

EDUCATING BLACK YOUTH THROUGH HIP-HOP STUDIES

EDUCANDO A JUVENTUDE NEGRA ATRAVÉS DE ESTUDOS DE HIP-HOP

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RESUMO

Este ensaio investiga o desempenho educacional entre brancos e negros nos EUA e as diversas razões apontadas pela pesquisa para a lacuna no campo da educação na América. Explora as dimensões de classe e de raça que embasam os argumentos acerca desta lacuna, mas interpõe uma explicação cultural, além de ressaltar os “conceitos norteadores” subjacentes como sendo a maior razão para esta lacuna educacional. Desmascara o “modelo de privação cultural” para o baixo rendimento entre os negros, defendendo, particularmente no ensino superior, que seja utilizado realmente a prolífica contribuição cultural negra como metodologia de ensino. Explora a Teoria Crítica Racial, assim como a Teoria da Pedagogia da Justiça Social do Hip-Hop para examinar explicações alternativas para o problema e métodos para melhorá-lo. Por meio de um estudo de caso, são apresentados exemplos de como os Estudos do Hip-hop obtiveram sucesso ao tornar a educação relevante para estudantes universitários de cor¹, em especial para estudantes negros, acarretando, do mesmo modo, implicações para os níveis de ensino fundamental e médio.

Palavras-chave: Lacuna na educação. Racismo na educação. Teoria Crítica da Raça. Estudos de Hip-Hop.

ABSTRACT

This essay explores educational performance between blacks and whites in the United States and the various reasons research has given for the education gap in America. It explores both the class and race based arguments for the gap, but interjects a cultural explanation and underlying “orienting concepts” as more salient reasons for the education gap. It debunks the “cultural deprivation model” for low by blacks, and argues for actually utilizing the prolific cultural contributions of black culture in teaching methodology, particularly in higher education. It explores Critical Race Theory, as well as Social Justice Hip-Hop Pedagogy theory to examine alternative explanations for the problem and methods to ameliorate it. Through the use of one case study, examples of how Hip-Hop Studies is shown to achieve success in making education relevant to university students of color, and black students in particular, which has implications for elementary and secondary education as well.

¹ O termo empregado nos EUA, *of color* traduzido aqui como de cor, refere-se ao conjunto de pessoas consideradas não-brancas, como, por exemplo os latino-americanos (brown).



Keywords: Education Gap. Racism in Education. Critical Race Theory. Hip-Hop Studies.

In United States, public education (kindergarten through 12th grade), it has become an accepted fact that there is an education gap between whites and blacks. From school readiness at the entry kindergarten level (GARCIA, WEISS, 2017) to disparity in tests scores of graduating high school seniors (DE BREY, 2018), the performance gap between whites and blacks in the United States, though narrowed over the last ten years, has remained troublingly high. These realities are then inherited by higher education for those students entering college. There have been much publish analyses about the reasons for this U.S. education gap based on race, including school-related causes, such as lack of black instructors as role models, Euro-centered curriculum, and disparity of punishment for misbehavior by suspensions and expulsion from school for black youth as opposed to whites. However, the usual justifications are poverty and lack of home resources and neighborhood environment. Both of these large arenas of causes---educational system and home/community lack---are linked to socio-political influences within the United States.

Manifestations of the gap between whites and blacks at the secondary level become apparent at the college level. There is lack of education preparedness leading to unsuccessful matriculation of black youth at the university level. As a retired university professor who taught university for twenty-years, in this essay, I focus on a potential remedy for the education gap. Hip-hop curriculum in the teaching of various socio-cultural subjects is an educational innovation that has proven successful in empowering black youth in high school and college. This enabling factor has the potential to narrow the achievement gap and to promote graduation from higher education for African Americans. The engagement of Hip-Hop Studies within humanities and arts curricula allow black students, as well as students of other ethnicities, to find resonance between their cultural interests and social, political, and economic educational theory. This connection promotes educational relevance



regarding their lived experiences. I elucidate the existing problems fostering the education gap, then examine educational theory that offers analysis of the problem, and finally offer Hip-Hop Studies as a new discipline that could potentially reverse the education gap.

