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Following the Drinking Gourd: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Curriculum Development Through the Arts

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Abstract

This article describes the experiences of three teachers who engaged in culturally relevant pedagogy and an arts curriculum designed to enhance student understanding of critical events in history. Their students attended a professional dance production based on the history of the Underground Railroad and then were exposed to a curriculum guide developed with the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy in mind. Teachers reported that their students' comprehension of important themes improved, and that the arts experience was deeply beneficial.

Key words: *arts education, culturally relevant pedagogy.*

Students file into a large theater and find their seats, excited to be away from their classrooms for a special field trip. They have been learning about the Underground Railroad and the events of the Civil War throughout the semester, but today, they are able to see some of these important stories realized on stage. For some, this is their first exposure to a professional theatrical production, so they are giddy and thrilled to get their programs and demonstrate what they have learned about attending this type of an event.

As the music begins—with a slow and steady pulsing of a faraway drum—they are immediately immersed in a great chase. A runaway slave, Tambo, climbs in and around their seats, hiding from slave catchers carrying ropes and guns and yelling that they will kill him. It is dark in the theater, and the now-frantic music continues while Tambo sprints onto the stage and dives under the curtain, closely followed by the catchers. Suddenly, we hear a gunshot, and the curtain rises to reveal a plantation full of slaves, moving in a sad, yet beautiful dance that depicts the harvesting of cotton on a hot and horrible day.

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The students will not learn of Tambo's fate until much later in the ballet, but they are already hooked—completely mesmerized by these images and this story. They want to know more and they sit transfixed in the dark and solemn theater. Ultimately, they will be taken on a two-hour journey along the Underground Railroad, and will experience the heartbreak and heroism of those who traveled this treacherous path.

A recurring musical motif in this production is the American folksong "Follow the Drinking Gourd," which is believed to have served as a guide for those traveling the Underground Railroad on their way to freedom. The song's title referred to a hollowed-out gourd used for drinking, but in the context of an escape from slavery, it served as a clear instruction to follow the Big Dipper and the North Star. If one followed carefully, he or she would one day be free. The courageous message of this song resonates with the important work of educators and students who travel sometimes-difficult paths to confront issues of social injustice and champion intellectual and societal freedom. The students watching this ballet in the auditorium are engaging in a project intended to advance these critical efforts.

The Study

Our project was designed to determine how and whether an arts experience, coupled with culturally relevant classroom activities, could enhance students' overall understanding of critical events in United States history while moving them toward a social justice agenda in their own lives. Our goal was to examine specific strategies to bring about student achievement and academic success while meeting the needs of all children. We found that one important way to do so is to embrace the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy—that is, pedagogy that results in organizational and structural change and that honors the personal experiences of everyone in the educational setting (Gay, 2002; Irvine, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2011).

In this article, we describe the activities of three teachers who engaged in culturally relevant teaching to enhance student learning. Specifically, these teachers participated in an arts curriculum designed to teach critical themes in United States history through professional dance. In developing this curriculum, we embedded at its core a social justice agenda. As part of the curriculum, students attended a professional dance production based on the history of the Underground Railroad (Störling Dance Theater's *Underground*), and they were asked to consider how they might bring about change in their own lives and communities. What became evident was that both students and teachers experienced intellectual growth and began to think about their own roles in developing a socially just environment.

Theoretical Framework

We looked to the ideas inherent in the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy to guide our inquiry and then linked those ideas to an arts approach to teaching. Our hypothesis was that drawing these connections between culturally relevant pedagogy and the arts would enhance students' educational experiences.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Research on culturally relevant pedagogy has shown that students do better when educators find strategies to connect to what students already know and can do (Heflin,

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2002; Irvine, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2011). This approach to teaching demands that educators create mechanisms that not only transmit content knowledge in meaningful ways, but also provide opportunities for their students to question those mechanisms. As Ladson-Billings (1995) noted:

Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (p. 160)

Thus, classrooms should be spaces where students are allowed to explore their worlds and make meaning through the ongoing and persistent questioning of their environment. For this to happen, students must feel that they are safe and that their own backgrounds and cultural experiences are honored and allowed to flourish. Irvine (2010) asserted:

