

Changing the narrative: Approaches to engaging previously incarcerated students and hip-hop generation

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“Culturally relevant teaching is a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20).



Student Demographics @ Newark Campus

- 40% Hispanic
- 51% Black
- 74% Female



The **Hip Hop Symposium** was organized by the Campus Librarian to promote critical thinking by encouraging students to take a closer look at the subliminal messages of violence, sexism and homophobia in Hip Hop lyrics and videos. Students were asked to watch the library provided documentary, “*Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes*” that was directed by Byron Hurt.

Ten classes representing over 100 students from a variety of subject areas gathered to hear a Panel discussion that included faculty from Social Sciences and Criminal Justice to address questions such as:

- Should artists make socially responsible work?
- Are artists of all ethnic backgrounds held to the same standards to create responsible art?
- Can some forms of art be deemed too violent?

Faculty were encouraged to integrate the event into their curriculum and most added an essay assignment. Students in a public speaking class were required to ask at least one question.



Additional Engagement Programs

Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon
Community Health Screenings
Topical Book Displays



The Mountainview Seminar New Brunswick

- is aligned with the New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons Consortium (NJ-STEP)
- NJ-STEP aims to “assist in the transition to college life upon their release into the community” <https://njstep.newark.rutgers.edu>

The class project involves finding and evaluating literature in order to create an action plan for a re-entry house for previously incarcerated college students.

Every fall semester (since 2015), the new cohort of students attends an information literacy instruction session that addresses ‘authority & audience’.

In the context of culturally relevant teaching, the following activities are employed:

- Viewing and discussion of Project Information Literacy’s [The Freshman Studies](#). **Students gain an understanding of traditional freshman student issues.**
- Self assessment of IL skills. Multiple choice pre-test using an anonymous audience response system. **Students privately recognize their strengths & challenges and can take steps to ameliorate as needed.**
- Team exercise on website evaluation for critical thinking & Team Report to the class. **Students paired together so that weaker ones are not left behind.**
- Brainstorming on appropriate keywords using their own experiences to fuel the exercise. **Use of politically correct words: e.g. previously incarcerated person vs. ex-convict**

Next Steps

Research question: *is there a correlation between length of incarceration and level of information literacy?*

References

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