1 THE RACIAL EDUCATION GAP

According to a 2013 study conducted by *Education Next*, a journal of opinion and research about education policy, the achievement gap between white and black students in the U.S. has barely narrowed over the last fifty years, “despite nearly a half century of supposed progress in race relations and an increased emphasis on closing such academic discrepancies between groups of students” (CAMERA, 2016, p. 1). The study was conducted by a senior fellow at Stanford University’s Hoover Institution, and was part of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of “Equality of Education Opportunity,” called the Coleman Report. The original report was written two years after the 1964 Civil Rights Act to examine the inequality of education opportunities in elementary and secondary education, especially in the south. The 2016 commemorative report was called “a national embarrassment” because little had changed educationally over fifty years.

Even with significant shifts in the civil rights of African Americans, data from the Education Next report revealed the gap had barely narrowed between the two racial groups. According to the National Assessment for Educational Progress, the average 12th grade black student placed only in the 19th percentile. In the era of reading and literacy the gap seems to have improved slightly more than in math. However, after a half century, the average black student still scores at just the 22nd percentile. The report suggests culture, as well as class, is part of the problem. I argue that with shifts in teaching style, these statistics would improve.

For many years, sociologists literally “blamed the victim” with the cultural deprivation model that attributed black and minority students with having little



“cultural capital” in their homes or communities. However, this explanation did not take into account the “political economy of the larger society or the structures within schools” (HOWARD, 2019,p. ix). The cultural deprivation explanation does not account for the fact the school teaching structure did not understand in actuality how rich the cultures from which these students really were. Historically, their cultures actually made significant contributions to the overall culture of the United States, and indeed the world, all of which could have been used as engaging teaching tools.

Studies show that the educational gap starts at the entry into the educational system and rarely shifts as the black child matriculates through the higher grades, with socio-economic status being the chief determining factor for the gap. In the U.S., black Americas make up 21% of people at or below the poverty line, while whites are only 8%. The poverty rate for blacks and Hispanics are double that of whites. Hence, African Americans’ higher poverty rates are exacerbated by the effects of the resulting educational gap, resulting in black youths having little to no social mobility. According to the Economic Policy Institute the fraction of children who earn more than their parents has fallen from approximately 90 percent for children born in 1940 to children born in 1980. Furthermore, the study summarizes that, “the tight links between economic inequalities and achievement gaps cast doubt on asserted equality of opportunity that promotes social mobility and puts the ‘American Dream’ within viable reach” (GARCIA, WEISS, 2017, p. 2).

To ameliorate the overwhelming effects of poverty and low economic status, over the years researchers have suggested particular behavior modifications that could reduce the education gap. These suggested reforms have been parental time spent with the child, and classroom-based preschool programs that get the young child started in a strong educational setting prior to kindergarten. Some research has shown that the latter programs have increased high school graduation rates by 11.4% (JACOBSON, 2017). However, other longitudinal studies have found that the consequences of poverty are increasingly hard to compensate for. The resistance of



educational gaps based on poverty “to these controls is thus a matter of serious concern for researchers and policymakers alike” (GARCIA, WEISS, 2017, p. 4).

Although class and poverty are a major factors, race and culture are also intersectionally implicated in the education gap. Education itself has been analyzed as both the solution and the problem in the socio-economic gaps between blacks and whites in general in the U.S. Historically black Americans have seen a college education, according to Boyer (1997), as “one of the greatest hopes for intellectual and civic progress in this country. Yet for many American, however, it has [also] been seen as part of the problem rather than the solution” (BOYER, 1997, p. 85). Although Boyer does not specifically mention African Americans, one can infer “the problem” part of higher education, which he was addressing, had occurred among blacks in particular.

The cultural deprivation concept, mentioned earlier, is a part of the cultural deficit model argued by sociologist in the 1960s to explain the education gap of black children. Although this model has been debunked, lingering stereotypes about black culture and youth continue. Howard believes that race still matters and influences teaching and learning in diverse schools in powerful ways because “[i]n a multiracial nation such as the United States, examinations of race are most critical within the domain of democracy,” which is the foundation of education, school, and equality. (HOWARD, 2019, p. 91).

