Running Head: **LIT JUST GOT REAL**

**Lit Just Got REAL: Relevant, Empowering, and Authentic Literature**

*A Culturally Conscious Approach to Literacy Employing Hip Hop and Pop Culture as Alternative Teaching Tools to Meet the Needs of African American Students*

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**Executive Summary**

African American students continue to suffer from the effects of a widening achievement gap. Students of this demographic often struggle to meet grade-level literacy benchmarks. With reading and writing fundamental to comprehension and the advancement of multiple literacies across all content areas, literacy must remain a school-wide priority. *Lit Just Got REAL*, a culturally conscious approach to literacy, is a series of pedagogical and curriculum changes that employ hip hop and aspects of pop culture in the selection of materials and instructional design to create an environment that is relevant, empowering, and authentic. This report outlines this approach and provides a three month implementation plan specific to Thomas Jefferson High School.

**Statement of Issue, Trend, & Rationale**

African American students continue to struggle academically and perform far below White students (Brooks, 2006; Gibson, 2010; Kynard, 2008; Matthews, Kizzie, Rowley, and Cortina, 2010). Explanations as to why the achievement gap persists between black and white students are in abundance as are statistics supporting the existence of an achievement gap. While this gap isn’t as large as it was 10 or 40 years ago, its width is still substantial and alarming. To measure academic achievement, statistics below highlight national reading and writing averages across middle and high school aged students.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Table 1. Average reading scale scores, by grade, selected years, and selected ethnicity | | | | |
|  | 8th Grade | | 12th Grade | |
|  | 1992 | 2009 | 1992 | 2009 |
| National Average | 215 | 219 | 263 | 262 |
| White | 267 | 273 | 297 | 296 |
| Black | 237 | 246 | 273 | 269 |
| Reading scale is from 0-500. 8th grade proficiency levels are as follows: Basic (243), Proficient (281), and Advanced (323). 12th grade proficiency levels are as follows: Basic (265), Proficient (302), and Advanced (346). | | | | |
| Data Source: U.S. Department of Education (USDE), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1992-2009 assessments, NAEP Data Explorer | | | | |

Table 1 displays the national reading average scores from 1992 and 2009. African Americans in the 8th grade remain 27 points behind white students and 19 points below basic. This is only a 3-point increase toward shortening the gap between black and white students since 1992. The average African American high school senior scored 27 points less than their white counterpart, again only a 3-point increment from 1992. However, in the case of high school seniors, it seems the achievement gap has widened since 1992.

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| Table 2. Average writing scale scores, by grade, selected years, and selected ethnicity | | | | |
|  | 8th Grade | | 12th Grade | |
|  | 1998 | 2009 | 1998 | 2009 |
| National Average | 156 | 150 | 153 | 150 |
| White | 157 | 164 | 155 | 159 |
| Black | 131 | 141 | 134 | 137 |
| Reading scale is from 0-300. 8th grade proficiency levels are as follows: Below Basic (0-115), Basic (115-175), Proficient (175-225), and Advanced (225-300). 12th grade proficiency levels are as follows: Below Basic (0-127), Basic (127-179), Proficient (179-230), and Advanced (230-300). | | | | |
| Data Source: (USDE), (NCES), (NAEP), 1998-2009 assessments, NAEP Data Explorer | | | | |

Table 2 illustrates the national average writing scores from 1998 and 2009. In 2009, the average black, high school senior scored 137, compared to a score of 159 from their white counterpart. When compared to the average scores of 1998, there is a 1-point increase in the gap. As demonstrated in table 1, the achievement gap at the high school level seems to have increased.

As reflected in tables 1 and 2, African American students are behind the national average. Several researchers have attempted to uncover the reasons this gap persists. Some scholars agree acceptable theories include: achievement theory, test anxiety theory, social learning theory, and attribution theory. Where these theories fall short is their oversight of social, cultural, and racial impacts on the motivation and academic achievement of African Americans (Cokley, 2008; Ford & Harris, 1992; Rodgers, 2008).

