

DETROIT NATIVE SUN

We need Black teachers in more ways than ever Tips to help students to be better writers



By Aziah Siid
SPECIAL TO THE SUN
 (WIB) - For grade-school teachers, keeping up with student slang is a race as old as the teaching profession itself, and one they can never win. Changing as quickly as the weather, the hot slang word or phrase of the moment – the one that’s so lit everyone in the caf is using it – is usually hella dead by the time most adults they know catch up.

When it shows up in the classroom in students’ oral answers and written exams, slang can leave teachers scratching their heads. That’s led some educators to take extreme measures: one teacher went viral for an outright ban on slang, while another pranks his own students with fake slang.

But some Black K-12 educators have taken a different view. They have embraced slang as a valuable teaching tool for Black students, one that celebrates their identities, culture, lived experiences, and linguistic ingenuity.

Chris Emdin, an associate professor at Teachers College, proposes a new approach to teaching he calls Ratchetdemic. It centers the language and culture of Black students’ lived experiences in a way that may not align with traditional academia.

“We don’t need their permission to create language, especially as people who created hip hop. This can be a valuable

teaching tool for our kids about linguistic ingenuity,” he says.

The Need for Black Teachers is Evident. Data underscores Emdin’s perspective. According to the language learning website Preply, about 3 in 10 parents said slang should be allowed in school, and 40% of teachers agreed that slang could help students express themselves. Thirty-six percent of teachers said accepting slang shows respect for students’ cultural identity.

At the same time, more than half of teachers surveyed worried that slang could lead to misunderstandings or miscommunications between teachers and students, and 50% believe it could disrupt the learning process. Earlier this year, a teacher went viral for posting a list of slang words she banned from her classroom.

But Emdin believes that’s the wrong approach. Students learn best, he says, when they feel comfortable bringing their whole selves to the classrooms. Acceptance of slang language on things like term peppers and in oral reports illustrates that.

“To be ratchetdemic is to have no part in starving the authentic self, while still maintaining high academic standards and high academic rigor,” Emdin, who wrote a book on the subject, said in a Harvard EdCast episode.

“I chose the word ‘ratchetdemic’ because it’s a merging of being ratchet and academic,” he said. “I was intentional about utilizing a colloquial slang word and merging that with being academic. I understand that for some folks to ratchet is to be loud or to be abrasive, but there are variations in ratchet.”

At the same time, many slang words are rooted in African American Vernacular English, which some studies recognize as a legitimate English dialect with its own rules and functions.

(StatePoint) No matter the career path students pursue, writing and communication skills are essential to success. Whether a student identifies as a “math kid,” a “sports kid,” or even a “reading kid,” writing doesn’t always come naturally.

Parents and teachers need to be creative in how they present writing, so students feel personally motivated to develop their skills.

“Almost any student is capable of becoming a strong, passionate writer,” says Rowana Miller, founder and Executive Director of creative writing education nonprofit Cosmic Writers. “The trick is in connecting writing to the activities, subjects and ideas that already excite them.”

Here are some tips from Miller to motivate kids to strengthen writing skills:
 Present Writing as Fun

Especially for students between the ages of 8-12, who have developed basic writing skills but may not have a defined sense of what it means to be a “writer,” it is essential to create positive associations with the act of writing.

To accomplish this, you can teach writing through gamified, collaborative and imaginative activities. For example, you can guide kids through the process of writing a series of “telephone stories.” With students sitting in a circle, have each one write an opening sentence on a piece of paper, and then pass the paper to the student to their right. Each student should continue the story by adding a sentence to the page, and then pass the paper a second time. This process repeats until each student has their original paper again.

Provide Engaging Materials

When kids’ writing practice only comes from dry textbooks, it is difficult to create positive associations with writing. Experts recommend using materials that are just as fun as the activities good teachers use when teaching.

For example, the 8-12 age range is well-served by such exciting activity books as “The Monster-Building Handbook,” a new publication from Cosmic Writers. “The Monster-Building Handbook” combines a narrative premise with a call-to-action for students to practice writing: fictional

monster-maker Angelica Fearborne needs them to develop an original monster character who can face off against her monster-hunter twin brother. Learn more at www.cosmicwriters.org.

Link Writing to Favorite Shows & Video Games

Students don’t usually recognize the connection between writing and the media they love. Writing becomes more exciting when they learn that writing is an essential part of a funny YouTube series or thrilling video game.

Students are particularly compelled by opportunities to write in the style of the media they enjoy. For example, if you are working with kids who like to play Dungeons and Dragons, it is a natural next step to practice fantasy storytelling and writing.

For almost any student, it is possible to find a connection between writing and something they already like. A “math kid” may engage most with genres that emphasize logic and problem-solving, like mystery-writing. A “sports kid” may be excited to write articles about the school baseball team. And when these students practice these kinds of writing, they may discover they have been “writing kids” all along.



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