

# Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies to Restore Individual and Collective Well-Being

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This essay begins with Nikole Hannah-Jones's assessment of the solidarity that has sustained African Americans' hope that our country can still make good on the promise of democracy. This social resilience has sustained BI-POC communities through the pandemic in ways that demonstrate how personal well-being is rooted in collective wellness. Research on students' understanding of social resilience has examined how feelings of dignity and self-sufficiency foster hope and enable collective agency. This dynamic is vital to culturally sustaining pedagogies that help students engage with the lifeways that help them feel connected and hopeful. We discuss critical hip hop pedagogy as an example of culturally engaged teaching that can cultivate students' social resilience by acknowledging the dignity of their communal experiences and traditions in ways that can sustain hope and enable collective action.

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The United States is a nation founded on both an ideal and a lie. Our Declaration of Independence . . . proclaims that “all men are created equal” and “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” But the white men who drafted those words did not believe them to be true for the hundreds of thousands of black people in their midst. “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” did not apply to fully one-fifth of the country. Yet despite being violently denied the freedom and justice promised to all, black Americans believed fervently in the American creed. Through centuries of black resistance and protest, we have helped the country live up to its founding ideals. And not only for ourselves—black rights struggles paved the way for every other rights struggle, including women's and gay rights, immigrant and disability rights.

Without the idealistic, strenuous and patriotic efforts of black Americans, our democracy today would most likely look very different—it might not be a democracy at all.

—Nikole Hannah-Jones

Nikole Hannah-Jones' Pulitzer-Prize-winning essay in the *NYT Magazine* examines the paradox at the heart of American democracy: its most committed advocates have been those most abused by it. This paradox came into stark focus with the Black Lives Matter struggle and the related social justice movements that pressed authorities to do more to support vulnerable groups during the isolation and alienation of the pandemic. Student activists and faculty allies built coalitions to press authorities to invest in wellness and self-care programs to provide essential support to students and faculty who were struggling to raise children, care for the sick, and pay the rent. One of the first lessons many of us learned from those struggles is that our well-being is interwoven with the well-being of our families, our communities, our students, and our coworkers, as well as the first responders and service workers we depended upon to deliver our groceries, nurse the dying, and keep the world running. One of the most pressing challenges we face is to make that lesson stick by sustaining the feelings of solidarity that link personal and collective wellness in what Martin Luther King Jr. characterized as "an inescapable network of mutuality" ("Letter from Birmingham Jail").

We became aware of the links in that network when it crashed during the pandemic, but system failures were building to a critical overload in the decade that followed the Great Recession. The doubling of student debt to \$1.7 trillion is only the most quantifiable measure of the trends that Linda Adler summarizes in "The 'Long Covid' of American Higher Education." Our students have become overloaded with debt to earn degrees that seem "less and less likely to guarantee job security" while also trying to overcome deepening "economic, gender, and racial inequalities." These trends have converged to make the pandemic a precarious time for younger generations, whose levels of stress surpassed even those of older Americans who were more at risk of being hospitalized and dying from COVID ("Stress in America 2021").

In these and other ways, the worst of the pandemic was a stress test that demonstrated system failures in our operating assumptions. Such critical overloads are often forgotten once everything is back up and running again, so we'd like to use this essay to reflect on what the pandemic continues to teach us about how our individual wellness depends on the collective well-being of the groups with whom we identify. As we will discuss, a rhetorical stance on social resilience provides an action-oriented standpoint for considering how much we depend on others in precarious times. Social resilience provides a frame for considering how culturally sustaining pedagogies such as hip hop can help us undertake the work of restoring hope and strengthening our collective resolve to take action on the systemic inequities that deepened in the pandemic. Culturally resonant pedagogies such as hip hop recognize the dignity and power of the lifeways of communities who have faced cultural

erasure and political oppression. The dignifying power of social resilience is evident in what epidemiologists have discussed as “the Hispanic Paradox”<sup>1</sup> as well as in the paradoxical faith in democracy that Hannah-Jones has discussed.

