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# Addressing Minority Student Achievement through Service Learning in a Culturally Relevant Context

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## Introduction

Adolescents born at the intersection of race and poverty are more likely to be impacted by a confluence of negative risk factors that result in several adverse outcomes over the course of their lives including: low school achievement (Kao & Thompson, 2003), unemployment and low wages (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn 2000), increased exposure and susceptibility to violence and trauma (Dahlberg, 1998), and poor health (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Many of these young people who grow up in poor urban areas across the United States struggle with understanding, accepting, and making the necessary adjustments to cross the cultural boundaries that are required to excel academically and socially in schools. Some of these young people resent school personnel's expectations that they must comply with behavioral norms that differ from their cultural traditions and resist these norms being the standard for achievement, rewards, and punishment in public schooling (Ogbu, 1983a). Increasingly, urban poor children and adolescents are disengaging from the standards-driven curriculum that is nationally sanctioned and promoted in public schools across the United States. Lack of cultural relevancy is cited as a primary reason for declining school connectedness and low school engagement for students of color (Blum, Libbey, Bishop, & Bishop, 2004). Middle school is when most adolescents are more attuned to peer pressure and social status. This is

## ABSTRACT

Research on recreational media use among youth indicates young people of color who spend more time with media may also be at higher risk for school disengagement and low personal contentment compared to their white peers. This puts these students in a position to be even more influenced by the themes and messages that abound in pop culture, particularly music and social media. ME: MIM is a multisensory, interdisciplinary, integrated approach to teaching and learning that uses music multimedia to engage students in individual and group activities and lessons that reinforces competencies aligned with positive youth development. Song lyrics, sound recordings and music videos are used as "text" to facilitate deconstruction and discussion of the themes and messages in music and the context. Students also discuss the influence of these themes and messages on their attitudes, beliefs, and choices as it relates to their cultural group identity and individual behavior both in and out of school. ME: MIMM has been facilitated through the Challenging Horizons Program (CHP), an evidence-based, after-school and summer service-learning program for academically and behaviorally challenged students. This study examined key stakeholders' (i.e., parents/guardians, program staff members, and school administrators) perceptions of feasibility and acceptability of ME: MIM.

also the time when they are exposed to the idea that education credentials are required for gainful employment and social mobility. Typically, in middle school, adolescents are expected to make the connection between school achievement and the job market, specifically how they are likely to fair with or without school credentials. This is also the time in a young person's life that they are taught and rewarded for working hard to earn good grades and complete high school or go on to college with the idea that these credentials are a near certain way to secure gainful employment and avoid financial scarcity (Fordham, 1988). For some, these instrumental beliefs and the attending behaviors required to reap the rewards of the American Promise are beyond their reach, but also a turning point to change their life trajectory.

**Literature Review**

For years, some urban black youth who attend schools in underfunded, under-resourced school districts, find the social and status mobility theory to be unsubstantiated and tantamount to folk lore (Ogbu, 1983b). Others believe that reaping the rewards of "the system" requires divesting from their kindred network that is solidified through shared perceptions about race and class, and who share life experiences with others similarly situated socio-economically. This kindred network is codified through language, social norms, cultural traditions and a sense of shared struggle (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Instead of fully investing their time and energy in school or formal education, urban black youth growing up in poverty are increasingly turning to recreational media, especially music and social media (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). There are many reasons for this trend, raising concerns that youth of color who are already at higher risk for a variety of adverse outcomes compared to their white counterparts is a special population that is highly vulnerable. Examples of adverse outcomes include academic, behavioral (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010), social (Rankin, & Quane, 2002), emotional (Weist, Freedman, Paskewitz, Proescher, & Flaherty, 1995), and vocational (Fordham, 1988). Research on recreational media use among 8-18 year olds indicates young people of color who spend more time with media may also be at higher risk for school disengagement and low personal contentment compared to their white peers (Rideout et al., 2010) putting them in a position to be even more influenced by the themes and messages that abound in pop culture, particularly music and social media.

The role of culture has been featured prominently in educational research, instruction and teacher education, school policies, and interventions targeting U.S. minorities since the early 1960s (Ogbu, 1995a). It began with the designation of poor people as culturally deprived, then culturally depraved (Erickson, 1987). These designations were based on the presumed Eurocentric cultural paradigm for which normative behavior and public schooling was established. More recently, the focus has been on replacing the Eurocentric, hegemonic, and patriarchal slant found in school textbooks across America with a more balanced reflection of history and the cultural contributions of people other than of European descent. Some educators and researchers believe the absence of a multicultural perspective that emphasizes resilience and protective factors is why increasing numbers of urban black youth are not interested in the curriculum offered in public schools (Harris, 2006). Minorities who have

not traditionally performed well in school think that more inclusion of their cultures and language expression would improve their academic achievement, reduce school adjustment problems (Ogbu, 1995) and would go a long way in increasing their interest in school. But key questions about the infusion of culture remain at the heart of the school reform debate. For example, is it important to understand the cultural backgrounds of the students and families served in school and if so, why? Further, whose culture is or should be taught and reinforced in schools and classrooms? How does one's cultural frame of reference inform or influence receptivity to cultural differences in schools? How should we account for cultural differences and conflicting cultural frames of references between school personnel and the students, families and communities they serve?

