

THE MIXTAPE

VOLUME 1

**Culturally Sustaining Practices Within MTSS
Featuring the Everlasting Mission
of Student Engagement**

Editors

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THE PROLOGUE CYPHER: STEP INTO THE ARENA

William Hunter (WH), Ed.D.
Jonte' (JT) Taylor, Ph.D.
LaRon Scott (LR), Ed.D.

WH: We are coming together like a cypher, spittin' off the top during this section of the book. Our first topic to discuss is: How did this project come together? I'll start us off, then JT and LaRon. So, there are probably quite a few backstories on how this project came together. It started off with our weekly Zoom meetings, discussing content for another project, and then as our discussions evolved, we talked, ya know, about how this project came to mind. We wanted to do something out of the box – something that'd integrate our interests that's tied in with Hip-Hop. We came up with this title, the Mixtape Volume 1. We came together like Voltron or Devastator, thinking about it like Transformers. We had an opportunity to do a call for chapters and reach out to different authors. The collective contribution of the authors of the book chapter is much appreciated.

JT: I can jump in and just cosign what you said, man. As many Hip-Hop songs can attest, our conversations were supposed to be about whatever academic thing we were doing, and then they became a lot more...I looked forward to our Zoom meetings. They were like the highlight of my week. We would get into conversations about culturally responsive and culturally sustaining teaching, and what does that mean at any particular level of education? When we're talking about elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, even at higher ed. And what does that look like for teachers? Teachers of color, teachers from marginalized backgrounds, teachers who have really good intentions and really good dispositions but don't have necessarily all of the tools or strategies that they need to help as many kids as possible. And I think the nexus and the genesis of this book came from those conversations. And even when we dive into pop culture/Hip-Hop culture conversations, we

just naturally and organically saw the intersection of these things and was like, You know what? This would make a really good resources for teachers and a tool for teachers and is needed. The book gave us an opportunity to do something super dope. So, that's how I think about it when I think about how this [book] came about.

LR: Yeah, and I agree with both you, Will, and JT. It's been an iterative process, but it's been really natural. Thinking back to where we began, talking about a possible collaboration and what those things could look like, I don't think any of us thought it would be this type of opportunity to move forward with a book. You know, it's different, and as JT mentioned the core is wrapped around culturally sustaining practices and pedagogy. I think that's one of the links, one of the many links that we discovered that we had authentically together. You know, coming from three different backgrounds, three different settings, three different approaches to our research, and still, at the core of that, we could always unpack and say that it's all about culturally sustaining pedagogy and practices. And having those raw conversations about our experiences as Black men, right? Both as kids who were in front of teachers in classrooms that didn't look like us. And then our experiences going into the teaching profession and the practices and the experiences that we had as teacher educators. Some of our initiatives failed at times, and some of those things worked out. And one of the things that worked out for us is being transparent, being authentic with our students, seeing the assets of our students, of our communities, and using innovative approaches to really support those students.

JT: Thank you!

WH: If I could chime in to wrap up this question to say: I am in total agreement with JT and LaRon, these were the highlights of my weeks, meeting with y'all. I think that's our organic concept was a dope aspect of our collaboration. On another note, I am really thinking about our experiences as Black men within the world of special education and our discussions centering around Black undergraduate and graduate students transitioning to become practitioners or faculty within higher education. It's the transparency and the vulnerability of the conversations. I think that if we didn't really have that sense of vulnerability, we wouldn't have been able to get this product out to what it is today. I think the audience is about to see it...so the next topic is intended audience. JT, if you could start us off with that one, then LaRon, and then me.

JT: As we were constructing this book, and it was in its conceptual frame and conceptual stages, we really wanted to put together a resource and a guide and, for lack of a better term, something cool. We know the importance of it being relevant and culturally relevant, beyond the space of pedagogy, but also in the conversations that are happening in education. The zeitgeist of education is fraught with a bunch of things that seem and that are anti-teacher, anti-culture, and anti-inclusive. And we wanted to combat that the best we could with something that teachers can use beyond that. So, the audience is really anyone who wants to better connect with their students, regardless of background, particularly those who come from marginalized backgrounds who may be overrepresented in some spaces or underrepresented in some spaces and those teachers who are dedicated [working with those students]. Whether a special ed teacher, gen ed teacher, or parent; it doesn't matter. Individuals who want to see the best for kids in the broadest sense possible. So that's the audience, at least as I think about this text, that I envision in my head.