These paradoxes demonstrate how hope enables social resilience. The research on social resilience that we will discuss examines how recognizing the dignity and self-sufficiency of one’s communities can be a source of hope. Like resilience, hope can seem to be a passive quality—a healthy emotion, but not necessarily a motive force. Resilience is often tacitly identified with the resolve needed to endure harsh conditions, with the only active dimension perhaps being the ability to bounce back to restore normalcy. As we will discuss, hope takes on a more activist stance if we consider how it serves as a wellspring for the restorative work involved in “education as the practice of freedom.” This is the work that we are called to by Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of Hope* (1992) and bell hooks’ *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (2004).<sup>2</sup>

Those of us who are committed to the sorts of antiracism and social justice that Freire and hooks have advanced need to respond to that call to engage with the rising numbers of students of color who are deciding not to attend college just as they have become the new majority. According to the 2020 Census, most Americans under 18 are now people of color, and national surveys have found that fewer new-majority high-school graduates are planning to go to college.<sup>3</sup> As a result of these trends, we have 20% fewer African Americans in our first-year courses than before the pandemic (“Spring 2022 Enrollment Estimates”). To support the ones who remain, we need to develop culturally sustaining pedagogies that can help students engage with the sources of resilience that empower their communities. Before we discuss how culturally resonant pedagogies such as hip hop can help us support the wellness of new-majority students, we will discuss research on how our students envision the challenges they face, particularly how they think about the hope, dignity, and agency that enables their resilience.

### **Social Resilience as a Bridge from Personal to Collective Well-Being**

While the rising numbers of new-majority students who are deciding not to attend college can seem like an overwhelming problem that is far removed from our individual classrooms, scholars in rhetoric and composition have a special responsibility to be concerned with the students who are not at the table because we teach the courses that are almost universally required of all entering students, and our courses are vital to helping students compose a place for themselves in higher education. In larger public institutions, we may be the only instructors who know students’ names. We work more closely with students on their hopes and anxieties than most other instructors. We have become more attentive to personal wellness as we have become more aware

of how stressed students have become. As our attention to mindfulness has developed, we have begun to look to the experiences that sustain students by connecting them with the communities with which they identify. We know how culturally responsive pedagogies can sustain students who may not feel they have a place at the table because no one sitting there looks like them, and the costs of being there are stressing them and their families.

The differences between students who live with precarity and those who are more economically secure are examined in Mari Sanchez, Michèle Lamont, and Shira Zilberstein's study of students' attitudes to social resilience. Sanchez and her collaborators interviewed two sets of forty college students to compare the perspectives of "privileged" students from upper-middle-class backgrounds with first-generation working-class college students. Two phases of interviews were conducted: just before the pandemic began (September 2019-February 2020) and at the end of the first phase (June-July 2020). Students were asked about the networks and resources that sustained them and how they perceived their own resilience and that of their communities. The authors defined social resilience as "a dynamic process that unfolds across time as actors identify and make sense of crises, develop strategies of action that increase a sense of dignity and agency, and imagine alternative futures that feed hope" (3). Sanchez and her coauthors focused on three aspects of social resilience: the sense of "dignity" that comes from feeling connected and secure enough to flourish, the feelings of "agency" that come from believing you can make a difference, and the "hope" that comes from feeling you can create a better future. Students were asked to talk about how they perceived crises, how they respond to such challenges, and how they imagine the futures they seek to create for themselves.