Culturally relevant pedagogy has theoretical roots in the notion that learning is a socially mediated process and related to students' cultural experiences. Culture is an important survival strategy that is passed down from one generation to another through enculturation and socialization, a type of road map that guides and shapes behavior. If new information is not relevant to those frameworks of culture and cognition, people will never remember it. If the information is relevant, they will never forget it. (pp. 58–59)

Accordingly, students learn best when teachers recognize students' culture and how it plays into their intellectual and social development. The trick, however, is to develop experiences that are not culturally superficial or that are merely celebrations. Indeed, Ullucci (2011) noted, "It is critical that the diverse needs of children of color do not get minimized by quick fixes" (p. 391). So, simply having a Cinco de Mayo fiesta during recess will not do. The educational experiences need to be structured so that not only is the content culturally rich, but also the methods for delivering the content are varied and designed with individual learners in mind (Gay, 2002; Irvine, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2011; Sleeter, 2012; Ukpokodu, 2011).

Arts Education and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Arts education is one way to provide a culturally relevant experience for students, because the arts allow individuality to flourish (Acuff, Hirak, & Nangah, 2012). The arts also provide an avenue for expression that moves beyond the realm of the written word, potentially allowing complicated themes related to race and culture to be addressed in ways that are not always easily achieved through other avenues. Lee (2012) stated:

Exploring complex issues, such as race, in and through art, allows ... teachers the possibility of "capturing the ineffable, the hard-to-put-into-words" (Weber, 2008, p. 225) and engages both their affective and cognitive processes. Because visual expression allows one to expand their understandings beyond the limitation of words, artmaking provides an often overlooked avenue of understanding and an underused avenue for exploring a phenomenon. (p. 50)

In addition, Reif and Grant (2010) stated that the benefit of employing the arts to make meaning in classrooms is clear, and that overall, students who engage deeply with the arts

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have “better reading and language skills, mathematics skills, thinking skills, social skills, motivation to learn, and a positive school environment” (p. 102). They suggested:

The arts represent a direct connection between creative and analytical thought, and they provide highly successful methods to convey academic ideas in an engaging and substantive manner. Learning, communicating, and questioning in conjunction with the arts develops a dynamic classroom environment where students and teachers alike are excited and engaged in the process. (p. 101)

This indicates that a multicultural approach to curriculum design is in order, as Reif and Grant further elaborated:

Children bring to the classroom a variety of languages and dialects, cultural traditions and practices, expectations and beliefs, skills, and interests. This rich classroom composition presents a challenge for teachers who rely solely on traditional content and instructional practices; in fact, teaching in a “business as usual” mode has continually resulted in low achievement of diverse populations and a lack of motivation and engagement of students (Koppleman & Goodhart, 2010). ... This rich classroom makeup presents an opportunity for teachers who embrace multicultural education. Whether the multicultural education approach espoused has the goal of adding multicultural content to an already existing curriculum, transforming an existing curriculum into a multicultural curriculum, or encouraging students to be agents of social change (Banks & Banks, 2003), the focus is one that draws its strength from the diversity of students, teachers, and staff. (2010, p. 100)

Thus, the goal of solid instructional practice should be to discover the most effective strategies for acknowledging the significance of students’ backgrounds and experiences and then to identify critical methods for capitalizing on what students bring to the educational table.

Data Sources, Techniques, and Modes of Inquiry

We were interested in determining how students would respond to a curriculum that is tailored to their academic needs and whether exposure to an arts experience—the ballet—would enhance their overall understanding of critical events in history. For participants in this study, we selected 75 ninth-grade students at a predominantly African American school in the heart of the urban core in Kansas City, Missouri, and their teachers. Two of the teachers could be considered veterans, as they each had more than ten years of experience in the classroom. The third teacher was a novice, and was completing his student-teaching internship under the guidance of the other two at the time of this study. They were selected to participate in this research because they were exploring culturally relevant pedagogy as students in our classes at the university, and they each had demonstrated an understanding of the tenets of this approach through class assignments and activities prior to our invitation to participate. Also, they were teaching students in a low-achieving urban school who likely had limited exposure to the arts.

At the core of our inquiry, we wondered the following:

- How can teachers use a culturally relevant arts curriculum as a mechanism for engaging students?