These are just a few pertinent questions about the role of culture and public schooling as it relates to school achievement and adjustment. For purposes of this manuscript, the authors refer to a definition of culture proposed by a renowned scholar in minority education: Culture is a framework through which members of a population or subpopulation see the world around them, interpret events in that world, react to their perceived reality, and began to behave according to acceptable standards (Ogbu, 1995b). Given school is mandated for as many as 11 years in some districts across the United States, it seems reasonable to conclude that classrooms and school buildings are where cultural differences are likely to collide. In most schools, there is a power differential between students and adults, and school is a place where students are expected to be subordinate. There is likely to be resistance from students whose instinctive cultural expressions differ from those espoused in school. These students may not be willing or able to cross the cultural boundaries required of them to be accepted and successful in school without accommodating for this difference.

Promotion of mainstream culture, social norms and the preservation of certain cultural traditions seems central to the way things operate in traditional public schools. Since many of urban youth of color growing up in poverty have a greater affinity for recreational media compared to their white peers (Rideout et al., 2010), they may be at greater risk of being exposed to the prevailing themes and messages in popular culture, especially popular music and social media (Author, 2015). High rates of school dropout, coupled with increasing rates of school disengagement and greater exposure to the prevailing themes in popular youth music and media, warrant further study of this special population of at-risk youth. Based on the literature reviewed for this manuscript, there are strong correlates and potential reasons why young people of color are not interested or engaged by what is offered in many public schools today. Chief among them may be the lack of culturally-relevant curriculum with an emphasis on their inherent strengths and resilience.

A curriculum that focuses on deficits versus one that highlights protective factors will likely not be of interest to a population of young people who may be feeling the effects of being marginalized in society (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999). The lack of culturally-informed approaches to teaching, learning, and discipline in schools is also a reason why young people of color have disengaged from traditional schooling (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005). Additionally, there is the perception that schools and traditional schooling requires students of color to abandon their shared cultural identity,

meaning to distance themselves from members of their broader social network. Many of these networks are comprised of older people, some of whom had an inferior education or resisted crossing the cultural boundaries required for school success (Ogbu, 1987).

The media and online revolution have converged to capture the attention of today's youth. Technology-enabled media facilitates real time access to everything from entertainment, information, and news (Peppler & Kafai, 2007) to accessing social and recreational media content. Recreational media is ubiquitously available via smart phones, tablet computers or other hand-held devices. Consequently, many young people spend nearly 11 hours a day engaged in multiple forms of media, either for informational or recreational purposes (Rideout et al., 2010). Interestingly, youth of color whose parents have less education spend the most time with recreational media. In a study released in 2011 through the Kaiser Family Foundation, African-American youth were exposed to more than four additional hours of media per day compared to their White peers (see Figure 1).
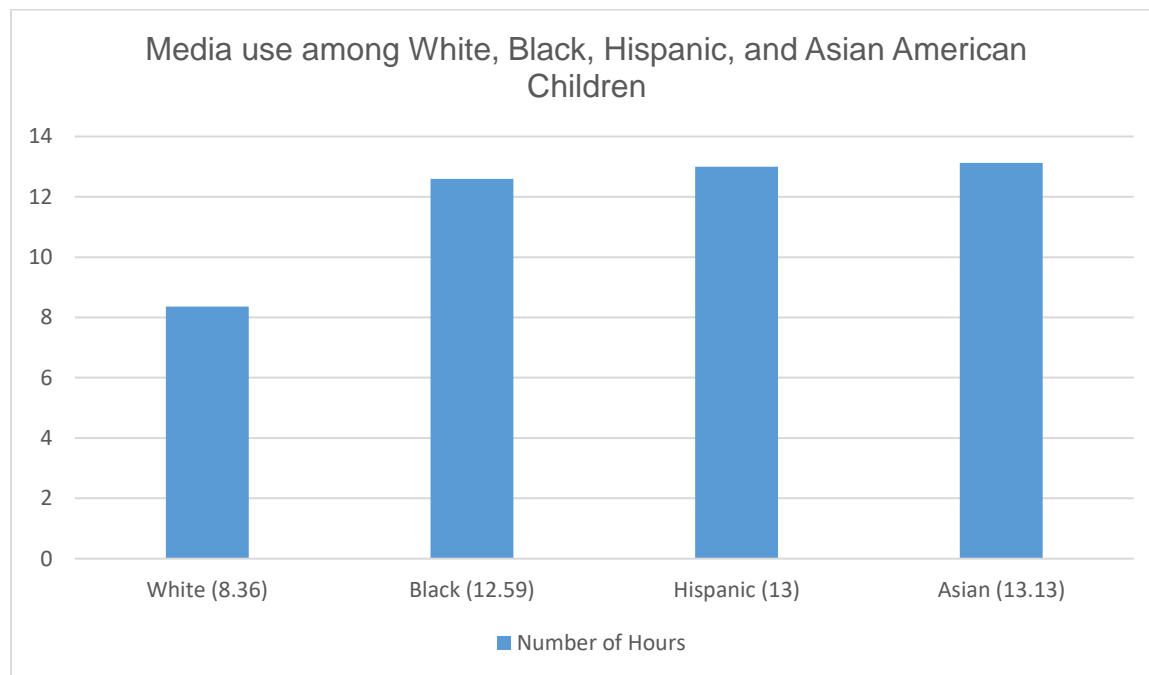


Figure 1. Media use among White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian American children. *In Rideout, Lauricella, & Wartella (2011).*

The adolescent years are an important time because they offer parents, school personnel, and others a time-limited window to provide pro-social and pro-health information that could significantly change a young person's life trajectory. Teaching and learning that engages the social and emotional attributes of a developing adolescent's brain and that integrates music may be a culturally responsive and timely approach to capture the attention of young people at-risk for school failure. Many policy

makers and practitioners who are concerned about the current trends have been calling for a more culturally relevant, culturally responsive approach to curriculum and instruction that places greater emphasis on resilience as a protective. Such a combination could potentially yield important information that may improve school connectedness, school climate and culture, and increase education achievement.