Sanchez et al. found that economically secure students tended to believe that established institutions would take care of their long-term needs, while less economically secure students were more likely to believe that they needed "to take direct action. . . in the here and now." "Progressive social movements" were seen by poorer students "as an effective pathway for social change," with 54% of "less privileged" respondents citing BLM protests as an example (7, 8). Two-thirds of the less economically secure respondents were students of color, who made up slightly less than half of the more advantaged group. While Sanchez and her collaborators did not explicitly examine the impact of students' racial identities, their study does provide detailed insights into how more and less economically secure students view crises through their differing histories. The more privileged students saw the pandemic, student debt, and the murders of African-Americans by police as recent crises that would soon be addressed, while the more ethnically diverse and less economically secure students were more likely to view the pandemic as having a long-term economic impact that would compound the ongoing effects of systemic racism. Sanchez

et al. conclude that the economically secure students were more optimistic that polarization could be overcome to bring people together, while students who lived more precarious lives felt that ongoing crises were making “the American Dream inaccessible to themselves and their family” (6).

These responses might seem to suggest that economically secure students tend to be more optimistic and less privileged students tend to be more pessimistic, but Sanchez et al. argue that the differences are more about whether the students expected that problems would work out for the best or whether the students felt called to take action to make things better. The study explored these differing stances by examining how hope, feelings of precarity, and perceptions of self-efficacy are involved in how students view life choices ranging from their choice of career to whether to attend a demonstration. For example, only one-third of the more privileged students and almost two-thirds of the less privileged students expressed hope and a willingness to engage in “tough conversations” about economic well-being and social resilience: “in contrast to the long-term, gradual approach of civility espoused by the privileged, the less privileged are more likely to. . . challenge entrenched preconceptions in the here-and-now” (7). This contrast distinguishes between a comfortable confidence that assumes all will work out for the best and a resolute commitment to taking direct action to address problems. This action-oriented stance can seem less optimistic, but it is more resilient in its commitments.

A model for how to help students strengthen such civic commitments is set out in Sanchez and her coauthors’ analysis of the three-part process of developing social resilience: the students discussed how they responded to crises by interpreting what was happening, then they developed strategies to take action, and concluded by envisioning “alternative futures” to provide a sustaining hope for change (Sanchez et al. 3). This three-phase process provides a model for thinking about how to help students build personal and social resilience by providing them with occasions to reflect strategically on the challenges they face, consider the sources of resilience that sustain them and their communities, and envision ways to collaborate with their communities to take action on issues. Classroom exercises that engage with each stage in this process can help students recognize the “emerging, intersectional, and dynamic ways” their communities sustain them (Paris and Alim 9). As Sanchez and her coauthors show, how we perceive the problems we face is shaped by how mindful we are of others facing the same problems. In such imaginings, our personal well-being becomes interwoven with acting on behalf of our imagined communities in ways that Sanchez and her coauthors insightfully examine.

## Restoring Hope through Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies

Culturally sustaining pedagogies developed out of concerns that efforts to make curricula more culturally relevant were oriented to the assimilationist goal of expanding access without challenging racist hierarchies. In their introduction to *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies* (2017), Django Paris and H. Samy Alim argue that more culturally engaged pedagogies can help teachers build on the “lifeways of communities who have been and continue to be damaged and erased” (1). That erasure is evident in the deficit narratives that perpetuate the assumption that mastering *Standard Academic English* will enable people of color to overcome racism and classism. That ideology has been repudiated in recent position statements such as *This Ain't Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice!* April Baker-Bell and the coauthors of this CCCC statement raised this “DEMAND” because the linguistic and cultural conventions of white English remain entrenched in the teaching of composition, as Asao Inoue and others have discussed. Culturally sustaining pedagogies are a broadly based effort to move beyond multicultural and multilingual approaches that profess the values of diversity and inclusion without engaging with critiques of racism and oppression.<sup>4</sup>

Culturally sustaining pedagogies foreground the relationships, traditions, and shared experiences that we need to engage with to support our students through the “youth mental health crisis” that was pronounced a year ago by Surgeon General Vivek Murthy (U.S. Surgeon General). That crisis is documented by the CDC’s 2022 report on a national survey of high-school students. The results help to explain why fewer of them are planning to attend college: 37% reported poor mental health, while 44% reported they persistently felt sad and hopeless. Racism and precariousness were major stress factors, while “school connectedness provided critical protection for students during COVID-19” (*New CDC*). Reports on student stress are not really news to us, but they should be prompting us to reflect on how connected we and our departments are with the community experiences that sustain new-majority students. Culturally sustaining pedagogies can provide frameworks for us to undertake those reflections and translate them into interdisciplinary collaborations to support student and community wellness programs.