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- How can teachers use the arts to develop a culturally relevant social justice agenda?
- How can teachers use a socially just and culturally relevant curriculum to increase overall student understanding and achievement?

To respond to these fundamental questions, we relied on videotaped interviews of teachers, who provided insights into the curriculum, their own students' levels of engagement, and their own feelings about adopting an arts approach to learning. The open-ended interviews took place at the school site and for approximately one hour each. After we conducted the interviews, we transcribed them and then met several times to identify significant categories, patterns, and themes.

Context of the Study

In the early stages of the study, we worked to understand better not only the context of the participants with regards to their exposure to an arts experience, but how best to develop a curriculum that was based on the important themes of the ballet. This section describes these initial activities.

Developing a Culturally Relevant Curriculum

Our task in writing the curriculum for *Underground* was threefold: (a) to identify areas to connect critical themes from the ballet to students' own backgrounds and experiences; (b) to identify important state-level standards and benchmarks for academic achievement and make sure our activities and assignments are in alignment with them; and (c) to construct a curriculum that extends the learning beyond the classroom, thus creating a student-centered circular continuum that is ongoing and regenerating. It was important to understand exactly what students brought to the table in terms of content knowledge, as well as their own life experiences. We also needed to develop a set of activities for various grade levels, because we knew that students from Grades 3–12 would attend the performance.

Using the materials we developed, we could determine and influence some of the students' prior knowledge about the Underground Railroad and this story in particular. Our goal was to ensure that seeing the ballet would support and enhance students' classroom work. Ultimately, we wanted students to display their understanding of important themes and be able to demonstrate that understanding in a clear, precise, and measurable way.

We first set about identifying critical themes in the ballet and determining how we might create a student-centered approach to teaching them. As researchers, we had seen the production several times, but needed to explore the inherent themes more deeply. Thus, we tape-recorded in-depth interviews with *Underground's* two creators and constructed a scene-by-scene synopsis of the show for teachers to use in preparation for the field trip. During these interviews, the creators discussed major themes in the ballet and important theatrical devices they used to illustrate the overall story.

Next, we held a focus group of classroom teachers in the Kansas City area, who reported their impressions of their students' knowledge of the history of the Underground Railroad and related themes. We were interested in learning how we might connect these themes to their students' lived experiences. This, we felt, would provide them with the

information they needed to be able to process the events on stage. We were able to gather enough data to begin to identify important areas of inquiry to pursue; for example, both the show's creators and the teacher focus group expressed that emphasizing the qualities inherent in heroes was important, and that lessons on the characteristics of heroes might be critical for students. We developed a curriculum based on this collected information and checked it against state standards for social studies and language arts. We distributed this curriculum to all teachers prior to their attendance at the ballet so they could prepare their students. After the theatrical experience, we gathered additional data through open-ended, videotaped teacher interviews.

In this article, we have included excerpts from the curriculum along with the impressions of a group of ninth-grade teachers (Victor, David, and Raymond) who relied on activities in the curriculum for guidance and instruction for their 75 students who attended *Underground* as an integral component of their studies. The innovation in this approach is twofold. First, students were exposed to an arts experience (the dance production) that was closely tied to their own cultural histories; and second, the activities we created in the accompanying curriculum guide closely aligned with their personal backgrounds and experiences. The dance production enhanced understanding of critical themes, and the classroom activities reinforced important lessons.

Engaging Social Justice in Curriculum Development

As previously stated, we sought to design a curriculum that was connected to what students and teachers were already doing in their everyday work and to be culturally relevant throughout our process. Indeed, we believed that part of our task was to develop a curriculum guide that would force discussions beyond the classroom and into the students' worlds, and that would allow students to explore strategies for their own activism or avenues for social change. Milner (2011) asserted:

Educators who create culturally relevant learning contexts are those who see students' culture as an asset, not a detriment to their success. Teachers actually use student culture in their curriculum planning and implementation, and they allow students to develop the skills to question how power structures are created and maintained in US society. (p. 69)

So, for example, high school students were asked to consider the plight of modern-day slaves and to develop a comprehensive research paper outlining the need for social activism. We were mindful of the need to create opportunities for teachers to enhance their lesson plans with activities that would support state standards, because they were in the middle of their testing cycle and careful to ensure that every minute of face time with students would be meaningful and productive. We believed, however, that the reality of assessment and evaluation does not preclude a culturally relevant approach to curriculum design. On the contrary, we worked to create activities that would honor the tenets of culturally relevant teaching while also providing the rigor and support necessary for academic achievement.