Context

Popular Youth Music Multimedia (PYMM) provides culturally-relevant content, context, and text to facilitate teaching and learning about adolescent risk-taking and decision making (Author, 2015). Adolescence is an ideal time to introduce and reinforce the rewards making informed decisions, as well as the consequences of making poor choices. PYMM provides culturally-relevant scripts that allow young people the opportunity to deconstruct what they see, hear and feel. The middle school years are the ideal time to create safe spaces for young people to process with a caring adult the themes and messages in popular music and to discuss their values, opinions and their options. Such an approach enables young people to make informed decisions that are aligned with their goals and emerging self-identity.

The Challenging Horizons Program (CHP) is an evidence-based, after-school and summer service-learning program for academically and behaviorally challenged students at two middle schools in South Carolina. The program primarily serves students who live in low income households and/or students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. A significant portion of the student population served by the CHP has been diagnosed with a behavioral or learning disorder. Examples of behavioral or learning disorders include attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). All of the students served by the CHP have been identified as being at risk for negative academic and/or social outcomes. The age range of the population served by the CHP is 11-14, and in 2014 CHP students were comprised of the following demographics: 65 African American; 10 White; 6 bi-racial, and 1 Latino.

This study is an examination of an approach to teaching and learning called *MusicsEnergy: The Message in the Music*™ (*ME-MIM*) that uses Popular Youth Culture (PYC) and Popular Youth Music Multimedia (PYMM) to help young people acquire the academic, behavioral, emotional, moral and social competences aligned with the goals of school engagement and achievement. ME-MIM addresses the following state-adopted standards in South Carolina: (a) Health Education Standard 2: "The student will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology and other factors on health behaviors;" (b) Media Arts Standard 3: "the student will access, analyze, interpret, and create media texts;" and (c) Media Arts Standard 4: "the student will make connections between music, other art disciplines, other content areas, and the world." (South Carolina Department of Education, 2010, p. 61).

ME: MIM is a multisensory, interdisciplinary, integrated approach to teaching and learning that uses music multimedia to engage students in individual and group activities and lessons that reinforces competencies aligned with positive youth development. ME:MIM also addresses health and media literacy by focusing on behavior, mental health and safety. Song lyrics, sound recordings and music videos are

used as "text" to facilitate deconstruction and discussion of the themes and messages in music and the context. Students are also asked to discuss the influence of these themes and messages on their attitudes, beliefs, and choices as it relates to their cultural group identity and individual behavior in school and out of school. This integrated approach targets five *key competencies* and six *skills* required for students to thrive in school and be successful beyond school. The following five competencies, aligned with positive youth development (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004), are addressed through the ME:MIM approach: academic, behavioral, emotional, moral, and social. The six skills aligned with the Partnership for 21st century Skills include: (a) collaboration; (b) close reading for comprehension; (c) communication (oral, written and listening); (d) critical analysis (i.e., critical viewing and critical listening); (e) information-seeking via research; and (f) note taking/reflection.

   *Theme-Focused Instruction.* ME-MIM addresses 10 themes: five *health-related themes* and five *ancillary themes* that together make up the Ten Prevailing Themes in Popular Youth Music Media (Author & Smith, 2016). The health-related themes include: 1) alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (ATOD); 2) casual and suggestive sex (CSS); 3) dark deviant behavior (DDB); 4) interpersonal conflict/bullying (ICB); and 5) violence, aggressive behavior & trauma (VABT). The socio-behavioral themes include: 1) consumerism/materialism; 2) criminal activity; 3) explicit language; 4) narcissism; and 5) a general category called "social problems". This category refers to macro issues in society such as racism, classism and sexism. Participants collaboratively define and provide examples of each for discussions and instruction. Participants also collectively discuss the context in which these themes exist in entertainment and in real life.

*Theoretical Framework*
   The theoretical base for this study originated from three sources: the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1996); the Cultivation Theory (Gerber, Gross, & Melody, 1973); and the Caste Theory of Education, also known as the theory of oppositional culture introduced by John Ogbu, a noted scholar in the fields of minority education, culture and identity. The Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes that learning occurs in a social context and much of what is learned is gained through observation. This theory has been applied extensively by researchers who seek to understand social behavior in schools. The Cultivation Theory suggests that persistent long term exposure to media content (e.g., television) has small but measurable effects on the perceptual beliefs of audience member. The Caste Theory of Education, also known as the theory of oppositional culture, refers to nonconformity within educational systems. Central to this theory is the acknowledgement of mainstream versus subcultures and the recognition that sometimes subcultures refuse to conform to mainstream norms and values. An example would be the refusal of youth of color to accept and internalize mainstream norms and values that have been adopted, upheld and reinforced in U.S. public schools. Other theories that enabled a discussion of the results included Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Parker & Lynn, 2002), Black Identity Theory (Helms, 1990; Jackson, 2002; Thompson & Carter, 1997), and Symbolic Interactionism Theory; (LeCompte, Preissle & Tesch, 1993).