LS: I think this book is intended for multiple audiences. And JT really nailed specifically who those audiences could be. And I have to agree with him that anyone who wants to make connections with their students is the audience here. And that could be from any part of the country, whether it's in urban settings, rural settings, suburban areas, or exceptional needs schools. At the core

of what we do as educators is make relationships and connections with our students. That's like tier one, right? And so, thinking about those ways and also folks who are really ready to have fun with their instruction. Folks who want to embrace something new but something with some evidence behind it as well. Folks who want to think about how, as an educator, I can again make those types of raw and authentic relationships with my students, get them to open up about their experiences and draw on that from an asset perspective to design instruction and design learning opportunities. I think this book is a novel contribution. And a part of that is me thinking back as a former K-12 teacher, I didn't have a resource like this when I was going through my program. And so, I think about those pre-service teachers who have an opportunity to have this as a resource. As a way to really shift conversation in

their pre-service preparation programs, as well as move from information to implementation, as they transition into their classroom. And so yeah, I mean I think it's a great resource that I wish I would have had going through my training program.

WH: I second the resource discussion, LaRon dropping gems on them. With that said, going back to my career as a special educator, mainly I worked with students with emotional behavioral disorders (EBD), and that was

really the whole reason why I even got into the "academia" game per se. Because whether people want to admit it or not, at times, it can appear to be a game. Where, as a former teacher of students with EBD, I was told that I was doing a good job in so many words because the students were not engaged in physical altercations. In my head, I was asking, "Where are the high expectations?" As a special education classroom teacher, there were times I felt that "I really needed professional development." What are some interactive strategies? How can I get them engaged? What are some culturally sustaining strategies? Believe it or not, as an instructor, I was implementing elements of Hip-Hop ed/Hip-Hop pedagogy within my classroom, but I didn't know that's what it truly was in terms of a pedagogical framework. But it came natural if that makes sense. And going to the general question of the audience, to kind of make another Hip-Hop reference, I'm a big fan of Wu-Tang Clan. Like this book is for the masses, and when I say that we look at pre-service teachers, enrolled in teacher prep programs. We look at those who are enrolled

"...the audience is really anyone who wants to better connect with their students, regardless of background, particularly those who come from marginalized backgrounds who may be overrepresented in some spaces or underrepresented in some spaces and those teachers who are dedicated..."

in counseling programs, social work programs. In fact, we got a whole chapter where the majority of the authors are social workers: the Therapeutic Drumming for the Classroom chapter (Section III, Tier 3). This is included as professional development for in-service teachers and administrators.. Like someone from those particular audiences can take an aspect of this book and apply it to their current role. Rather than just thinking about teacher dispositions or thinking about Black feminism or thinking about interaction, active engagement, or looking at math as a way to connect with students with academic or behavioral challenges or different math strategies. Like this is a true mixed tape. In terms of going back into the 1980s where we had Memorex tapes and put in the tape, then hit record. And then once that tape pops, you switch tapes and put it on the other side. Like it gives you a variety of sounds, a variety of thoughts. A variety of perspectives within this chapter and other chapters of the book.

JT: If I can jump back in... it really doesn't matter where you're coming from in your profession and your career. We talked about in-service and pre-service teachers. The book, hopefully, is designed to support novice teachers as well as expert teachers. I also hope teachers can extrapolate the bigger idea of the culturally sustaining and culturally relevant parts. For example, I've not only worked with kids who need emotional and behavioral supports, but also with kiddos with autism, in suburban schools, in rural schools, and in all types of backgrounds. So, you can come to this book with whatever background you have and hopefully you should be able to take something out of it, regardless of the population that you work with, regardless of your training, regardless of if you're a new teacher or if you're a seasoned vet. It doesn't matter where you're coming from. We also divided this book up into sections. We have a whole section on dispositions. Dispositions and theory and how you can think about Hip-Hop pedagogy in a way if you've never really thought about it before or a different kind of lens of thinking about culturally sustaining and culturally responsive practices. The same thing with our other big section, which is actual strategies, whether they're behavioral strategies or academic strategies. We structured it in a way so we, regardless of where you're coming from in your career, in your experiences, in the profession, if you're about helping kids, then this book should help you help kids. And again, you should be able to extrapolate and get its Hip-Hop

