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Whenever hip hop and its implications are brought up as a viable pedagogy, numerous English educators, especially those in rural settings, are quick to reject it or not utilize it in their classrooms. The dismissal by rural educators may be due to a lack in understanding of what hip hop artists are communicating, the inability to see beyond the hook of hip hop, and/or the advice or the directive not to teach with hip hop from colleagues or administrators, respectively, because hip hop doesn't match up with the needs and wants of rural students. While these concerns are worth considering, hip hop education *can* be utilized in a rural setting by incorporating a widespread use of youth lens, analyzing social justice issues with place-based pedagogies to draw similarities and notice differences between hip hop and rural settings, and incorporating hip hop's true intentions rather than it's hook for connecting with youth.

Twenty percent of the nation's public school students are educated in rural schools (Eckert & Petrone, 2013, p. 70). These students and the schools they are educated in are faced with many roadblocks, including large distances from institutions of higher learning, which limit connections to teacher education programs and collaboration or research possibilities; teachers having limited knowledge of the community's values; and detrimental issues ranging from poverty to a lack of educational resources to systemic marginalization (Eckert & Petrone, 2013, p. 71). All of these roadblocks place innumerable amounts of stress on the educators tasked with

teaching students the required skills and content deemed by their local school boards, administrators, and state and federal requirements.

Often one of the content and skill requirement that teachers are tasked to teach is poetry. I can imagine the sounds of the grunts and gasps that students emit whenever I bring up “poetry” as the next unit of study. These noises are attempts at communicating the pain and torture that students often associate with poetry and the teacher(s) that made them write, read, and recite poetry in its many forms. Poetry is where hip hop can be incorporated the most effectively.

Prior to taking TE 891: Special Topics in Teaching, Curriculum and Schooling: Enacting Hip-Hop Literacies, I was just as guilty as the educators out there who utilize hip hop as a gateway to canonical texts within a poetry unit. The poetry unit reviewed poetic terms learned in previous grades, added nuanced and more complex terminology, incorporated hip hop to hook students into the unit, and led to students analyzing and writing their own “Where I’m From” poems. The unit also was a means to get to know students better because poetry was more authentic writing that allowed the writer/poet to express themselves in ways an analytic literary theory essay on a piece of assigned text did not. My intention to get the students hooked and interested in poetry worked until I pulled away the curtain to bring in canonical texts and writing styles. At that point the charm was gone and students were back to dreading poetry.

Upon reflection of my own teaching and the rural context I work in, I have figured out a way to incorporate hip hop into my classroom. To begin, the poetry unit is now taught in an English course focused on the development and future of the individual rather than an English course focused on taking a stance on a topic or issue. This relocation allows students to utilize the Youth Lens (YL). The YL “examines how texts represent adolescents” and how “various

figurations of adolescents/youth are reinforced or disrupted” (Petrone, Sarigiandes, & Lewis, 2015, p. 511). Other assumptions that can be investigated include: adolescence as a construct, adolescence not being a universal experience, adolescence as a symbolic placeholder, and conceptions of adolescence having consequences (Petrone, Sarigiandes, & Lewis, 2015, p. 510).

Within a course focused on the individual and the decisions that are being made by them to impact the present and future, this YL gives students the ability to connect with the main character(s) through the text that is being presented whether it is an assigned text to be read as a class, a choice text in an independent reading unit, or a poem or song in the poetry unit. In specific terms within the poetry unit, the youth lens can be used to analyze and consider the issues and topics being addressed in hip hop lyrics and what the artists are communicating to their audiences. For example, besides “Lose Yourself” having an excellent example of an internal rhyme scheme, students can analyze the hardships and struggles that Eminem is rapping about, especially as an adolescent/young adult.

Upon identifying hip hop as a means to connect with students, I often find it troubling that students are quick to jump on the bandwagon of the latest song or album that a hip hop artist releases and not acknowledge the social or cultural implications and elements that artists of hip hop are talking about in their music or lyrics. This form of semi-cultural appropriation was shown recently in my classroom when discussions centered around the Black Lives Matter movement and Colin Kaepernick’s movement of kneeling during the National Anthem to protest violence and injustices against racial minorities. My rural students were quick to denounce anyone and everyone associated with these types of movements, even the rappers they claim to enjoy and love.

Place-based pedagogies “are a useful framework to set up English courses” in their entirety, but also to assist teachers with their lack of understanding the social and cultural issues taking place in the community in which they teach (Eckert & Petrone, 2013, p. 76). The demands that are met and addressed within these pedagogies bridge the gap between the rural students and the teacher who, more than likely, lives and has grown up outside of a rural community. Teachers should never want to teach with a “deficit model or belief that rural students are behind” in popular culture” or skills (Eckert & Petrone, 2013, p. 72), but that is often the assumption that new teachers either to the profession or the community carry with them or that they are told to teach with by directives from curriculum directors and administrators that dictate curriculum.

Michael Dando believes that, “hip-hop education is a rethinking of instructional approach rather than an instructional intervention, unit, lesson, or module” (Dando, 2013, p. 33). Rather than have students tell or write to the teacher about what it is like to live in their community, students can remix this communication into a spoken word poem, such as a “Where I’m From” poem. This instructional approach brings the "focus (back) on youth's multiliteracies practices as exemplars of what youth can do" rather than focusing on the deficit model (Watson, 2016, p. 61). This would also play into place-based pedagogies by creating a third space that works to "connect curriculum design and teaching practices outward from youth's lived in experiences to standard-based curriculum and teaching" (Watson, 2016, p. 61). Chief the Poet’s “Where I’m From” poem is an excellent mentor text to showcase community, youth, and family in Chief the Poet’s life. While there are differences in his upbringing in an urban community, this mentor text opens up the opportunity discussion for students to notice how social injustices affect their lives

and the lives of others, even when they may have not noticed or known about them before. This continued rethinking of instructional approach to teaching students continues to build on the ability to use hip hop in the classroom and address place-based pedagogies.

Educators should be using hip hop as “a vehicle and pedagogical strategy” (Ladson-Billings, 2017, p. 89). We can do this by acknowledging the “elements of hip hop pedagogical flows ... (such as), flipping something out of nothing, staying fresh, sampling and mixing, and employing creative resourcefulness” (Ladson-Billings, 2017, 90). Ultimately, this is what employers are looking for in their workforce; someone who is able to think on their feet, make changes effortlessly, and taking the lesson or understanding from multiple perspectives, texts, teachings, etc. and put their own spin into a final project or presentation.

When teaching poetry, teachers can push students examine various texts to see how and why the ideas being presenting are “staying fresh” and making one thing into another. An example of this would be a recent song by Logic, Alessia Cara, and Khalid titled “1-800-273-8255.” Prior to having students bring up this song in a discussion, I had heard it on the radio a few times, but did not understand its meaning. The phone number is to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This song and its music video present an opportunity for a challenging discussion about issues that they as adolescents are going through, such as depression; anxiety; pressures from home, friends, school, parents, etc.; and the rising way that teens are solving these problems through suicide. The English educator may not be trained on all of these topics, so additional guidance and assistance needs to be sought so if looking to implement in the classroom.

It is my hope that educators, specifically rural educators, realize that hip hop is more than a hook to get students interested in a poetry unit through a widespread use of youth lens, place-based pedagogies and understanding of hip hop's true intentions.

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