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to complete step one of the six-step Deployment Focused Model of Development and Testing (DF Model) by documenting key stakeholders' assessment (i.e., acceptability and feasibility) of using Popular Youth Culture (PYC) and Popular Youth Music Multimedia (PYMM) as content and context to engage a group of black urban youth who were screened to be a higher-risk for negative school outcomes. This study examined whether this approach would be acceptable and feasible toward building academic, behavioral, emotional, moral and social competencies linked to positive youth development (Catalano et al., 2004). In addition, researchers wanted to explore and document whether this approach to teaching and learning could be useful in improving school connectedness, as well as literacy skills (i.e., reading comprehension, health and media literacy). Toward this end, data were collected from parents/guardians, school administrators and staff of an afterschool/summer enrichment program. Standards in the following five subject areas are addressed in ME-MIM: (1) Computer and Information Technology (C/IT), (2) English Language Arts (ELA), (3) Health Education (Hlth Ed), (4) Visual and Performing Arts/Media Arts (VPA/MA), and (5) Social Studies (Soc St).

*Research Questions*

Three research questions guided this study:

Q1: Will parents, program staff and school administrators find music media literacy to be an acceptable and feasible approach to build academic, behavioral, emotional, moral and social competence in youth?

Q2: Will parents, program staff and school administrators find music media literacy to be an acceptable and feasible approach to increase school connectedness in youth?

Q3: Will parents, program staff and school administrators find music media literacy to be an acceptable and feasible approach to engage youth in risk-taking and decision-making linked health and media literacy?

In addition to these three research questions, further research has been conducted to address the following two research questions: (4) Will students who participate in the study find music media literacy an acceptable, feasible and satisfactory approach to enrichment programming linked to school success? (5) Will teachers find the proposed approach to teaching and learning to be an acceptable and feasible? Results for questions 1 to 3 are reported in this manuscript. For results to the additional research questions 4 and 5, see Author and Smith (2016).

**Method**

The study complied with the definition of action research as proposed by Bradbury and Reason (2003). In addition, the study focused on completing Step I of Weisz' (2004) Deployment-Focused Model of Intervention Development and Testing

[DF-Model]. The Action Research Cycle (ARC), as proposed by Coughlan and Coghlan (2002) also guided this study. The ARC consists of three main steps: (a) to understand the context and purpose of the study; (b) employ six 'mini-steps' to gather feedback, analyze data, plan, implement and conduct evaluation; and (c) a perform a meta-step to monitor implementation. The DF-Model (Weisz, 2004) consists of six steps: (1) assessment and planning; (2) staff training; (3) supervised implementation; (4) monitoring implementation; (5) two-way feedback with program revisions; and (6) ongoing data collection. A major part of step one of the DF-model is to ascertain provider acceptability and perceived feasibility of the intervention in a "real world" setting. Completing Step 1 in both the ARC and the DF Model (as adapted by Molina, Smith and Pelham (2005)) was the focus of the present study. Data gathered were to further develop and refine the intervention starting with assessing its feasibility and acceptability among practitioners in natural settings.

Qualitative action research (Coghlan & Coghlan, 2002; Bradbury & Reason, 2003; Weisz, 2004) was appropriate for the DF Model because data were gathered and interpreted within an embedded context in contrast to positivist science, wherein findings are validated by the consistency achieved via prediction, control, logic and measurement (Baum, McDoughall, & Smith, 2006). Unlike positivist scientists' presumed detached and neutral relationship to the research, an action researcher is immersed in the setting as an active actor/agent. The primary researcher in this study was intentional about collecting and analyzing data from stakeholders as a critical and analytical Participant/Researcher [P/R].

Within action research, participants are seen as valued stakeholders who hold important information. The P/R seeks a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. In action, research, the P/R is a facilitator and works with stakeholders to peel back the layers of a phenomenon in an attempt to discover or confirm core issues under investigation. Action research enables the P/R to gather information shared by stakeholders and return this information to stakeholders for the purpose of confirming if the interpretation of the information is correct. If the interpretation is not correct, the stakeholders have the opportunity to refine, modify, or clarify. This process continues until a comprehensive picture emerges. In this regard, participants are co-creators of the knowledge gathered within the study (Stringer, 2004).

PYMM may be a culturally and ecologically-valid means to engage students in social learning that reinforces key competencies linked to literacy, and possibly behavioral and mental health. Aligning the classroom with real world environments likely results in a more engaging, culturally-responsive, inclusive learning space for all. Applied and interactive teaching and learning may be particularly appealing to youth from diverse socio-cultural and racial backgrounds as this may align with their preferred learning style and may give them more motivation to learn in a context that is immediately relevant to their lives. This approach also aligns with state-adopted standards in five subject areas, thus likely appeals to school personnel and parents.

*Participants*

From June 2014 to October 2014, an action research study was conducted with parents, guardians, teachers, school administrators, program staffers and students

participating in the Challenging Horizons Program (CHP) in Columbia, South Carolina. Participants in the present study were parents/guardians, program staff members, and school administrators. A total of seven (N = 7) parent/guardians and program staff members participated in a focus group, and four (N = 4) program staff members completed acceptability and satisfaction surveys. Additionally, two school administrators participated in the in-depth interviews. Any reference to program staff in the present study refers to CHP counselors, all of whom had a least one year of experience working with the Program. The site director of the CHP at the time had more than seven years of experience working with the CHP. The two male school administrators who participated in the study had an average of 20 years of experience as educators or administrators between them. One administrator was African American and the other was Caucasian. The black administrator worked at an alternative high school that serves mostly African American middle through high school students and families. The white administrator was the eighth grade Assistant Principal for Curriculum at the site where the study was conducted.