Previous research has outlined factors contributing to the continued growth of the achievement gap, for example, socioeconomic status (SES), home literacy environments, and externalizing behaviors (Brooks, 2006; Gibson, 2010; Kynard, 2008; Matthews et al., 2010). In spite of these challenges, through applied best practices and relevant pedagogies, African American students are capable of reaching grade-level literacy development goals.

Strong literacy skills are necessary in navigating all content areas (Matthews et al., 2010). With a myriad of contributing factors to the academic achievement gap – including school climate, discrimination, and low motivation – researchers tend to focus on the most common predictors of low achievement; socio-economic status, interpersonal skills, home literacy environment, learning related skills, and classroom characteristics (Connor and Craig 2006; Matthews et al., 20120). For the sake of time, this report will not discuss interpersonal skills or home literacy environment. Instead, this section will focus on SES, learning related skills, and classroom characteristics as predictors of low academic achievement. Future research should expand upon these concepts and include interpersonal skills and home literacy environment.

Previous studies have found that African American students are more likely to come from low SES environments which often translate to a lack of educational and health services (Connor and Craig, 2006; Kynard, 2008; Matthews et al., 2010). Learning related skills are social skills that help facilitate effective learning. This concept relates heavily to self-regulated learning and motivation literature (Matthews et al., 2010). Lastly, a child’s classroom characteristics are imperative to their academic achievement. In the case of African American students, it is common for them to be placed in challenging school environments with low performing teachers (Connor and Craig, 2006). In addition, there is often a disconnect between African American children and the texts provided, most commonly due to a lack of cultural relevance or interest (Richardson, 2002 cited in Gibson, 2010).

Clearly, attempts to close the achievement gap not been successful. There is a high need for a program that will consider all factors contributing to the achievement gap and pedagogies that speak directly to specific culturally needs of African American students. *Lit Just Got REAL* is a compilation of conceptual frameworks and pedagogies that lend to improving the academic experiences of African American students that go beyond the classroom and have far reaching implications.

**Target Student Population**

*Lit Just Got REAL* emphasizes the academic success of African American students. The program might also thrive in communities where ethnically diverse populations are underserved. Using the framework outlined within this report, future research and application should explore the specific cultural needs of individual ethnic groups. For the purpose of this report, demographical information will highlight Thomas Jefferson High School (JHS) in South Central, Los Angeles.

JHS has historical significance to African Americans in Los Angeles. As the fourth-oldest high school in L.A., it was one of few schools open to African Americans during the 1920’s and 1930’s. It produced the most jazz musicians “West of the Mississippi” and became known locally as the “black school” with notable alumni such as Dr. Ralph Bunche, Horace Tapscott, and Etta James (Stanford, 2010). The surrounding community, for several years, remained predominately Black as Jim Crow and race related tensions kept African Americans east of Central Avenue. It is also important to note, this particular area of South Central is primarily low-income and working-class.

According to the California Department of Education (2011), JHS had 1,619 students enrolled. Of that number, 118 were African American, 1,497 were Latino, and 4 were of other varied ethnicities. As a measure of academic achievement, dropout rates across all four grades showed that 160 Latino students and 27 African American students did not complete high school. On the other hand, the graduating class of 2011 included 276 Latino graduates and 25 African American graduates. Additional data also indicates at least 57% of the total population received free or reduced lunch and a total of 1,420 students are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged. According to 2011 Academic Performance Index (API) scores, of 1,420 total students tested, 1,315 were Latino and 103 were African American. JHS has a school wide base API score of 546, had a target score of 559, and experienced a growth of 13 points. In regards to English Language Arts and of the students tested, only 5.6% of African Americans were proficient or advanced. While a total of 12.7% of Latino students were proficient or advanced (C.A. Department of Education, <http://www.cde.ca.gov>).