focus. But if you work in a place where all the kids and all the families only listen to country music, the strategies themselves and how we have positioned those strategies in Hip-Hop can be repositioned for people who are country music fans. The idea is to think about how you're teaching, how you're doing instruction, and how you're connecting with your students in a broader sense. So, the audience is really, we hope, as wide and as broad and as diverse as possible.

LS: And if I can piggyback off of JT, I think also as educators you sometimes feel like you are pulled in so many different directions. You have to either solely teach academic content and transition content is something separate. You have to also learn MTSS and that's another layer of your learning. You also have to learn, as JT sort of pointed out, all of these instructional strategies. As educators we are pulled in multiple directions and having to choose what direction to go can be overwhelming sometimes in and of itself. I think something that this book helps to capture is how you bridge all of those different components and strategies into a core way of thinking about your instruction. So no longer do you have to choose to focus on simply culturally sustaining pedagogy or MTSS or focusing on academic content today. It's

bridging all of those practices together under one umbrella and moving from having that information to showing educators how to actually implement it, which I think is really important for a lot of our folks. They're sometimes just inundated with information without the details on how to actually implement the practice in their classroom or school or community or wherever they are. And what we attempted to do with this book was show educators how to do the work.

WH: I want to kind of throw a bonus question in. Because within the title, I think we alluded to it in our previous discussion within this prologue, and again, this prologue is set up like a cypher as we're kind of going back and forth. In terms of MTSS, how does this book address MTSS in a positive way or are there areas that need to be enhanced? LaRon, if you could start us off with that.

LS: Aight with the bonus question! I think this book helps enhance what we know and what we think we know about MTSS. That is, when we look at MTSS, through the eyes of doing it from a culturally responsive, culturally

“...if you work in a place where all the kids and all the families only listen to country music, the strategies themselves and how we have positioned those strategies in Hip-Hop can be repositioned for people who are country music fans.”

sustaining approach, that information is not always readily available and detailed and out there. So, when we begin to unpack how to, again, bridge MTSS with the other core areas of our book, culturally sustaining pedagogy and Hip-Hop pedagogy, how can we bridge those three things together? So, as you're putting forward a Tier 1 framework or Tier 1 intervention, there's a chapter, "The Blueprint": Universal Design for Learning and Student Success (Section III, Tier 1). And thinking about how UDL and MTSS speak to each other through this culturally sustaining framework, I think is a very unique contribution to how MTSS is and has been shared out.

JT: I don't care what tier you're on: Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3. Whatever system it is, whether it's a RTI system (a response to intervention system) or a positive behavior interventions and support system or social emotional learning system or framework. The other part of the book title is about student engagement. I don't care what tier you're on. Without student engagement, we will get nowhere. So, the importance of the book to me and its connection to MTSS at any level, through any framework is that focus on student engagement. How are we getting students engaged? How are we engaging students as professionals, teachers, resources, wherever we are? Researchers, teachers, social workers, whatever. So, to me the importance of it is and the significance of the text is rooted in the fact that the focus is on student engagement, and its student engagement within these tiered systems of support.