*Focus Groups and Interviews*

Qualitative data from the parent/guardian/program focus group and one-on-one interviews with school administrators, are presented in this manuscript. Quantitative data from a survey completed by program staff are also presented in this manuscript. These data were collected as part of a larger study that included quantitative collected from a survey and qualitative data from two additional 60-minute focus groups. These data were of students' experience participating in a 5-week summer enrichment program.  (For further results, including data from 8 school teachers and 11 black middle school graduates, 10 of whom were black males who were screened to be at high risk for adverse academic, social, and emotional outcomes and received a five-week version of ME: MIM, see Author & Smith, 2016).

*Adaptability and satisfaction surveys*

The following six criteria were identified as a basis for the survey and coincided with the research questions: (1) acceptability– assessed to be agreeable or satisfactory; (2) conditionally acceptability–assessed to be agreeable or satisfactory with conditions; (3) feasibility–capable of being achieved or possible; (4) ambivalence – the coexistence and simultaneous existence of opposing attributes or feelings; (5) acceptability and feasibility– assessed to be both satisfactory and possible; and (6) not acceptability/not feasibility–assessed to be neither satisfactory NOR possible.

In addition to the qualitative data presented, the study included an acceptability/satisfaction survey to assess specific program components of ME:MIM, and quantitative data obtained from these surveys are presented in this manuscript. All focus groups and in-depth interviews were audio recorded and professionally transcribed. This facilitated the excavation of emergent themes and relevant constructs (Denzin & Lincoln 2008). A preliminary codebook was developed through an open coding process. Open coding of the transcripts led to the conceptual organization of the data based on emergent themes.

Codebook categories, sub-categories, dimensions and definitions were updated after each transcript was analyzed and before proceeding to the next. Authors of this manuscript acknowledge the potential for bias toward the data, but incorporated the P/R's identity as an African American male during analysis. Doing so authenticates the P/R's own voice during interpretation of the participant's perspectives (Denzin et al, 2008; Patton, 2002). Every effort was made to faithfully record and interpret data from the participants' perspectives. In so doing, the P/R refrained from judging participant's data against his own value system or any other.

## Results

In addition to the focus groups with key stakeholders, four of the Challenging Horizon's program staff members completed acceptability and satisfaction surveys indicating their level of agreement with the training for and overall intended outcomes of the ME-MIMM program. CHP program staff responded favorably as seen in Tables 1 and 2. On the survey, CHP program staff were also asked whether ME-MIM was inappropriate for the classroom setting, and all of the participants strongly disagreed.

Table 1
*ME-MIMM Responses from CHP Program Training Survey* (N = 4)

| Staff who indicated ME-MIM training topics were: | Strongly Agreed |
|---|---|
| ▪ Relevant, interesting and timely. | 2 (50%) |
| ▪ Culturally familiar. | 3 (75%) |
| ▪ Culturally relevant. | 3 (75%) |
| Staff who indicated ME-MIM training was: | |
| ▪ Consistent with expectations. | 1 (25%) |
| ▪ Useful in working with the CHP population. | 1 (25%) |
| Staff who indicated ME-MIM training helped to: | |
| ▪ Be a more engaging facilitator. | 2 (50%) |
| ▪ Facilitate students' learning through the use of PYMM. | 2 (50%) |
| ▪ Increase students' literacy about music's influence. | 2 (50%) |
| ▪ Facilitate clarification of students' attitudes, beliefs and choices that may be linked to PYMM through dialogue. | 3 (75%) |
| ▪ Increase students' understanding of potential health risks linked to PYMM. | 3 (75%) |
| ▪ Facilitate clarification of students' values linked to PYMM. | 3 (75%) |
| ▪ Student's identify and share their thoughts and feelings. | 4 (100%) |

Table 2
*ME-MIMM Survey Responses from CHP Program Staff* (N = 4)

| Staff who agree ME-MIM: | Strongly Agreed |
|---|---|
| ▪ Is a way to build key competence in students. | 4 (100%) |
| ▪ Could be offered during the school day to build key competencies in students. | 4 (100%) |
| ▪ Is appropriate for classroom instruction and out-of-school enrichment activities (i.e., after school and/or summer enrichment). | 4 (100%) |
| ▪ Prompts me to think more critically about the messages and themes in PYMM and my own ABCs. | 3 (75%) |
| ▪ Prompts me to think more critically about the messages and themes in PYMM and potential links to youth problem behaviors. | 3 (75%) |

The CHP Program Staff were also invited to attend a focus group alongside parents/guardians to discuss the intended outcomes of the ME-MIMM program. Results obtained from parents/guardians and CHP program staff were coded and grouped according to the following two measures: Acceptability and Conditionally

*Acceptable/feasible: Parents/guardians and program staff*
When parents and guardians were asked whether they believe it is important to integrate culturally relevant, youth-friendly music media as a way to engage students in learning, they elaborated:

> "Yes, because you are discussing it [the themes and messages in the music] with them. That's going to show them that you're listening to the music and helping them to interpret what it means with that song that they enjoy. Then they'll have those skills too."