**Review of Literature**

Several studies conduct in-depth research centered on African Americans students (AAS) and literacy development. Simone Gibson (2010) discusses the use of urban fiction as a means of supplementing learning and engaging African American teens, primarily girls. Gibson builds upon three theories: reader response theory (Wilhem, 1997cited in Gibson, 2010), critical literacy theory (Collins, 2006; Freire, 1979 cited in Gibson, 2010), and new literacy theory (Gee, 2000; Street, 1993cited in Gibson, 2010). She argues that urban literature is a way for young black girls to explore taboo topics (i.e. sensuality and gender), an escape from their environments, and easy to relate to. Though the language is sometimes inappropriate, based on the premise of culturally responsive teaching, urban literature can benefit African American teens in a classroom setting.

Researchers, Connor and Craig (2006), conducted a study on preschool aged children exploring the connection between their emergent literacy skills and their use of African American English (AAE). They found that students were able to shift between dialects. In cases where explicit instructions were given, students were able to use Standard American English (SAE). In cases where instructions were implicit, students switched back to AAE dialect. This study also found that less frequent use of AAE after preschool and a greater use of SAE was a strong predictor of positive reading achievement. Surprisingly, students who used AAE more frequently demonstrated stronger emergent literacy skills than those who used it less. These findings support the idea that a student’s overall linguistic skills are a better predictor of reading as opposed to assumptions associated with a child’s use of AAE (Connor and Craig, 2006).

Wanda Brooks (2006) conducted a study that assessed AAS responses to culturally conscious African American literature and whether the most appropriate in developing literary understandings. Brooks based her study on two frameworks: reader response criticism and culturally conscious African American children’s literature. Reader response criticism highlights a readers’ role during meaning construction (Marshall, 2000 cited in Brooks, 2006). More specifically, it relies on the ways in which readers identity with characters, and plot (Beach, 1993, p.8 cited in Brooks, 2006). Culturally conscious African American children’s literature is defined as works by and about African Americans that recognize the genuine experiences and nuances of African American culture (Sims, 1982 cited in Brooks, 2006). This type of literature allows AAS to visualize themselves within the text and gives them an opportunity to activate their funds of knowledge (Brooks, 2006).

In a 1995 study, African American fifth graders self-selected books and responded to texts that had themes and illustrations which closely mirrored their own life experiences and culture (Smith, p. 571 cited in Brooks, 2006). Another study found that if AAS have some knowledge of African American history, their desire to embrace books about their own ethnic group increased (Grice and Vaughan, 1992, cited in Brooks, 2006).

This body of literature supports four primary strategies in improving literacy development amongst African American students and closing the achievement gap. One, educators should strive to provide relevant and relatable texts, especially culturally conscious material (Brooks, 2006; Connor and Craig, 2006; Gibson, 2010). Gibson (2010) suggests that educators consider the following when selecting texts: how will students relate to the protagonist and how does the author attempt to appeal to this relationship. Two, teachers should always employ culturally responsive practices that respect students’ cultural richness and is sensitive to dialect switching (Brooks, 2006; Connor and Craig, 2006; Gibson, 2010). Three, educators must implement explicit instruction strategies and effective modeling in day-to-day practices. In regards to AAS, research shows that these tactics help improve dialect awareness (i.e., the conscious awareness of code shifting) for African American children which, over time, will contribute to stronger literacy outcomes (Connor and Craig, 2006). Lastly, teachers must help students develop learning related skills, specifically, self-regulated learning strategies that will encourage motivation, engagement, and strong study habits (Matthews et al., 2010). Researchers agree; in order to help African American students succeed academically by increasing literacy development skills, educators must provide engaging classroom environments, relevant teaching strategies, culturally conscious texts, and effective language modeling.

**Theoretical Framework**

Several conceptual frameworks have been developed over the years to address the needs of ethnically diverse student populations. The current report relies on several frameworks to situate the *Lit Just Got REAL* approach to improving literacy development amongst African American students; a culturally framed motivation model, racial identity development theory, culturally responsive pedagogy, and hip hop pedagogy.