CSP frames can be helpful in articulating some of our key assumptions in broadly accessible ways to colleagues, students, and their families. Like translanguaging, CSP recognizes that cultures are “dynamic and fluid,” evolving, merging, and renewing themselves with each generation (Paris and Alim 8). That dynamic is examined in various chapters in *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies*. For example, Mary Bucholtz, Dolores Inés Casillas, and Jin Sook share an account of how a culturally sustaining high school curriculum resisted

English-only mandates to provide academic recognition for the distinctive cultural idioms of two translingual Latinas in a university-community partnership program (45). One student delivered her linguistic autobiography in Spanglish at a university-school-community celebration, and the other initiated a campaign to change the English-only policy of her school's commencement ceremony. Such efforts to reclaim public educational forums provide powerful examples of how culturally engaged pedagogies can bolster the social resilience of students and their communities by recognizing student activists as cocurricular partners and providing venues for students to celebrate the "joy and pride" they feel in sharing their linguistic and cultural experiences (53; see also Kynard's *Vernacular Insurrections* and Cole's "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in Higher Education").

Culturally sustaining frameworks bridge discussions of translingualism and anti-racist pedagogies in the ways that are examined in Tom Do and Karen Rowan's *Racing Translingualism in Composition: Toward a Race-Conscious Translingualism*, which argues that antiracist work has faced more resistance than translingual scholarship because confronting racial hierarchies is more difficult to do than recognizing linguistic diversity. Do surveys related work by scholars such as Scott Lyons on Indigenous struggles for linguistic self-determination, and Latinx scholars concerned with the translingual dynamics of "heritage and identity," and uses these converging lines of research to examine how ethnic identities are sustained by "communities of practice" that share "material artifacts, ritualized processes, and intra-cultural interactions" (69). Do expands upon theories of communities of practice to argue that peripheral participation in communal practices sustains broader racialized traditions of practice by enabling participants who may not speak their heritage language to share in their traditions.

Do's research examines how scholars in our field can help students sustain themselves by valuing their translingual experience. As he and the other contributors to the collection discuss, many new-majority students feel torn at times between heritage languages that they may not be comfortable speaking, the translingual forms they are comfortable with, and the academic standards that do not value their virtuosity with code meshing and counternarratives.

Paris and Alim provide a powerful example of how racialized translingualism can be incorporated into culturally sustaining pedagogies in their article on California high-school students' experiences with hip hop. Paris and Alim observe that "hip-hop practices" are part of how "many Mexicana/o, Mexican American, and Pacific Islander youth" navigate their "identities . . . while simultaneously participating in their own heritage practices" ("What We Are" 91). These observations helped teachers recognize and illustrate how students are constantly interacting with translingual traditions that shape how they "live

race, ethnicity, language, and culture” in dynamic ways and their argument that teachers should be considering those realities in our classrooms (90). When these translanguaging experiences are examined in race-conscious ways, the possibilities of culturally sustaining pedagogies become apparent in the ways that Tom Do, Karen Rowan, and their contributors examine (2022). Engaging with the translanguaging rhetorics that shape the lives of our students can help us rewrite our curricula and reshape our classrooms to develop culturally sustaining courses that confront the “regressive . . . homophobia, misogyny, racism,” classism, and ableism that undermine the resilience of our students (Paris and Alim, “What Are We” 92).