We also wanted to provide a variety of options so that teachers could select the activity that would best suit a specific class or student. With these ideas in mind, for instance, elementary school children were given the opportunity to share their understanding of

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significant themes through creative movement activities and mapmaking. Additionally, elementary students analyzed the lyrics to “Follow the Drinking Gourd” and examined the use of song in the history of the Underground Railroad movement. Middle school students could use journaling and letter writing to take on the personas of characters in the ballet or create dialogue for the dancers they saw on stage. High school students could identify a current injustice in their world and outline their ideas for confronting it, or write about their views on the protagonists and antagonists in a recent controversy.

We wanted teachers to believe they could rely on the arts to help make meaning of critical themes. Teachers also needed to embrace the notion that an afternoon at the ballet would be valuable and engaging, and not take away from instructional time. For these participants, the dance and the artistic approach to the unit on the Underground Railroad became the focus of the instruction, and everyone benefited. Ladson-Billings (1995, 2000) recommended using tactics that empower students to challenge injustices while they engage in rigorous and cutting-edge instruction. The students and teachers in our study were transformed through their experience with an arts curriculum. They were brought into the world of the Underground Railroad through the ballet, moved by the stories of those long-ago heroes, and urged to seek out their own paths to creating a more just society.

Findings: Teacher Interviews

Four themes emerged from the teacher interviews:

- Teachers were willing to try new strategies that do not limit students.
- Teachers valued honoring student culture.
- Teachers valued exposing their students to a social justice agenda.
- Teachers believed an arts experience provides students intangible benefits.

Willingness to Try New Strategies

What we found throughout this study was that teachers were willing to try new strategies and wanted to seek out innovative methods for engaging students. They were open to exposing students to the arts curriculum and were excited by their students’ reactions to it. They reported that their own ideas about what they thought their students would enjoy changed. For example, Raymond reported that he worried his students would not understand a story told solely through dance and might not enjoy the theatrical experience. He was surprised not only by his students’ ability to grasp critical concepts in the dance, but also by how much he changed his own attitude about how the arts might be used in the classroom:

My concern was that the students might have a difficult time understanding the various themes going on onstage, because there was no spoken language. And I was astonished by how in tune the students were with the ballet, and what they were able to take away from it. What I have learned is not to limit the students in what forms of art that they might be exposed to. They were very into the ballet, and they were able to take away a lot of meaning.

Victor noted that students immediately became enthralled with the action in the theater and remained transfixed throughout the production. He suggested that this engagement

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continued beyond the confines of the performance hall, and that classroom discussion benefited as a result:

I have to say that one of the best parts about the ballet besides the rich, cultural experience was that it engaged students right from the start, with the dancers coming up right into the audience. The students got to feel like they were part of the ballet, and I think that kept them engaged throughout the whole process. They sympathized with the characters, and when we got back to class and had a chance to dialogue about what they had seen, they really sympathized with the characters and they talked about the fear of the slaves and how that made them feel. We talked about how music can create mood and how dance, as a physical, kinesthetic expression, can say so many words when there are no words being spoken. So we were able to give them this experience, and I think that's so important, particularly in schools where the arts are being defunded.

Honoring Student Culture

Victor noted the importance of providing educational experiences that honor students' cultures:

*I felt that our students needed to be exposed to the arts and to see their culture, and I thought that *Underground* gave us a great opportunity for them to experience this. It tied in perfectly with our Black History Month activities, and we were able to tie it to various curricula. Of course, we connected it to social studies, but we also connected it to math with evaluating the numbers of slaves, the economic issues, and the so-called need for the slave trade. We tied it to communication arts with the writing projects provided in the curriculum guide. It just so happened that this project coincided with our testing, so we wanted to make sure it tied into those requirements and that it utilized their background knowledge around the use of character, plot, setting, and imagery. We were able to bring in mood and really connect to some of the more difficult state-level testing requirements while creating a space for students to explore their culture.*