First, Rodgers (2008), as displayed in table 3, applies a cultural frame to Eccles et al. (1983) Expectancy-Value motivation model. This model establishes expectancy for success and task value as predictors of motivation. Embedded within this model is one’s academic self-concept and self-efficacy.

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| Table 3. A culturally framed application of Eccles et al.’s Expectancy-Value Motivation model | | | | | | |
|  | Expectancy | | x Task Value | | | |
| Motivation = | Beliefs about the self | Self-efficacy | Cost | Intrinsic interest | Attainment value | Utility |
|  | Do I have a positive sense of myself as a student? | How likely is that I can achieve a positive academic outcome? | I may have to act differently | My parents will be proud of me | If I do well, there will be more educational opportunities available to me | By doing well, I may be awarded scholarships |
|  |  |  | I may be less accepted by my peers | I will defy racial stereotypes if I do well | If I do well, I will project a positive image of African American students | I will be better prepared for college and eligible for honors programs |
|  |  |  | How important are these things to me? | How important are these things to me? | Do I value these things? | Will these things be useful for short- and long-term goals? |
| Source: Rodgers, 2008. | | | | | | |

Simply put, academic self-concept is a student’s view of his/her academic ability in comparison to other students (Cokley 2000). Self-concept relies on a student’s attitudes, feelings, and perceptions about their academic skills (Lent, Brown, & Gore 1997), and is crucial in a student’s academic achievement (Cokley 2000; Graham, 1994; Reynolds 1988; Witherspoon, Speight & Thomas 1997). Surprisingly, African American students often demonstrate higher levels of academic self-concept than other students even in the face of low academic-achievement (Graham 1994; van Laar 2000).

Rodgers (2008) goes on to discuss racial identity development and calls for an inclusion of race centrality in the consideration of motivating African American students. She found that black students with well-developed racial identities, often had higher grade point averages. Correlated to this, she found that “gifted” students inherently demonstrated strong connectedness with being black, more so than non- gifted students (Carter, 2008; Cross & Vandiver 2001; Obrien, Martinez-Pons, & Kopala 1999; Rodgers, 2008). In other words, African American students’ self-esteem, self-efficacy, and academic self-concept fare better when their racial identities have fully developed.

A positive African American identity is characterized by three traits: (a) connectedness - envisioning one’s self as a part of the racial group, (b) awareness – of stereotypes and limitations based on social and economic outcomes, and (c) achievement as an African American (Oyserman, Grant, & Ager, 1995, cited in Carter, 2008). Racial identity development, also referred to as race centrality, is “the degree to which an individual values race as a core part of his/her self-concept” (Carter, 2008; Rodgers, 2008). Table 4 outlines the stages of racial development, as it pertains to African Americans, from the least healthy to the most healthy (Cross & Vandiver, 2001, cited in Rodgers, 2008).

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| Table 4. Cross and Vandiver’s (2001) Theory of Black Identity Development | | |
| Least Developed | Pre-encounter | **Assimilation** |
|  |  | Sense of self is centered around being an American and an individual |
|  |  | **Miseducation** |
|  |  | Accepts the negative stereotypes and historical misinformation about his racial or ethnic group without question |
|  |  | **Racial self-hatred** |
|  |  | Experiences profoundly negative feelings about being black |
|  | Immersion-emersion | **Anti-White** |
|  |  | Consumed by hatred of white people and society and all that it represents |
|  |  | **Intense Black involvement** |
|  |  | Has an simplistic and somewhat romantic and obsessive commitment to all things black |
|  | Internalization | **Nationalist** |
| Most developed |  | Stresses an Afrocentric perspective and engages in the problems of the black community |
|  |  | **Biculturalist** |
|  |  | Gives equal importance to being black and being American and can engage in both without conflict |
|  |  | **Multiculturalist** |
|  |  | Most well developed form of racial identity at which one can successfully manage two or more social identities |
| Source: Rodgers (2008). | | |