WH: So, I think to kind of summarize the MTSS bonus question, it's that, thinking about it from a scientific aspect of progress monitoring, using evidence-based practices

as we navigate students through the multiple tiers, one of the key elements missing is the teacher being the facilitator, which is one of the tenets of critical Hip-Hop pedagogy. And then also elements that are missing as far as this within that tiered system. How does the facilitator include the lived experience of the students? Which is an element, another tenant of critical Hip-Hop pedagogy, of incorporating the lived experience. The human side, the building relationships, which ties into high-leverage practices, which I think are eloquently interwoven throughout this whole book, specifically high-leverage practice 7 where building those positive relationships goes hand-in-hand with the scientific element of MTSS. For ours, moving students through whole group/Tier 1, smaller group/Tier 2, and moving out of our response intervention of PBIS or intensive services/wraparound PBIS or intensive instruction, response to intervention. That human element, that teacher as a facilitator, a teacher as a MC producer. I think this is what we bring to the table with this book. And with that human element, it allows teachers to self-reflect and eliminate potential biases that they may have. They may have unconscious biases which could affect the intended academic or behavioral outcomes of the students they're trying to support. Bringing this project to light can hopefully enhance MTSS practices. Don't get it twisted; there are chapters in the book that challenge MTSS in its current state. If we don't think it needs to be enhanced, then challenges would not exist.

THERE ARE LEVELS TO THIS: HIP-HOP, MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT (MTSS), AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Jonte' C. Taylor

In this chapter, we:

- detail a brief history of multi-tiered systems of supports (MTSS),
- describe commonly used MTSS for academics, behavior, and social/emotional learning
- introduce a tiered system of support for Hip-Hop Pedagogy.

Throughout this chapter, we discuss the usage of various MTSS structures used in educational settings (e.g., Response to Intervention [RtI] and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports [PBIS]). Further, we introduce connections between Hip-Hop Pedagogy and MTSS to encourage active student engagement and culturally responsive practice.

Keywords: multi-tiered systems of support, MTSS, RTI, PBIS, Hip-Hop, culturally responsive

Listen Up: Sounds for this Section

Let's Get It Started - MC Hammer

Engagement is the cornerstone of capturing the attention of your audience. In Hip-Hop, engaging your audience can include making them a part of the cultural expression through some of the core elements related to auditory, visual, and movement arts (these elements will be discussed in detail in a later chapter). In schools, the importance of engagement for students cannot be overstated. Student engagement is the crux of school success for most students and begins the process of teaching and learning. The MC Hammer quote above provides a context in how to think about engagement – how do you get “it” started in both Hip-Hop and within school settings.

The most successful producers, performers, or practitioners in Hip-Hop culture or educational settings are those who maximize engagement. Hip-Hop cultural artists known for encouraging crowd interactions (e.g., deejays such as FunkMaster Flex or rappers such as Dr. Dre) or eliciting crowd reactions (e.g., break dancers such as Richard “Crazy Legs”

Colón or graffiti artists such as Lonny “Phase 2” Wood). Successful engagement (i.e., interactions) that occur within Hip-Hop can take the form of active participation from an audience (as demonstrated by rappers and deejays) or in the display or performance of Hip-Hop arts in the public sphere (as with dancers and visual artists).

Outcomes related to student engagement in educational settings have been consistent over time, developmental stage, and predictable achievement (Janosz et al., 2008; Reschly et al., 2020). In fact, students who demonstrate high levels of engagement in school are associated with high levels of success and achievement (e.g., graduation; post-secondary attendance); conversely, students with lower levels of engagement to have diminished school-related results (i.e., dropout; Janosz et al., 2008; Li & Lerner, 2011; O'Donnell & Reschly, 2020; Wiley & Hodgen, 2012). Further, engagement has been recognized internationally as an amenable and predictive construct that is associated with student outcomes (Christenson et al., 2012; Reschly & Christenson, 2012). Student engagement as a measure has been exposed to and proven to be influenced by intervention (Reschly & Christenson, 2019). Reschly et al. (2020) stated that support for students who struggle with reading, attention, and disengagement

could not be fixed with simple solutions as these problems are too complex. However, how does one capture the audience's (i.e., class's) attention? Reschly (2020) asserted that "efforts to promote student engagement occur best when conceptualized within [a]...multi-tiered System of Supports [MTSS] framework" (p. 42).