Parents and guardians specifically discussed what they believe is needed to enable them to feel better prepared to integrate media literacy concepts into parenting or after-school programming:

> "I think having an approved catalog of music and new music each semester keeps it fresh; that keeps it coming in as you get newer kids coming in. Their music is going to be newer than 4 years ago when those kids just left the program. So, every kid that comes in can pick their own songs."

*Acceptable/feasible: School administrators*
School administrators were asked whether they believe popular music that appeals to you could be used for instructional purposes to engage students and if so, do they believe such an approach could be used to address standards in addition to the

curriculum currently in place. One administrators addressed the use of these methods by commenting:

> "I think it's OK to introduce them to some of our music as well as being open to listening to some of their music and sitting down with them, especially in an English class or a Social Studies class and identify what is being said."

When asked whether music multimedia would be helpful in addressing particular Common Core standards, a school administrator commented that he believes using music multimedia would be helpful [*Note*. Select state-adopted, national standards in Computer/Information Technology, ELA, Visual and Performing Arts, Health Education and Social Studies were projected on a screen during the focus group] and elaborated:

> "I think Health Education is one. I think it could be a big thing in Health Education just from a lot of the things I saw on your list - Visual and Performing Arts, Social Studies and depending on how it's used, if the right way, it could encompass both English and the Computer/Information Technology. But, I think the easiest, the low-hanging fruit so to speak would probably be Health, Visual Arts and Social Studies. If done properly, I think you could tie in ELA and Computer and Information Technology."

Another administrator discussed whether stakeholders (e.g., parents, students, other school administrators, counselors, community members and Program staff) would approve of using popular youth music multimedia for classroom instruction, if the instructional materials are approved prior to implementing in the classroom, stating:

> "Well first you're setting the hook and getting the students interested. And then you design around that. From what I understand you are saying you design the lessons around the music they brought in that they have an interest in. They are engaged in, I mean, we can put some of the best literature in the world in front of them but that doesn't mean they're going to read it."; "If it's going to engage them, it's a good thing. We can put all different sorts of stuff in front of them, but that doesn't mean we're going to engage them. This is something that's going to engage them."

*Conditional acceptability: Parents/guardians and program staff*
When asked whether the parents/guardians had any concerns about whether such an approach would be effective as part of after-school enrichment programming, responses noted were:

> "If you're going to use their [students'] music, you have to have someone who respects their [students'] music."

I'm uncomfortable having someone implementing this program without training, because someone without training could be in front of the classroom and insert

their own biases and give their judgment and I don't need somebody to cause conflict with what I'm teaching my child."

Another parent elaborated on her expectation if a teacher or staff person chose to using popular digital music multimedia for parenting or enrichment programming:
"The teacher or staff would have to have a diverse background."

The two school administrators spoke candidly in the one-on-one interviews about the implementation of the ME-MIM in their schools. These data were grouped and coded as "conditionally acceptable." Responses from the school administrators are detailed below.

*Conditional acceptability: School administrators*
School administrators were asked what they thought the main challenge would be in using popular youth digital music multimedia as instructional material in the classroom.

They elaborated:
"I think choosing the right people to develop is going to be a huge thing…. Where if you select the right people that are interested to begin with, like I said, they have knowledge of young folks; are knowledgeable of the musicians and stuff like that. So I think the selection of who you're with [is important]. I think also the kids that you select to begin with, to work with so that you can be successful and grow that success in a success breeds success kind of thing then you can kind of figure out."

The school administrators were also asked why they thought more teachers do not use popular youth culture and popular youth music entertainment media in classroom instruction, and they responded with the following:

"You may have a 22-year-old African American that went to Dartmouth and Yale that can't relate to these folks at all that are in the CHP and you have a 47-year-old White male that grew up in Orangeburg, South Carolina who has more personal connection with these folks than that. So, I think if you're talking about that kind of background, I think it's someone that can empathize and relate and kind of see where the kids are coming from but I think if you – I almost think that if the person is young, that they might be a better selling point for the kids, especially 12 and 13 year-old kids. If they're young and if they – I have a very minimal background of a lot of these performers, so I think a young person that's more knowledgeable about these folks would better than me."

According to one school administrator, something very specific is needed to enable teachers to feel better prepared to integrate the concept of media literacy into lesson plans and that is:

"Our district is huge and the data, being able to trace what – now if it were for a special class that were offered or some special elective possibly, we have several intervention classes that we have in place right now if that were framed in that purpose that might be a during school time thing.  But I think the more – the more data that we would provide especially with like an after-school program or an enrichment program or something like that the better we would have – cause a lot of our programs kind of started that way, but as an intervention program – at risk kids then it might be able to transition to a school day kind of program."

## Discussion

While race and class are sensitive topics for most educators, it is important for those who work with students of color, especially students of African descent, to acknowledge that race does matter to many of those living at the crossroads of race and poverty in the United States. This acknowledgment may go a long way to establish a credible relationship with youth who are stigmatized and marginalized based on their socio-economic background. Some black youth growing up in poverty may not be willing or able to engage in formal or informal learning that does not account for the role that race, culture and ideology play in public schooling.