Similar to how an English-learning student develops language skills, African American students must develop their identities in terms of race and culture. Assimilation represents the least developed identity and multiculturalist represents the healthiest level of identity development. A similar study conducted by Carter (2008) attests, black students’ racial identity has a great impact on academic achievement and behavior (Cokley, 2003; Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998). As African American children develop their identities, motivation increases and their academic self-concept is heightened.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is essentially, “a compilation of ideas and explanations from a variety of scholars,” across the field education (Gay, 2000). It is always validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory. Culturally responsible instruction is affirming of students’ worth, bridging together their lived experiences and cultures. It translates into academic competence, courage, personal confidence, and motivation. Such teachers aren’t afraid to defy conventions in order to better serve students of multiethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. A culturally responsive pedagogy, “…releases the intellect of students of color from the constraining manacles of mainstream canonic of knowledge and the ways of knowing,” ultimately helping students realize there is no single version of the truth; knowledge is never total or permanent and should never exist without dissent. As with racial identity development, collaboration and connectedness are central to its successful implementation. Expanding upon culturally responsive pedagogy is hip hop pedagogy.

Hip Hop culture encompasses the lived experiences of urban youth world-wide. In America, hip hop and its creation is attributed to African American and Latino communities of historically low socio-economic status (Rose, 1991, cited in Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2002). Hip Hop took root after the assignation of Malcolm X and arose at the height of the Bush/Reagon era; during global anti-apartheid struggles and the fight to free Mandela. Hip-Hopers were born from civil rights and black power leaders; raised in the traditions of dissent and civil-disobedience. Founded on the premise of love, peace, happiness, and having fun, hip hop can be credited with ending gang wars and bringing peace to minority communities (Chang 2005; Kitwana, 2002). The four base elements of hip hop – deejaying, emceeing, graffiti art, and breakdancing – and the fifth element – knowledge – lend themselves to the classroom; underlining creativity, ingenuity, resourcefulness, empowerment, diversity, cooperation, collaboration, and expression. In recent years, the globalization of hip hop has expanded the scope of the culture and transcends race, religion, and space.

In an in an interview with Gabriel “Asheru” Benn he stated, “As an emcee and teacher, I saw the importance of Hip Hop in the classroom because of the automatic metaphor of teacher to emcee. The emcees’ job is to get the audience excited and ‘move the crowd’. Call and response, visual aids, and passionate delivery are all tools of a good emcee; all tools of a great teacher.” Asheru serves as a teacher in Washington, D.C. and is the founder of Hip Hop Education Literacy Project ([www.edlyrics.com](http://www.edlyrics.com)). Hip Hop is relevant in teaching because it serves as a springboard for critical analysis, multicultural relevance, and making real world connection with language, syntax, and poetic devices. Above all that, for many underserved youth, both in rural and urban areas, Hip Hop music and culture is the language and predominant subculture. There is a burgeoning group of artist, scholars, hip hop practitioners, and activist who agree.

Marc Lamont-Hill (2009) frames what hip hop pedagogy looks like, considering identity, race, and relevant education theories. Hip Hop pedagogy, “…creates spaces of both voice and silence, centering and marginalization, empowerment and domination” (Lamont-Hill, 2009). In this way, students and educators – together – can challenge the canonical knowledge while bridging cultural gaps with one another. Lamont-Hill refers to this continuously evolving pedagogy as Hip Hop Based Education (HHBE).

Hip Hop based curriculum can help to “scaffold canonical knowledge (Hill, 2008; Morell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Rice, 2003), increase student engagement (Mahiri, 1998; Stoval, 2006), and raise critical consciousness (Dimitriadis, 2001; Duncan-Andrade & Morell, 2005; Hill, 2006; Pardue, 2004).” Literature shows hip hop as especially relevant in developing critical media literacy (Hill, 2006; Morell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Through this growing body of research, HHBE scholars have constructed a strong case for the pedagogical value of incorporating hip hop across a variety of content areas.