2 CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND CULTURE

I use Critical Race Theory (CRT) as an analytical tool to examine how U.S. black students are systemically discriminated against in the educational system. CRT was first theorized in 1995 by Ladson-Billings and Tate and has become increasingly important in investigating chronic racial inequality in higher education, particularly in policy making and the “racialization of student development theories and topics related to college student success” (HARPER, SMITH, DAVIS III, 2016). Essentially,



CRT synthesizes several disciplines, including law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women's studies in the service of racial justice in education. At the core of CRT analysis are seven basic principles:

1. Racism is normative in American life, yet it is not always overt and therefore is difficult to eliminate.
2. CRT rejects the concept of a “colorblind” society, because so-called colorblindness renders misconceptions concerning racial fairness in institutions. It often only addresses the overt forms of inequality and disadvantage caused by racism, while concealing the subtle, covert forms of racism.
3. CRT focuses on the unique perspectives and lived experiences of people of color, and by acknowledging the validity of these lived experiences scholars can place racism in a realistic context and actively work to eliminate it.
4. CRT recognizes “interest-convergence,” the process whereby the white power structure will allow certain racial improvements when they also encourage advances that also promote white self-interests. CRT asserts that whites have been the main beneficiaries of the 1964 civil rights legislation.
5. CRT is founded in “revisionist history” that reexamines America’s historical record, often revising master narratives of past events with those that utilize the experiences of people of color, including slavery, Jim Crow laws, and racial and school segregation.
6. CRT depends on a sense of racial realism, realizing that although race itself is a social construct, racism is a method by which society allots privilege and status. This implicit contradiction necessitates the understanding of racism as basically permanent, while still working strategically to improve the lives of historically oppressed people.
7. CRT continuously critiques claims of meritocracy in all societal realms, including education, because it sustains white supremacy. CRT insists that



racism is systemic and is not individual (Harper, Patton, and Wooden, 2009, 390-392).

These seven principles of CRT allow me to exam the education of black youth, particularly in higher education, utilizing its principles of racial realism (6) and to realistically utilize their lived experiences (3) to propose a curriculum based on those experiences (5) to ameliorate the effects of racism. It also inspires students to bridge the education gap, matriculate, and graduate. The approaches to education that focus on the lived experiences of students of color, and black students in particular, shift the focus from the aforementioned cultural deficit model to a cultural difference paradigm. The focus on culture becomes an important marker for a revised curriculum that accounts for “traits or learning styles that are common among working-class students and students of color, and as a result teaching styles that are congruent with these traits should be constructed” (HOWARD, 2019, p. 52).

Cultural approaches to curriculum development that incorporate different learning styles of students of color, I argue, is the answer to narrowing the achievement gap. As Howard notes, “it is critical to understand how culture plays out in schools and connects to varying types of knowledge” (HOWARD, 2019, p. 53). The conventional wisdom views schools institutionally as conductors of academic knowledge, but that expertise carries certain *types* of cultural knowledge consistent with mainstream beliefs, templates, and experiences. This is problematic for non-mainstream students who grow up with difference experiences and templates for life. CRT implicitly includes “the voices of those who rarely are heard.” Howard uses Rogoff’s (2003) principle of “orienting concepts” that he says influence cultural activities as a part of the entire cultural process of human development (HOWARD, 2019, p. 58). If teachers are trained in the various orienting concepts of the various cultures in their classrooms, they could then inspire students who may learn from different orientations than they did. This multicultural educational approach could then narrow the education gap among black students. Hip-Hop culture has already



proven that it contains the inspiring orienting concepts that can turn around education for black students in particular, and working class students in general.

3 PRINCIPLES OF HIP-HOP STUDIES

Taken in tandem, the music, dance, verbal skills, and pervasive semiotics of dress and style that constitute hip-hop culture are a part of an enduring tradition of historical cultural phenomena that has been delineated as the Africanist aesthetic (OSUMARE, 2007). The Africanist aesthetic encompasses African-based cultural forms and philosophical approaches existing in the African diaspora, including the United States. These cultural forms continue to reflect similar musical, dance, and oral, and visual practices, as well as philosophical principles, as those in Africa; though not African per se, enough resemblances in the artists' attitude and relationship to audience-receiver exist that cultural connections to African cultural practices are apparent. Hip-hop, as technology-mediated global youth culture, is a contemporary trajectory of this historical Africanist aesthetic that resonates with youth throughout the world, and definitely with black American youth, because it grows out of their lived experiences. Regarding hip-hop culture, this manifestation of the Africanist aesthetic started in the Bronx, New York in the mid-nineteen seventies.