Based on a review of the literature, there is no empirically-supported positive youth development (PYD) model that meets the following four important criteria: (1) involves more than one social domain (e.g., family, peer, school, community, culture); (2) demonstrates measurable improvements in promoting five key competencies and state adopted common core standards; (3) combines multi-sensory instruction techniques (i.e., critical listening, close reading, and critical viewing); and (4) uses popular digital youth multimedia to deliver culturally-relevant pedagogy. Findings from this study fill a gap in the literature about evidence-based intervention development and deployment that focuses specifically on building competencies aligned with positive youth development (PYD). Knowledge gained from this theory-driven approach to intervention development and deployment will be used to guide more action research as this study documents many of the nuances of a learner-centered, culturally responsive approach to improve the teaching and learning experience during middle and high school for youth of color living in poverty.

Facilitating academic and social success in schools is largely dependent upon access to a culturally-relevant curriculum and having educators who are prepared to address the themes and messages in music in a respectful manner. If facilitating academic and social success in school is the goal, a key factor impacting successful adoption of the proposed approach is facilitator readiness via teacher education or professional development with a focus on training. The facilitator, whether it be a teacher or program staff, must be properly trained. This training would be significantly enhanced if guided by evaluation data. This training should also be in accordance with manualized procedures and protocol, including specified outcomes and fidelity measures to ensure the approach is implemented as intended. Stakeholders in this study were pleased to know that the proposed approach addresses state-adopted standards of learning, however, indicated that there would need to be more explicit

emphasis on teaching pedagogy to give facilitators the opportunity to become comfortable and proficient using PYMM for instruction or engagement purposes.

Clearer articulation of the values that are promoted in ME-MIM was cited as a condition for its acceptability among key stakeholders in this study. We know from the literature that adolescents must develop a personal value system that bodes with their emerging self-identity, especially their sexual identity (Potter, Schliskey, Stevenson & Drawdy, 2001), however, this value system is not developed in a vacuum. Caring adults must play a role, hence parents and staff involvement in the selection and approval of the PYMM for instructional purposes is critical. On example cited was the creation of a database of songs that have been tagged according to the themes and messages in the song. This recommendation aligns with data obtained from teachers (see Author and Smith, 2016) and is strongly encouraged in future studies of ME:MIM.

Popular youth music presents contrasting values, many of which conflict with those upheld in public schools. While PYMM will surely engage students, its use presents certain challenges when used to promote academic, behavioral, emotional, moral and social competencies toward the goal of enriching existing curriculum or instruction. As noted in the literature review, Weissberg & Sivo (1989) urged that competence be viewed and measured in research studies as a stand-alone developmental outcome. Competence can be specified and measured independently serving as its own outcome.

Parents/Guardians expressed a desire to be involved in the selection of music that would be used for enrichment, curriculum or instructional purposes. Securing their buy-in as key stakeholders can serve as the foundation upon which additional training and implementation considerations can be assessed. In addition, parents want to be assured that facilitators are respectful of cultural differences, hence they want to know that anyone involved in using PYMM for enrichment, curriculum or instructional purposes receives training in cultural sensitivity, particularly as it relates to values and morality. Values are often associated with morality and an infusion of morality in ME:MIM is aligned with what Piaget and Cook (1952) described as working toward moral maturity, which is both a *respect for rules* and a sense of *social justice*.

The most appropriate time of day to implement such an approach is a key feasibility concern. After-school and summer enrichment programs tend to be more feasible and acceptable to key stakeholders. Programs that help kids connect with a traditional school model can provide additional support to students whose schools and districts either lack the resources or desire to make necessary curriculum changes. An advantage of after-school and summer enrichment programs is that this programming can reach students who have not received earlier interventions. These are all reasons that support after school or summer programming in a service-learning context.

*Additional perspectives*

Equally important in this discussion is the inclusion of data that indicate a lack of acceptability by key stakeholders. An adolescents' maturity level is a key consideration when using PYMM, given the salacious and objectionable content of commercially popular music. Similar concerns were noted by program staff who indicated that the proposed approach is developmentally inappropriate for 6th grade students.

Empirically validated measures of student achievement, school connectedness, and literacy will enable key stakeholders the opportunity to continue assessing the potential of competency-based education that is engaging to today's youth. Based on findings in this study, efforts to engage students that integrate popular youth culture while emphasizing competency may be a bridge for culturally responsive teaching and learning that may could increase school connectedness, and engagement. According to key stakeholder's comments, such an approach could also provide context for dialogue about health, safety and school climate, particularly with regard to acquiring and internalizing key attitudes and belief required for school success.

Based on findings from this study, parents/guardians, youth serving professionals, and school administrators agree that students behave, think, and feel based on their respective cultural frames of reference or the "cultural world" in which they exist. The "cultural worlds" of these stakeholders may differ for a variety of reasons including age, socioeconomic background, racialized ideology or political persuasion, to name a few. Some young people struggle with the transition from the home and community supports to school, and it may prove instructive to acknowledge the role of culture and cultural difference, as well as the biases that often accompany these cultural frame of reference.

Popular youth culture and popular youth music multimedia, in particular, are examples where attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and language communication are codified and may constitute the content of many urban young people's cultural frame of reference. This is likely given the data indicating minority youth whose parents have less formal education are consuming more entertainment media compared to their white peers (Rideout et al., 2010). Given that PYMM is individually consumed and frequently shared via social media, it is entirely likely that the attitudes, behaviors, and language expressions therein may become and reflect the cultural frame of reference of those who consume it, especially heavy consumers.