**Participants, Resources, & Proposed Plan**

The proposed plan is summed up in its name, Lit Just Got R.E.A.L.; relevant, empowering, and authentic literature. Based on the literature reviewed and presented theoretical frameworks, this plan calls for the implementation of alternative pedagogies, lessons, text, and materials. The goal is to improve the literacy skills of African Americans students by employing culturally relevant and authentic tools (i.e. hip hop, comics, anime, and other sub/pop cultures) that will empower students, improve their academic self-concepts, and help students meet grade-level literacy development goals.

Successful implementation of this program will rely on the collaboration of all school-community members; teachers and administrators must work together. As a fundamental pedagogical and curriculum change, *Lit Just Got REAL* should be adapted within resource English Language Arts, CAHSEE prep courses, and other English courses. There are no clearly defined classroom strategies or lesson plans. Rather, this report is a guideline as to how teachers should collaborate to design and implement lesson plans. To provide teachers with too many restrictions may defeat the purpose of such a program. The aforementioned theoretical frameworks share themes of getting to know your students, meeting their specific needs by any means, liberation through knowledge of self, and the explicit acknowledgment of race. In short, lessons and materials should be dictated by the present student population and their personalities.

*Curriculum & Unit Design.* Curriculum and unit planning should be based on broad themes that go beyond curriculum. The present student population should dictate each classes’ specific themes to be covered in a semester. For example, in South Central L.A. and surrounding JHS, one theme might be “Hood Politics” as a way to discuss conflicts between black and brown community members, police brutality, or other issues that arise in their community. Another theme could be “Pop Culture” as a way to determine what students consider popular in order to shape lesson plans around their interests.

*Materials & Sample Texts.* Texts should be selected with students’ ideas of what is popular in mind. At an early point in the semester, teachers should have already determined what students deem “popular”. Teachers, for example, might consider using actual lyrics or songs within the genre of hip hop as text. In a unit where the theme is love, “The Light” by rapper Common could serve as a great poetic text to guide discussions about love, sexism, gender relationships, and mutual respect. Beyond thematic discussions, these lyrics also help shape lessons around poetry, point of view, rhythm and pacing, rhyme, meters, and feet. When selecting texts, teachers should also keep in mind state standards in English and other content areas. Whenever possible, texts should connect to multiple content areas and English Language Development standards. Moreover, texts, materials and activities must go beyond songs and lyrics. Teachers must also explore multimedia outlets, all four elements of hip hop, and other aspects of students’ sub cultures (i.e. sports, skating, or anime).

*Classroom Strategies.* Some strategies and activities that might be implemented are writing workshops, performances, spoken word open-mics, blogging, or the development of an electronic magazine. Writing workshops, performances, and open-mics help students to see beyond the present discussion. Moreover, incorporating technology that students are accustomed to gives them a way to “write” beyond typical pen and paper. Also, for students who may not be as familiar with technology, exposing them to it serves a purpose. As teachers incorporate themes that speak to the lived experiences of their students, the technology used should do the same. These strategies give students utility and value in the class as well as skills to be applied elsewhere.

*Training & Speaker Series.* As the professional development piece to this proposal, teachers and administration should participate in training and lectures from special guest. Employing new pedagogies dictates that teachers are strategically guided through the process. These training sessions should be led by experts in the fields of hip hop based education, race centered theories, and empowering students. To be relevant and authentic requires teachers to truly understand students’ cultures. Therefore, an example of a guest speaker might be rapper Chuck D. As a founding member of hip hop, he can provide a clear picture of hip hop culture is. However, in consideration of costs, Chuck D may not be feasible but showing a documentary featuring Chuck D and bringing in a professor whose research is in hip hop pedagogy might be.

