

Praxis Paper

The arts have a great potential to engage students in the critical analysis of merely “mundane” events and forms of expression. There is a large amount of literature exploring the effects of the arts on developing critical thinking skills. Berriz, Poey, and Wagner (2017) describe the arts as, “foundational literacies that engage participants in the process of observing, connecting, finding solutions, making meaning and communicating/expressing” (p. 15). These are essential skills for students to adopt during the learning process. The wide range of art forms (i.e visual, musical, dramatic) present many opportunities for students to develop such skills through critical engagement. Critical engagement becomes more interactive when students are physically and mentally immersed in the creation and evaluation of new content. When students are presented opportunities to engage in dialogue about cultural practices that are common in their lifeworlds, they gain “access to symbolic capital with a real valency in the emergent realities of our time” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 18). Thus, the educator’s role today is to provide opportunities for critical engagement in the classroom, not only through prescribed curriculum content, but also by purposefully using content that stems from students’ lives. Hip Hop, for example, is a widely popular genre of dance and music among various generations today. Many students can be found listening to Hip Hop music during school hours, or even participating in dance teams during their time out of school. In 2016, CBC News published an article highlighting the work of an organization that uses, “Hip Hop as Critical Pedagogy (HHCP), a type of teaching that explores how hip-hop culture can be mobilized not only to encourage engagement but also to challenge inequities in the classroom” (Parris, 2016). Students were engaged in discussions about Hip-Hop culture as a means of addressing issues they observe in the school setting, as well as in their social lives. Through the design of the hip-hop figure drawing lesson, our aim is to engage

students in discussion about the role of females in a traditionally male-dominant form of expression. The use of a very traditional visual arts practice (figure drawing) paired with a modern genre of dance and music gives students a familiar subject matter to explore in an academic environment. This lesson also has the potential to challenge students to speak about the deeper issues underlying the role of girls in the world of hip-hop. Furthermore, the lesson requires students to use text as an additional mode to concisely describe power projected through the dance movements. Jennifer Rowsell (2013) describes movement as “different from musical composition in that it requires your body to enact text” (p. 110). Through this lesson, students decode this enactment by synthesizing the modes of movement (through dance) and text (through the words they choose to describe the figure drawings they create) in the attempt to make a bold statement about the nature of hip-hop dancing today. By critically looking at the hip-hop dancing figure, listening to hip-hop music, and engaging in traditional figure drawing, we hope that students will be engaged in discovering the power they have to make derive such a strong message in such simple terms.

References

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