### **The Rhetorical Resilience of Hip Hop as a Resource for Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies**

Our argument for further investigations of culturally sustaining pedagogies follows in a tradition of scholars in the field who have advocated for investigations of culturally situated figures that remix our theories and applications. Adam Banks’s *Digital Griots* presents the Black icon of the DJ as a model of rhetorical excellence to call for remixing and rethinking composition in more culturally embedded ways. For Banks, reorienting composition studies to center on such models of eloquence “no longer consigns black students, writers, or scholars to token ‘colored day at the carnival’ status nor consigns digital theory, rhetoric, and writing as white by default. . .” (27). Such expansions of composition studies do not just acknowledge the rhetorical skills of Black students because hip hop is a translanguaging space that can help to “establish connections to storytelling traditions in all cultures” (33). Banks maintains that “the innovative practices and conceptual frameworks fostered by Black DJs in the hip hop tradition opens up space for connection with everyone and every culture as well, as hip hop DJing has influenced the entire society” (33). Hip Hop’s global influence supports Banks’ claim. Alastair Pennycook examines how hip hop’s global spread has created a transcultural flow that follows upon the African diaspora (90). Hip Hop’s connective marginalities have helped international audiences to explore their own cultural challenges, for as Halifu Osumare has discussed, “black expressive culture” resonates within “similar dynamics in other nations” (172). Hip hop’s translanguaging roots in African-American culture, and its global spread are but one example of how the story of Black American struggle and resistance has served as a model for rights movements around the world.

As an embodied art of resistance, the freeform oppositional performances of hip hop challenge the white norms that prevail in many daily interactions. Hip hop performance culture plays back instances of racialized resistance, whether it be the type of swag someone owns as they walk down the street

with a rhythm and a bounce that dignifies their presence amidst a crowd of straight-legged speed walkers, whether it be the professor whose dreads flow freely over her blazer-button down combo as she lectures a room full of wide-eyed graduate students and professors about urban youth's capacity for hope and agency, or whether it be an employee showing up to a business meeting rocking a snapback cap on backwards with their sleeves rolled up to showcase their tattoos to contest business-as-usual conventions. Each of these self-performances oppose white normative discourses to assert the dignity, hope, and agency of Blackness to enact the sort of social resilience Sanchez and her coauthors studied. The walker with swag and rhythm illustrates that simple daily activities can be dignified with style, with each movement expressing feelings of solidarity that foster resilience. The professor rocking her dreads in class illustrates that Africanized hair styles also belong in professional spaces despite the hair-based microaggressions that permeate workspaces. The employee with a snapback cap and tattoos similarly brings in Black-inspired styles into non-Black spaces to signify communal solidarity that resists white expectations. In these examples, dignity is signified through modes of self-representation and assertions of solidarity that show the sorts of guile and cunning that Henry Louis Gates Jr. identified with the rhetorical dynamics of Black literature, art, and culture (2014).

Hip hop's foundation in hope, dignity, and resilience is important in understanding how it embodies distinctive rhetorical repertoires and worldviews. The critical capacities of those artistic forms are developed through double-voiced forms of collaborative reflection. Critical pedagogy provides a dialectical frame for assessing how hip hop performance culture embodies reflection in action. A. A. Akom notes that, "the use of hip hop as liberatory practice is rooted in the long history of the Black freedom struggle and the quest for self-determination for oppressed communities around the world" (53). Akom's theory of Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy (CHHP) positions hip hop as a lens for student-led socio-political analysis and representation that seeks to transform education by creating spaces where marginalized students "are enabled to gain a consciousness of how their own experiences have been shaped by larger social institutions" (63). Hip Hop provides a performance space for critical praxis in which students can move past discourses of victimization and expand their rhetorical skills to confront unjust social conditions such as racial profiling, state-sanctioned violence, and economic precarity (57).