*Planning Workshops & Checkpoints. Lit Just Got REAL* is intended to cross multiple content areas. As such, it requires constant and consistent teacher collaboration. As a component to professional development, teachers should meet regularly to discuss curriculum and plan lessons in order to determine what works best and how to meet several standards across several content areas. Moreover, teachers should also work to hold each other accountable. To address this, there should be checkpoint meetings to allow teachers time to run through proposed lesson plans and receive feedback prior to implementation.

*Afterschool Club.* To provide additional support for students struggling across several content areas, an afterschool component should be implemented. This gives students more time to develop rapports and mentor relationships with teachers. Also, as a collaborative effort, there should be more than one sponsor for the club to allow for shared responsibility.

*Program Goals.* This proposed plan has several goals that target the school-wide climate, the immediate classroom environment, and student skill level. Table 5 outlines these goals.

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| Table 5. Program Goals |
| School-wide Climate Goals |
| 1. Meet C.A. content and English Language Development standards across several subject areas with a focus on English language arts, visual and performing arts, and social studies; 2. Create and meet multiple-literacy goals through technology (i.e. computer literacy, creating Power Points, Microsoft Word, online safety, etc.); 3. Increase overall literacy skills and meet grade-level reading and writing benchmarks. |
| Immediate Classroom Environment Goals |
| 1. Create and maintain an environment of mutual respect, democracy, and cultural relevance. 2. Discourage lecture based and teacher-centered classrooms. 3. Facilitate storytelling and place high value on students’ lived experiences. 4. Openly acknowledge students’ feelings of “otherness” and help students’ overcome feelings of marginalization. 5. Address the politics of Standard American English versus the language used in the community or on the playground. |
| Student Goals |
| 1. Help students realize the arbitrary nature of “canon” and guide them towards calling into question what is culturally authentic. 2. Help students develop prose, narrative, and other styles of writing. 3. Develop students’ vocabulary. |

*Implementation Plan.* Below, tables 6 outlines the implementation of *Lit Just Got REAL* in three months. Following, table 7 bullets the definitions of abbreviations.

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| Table 6. Three Month Program Implementation Plan | | | | | | |
|  | | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
| Month 1 | | | | | | |
| SEPT. | Week 1 | T/SP | P/W |  | A | CP |
| Week 2 |  | P/W |  |  |  |
| Week 3 | T/SP | P/W |  | A | CP |
| Week 4 |  | P/W |  |  |  |
| Month 2 | | | | | | |
| OCT. | Week 1 | T/SP | P/W |  | A | CP |
| Week 2 |  | P/W |  |  |  |
| Week 3 | T/SP | P/W |  | A | CP |
| Week 4 |  |  |  |  |  |
| Month 3 | | | | | | |
| NOVEM. | Week 1 | T/SP | P/W |  | A |  |
| Week 2 |  |  |  |  | CP |
| Week 3 |  |  |  | A |  |
| Week 4 |  | P/W |  |  |  |
| Week 1 |  |  |  |  | CP |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Table 7. Program Implementation Plan Legend | |
| T/SP | Training & Speaker Series |
| P/W | Planning Workshops |
| A | Afterschool |
| CP | Checkpoint |

*Cost & Resources.* The foreseen costs of implementation are minimal. Much of the text and materials are free through the internet or libraries. If teachers and administrator have come up with specialized items they’d like to incorporate, then those costs would be assessed appropriately. The bulk of the cost for such a program comes from human capitol. Administrators can expect to pay for a series of public speakers and additional planning time for teachers to shape an affective program.

**Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

It is important to note the data used to describe the black-white achievement gap is not extensive and does not belay all contextual barriers or contributing factors. This report relied on demographical information from Thomas Jefferson High School in South Central, L.A. where the population was primarily Latino. Though JHS was a historically “black” public school in Los Angeles, it no longer is. Future expansions of this report might include demographical information that better represents the intended target population. Also, many studies in the literature implied gender-specific differences in motivation and academic achievement amongst African American students. Further research should consider these findings in designing gender- and race-specific practices toward fostering empowerment and increasing academic achievement. In discussing the positive racial identity development of African American students, there was limited discussion concerning the identity development of multi-racial students. Do these students identify as black? If so, how does their identity development process differ?