THREE TIERS OF MTSS FRAMEWORKS AND HIP-HOP CULTURE

Listen Up: Sounds for this section:

Humble - Kendrick Lamar

A common sentiment expressed in Hip-Hop, and in the quote above, is the concept of levels. That is, there are steppingstones or tiers to understanding the culture. As you move through these tiers your connection to Hip-Hop culture intensifies. Similarly, the use of MTSS frameworks in schools follow the same trajectory. In fact, one of the main features of MTSS frameworks is the progressive nature of moving through tiers to intensive student supports.

MTSS Framework Tiers

A provision of the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) offers a definition of MTSS as "a comprehensive continuum of evidence-based systematic practices to support a rapid response to students' needs, with regular observations to facilitate data-based instructional decision making" (20 U.S.C. § 8802 [33]). While not required by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the specific mention of MTSS encourages its use in schools and support for implementing approaches that improve academic, behavioral, and social/emotional outcomes. Aside from the federal definition, Cook et al. (2010) described MTSS as a framework that uses an organized continuum that allows for the delivery of evidence-based practices using data-based decision making. There are MTSS frameworks that focus on various aspects of in-school constructions (i.e., academic and behavior). Tiered academic systems are generally considered as response to intervention (RTI) frameworks. Behavioral tiered systems are generally described as positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS). There are a number of wellness-based tiered systems that focus on social/emotional learning (SEL).

Regardless of the system, most MTSS frameworks use a three-tiered model, with each tier increasing in the level of support provided. The tiered model generally follows a similar structure depending on the focus of the implementation (e.g., academic; behavior; wellness). As

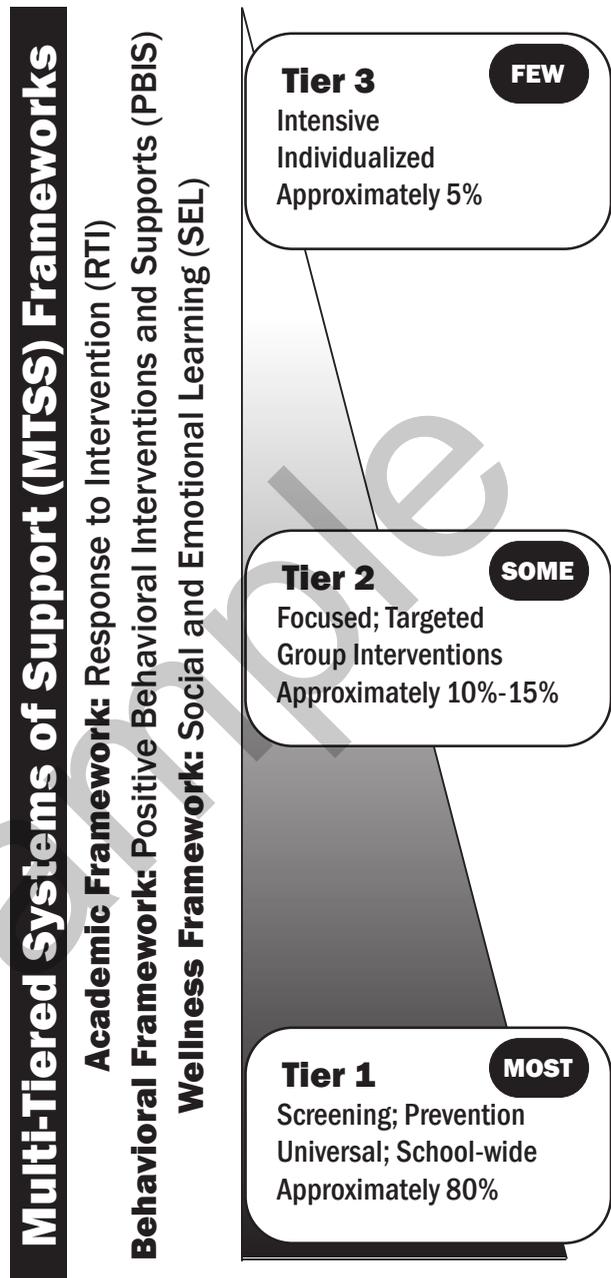


Figure 1: MTSS Three-Tiered Systems

explained by Sugai et al. (2019):

- Tier 1- screening, universal or school-wide implementation; preventative interventions; most students (approximately 80%) at this level
- Tier 2: focused or targeted additional supports; group interventions; some students (approximately 10–15%) at this level
- Tier 3: intensive supports; individualized interventions; few students (approximately 5%) at this level

See Figure 1 for a visual representation of the MTSS three-tiered systems.