CHHP provides a vision of hip hop as a critical praxis that reinforces social resilience through remixed artistic expression that celebrate students' connections with the traditions that sustain them. Those expressions are more than passive stories of resilience; they are rhetorical moves founded in hope and agency that show a culture in constant opposition to the same dominating

discourses that have marginalized and oppressed them (Hill, *Beats*). Hip hop is often discussed in terms of its five “pillars” (deejaying, emceeing, breakdancing, graffiti, and knowledge), but CHHP suggests an interconnectedness among these performance domains to set up a functioning rhetorical system. Every rap bar that is uttered, every record scratched and mixed, every step or break performed on the dance floor, and every tag thrown up on a concrete wall both draws from and continually remixes a hip hop episteme. Hip Hop provides new-majority youth with the knowledge of how to push back with a resilient recognition of the beauty in their humanity and the power of their solidarity.

The power of hip hop performances arises from the distinctive ways that MCs, DJs, and break-dancers interact to sample and remix traditional modes of expression. These interactive performances embody communal ways of knowing that enable participants to share in the strength and well-being of their collective. DJs provide the vibe for any performance, but that vibe depends upon a DJ’s capacity to read, listen, anticipate, and acknowledge the experiences of the community, including the community enacted in the performance space as well as the broader communities who look to such spaces to sustain themselves. When a DJ is able to effectively connect and engage with the audience, the participants in the collaborative performance are empowered to challenge the white norms that shape much of their lives. As Akom’s analysis suggests, these modes of engagement provide frameworks for considering how hip hop studies can help students sustain themselves and their communities.

### **Performing Social Resilience in the Classroom**

Many researchers have documented hip hop’s relevance to student well-being and social resilience. In their narrative synthesis of twenty-two research studies related to hip hop interventions for students’ health and wellbeing, Alexander Hew Dale Crooke, Rachael Comte, Cristina Moreno Almeida provide an overview of how educators present and situate hip hop as a means for enhancing students’ well-being. Crooke et al. found that most studies positioned hip hop as a way “to make health interventions more palatable or retain participation in other elements of a program” (16). Crooke et al. caution against valuing hip hop simply because it is an engaging and culturally relevant delivery method for well-being content. This approach trivializes hip hop culture as simply “a sweetener for real work” (16). Rather than focus on these trivial inclusions of hip hop, Crooke et al. emphasize several studies that embrace the dynamic and global cultures of hip hop and consider how those cultures foster students’ wellbeing (Levy et al. 2017; Hill 2009). In line with Crooke et al. we emphasize the potential impact hip hop can have as “a world view” that dignifies students’ identities, empowers “them to become agents in their own healing” and “provides a unique space familiar to many young

people in which they can engage in wellness work” (17). In this way, hip hop centers students’ dignity, agency, and hope.

In recent decades, scholars have turned to the engaging power of hip hop to develop culturally sustaining pedagogies that are attuned to the rhetorical dynamics of Black styles of speech, dress, art, and music (see Banks; Craig; Green; Petchauer). In this section we outline how the core values and grounding principles of these rhetorical dynamics can help teachers create classrooms that allow students to engage with challenges to their individual and collective wellbeing and center their social resilience. In order to make these connections between hip hop, wellbeing, and social resilience, we emphasize how hip hop pedagogies reinforce the ways that students living in precarity sustain themselves. Sanchez and her coauthors observed that students’ experiences with social resilience were shaped by how they perceived problems, developed strategies to take action, and developed a sustaining sense of hope as they worked to imagine alternative futures.

We have discussed how culturally sustaining pedagogies such as hip hop begin by dignifying students’ culture and language. By engaging with the languages and cultures that students bring to our classes, we position them as experts of their experiences. Hip Hop is one of the most culturally significant influences in students’ lives. Its translingual roots in African American culture and global resonance is a commonplace for students, but our classrooms ignore the significance of hip hop culture in students’ lives. This disconnect echoes an aspect of Nikole Hannah-Jones’s paradox: hip hop is one of the most coveted art forms in the world and one of the US’s most significant and original cultures, but it is not recognized as integral to our classrooms.