To understand how Hip-Hop Studies actually engages black students for educational success, I utilize Social Justice Hip-Hop Pedagogy (SJHP) theory, as articulated by Marcella Runell Hall (2011). SJHP is a layered approach founded on social justice education and is embedded in an understanding and appreciation of hip-hop culture. It is reliant on critical pedagogy along with community activism in curricula that validates youth culture and promotes increased media literacy, which is crucial in the 21st century education. Educators are currently teaching hip-hop as its own subject, while utilizing its pedagogy to teach many humanities-based subjects. Hip-hop pedagogy relies on the resonance between hip-hop messages and aesthetics with students' lived experiences, and in the process engages students in



classroom instruction. This grows from CRT's third major tenet: acknowledging the validity of the lived experiences of students of color.

By utilizing Critical Race Theory and Social Justice Hip-Hop Pedagogy, I explore how Hip-Hop Studies is allowing educators in the United States to successfully engage black students at the secondary and college levels. Students become more attentive to classroom subjects because they see the relevance to their lives. This increased educational engagement occurs also because hip-hop methodology utilizes the cultural tenets that reflect their generation, such as “phat beat” through deejaying, “dope rhymes” with rap, and “def moves” that constitute hip-hop dance styles (OSUMARE, 2007). Furthermore, hip-hop music and its overall culture can “provide a counter-narrative to mainstream cultural values” (HALL, 2011, p. 1). Creating music and culture in response to dominant cultural supposition, hip-hop often brings issues of race and class to the forefront.

Universities from Stanford to Harvard, and from University of Arizona, which has a minor in Hip-Hop Studies, to University of California, Berkeley, are offering accredited courses in hip-hop culture, from literary, music, psychology, and sociology perspectives. There are a preponderance of published texts and courses on the subject that hip-hop studies has become a new academic field in academia.

Yet hip-hop culture is not without its own contradictions. As Hall analyzes,

Youth culture, in a desire to be counter-narrative, has connected to the counter-hegemonic undertones evident in Hip-Hop music. However, hip-hop still exists within a society that is racist, classist, sexist, homophobic, and intolerant of many diverse religious beliefs. Though hip-hop music and culture can provide a counter-narrative to mainstream cultural values and media influences, [it] can be both liberatory and oppressive itself. (HALL, 2011, p. 54).

Therefore, it is incumbent upon the teacher to use critical thinking to interrogate both rebellious social message, as well as the form itself. “The greatest appeal of hip-hop culture is that whether or not it can provide answers, it allows

listeners to ask critical questions and investigate subtle nuances” of society (op.cit. p. 54).

Hip-hop Education scholar Martha Diaz is on the forefront of the field of Hip-Hop Studies and it's use in education. She notes that,

Hip-Hop-based education has empowered thousands of youth and adults around the world to develop their own identity, voice, and leadership in society. Through Hip-Hop culture, youth learn to 'read' the world and develop what Freire calls 'critical praxis,' reflection, and action (DIAZ, 2011, p. 2).

She reflects that hip-hop studies is an extension of Black Studies that became a hard-fought field in academia in the late sixties, producing “culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical tool[s] used to engage youth in academic learning, develop artistic skills, and cultivate a social justice lens to critically analyze the surrounding world” (op.cit. p. 2). While most see rap music as a multi-billion dollar global industry, the culture that produced it has become a successful educational tool that speaks “to the experiences of disfranchised and underrepresented urban youth across the world” (op.cit. p. 2).

The idea that so many school age youth are a part of disfranchised sectors of society not only the United States, but also throughout the world, is what I call “connective marginalities” (OSUMARE, 2007). It is precisely because some youth, due to race and class, are marginalized, oppressed, and disenfranchised, that hence they are also underrepresented in education. Hip-hop becomes an expressive cultural tool to voice this underlying social marginalization, as well as promoting alternative cultural priorities for those youth. Hip-hop culture, and particularly rap music, becomes a way of “[...] extolling one's community context ... [and] allows for myriad enunciations of individual subjectivities and discrete local identities now circulating the globe through rap music” (op.cit. p. 73). I have discussed this global connection of youth marginalization, particularly in the African diaspora in



“Marginalidades conectivas” do Hip hop e a Diáspora Africana: Os Casos de Cuba e do Brasil” (OSUMARE, 2015).

Hence, because of hip-hop’s commercial success, youth from marginalized communities globally have been emboldened to demand their education include their popular cultural expression. “Thus, extant global inequalities work in tandem with the irresistible Africanist aesthetics to construct the global lure of hip-hop” (OSUMARE, 2007, p. 68). This is why it has become essential to include hip-hop studies as a part of secondary and higher education as an effective educational tool for inclusion.