At each tier of MTSS implementation, students' needs are determined via data-based decision making while accounting for micro- and meso-systematic factors (Cook et al., 2020). In support of the use of MTSS frameworks, Greenberg and Abenavoli (2017) stated:

Given the prevalence and impact of academic, social, emotional, and behavioral problems on student short-term and long-term success, there is an increased need for schools to implement population-based practices to prevent problems that result in negative school and life outcomes (p. 213).

Hip-Hop Cultural Tiers

Similar to MTSS Frameworks, Hip-Hop can parallel a similar three-tier structure. The expansion and reach of Hip-Hop has grown from its humble beginnings in New York City in the mid-1970s. Culturally, Hip-Hop did not stay confined to New York City or to the borders of its country of origin. Hip-Hop culture has grown from a local fad, regional trend, and national experience. Due to this growth, Hip-Hop culture is now considered a significant phenomenon in every part of the world (Benzerara, 2017).

Similar to the first tier in MTSS frameworks, Hip-Hop culture can be viewed as universal. The broad appeal of Hip-Hop can be seen and felt around the globe in all aspects of life (i.e., socially, politically, economically, culturally; Brown, 2021; Chang, 2009). Thus, it connects to a wide range of people and places. In fact, immersive Hip-Hop cultural scenes can be found in the United Kingdom, South Korea, Japan, Poland, France, Brazil, and Nigeria and almost every other corner of the globe (Benzerara, 2017).

The second tier of MTSS frameworks has been described as focused or group-level strategies. This tier of Hip-Hop culture should be thought of as community. Since its inception, Hip-Hop in all its forms has been tailored around the gathering of like-minded people to share in a common experience (The Kennedy Center, 2019). This continues to be true to this day. Those who appreciate Hip-Hop as a culture recognize the community they are in and share in its interactions, engagements, and rituals. True Hip-Hop aficionados seek out others to share in these cultural experiences as a community.

Tier three in MTSS frameworks have been characterized as intense or individualized. At its core, experiences with Hip-Hop culture can be both intense and individualized and expression is rooted in authenticity and knowledge of self (The Kennedy Center, 2019). These expressions across the culture are deeply personal and may

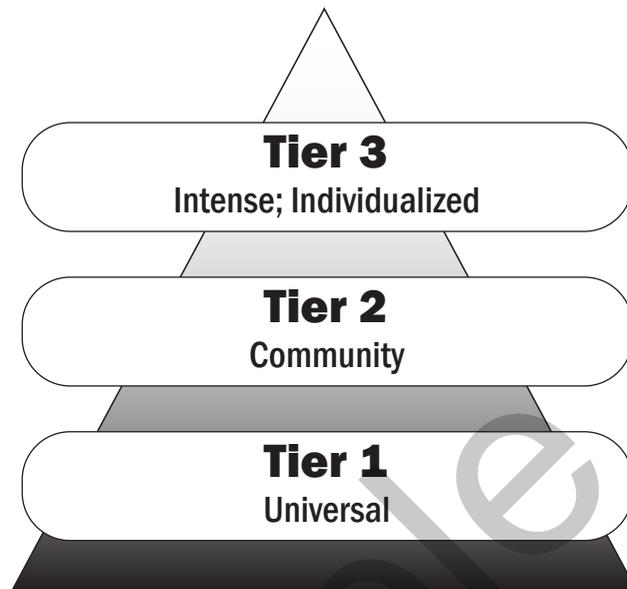


Figure 2: Hip-Hop Culture as a tiered phenomenon

include intense feelings of joy, pain, jubilation, or anguish. As a reflection of life circumstances and the personal human connections and interactions that occur at cultural and personal levels, Hip-Hop culture echoes across our global society in a similar way that MTSS frameworks operate in school settings. See Figure 2 for Hip-Hop culture as a tiered phenomenon.