The concept of real talk can help students reassess the disconnect between their cultures and their schools. Alim’s hip hop-based pedagogical project “Real Talk” focuses on developing students’ awareness of linguistic variation, an important part in disrupting the limitations of normalized standard English (2007). Where hip hop encourages innovation, playfulness, creativity, and joy, white linguistic ideologies encourage conformity and assimilation. As bell hooks suggests in *Teaching to Transgress*, a forced silence is often seen as the right type of speech for the oppressed since they no longer have the capacity to question or challenge practices of domination or established social hierarchies (6). Principles such as real talk encourage composition instructors to build on the ways hip hop is already helping students make sense of the challenges they and their communities face.

The second part of Sanchez’s model suggests teachers and students recognize their collective agency in responding to the problems they face. Cultivating a sense of agency in our classroom is messy and relational. We must constantly push against the rhythms of educational inertia. Ruth Nicole Brown and Cha-

maria Jewel Kwakye see this process as a form of leadership inspired by Hip Hop Feminism in that it requires trust and responsibility as teachers and students negotiate “generational tensions,” and center the needs and desires of students as opposed to the status quo (1). bell hooks’ concept of engaged pedagogy aligns with Brown and Kwakye’s notion of hip hop feminist leadership in that it requires a “holistic approach to learning” that seeks its end in “knowledge about how to live in the world” (1994, 14-15). The goal of engaged pedagogy is to create space for the type of empowerment and healing that hooks found when she walked into her women’s studies department as a student: one of the only places on campus that her experience as a Black woman was acknowledged. The agency enacted in such spaces sustains individual well-being by grounding it in the communities that keep one well.

The final part of Sanchez et al.’s model requires classrooms to maintain hope in the face of the ongoing pandemic. The performative and embodied rhetorical practices of hip hop enact hope for alternative futures every day. The hip hop performance space is characterized as a cypher, a gathering of artists who create art and knowledge in improvisational ways that riff off of the rhythms and motifs of the vernaculars of the community. House argues that the cypher offers hope through a working illustration of translingualism in composition; it imagines a space where linguistic and cultural difference can be anticipated and critically encountered in our pedagogies (2020). His argument for cyphers in composition imagines a hopeful space where students are not forced to deny their identities for the sake of institutional or disciplinary visibility. Instead, the cypher provides occasions to exist within and value student differences.

Including vernacular cultural forms such as hip hop in composition courses can help students understand how social resilience can be strengthened by engaging in the forms of conversation and communion that enact communities’ forms of social resilience. In the same way that Freire positions critical consciousness as the capacity for the oppressed to understand their situations, so too does our argument for continued applications of CSP claim that social resilience comes from the remixing of our classroom communities as they turn away from competitive models of individual advancement through higher education and morph into communities of critical praxis that value and sustain the lived experiences and cultural locations of all who participate in the ways that Do’s case study details and as Carmen Kynard has described in “‘All I Need is One Mic’.” We understand the work of culturally sustaining pedagogies and the rhetorical potentials of hip hop culture, but as Tessa Brown has discussed, that understanding is still not established as part of the “threshold concepts in our field.” Like Brown, we still do not see translingualism as an elemental part of “writing about writing,” and culturally sustaining work with hip hop as

part of the transformative concepts that constitute our disciplinary standpoint and the work that lays before us.

### **How Can We Help New-Majority Students See College as a Way to Achieve Their Hopes?**

Hopelessness is but hope that has lost its bearings.

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 16

Culturally sustaining pedagogies are vital to consider as we continue to live through the pandemic. We need to make common cause with local schools to engage new-majority students who do not see much to hope for in higher education. A culturally sustaining perspective on our curricula can help with that and with supporting the students in our institutions who are continuing to struggle with “stunning” levels of stress and alienation, including “low motivation, lack of focus, and enduring feelings of isolation” (McMurtrie). These anxieties, and the economic insecurities that contribute to them help to explain why college enrollments have dropped by 1.3 million since the start of the pandemic, and why we have lost 20% of African American students (“Spring 2022 Enrollment Estimates”). To identify and remove the barriers new-majority students face, we need to help our institutions develop more culturally engaged curricula and support programs. That need is stronger for those of us who teach in public institutions, which have seen worse losses in enrollments, and these needs are even more pressing for those of us who teach in community colleges, which have seen the worst drops in enrollments since the start of the pandemic. Just as new-majority students are graduating from high school, fewer of them are planning to attend college (Ahn and Dominguez-Villegas).