The literature also indicated there may be slight, but significant, differences in identity development amongst “gifted” students and learning-disabled students. An extension of this research should address this issue. Additionally, future research in the form of a case-study should be conducted in order to fully examine the effectiveness of hip hop based education programs. It is assumed in this paper that hip hop is a subculture that African American students will ascribe to. In most cases, this may be true however it is not wise to make such a generalization. Given additional time, future research should discuss why this may be the case and support the findings. Finally, an extension of this paper will outline specific and detailed lesson plans, incorporating all findings.

The report mentions the use of authentic and relevant texts and materials in the classroom. This is a pivotal piece to *Lit Just Got REAL*. However, it is understood that there are “classics” that all students deserve access to. The goal is not to eradicate these classics, but find a way to make them relevant to students. Future research should discuss in-depth ways to do this. Lastly, while this report focuses on the achievement of African American students, it applies to all underserved people. It can be adapted to fit the needs of specific ethnic groups (i.e. Latinos or Pacific Islanders) or multicultural classrooms. Through the emphasis on pop culture, as opposed to hip hop based education, teachers and administrators can easily adapt this program to highlight students’ cultural inheritances (Freire, 2005) and shared culture,

**Conclusion and Discussion**

Before concluding, it is imperative to discuss the underlying motif across the literature pertaining to African American students and academic achievement - empowerment. Empowerment equates to high intrinsic motivation, academic achievement and a strong academic self-concept. Educators can help African American students gain power by creating environments that foster motivation and cultivates a positive racial identity. A culturally framed perspective on motivation and the acknowledgement of African American students’ racial identity development process ultimately strengthens academic self-concepts and increases achievement amongst African Americans. With the amalgamation of hip hop and culturally responsive pedagogy, educators can create a classroom and school climate that meets the needs of every student, but specifically heightens the success of African Americans towards closing the achievement gap.

Scholars suggests, the primary and most effective strategy in implementing hip hop based education is to use hip hop as texts, especially in scaffolding traditional knowledge and standard-based instruction across content areas such as Literature and Social Studies. Replacing classic texts for hip hop completely is not advised; however, in some cases, it may be preferably and warranted. Hip Hop, while valid, should never deprive students of necessary exposure to canonical texts. Furthermore, the potential of using hip hop and pop culture as primary, companion or supplemental material is limitless.

Hip Hop’s rich and diverse culture stimulates dialogue on topics such as oppressions, freedom, liberations, and peace. Its viability is most evident in content areas of English, literature, literacy and social studies but can easily be adapted to math, science, and language development. Moreover, hip hop as a content area itself facilitates discussion concerning minority and urban communities across several sub-topics: politics, socio-economics, gender, race relations, globalization, media literacy, and language. Employing students’ cultures, ideas on pop culture, hip hop speaks to one simple truth: when students can see themselves in the text, lessons become authentic and relevant (Taliaferro, 2009).

In closing, for this plan to work teachers must possess specific qualities that, Paulo Freire (2005) states, creates and sustains a truly liberating and democratic classroom. Teachers must have humility, common sense, lovingness, courage, and tolerance. Without these qualities, teachers would never be able to build the rapport with students that is necessary to facilitate learning. Humility requires self-respect and the complete resignation of cowardice. Freire (2005) writes, “No one knows it all and no is ignorant of everything; we all know something and are ignorant of something.” Common sense and lovingness seem self-explanatory but are crucial to stay adaptive and show students you care. Courage speaks to a teacher’s level of fight and implies the ability to fear and conquer those fears. Tolerance, above all else, is a priori for authentic democratic experiences and progressive educational practice. The teacher that is all of these things and accepts this framework as fluid will have no trouble implementing and developing *Lit Just Got REAL.*

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