HIGH LEVERAGE PRACTICES, MTSS FRAMEWORKS, AND HIP-HOP

Listen Up: Sounds for this section:

Wish I Had It - Kevin Gates

As the lyrics to “Wish I Had It” expresses, time is of the essence when it comes to helping students succeed. Practices that account for student differences and individualities provide the best opportunities to support students and encourage student engagement. These outcomes are not only important but have also been recognized in the field as integral to providing a nurturing and supportive environment for students that maximizes their success. Specifically, high-leverage practices (HLPs) have been recognized as actions and considerations that teachers should put into practice in schools, classrooms, and all educational settings. Created by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the Collaboration for Effective Educator, Development, Accountability and Reform (CEEDAR) Center, HLPs focus on 22 practices that K–12 special educators should master and demonstrate in four broad areas: a) collaboration, b) assessment, c) social/emotional/behavioral, and

c) instruction (McLeskey et al., 2017). Both MTSS frameworks and the integration of Hip-Hop cultural elements as part of teaching and learning align well with HLPs.

Using MTSS in schools and classrooms requires consideration for all students regardless of background and individual characteristics. MTSS can be directly connected to HLPs in assessment and instruction as follows:

Assessment

- HLP5: Interpret and communicate assessment information with stakeholders to collaboratively design and implement educational programs,
- HLP6: Use student assessment data, analyze instructional practices, and make necessary adjustments that improve student outcomes

Instruction

- HLP20: Provide intensive instruction.

The use of MTSS frameworks and their multiple components as well as their alignment to HLPs, make them a viable mechanism to support students. To further the effectiveness of MTSS frameworks, researchers have investigated ways to make them culturally relevant and sustaining to support more students. For example, Dong and associates (2020) discussed being culturally responsive within MTSS frameworks through an understanding of students' backgrounds, families, communities, geography, and identities. Jackson (2021) summarized five components that increase the likelihood of MTSS frameworks resulting in inequitable outcomes for students, including: a) culturally responsive instruction and assessment, b) high quality and early instruction, c) data-based decision making, d) leadership, and e) continued professional development.

Integrating Hip-Hop culture in the classroom can provide students opportunities to learn and demonstrate learning in ways that may not commonly be available to them. This is particularly salient for students from marginalized backgrounds or who may not respond to traditional educational interactions (Kim & Pulido, 2015). Specific to the Instruction domain and HLP 18 (i.e., use strategies to promote active student engagement; McLeskey et al., 2017), incorporating elements of Hip-Hop in instructional delivery and how students express learning can optimize participatory engagement that is at the spirit of HLP 18. Additionally, if implemented as

a regular part of classroom teaching, Hip-Hop culture can positively impact the learning environment of the educational setting as it shows respect to students and families that feel a cultural connection to Hip-Hop (i.e., HLP7: establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment; Social/Emotional/Behavioral Practices domain; McLeskey et al., 2017).

By using HLPs and aligning them with MTSS frameworks and Hip-Hop cultural elements teachers can demonstrate culturally responsive practices and establish deep connections with their students. These student/teacher relationships are critical and provide the foundation for activating student engagement (Taylor, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Listen Up: Sounds for this section:

K.R.I.T Here - Big K.R.I.T.

As the lyrics “That was then, this is now” indicate, to shift the paradigm of success for students in a positive direction, we as educators must move away from traditional forms of teaching to ways that connect with students. Connecting to your audience in Hip-Hop or in the classroom provides for authentic experiences and growth for everyone. It is crucial to consider and address equity, cultural relevance as it relates to MTSS, and how those things influence student engagement. Understanding Hip-Hop as a culture and leveraging this understanding during classroom instruction can support engagement. The educational systems in America have a history of active and benign inequities that persist (Jagers et al., 2019). MTSS and Hip-Hop can provide opportunities for schools and educators to support students' academic, behavioral, and wellness needs. Regardless of the MTSS framework (i.e., RTI, PBIS, or SEL), all students deserve support to maximize their potential to achieve success, teachers should encourage engagement and reflect practices that are culturally relevant and Hip-Hop can provide those optimal opportunities.

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