Such pedagogies harness the power of hope in new-majority communities. That power is apparent in the fact that while new-majority populations had limited access to vaccines and high exposure as essential service providers, these communities overcame the disproportionate death rates they experienced in the first phase of the pandemic. According to the Center for Disease Control’s most recent reports, in the last year the COVID-19 death rate for white Americans was actually 14% higher than that of African Americans and 72% higher than that of Latino/a communities (Leonhardt). In many new-majority communities, church leaders and community activists worked with community educators and clinicians to encourage people to get vaccinated and ignore the disinformation that contributed to the deaths of disaffected white Americans. The impact of this community-based, culturally responsive approach demonstrates the power of educational efforts that connect individual

and collective well-being. Community educators and clinicians have used the strategy of “centering at the margins” to strengthen community resilience. One of the developers of that methodology, Sarah Howard, identified that strategy as one part of systemic efforts to intervene in structural racism. The success of such community-based educational interventions calls upon us to recenter our classrooms on the experiences of new-majority students, including the cultural forms that sustain them and their communities.

We are well positioned to help with that recentering, not only because we teach the bridge courses that students move through on their way from high school into college but also because we have a rhetorical standpoint that is concerned with helping students translate their hopes into action. The rhetorical dynamics of resilience are examined in *Feminist Rhetorical Resilience* by Elizabeth Flynn, Patricia Sotirin, and Ann Brady, who look to the same dynamic as Sanchez and her coauthors. *Feminist rhetorical resilience* is defined by the “communal, relational, and social” connections that sustain us, our coworkers, and the work that we do, particularly the rhetorical dynamics of fostering hope for change and mobilizing agency to achieve those changes. As Flynn and her coauthors discuss, we understand the power of *mêtis*, as the art of cunning that marginalized groups use to work around the barriers that are imposed upon them. A rhetorical standpoint on individual and collective resilience can help us engage with the process of sustaining the feelings of solidarity that have been emphasized through the pandemic. That process begins with reflecting upon the lessons that emphasize how our individual wellbeing is caught up in the “network of mutuality” in the ways that we have discussed.

## Notes

1. Hundreds of epidemiological studies have found that Latinx Americans are generally healthier and live longer than non-Hispanic Whites despite disparities in income, education, and access to healthcare. These studies have identified various factors, including the greater faith and hope of Hispanics. These attitudinal differences also help to explain why poor Blacks are healthier and live longer than poor whites according to Graham and Pinto. The pandemic disproportionately impacted the healthcare of older Latinx Americans and other BIPOC groups, but according to the latest CDC report, whites actually had higher pandemic-related death rates in the last year than Hispanics, African Americans, and Asian Americans, as we will discuss in the conclusion (see Leonhardt).

2. In *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire notes that “there is no change without dream,” and “no dream without hope.” He argues that “dreaming is not only a necessary political act . . . it is part of human nature, which, within history, is in permanent process of becoming. In our making and remaking of ourselves,” we translate dreams into action and become “a mover of history” (96).

3. 52.7% of Americans under 18 are people of color according to the 2020 Census, which has been criticized for systematically undercounting people of color, particularly youth (Wines and Cramer). Disproportionate numbers of new-majority students are delaying college according to a survey of over 20,000 high-school graduates conducted in 2022 by YouthTruth (“Class of 2022”).

4. The distinction between culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogies is not merely conceptual. The former term tends to be used by educators who focus more on individual interactions and ways to bring students’ cultures into curricula, while those who talk about antiracist and anti-oppressive teaching are more likely to discuss how to create dialogues about systemic inequities according to Mollie Galloway and her coauthors’ interview study, which reviews related research on these perspectives.

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