount of research addressing the subject of culturally relevant pedagogy that can be applied to every academic discipline. In the academic discipline of music, it is imperative that the students’ culture be validated, acknowledged, and respected by the teacher tailoring the pedagogical framework to include musical repertoire which correlates with the natal origin of the student; thereby establishing security, identity and pride (Shaw, 2012). While Eurocentric music has a large representation in the curriculum, teachers must design curriculum that connects new knowledge to student’s cultural foundation. Students whose culture is represented within academic material will feel complete and significant, resulting in the cultivation of sociological cultural competence and empowerment.

In every discipline taught, teachers should develop a knowledge base which is culturally relevant and will serve as a means to connect new academic material. Becoming genuinely involved with parents and community by actively listening and becoming social aware will yield greater academic and relational impact with the students taught. Teachers who care about their student’s academic well-being will see the moral, social, and academic ramifications in connecting culturally relevant pedagogy to the demographic (Gay, 2001). It is imperative for teachers to be open, fun-loving, and genuine with their students, in conjunction with setting high expectations knowing they have the ability to excel. Primarily, teachers instructing students whose cultural backgrounds differ from their own should examine hidden biases and stereotypical perceptions in order to have a clearer understanding of the culture (Milner, 2012). Shedding biases and false cultural concepts will allow a broader spectrum of humanity to be experienced. When teachers experience freedom, they possess authority to liberate and empower their students (Gomez, 1991).

Since the year 2000, 83-90% percent of Americas’ teachers are Caucasian, middle class females who do not live in urban areas, while the Caucasian student population in public schools has decreased to fifty-six percent (King, 2000; Seidi, 2007; Shaw, 2012); thus increasing the challenge to teach from a culturally relevant perspective. Many Caucasian instructors have not seen the need to regard any other culture outside of their own; therefore making it difficult to connect with students of color.

Seidi (2007) stressed the need for Caucasian teachers to search outside of their comfort zones and communities for ways to develop pedagogy that is culturally relevant to their African American students. Reading books relating to African American history and its’ effects on culture as well as visiting African American churches are just some ways to broaden perspective and develop a culturally diverse pedagogical framework from which to work from.

Sampson and Wade (2011) conducted a mixed-method study which compared culturally relevant to non-culturally relevant pedagogy in a large urban high school in Colorado. The focus of the study was to educate teachers on the value of creating culturally relevant pedagogy by observing their students and listening to their cultural needs via enlightening feedback. We live in a multicultural society where Eurocentric pedagogy has segregated education and weakened its’ impact. In order to be academically competent in all areas of education, it is vital to receive an open-minded, well-rounded education which validates all cultures and their contributions to society. A culturally diverse education is the foundation of all education (Asante, 1991).

**Research Design**

The purpose of this research will be to explore culturally relevant pedagogy and how teachers can be educated in its’ proper implementation by which to affect the way African American students learn in middle school.

This study will be designed to address the following:

* How can teachers be trained to implement this pedagogical technique into their lessons?
* How can teachers that are unfamiliar with their teaching demographic become more connected with the students they teach?
* What can administrators do to support the implementation of this technique?

This experimental study will be conducted as qualitative along with quantitative support utilizing surveys and interviewing teachers and students.

A high needs school district from Long Island, New York will be selected for this study. Site demographics consist of African American students with approximately thirty children in each class. Teachers participating in the study will range from elementary to high school. A formal email will be distributed to each department in the district asking for volunteers to participate in a study regarding teaching styles from which five teachers will be selected. Each selected teacher will be given a questionnaire asking them about their pedagogical and assessment techniques. Baseline tests from the previous and current year will be obtained as well as lists of students who have dropped out of class in the beginning of the school year.

Each teacher will be observed over a four week period. The focus for this study will be:

* Teacher’s pedagogical style type
* Interactions between student and teacher
* Classroom management
* Assessment strategies
* What group of students the teacher gravitate to most during instruction (boys, girls, African American, Caucasian, Hispanic)
* Does the teachers’ observable pedagogical style indicate a love for the art of teaching

At the completion of observations, teachers will fill out a survey sheet to help reflect on their overall impact with the students they teach. Questions will be constructed to calculate, but will not be limited to: percentage of academic engagement versus the baseline test results, classroom management, teaching methods assessment, community involvement, and P.T.A. collaboration, and the likelihood of attendance if professional development classes on culturally relevant pedagogy became available. The students will also fill out survey sheets rating the enjoyment level of the class, level of social and academic connection between student and teacher, the level of academic understanding of topics taught and so on. Chart evaluations will then be created to measure the amount of culturally relevant pedagogy actually utilized in class by each teacher, the observable amount of student engagement to the material taught based on the focus of the study, information results of baseline assessments, including race differentiations and gender of teacher and students.

**Significance**

This study is of immense importance with regard to the future of education and our society. Racism continues to permeate the foundation of our country and government, which dictate our laws, perspectives, and lifestyles. The effects of racism on our educational system has led to large disparities in the number of students of color classified as special education cases, excessive numbers of students being disciplined for minor infractions, excessive suspensions and expulsions, students of color being disproportionately unrepresented in gifted and talented academic programs, and Caucasian teachers who dismiss their own racial biases by professing their inability to see color resulting in cognitive dissonance (Milner, 2012). Studies focusing on cultural relevancy can assist teachers with tailoring their pedagogical techniques and academically impact their students by connecting lessons to their natal culture (Shaw, 2012). Teachers who decide to be open, honest with themselves, and inspired to change can effectively influence students and their communities. Empowering students through their culture nurtures sociopolitical and cultural competency which validates them as significant people who will become the catalyst of transformation in their communities.

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