4 CASE STUDY IN HIP-HOP EDUCATION

I turn now to a case study of hip-hop in higher education and its effect in classroom achievement at the university level. Although I am interested in hip-hop pedagogy at the elementary and secondary levels, more published analysis has been achieved at the university level, and hip-hop studies is more easily implemented in colleges and universities. English education and hip-hop scholar Emery Petchauer claims that few actual case studies have been conducted on hip-hop on college campuses, and that, “This dearth of work in higher education is a shortcoming because of the unique ways that both institutions and students have incorporated hip-hop into the academic and social fabric of institutions.” He further explains that, “These ways include hip-hop courses, curricula, and symposia, campus organizations, and the many ways that students create and participate in hip-hop on their own” (PETCHAUER, 2010, p. 769). He indicates how these various platforms have aided in configuring educational proficiencies for students who participated in his study.

Petchauer presents “different ways that students deeply involved in hip-hop at two institutions (i.e., *hip-hop collegians*) made their personal experiences in hip-hop relevant to their educational pursuits” (op.cit. p. 769). At the basis of his study is Kearny’s (1984) “worldview” conceptual framework that contains “basic assumptions



and images that make up a more or less coherent, though not necessarily accurate way, of thinking about the world” (op.cit. p. 772). Kearny’s worldview construction has five different dimensions that are pertinent for Petchauer’s study: 1) self and other, 2) relationship between the self and other, 3) classification of other domains, 4) causation, and 5) space and time (KEARNY, 1984). “Self” is how a particular person or groups of people construct themselves and their identities; while “other” represents the categorical realms that are distinct from oneself.

Petchauer elaborates on Kearny’s framework with “generation” itself as a component of the self-identity. He formulates that, “For some young adults, hip-hop also exists as a generational identity that signifies common values, ideologies, and perspectives” (PETCHAUER, 2010, p. 769). I too have found “youth,” or “youth rebellion,” a salient category among connective marginalities, linking hip-hop youth globally. As I have said, “[...] hip-hop’s youthful irreverence challenges adult authority and the social and cultural norms that the previous generation has established. Even as hip-hop’s practitioners themselves age, the youth dynamic of international hip-hop culture remains” (OSUMARE, 2007, p. 72).

Besides Kearny’s worldview framework, Petchauer also utilizes Critical Pedagogy theory, which intersects with Critical Race Theory. He uses Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 2007; and Freire, 1973 to interrogate how students “constructed higher education at their respective institutions” in order “to understand the relationship component of worldview.” As he says, “critical pedagogy asks, how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others clearly are not” (PETCHAUER, 2010, p. 772). These theoretical questions are obviously crucial for marginalized black youth, and for investigating the foundations of race, class, and culture within education and the assumed epistemology appropriate for educational settings.

Petchauer’s study took place at two large, public institutions in the southeastern and southwestern United States during the 2005- 2006 academic year.

University #1 had 20,800 students representing the following ethnic demographics: 70% Caucasian, 20% African American, 6% Asian, 3% Hispanic, and 1% Other. He says,

During the time of this study, I described the level of hip-hop activity in the surrounding scene as moderate, consisting of weekly hip-hop nights at local venues, events run by independent (i.e., noncorporate) promoters, a local chapter of the Universal Zulu Nation (an international organization for hip-hop culture). (PETCHAUER, 2010, p. 773).

At the University #2 in the southwestern U.S. there were 38,000 students enrolled, with the ethnic breakdown as follows: 45% Caucasian, 4% African American, 15% Asian, 23% Hispanic, and 13% Other. The surrounding hip-hop activity he describes, “[...] as high due once again to a UZN chapter, many local groups and collectives, at least five independently owned hip-hop music stores, and multiple spaces every week for independent hip-hop events”. (PETCHAUER, 2010, p. 774). The surrounding hip-hop community was important because Petchauer himself had participated in that community two years prior to beginning the study at the universities, giving him an insider status with the students participating in the study.

His methodology consisted of in-depth interviews, covering the relevance of hip-hop and education to their lives and identity, the activities in their daily lives, and the meanings the participants attributed to those activities. As Petchauer reports, he utilized “comparative coding, keywords in context, and classical content analysis,” in order “to identify common refrains, rituals, and metaphors with the aid of qualitative data analysis software” (PETCHAUER, 2010, p. 775).