Ensuring that the cultural frame of reference of a subordinate group is not stigmatized by the dominant group is controversial, but perhaps should be a goal in a culturally responsive approach to addressing minority student achievement through service-learning. This does not mean that dialogue about divergent points of view cannot exist. For example, school personnel and other adults who support youth in formal and informal learning settings must be culturally sensitive and highly attuned to the appearance of judging the attitudes, behaviors, and language expressions reflected in PYMM. The perception by youth that their music is negative would likely result in the proposed use of it being rejected by parents, as well as young people. When an individual's cultural frame of reference differs or is viewed as oppositional, it tends to result in cultural discontinuity, especially if this is the case with school personnel and the student or his or her family. Regrettably, such discontinuity contributes to the teaching and learning experience and may impact student achievement, school adjustment, and even contribute to the low self-esteem and trajectory of poor health by those who may drop out of school due to lack of being engaged or connected.

School administrators, parents/guardians and program staff recognize the need for new approaches to teaching and learning that include more emphasis on culture, with relevancy and responsiveness as key objectives. Music has the potential to capture the attention and emotion of people of all ages, regardless of their differences. ME:MIM

or similar pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning offer real possibilities to effectively engage students given that it incorporates autonomy, relatedness and the ability to demonstrate competence, in addition to be culturally-relevant, culturally-responsive and culturally-familiar. Buy-in from key stakeholders is a necessary prerequisite for adoption of these new approaches.

*Next steps and future research*

This study provides initial evidence for the acceptability and feasibility of the proposed approach to teaching and learning for enrichment and instructional purposes. Clearly, more 'data' or 'evidence' is needed. A logical next step is to address some of the conditions noted by these three stakeholder groups and to delve deeper into the dimensions of culture as a construct integral to this intervention.

A goal in a future research scenario is to determine the effectiveness of the intervention that can be assessed by measurable changes in the five competencies. It could also be helpful to ascertain whether each module, and the activities or lesson plans for each module, results in any change or if it is the cumulative effect of being exposed to more than one module that matters. Determining the effectiveness of smaller components of the intervention will yield important information that will be useful in future research scenarios. Next steps for *ME-MIM* will follow the general guidelines outlined in Kern, Evans and Lewis (2011): *Phase I – initial intervention development*. The purpose of Phase I was to modify and refine *ME-MIM* based on preliminary studies so that this intervention reflects an appreciation of PYC, cultural norms in PYMM and skillful facilitation of Socratic dialogue to engage youth (and families) in discussion that my highlight cultural differences between school and out of school norms as it relates to language, ideology, values and communication. *Phase II – preparation for intervention*. In this phase, the following key question will be addressed: 1) 'what is needed to be fully prepared to implement *ME-MIM*?' In *Phase III – implementation, feedback and revision,* *ME-MIM* will be further refined to specifically evaluate the training needed for implementation with integrity. The specific question to be addressed in this phase is 'can practitioners implement *ME-MIM* with integrity?" In *Phase IV –intervention refinement*, the identification of outcome measures to assess desired change will be finalized. During this phase, a review of the literature regarding proximal and distal measures for assessing behavioral change associated with the ten themes will be assessed. During *Phase V – further refinement with a divergent sample* a trial using an intervention package with a larger and more diverse sample will be undertaken. This will enable further refinement of the intervention with detailed attention on each activity within each module. The specific research question during *Phase VI* is*, What intervention revisions are necessary to accommodate different populations and settings?*

Perhaps, an important next step toward addressing the minority achievement gap is for young people and the adults who support them in school and community settings to acknowledge the pervasive role of popular culture in the lives of adolescents, especially the implications this may have in schooling and education. Perhaps, it is also time to face the fact that cultural differences and America's dark past may be preventing key stakeholders from crossing the cultural boundaries required to improve educational

achievement, reduce school adjustment difficulties, and improve the health trajectories of those at higher risk for adverse outcomes that may be linked maladaptive health behavior. The earlier these matters are addressed the better, but perhaps, the transition from middle to high school is an appropriate time to have these discussions given that so much is at stake.

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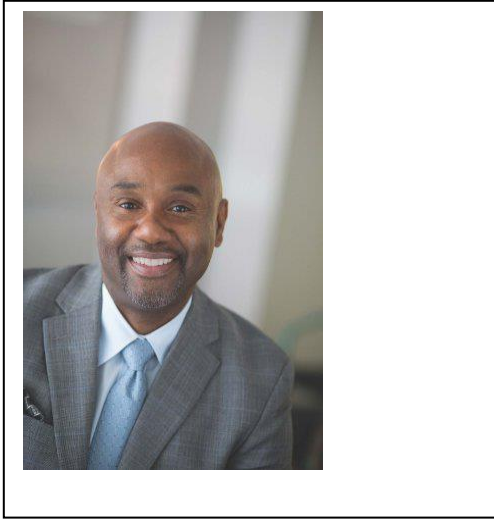


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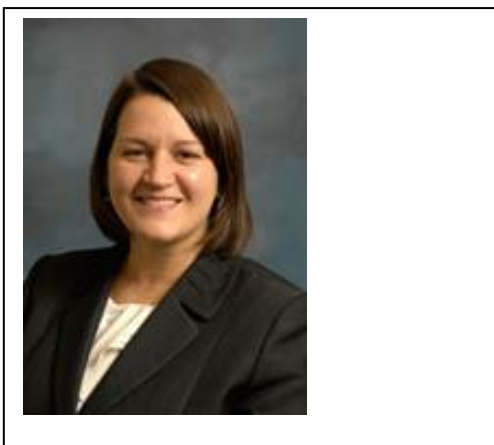


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