Milner (2011) suggested:

Students are empowered to examine more intently what they are learning, to create and to construct meaning, to contribute to the multiple conversations in a classroom with agency, to succeed academically and socially, and to gauge contradictions and inequities both in school and outside of school. In addition, culturally relevant pedagogy allows students to see their culture in the curriculum and instruction, and students are encouraged to maintain it. This idea of seeing oneself in the curriculum and through instruction helps students understand the important ways in which their culture ... contributed to various genres of curriculum content and also to the fabric of US society. (p. 69)

Raymond asserted:

The curriculum made the ballet relevant to the students. We were able to connect the various writing prompts to the students' interests and their lives. What students seemed to enjoy was the fact that this was their history, their story. They immediately got invested

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in it as a result. They knew that their ancestors went through what was on that stage, and it made them think more about what it meant to be a part of a struggle. One of my male students actually said he really appreciated being exposed to this type of production because for once, he felt like he could relate to it. He turned in a great essay, too, that spoke to this. It was very powerful and well written.

Raymond's statements challenge the notion that culturally relevant or multicultural teaching does not adhere to the rigor required for academic achievement through standardized assessments. Rather, the teachers shared that students displayed deeper understanding about complex issues related to historical events, and that they seemed eager to engage in traditional forms of expression (e.g., essay writing, poetry analysis) which involved deconstructing their experiences with the ballet. David noted, "The curriculum guide was critical to our understanding. We were able to use specific writing prompts, and students engaged in various ways with the lessons provided." Victor indicated:

I thought they were higher-level lessons that engaged in multiple intelligences, which is something we like to do. I actually remember using the lesson that asked students to analyze the lyrics from one of the songs in the ballet. Essentially it was an analysis of poetry, and I wanted to gauge their understanding of the words and meaning. One of my students submitted her analysis and commented specifically on what she had seen onstage. The song/poem comes at a moment in the ballet when a group of abolitionists decides they must help with the Underground Railroad effort, and they are searching for guidance in that process. Well, my student wrote that she could tell that the song/poem was meant to suggest that these particular abolitionists found a spiritual reason for their commitment, because when the dancers opened their arms and reached and looked up at the heavens, they had made their decision to help free runaway slaves. So I definitely think that seeing the poem or song enacted onstage helped my students understand complex themes. Also, we were able to differentiate instruction, and it was great to get all of the background about the ballet beforehand—the characters' names and the context of what was going on, so students were well prepared for the performance.

Raymond stated:

I was very pleased with my students' ability to evaluate the themes presented onstage. The students did an outstanding job of connecting some of the imagery in the ballet to historical events, and I really found it to be beneficial to the students, especially with respect to understanding their history. I think for me, as an educator, it really helped my students to see social activism onstage and to try to think of ways to transfer that kind of effort to their own lives. It's one thing to read about it or even to see it in a movie, but for some reason, because there was no spoken language in the production, the kids had to make meaning out of the movements of the dancers, and that forced them to think about the themes in a different way.

What became clear was that students in this study seemed to become engaged the minute they realized this was an experience that honored who they were. From there, they were able to open themselves up to the lessons provided not only through the production but

also in the curriculum. The result of their engagement was more thoughtful and critical analysis, as evidenced in their coursework.

Teaching a Social Justice Agenda

Culturally relevant teaching demands that everyone in the educational setting challenge systems that are unjust and identify strategies for confronting inequities (Gay, 2002; Irvine, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000; Milner, 2011; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Sleeter, 2012). Some of the students in this study chose to write about a current injustice in their community or in the world. David noted:

My students felt like they needed to take action and feel some sort of connection to their communities and the world. Some students wrote about child slavery and other forms of injustice that are taking place across the world today. After they saw the show and we talked about the themes, they thought it was very powerful. So, one of the things I enjoyed about this experience was that when we think about what it means to be culturally relevant in our approach, we have to think about the process of encouraging activism in our students. I remember another student chose to write about how she related what she saw the abolitionists do in the ballet to what she wants to do one day as a social worker helping the homeless.