Petchauer’s findings were varied, but demonstrated a strong relationship for his student participants between hip-hop practice and consumption with educational choices. One male participant expressed that hip-hop played an important role in his adopting a skeptical perspective on the U.S. government and the Iraq War, which influenced his decision to break with family tradition of joining the military, and



instead enrolling in college. He found new life meanings from hip-hop music and culture, particularly from listening to emcees like Talib Kweli, Mos Def, and Common, known as “conscious rappers.” This same student began to see the difference between the master narrative of the government, and the perspective of the marginalized in society through hip-hop: “For me, [hip-hop] lets me see a different side of things. The news isn’t really going to talk about the viewpoint of someone from the street actually in that situation” (op.cit. p. 777). Petchauer notes that, “This relationship between hip-hop and personal experience is important to highlight because it underscores that identification with themes in music does not happen in a contextual vacuum” (op.cit. p. 778). His analysis has significance for education because it reveals how one can understand one’s personal circumstances through an educational lens, and hip-hop is a particularly potent social prism for curricular relevance.

In his case study Petchauer also found some students made even stronger connections to their academic majors through hip-hop. Another student who was a history education major articulated that he “believed that the overall goal of educating younger generations about history was to give them the tools to question and evaluate the world rather than passively accept the dominant and prevailing ways that previous events have been portrayed” (op.cit. p. 778). This second male student felt that being able to pass on critical thinking skills to his future students as an educator was absolutely essential. The student also noted that his own critical thinking came from hip-hop, but not any specific songs. As student of history, he had studied the beginning of hip-hop in the 1970s in poor Bronx neighborhoods. He felt that those earlier youths developed the beginning of hip-hop culture as an “anti-establishment” mentality, and their attitude was a natural reaction to public education cutbacks in music programs and recreational activities in New York at the time. Hence, this student’s understanding of the social-political conditions prompting the origins of rebellious hip-hop culture was actually lodged in Critical Race Theory’s principle of challenging the claims of meritocracy at the basis of American society.



Instead, the history of hip-hop taught him that a “revisionist history” is necessary to understand the socio-political truths underlying American society.

At Petchauer’s second college, he found an African American student who was a professional deejay and turntablist, while he was studying public health at the university. This student advocated for both commercial and underground hip-hop music, while developing a critical perspective in school. He was particularly interested in “how minority groups are educated about health risks, how health care is made accessible, and how health is related to racial and economic oppression in the United States.” In one of his health classes he learned about the infamous Tuskegee Experiment, where African American men were intentionally denied penicillin treatment for the syphilis disease, and were used as guinea pigs by white doctors to learn more about the illness. Petchauer recorded him as saying, “It’s shocking to learn that kind of stuff in school. Honestly, I come to school to learn stuff I am not supposed to be learning, like facts like that. That’s what makes school fun to me” (PETCHAUER, 2010, p. 779). This student participant acknowledged that it was necessary for him to use some of the formal knowledge he was learning in the classroom, but mix that with his own growing understanding of the reality of the world. Petchauer discusses “knowledge source-mixing,” a concept “based upon the hip-hop aesthetic practice of sampling and its related epistemology” (op.cit. p. 780). As a practice, sampling uses digital instruments like the sampler to capture different musical elements in order to create something greater than the individual mixed components. Petchauer notes that this student understood that, “since there are perspectives and bodies of knowledge that one will not learn in school, one must sample sources of information outside of school. The student learned to trust his skills of mixing, transferring it to understanding the social, historical, and political structures underlying public health that he was studying in the classroom.

Although I have only revealed a three participants in Petchauer’s case study, they illustrate the general finding of his fieldwork. As he says, “The results of this study illustrate how students applied their experiences with the critical discourses of



hip-hop music and the questioning discourse of hip-hop more generally to their perspectives of university education and their specific academic pursuits” (PETCHAUER, 2010, p. 769). The study exposes the different ways that young adults from various ethnic backgrounds make a cultural product (hip-hop), created primarily by Black communities, relevant to their educational lives. For black students in particular in higher education, their interest in, as Petchauer puts it, “knowing what’s up and learning what you’re not supposed to,” can be the educational hook that leads them to bridging the education gap leading to graduation with a college degree. This also has implications for education using hip-hop to construct notions of identity and history at the elementary and secondary school levels as well.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that racial segregation, including the operation of “separate but equal” facilities in public education would no longer be legal. However, this court ruling did not go into immediate effect. In fact, most schools were still segregated ten years later when the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act followed in 1965. America wanted to remain separate and unequal, and fought hard to remain that way. Education was at the core of the conflict, because an educated black citizenry, which had been enslaved for two-hundred and forty years, would mean that socio-political power would have to be shared. Today, black Americans are still fighting for an equal education, and many public schools remain segregated based on neighborhoods. The education gap is both class based and race based, and is imbedded in the long history of inequality in the U.S.

The mid-sixties civil rights era, and the late sixties Black Power and Black Arts movement, which influenced many other marginalized peoples throughout the world, were the beginnings of self-determination educationally and culturally. The battle to develop Black Studies and Ethnic Studies departments, with their attendant new



scholarship and aesthetic values, challenged the Eurocentric U.S. educational system. Beginning at the university levels, alternative narratives of history with a more inclusive American identity began to trickle down to the public schools, precipitating another fight over elementary and high school textbooks. Out of this educational struggle, Critical Race Theory (CRT) evolved to codify the conflict and potential remedies. CRT proved that racism was at the basis of many sectors of American society, including education. It also articulated the unique perspectives and lived experiences of people of color. CRT set the stage for the inclusion of Hip-Hop Studies that began to academically evolve in the 1990s, based on the grassroots culture of 1970s Bronx, New York. Hip-Hop Studies is not a panacea for the education gap, but it is an important tool in inspiring black students and students of color in education by using their lived experiences to understand the world around them.

Since 1.1 million high school students drop out every year (BROAD..., 2010), it is important to become more innovative in our educational methodologies. Research has shown that the failure of education is connected to “the persistence of rote learning, ineffective teachers, poor school leadership, and a lack of resources in schools and surrounding communities. In turn, “This education crisis has direct negative consequences for poverty, crime, and economic conditions in the U.S.” (DIAS, FERGUS, NOGUERA, 2011).

With these dire circumstances, finding new approaches to inspiring youth in education becomes important for the future of the country itself.

Education and hip-hop scholar Marcella Runell Hall’s concept of “Social Justice Hip-Hop Pedagogy” which parallels with hip-hop studies could be one such methodology. Her concept focuses not just on curriculum, but the institution itself. It investigates how racism, classism, and sexism “influence all aspects of education including policies, administrators, curriculum developers, as well as teachers, students, curriculum and pedagogy.” She says, the goal of social justice education is “full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet



their needs.” Furthermore, she asserts that the foundation of hip-hop culture is based on similar tenet of social justice education” (HALL, 2011, p. 89). Hence, the use of hip-hop pedagogy, which we have seen through Petchauer’s case study, is critical to turning these educational statistics around.

Implementing Hip-hop curricula within academia is not without its conflicts. As Petchauer (2012) analyzes, academia views hip-hop “as the source of anti-intellectualism, immorality, and general undesirable behavior among students” (PETCHAUER, 2012, p. 5). He also notes that academia also has some problems with the implicit practices and discourses of hip-hop culture. From hip-hop culture’s perspective, young practitioners feel that educational institutions are promoting misinformation about American history and contemporary society, because it represents the master narrative, which from their point of view, needs to be deconstructed.

The entire educational system and the classroom structure needs to be re-envisioned to solve this conflict and potentially evolve innovative new teaching methods for educational success. One of the innovative methods that hip-hop educators utilize to bridge the two realms is a change in the teaching arrangement from the instructor being at the head of the learning process to the hip-hop “cipher.” A cipher is a circular communal space in which practitioners usually participate in hip-hop. Utilizing hip-hop culture in the methodology of curricular sharing could be a simple innovative classroom shift in formation. Petchauer (2012) says, “education that happens indirectly or as an implication of an activity” (op.cit. p. 72) is a useful tool. In other words, breaking up the “talking head” of the all-knowing instructor in the classroom, and engaging activity that involves the students in the learning process becomes another epistemological modality that can simultaneously entertain and educate the student at the same time.

With innovative classroom teaching methods that utilize the lived experiences of many of the students, innovative educational modalities can be engaged to deliver educational material for student success. As Howard (2019, p. 65) rightfully analyzes,

“Cultural responsive pedagogy embodies a professional, political, cultural, ethical, and ideological disposition that supersedes mundane teaching acts”. Culturally responsive pedagogy that engages students of color goes beyond mere rhetoric of educational success to the reality of educational relevance.

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