Intangible Benefits

What we also found interesting were the intangible benefits related to attending a ballet. These include students' wonder at what was for many a new form of expression. David stated, "Our students are really talented, but this is the first time many of them had ever been to a professional production. A lot of them shared that this experience opened their eyes to a new type of expression that they had never been exposed to before." Victor agreed:

I think the ability to see someone who looks like them, actually performing and executing in a celebration of their culture and a celebration of history was just outstanding. The facilities were great, and we talked about proper decorum involved in seeing a professional production, so we were able to do some social education as well.

David identified other intangible effects related to students' overall sense of well-being and the discovery that their exploration of the world need not be confined to the classroom. He also reported that some students wanted to be onstage with the dancers and that they were impressed by the work that went into the production:

I think the production made students think about living a healthy lifestyle—thinking about the flexibility and the strength of the dancers ... so we even had a conversation that included diet, exercise, and practicing their craft and what it means to develop a solid work ethic.

Taken together, these ideas suggest that many students can benefit from what some consider nontraditional forms of instruction, and that learning may be enhanced through these activities. Raymond stated, "I would say that this really helped our students understand that period of time and their history."

Discussion and Implications

Ukpokodu (2007, 2009, 2011) suggested that even the most well-meaning educators interested in developing culturally relevant teaching strategies can still struggle to identify practical avenues for success. Nevertheless, her 2011 study, which examined a group of math teachers who wanted to embrace the tenets of culturally relevant teaching, found that this approach must begin with high expectations for success. Too often, culturally relevant teaching has been interpreted as just another strategy to deliver content strictly related to race or ethnicity. However, the foundation of this approach begins with the educator considering who will or will not benefit from the instruction, and how to ensure that each student has the opportunity to learn in the most suitable way. Our study revealed that this set of teachers had extremely good intentions; they wanted to learn new ways to teach familiar topics and had high expectations for all students. So, in a way, they were already quite far along in their journey to culturally relevant instructional practice. However, even they were impressed with how much their students seemed to benefit from a rich arts experience and a curriculum that enhanced their comprehension of historical events.

When we set out to design a curriculum to guide instruction related to the Underground Railroad, we worked to provide multiple avenues to achieve a similar result. So, for example, students who enjoyed learning through music could do so, and those who wanted to illustrate their understanding on a poster or collage had that option. Our study revealed that although our activities centered on language arts and social studies, teachers were able to find connections to other disciplines, and the learning expanded far beyond their (and our) initial planning. Young (2010) stressed that teachers who are mindful of culturally relevant instruction always can find opportunities to promote rigorous academic learning and a sociopolitical consciousness. The teachers in our study worked to connect this arts experience and the accompanying curriculum to a number of issues related to inequity and injustice in their communities and world.

We also suspect that this type of curricular approach is indeed quite rare in the world of theatrical dance. The curriculum guides accompanying dance productions that we have encountered are primarily limited to exploration of the music and costumes, and perhaps a retelling of the plot. The typical ballets that students encounter on field trips—for example, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker*, or *Cinderella*—are valuable in their own right for their beauty and artistry. However, such works rarely challenge students to think about how themes relate to their lives or require them to consider how they will go about making change in their world. Thus, it was important not to expose the students to just *any* dance performance. The production had to provide the appropriate foundation for a curriculum designed to enhance students' understanding of complex concepts through a culturally relevant approach.

Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) provided a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of culturally relevant pedagogy and affirmed that since its inception, this framework has had at its core the idea that all children deserve to be taught in a way that helps them experience intellectual and societal freedom. In addition, students should be allowed to express themselves and demonstrate their comprehension of complex ideas in a variety of ways. Our study illustrated what happened when one group of teachers decided to approach their

unit on the history of the Underground Railroad in an inventive fashion. Students could see and hear what those horrifying moments must have been like for so many who came before them, and in the darkened theater, it was easy to imagine themselves in that world. By the production's end, when the dancers who appeared ragged and hopeless in the opening leaped and jumped in joyous song as a new century promising freedom dawned, many of the students and teachers in the audience also were uplifted. They had shared an experience and would soon be at a place—their classroom—where they could engage in greater detail with its implications for their lives. Their embrace of this opportunity suggests that teaching and learning can be enhanced when educators and students are provided with the opportunity to experience the arts within the structure of a culturally relevant curriculum.

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