

2014

# Teaching English as a Second Language through Rap Music: A Curriculum for Secondary School Students

Beth Segal  
*University of San Francisco*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/thes>

 Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Segal, Beth, "Teaching English as a Second Language through Rap Music: A Curriculum for Secondary School Students" (2014).  
*Master's Theses*. 104.  
<https://repository.usfca.edu/thes/104>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and Projects at USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact [repository@usfca.edu](mailto:repository@usfca.edu).

Running Head: RAP FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

University of San Francisco

# **Teaching English as a Second Language through Rap Music: A Curriculum for Secondary School Students**

A Field Project Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education department

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

By  
Beth Segal  
September 2014

## Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract .....	iii
Chapter I – Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Purpose of the Project .....	3
Theoretical Framework.....	3
Significance of the Project .....	6
Definition of Terms.....	6
Chapter II – Review of the Literature .....	8
Introduction.....	8
Music is Effective Avenue to Teach ELLs .....	9
Song Aids in Producing Prosody and Pronunciation .....	10
Music Helps Memory of Language .....	14
Songs Communicate Culture .....	16
Music Creates a Positive Environment and Lowers the Affective Filter.....	17
What the Form of Rap Video has to Offer a Curriculum .....	18
Summary .....	19
Chapter III – The Project and Its Development .....	22
Description of the Project .....	22
Development of the Project .....	22
The Project .....	26
Chapter IV – Conclusions and Recommendations .....	36
Conclusions.....	36
Recommendations.....	38
References.....	46
Appendixes .....	49

### Abstract

This project provides a sample of the curriculum, *Rapping English*, which uses rap/hip-hop style music to teach ELLs vocabulary, grammar, discourse and prosody. The rationale for using musical instruction is based on Gardner's (2006) multiple intelligence theory and Bloom's (1978) learning domains. This curriculum instructs students through musical intelligence and the affective domain which are often neglected in traditional instruction. Furthermore, this project explores how musical curriculum can be used to lower the affective filter (Krashen, 1981) and provide emotionally appealing and memory stimulating instruction in line with the findings of current neuropsychology, specifically the work of R. Caine and Caine (2011), Sylwester (2006) and Wolfe (2006)

The curriculum uses rap/hip-hop style music to demonstrate prosody and an informal register while teaching vocabulary, grammar and discourse explicitly through song. *Rapping English* is relevant to youth of all cultures while the songs can be used to unconsciously take down cultural barriers of students who may feel disconnected to the American society. The curriculum partially fulfills the Common Core State Standards' objectives for ELLs to have instruction in English foundational skills in order to create access to grade-level course work.

The project concludes with recommendations on how to use the curriculum to supplement other ESL materials. It demonstrates how ESL teachers who are not musically inclined can easily use these materials and methods.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2011) reported that 5.3 million English language learners (ELLs) were enrolled in U.S. public schools in the 2008-2009 school year. This reflects a 51 % growth in the student population over a ten-year period, while, according to the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center (2011), the general population of students only grew to 49.5 million students which reflects a 7.2 % growth. Because of the large number of ELLs, and since their growth rate exceeds that of the general population; clearly the needs of ELLs must be addressed. Especially considering that it is reported that English language learners are performing below grade level in literacy standards at a far higher rate than their peers in the general population of students.

The Common Core State Standards are standardized learning goals for math and English language arts which 44 states have adopted. They include objectives for ELLs: schools should provide “literacy-rich school environments where students are immersed in a variety of language experiences [and] instruction that develops foundational skills in English and enables ELLs to participate fully in grade-level coursework” (*Application of Common Core State Standards for English Language Learners*, 2011). It is important to consider that much of the curriculum created to teach ELLs “foundational skills” is aimed at teaching students to read, write, listen to and speak English using those same modalities. This sounds logical, but it puts students at a disadvantage if they do not have dominant linguistic intelligence. According to Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences

(MI), some students learn better by using different intelligences. Gardner (2006) calls an approach that focuses on logical or linguistic intelligences to teach most subject content “fundamentally unfair. It privileges those who have strong linguistic and logical–mathematical intelligences” (p. 56). Therefore, ELLs are not simply faced with learning a new language’s foundational skills at the same time as they are learning the higher level content of academic classes. If their linguistic intelligence is not one of their dominant channels, they are doubly disadvantaged. ESL curricula that are set up to teach the English language primarily through the linguistic intelligence are, therefore, a social injustice to those who are stronger in one of the other intelligences that Gardner refers to.

Moreover, Benjamin Bloom is known for his explanation of domains, especially the affective domain, and how it relates to learning. Bloom (1978) explains that peak learning experiences occur when curriculum and instruction address both the cognitive and affective domain. He also says, “Our schools must search more seriously for ways in which the arts may provide one source of comfort, satisfaction, and enjoyment for all—both during the learning process and throughout life” (p. 574). Music in curriculum is one way to create a positive learning experience advocated by Gardner and Bloom. Further, traditional education that teaches almost entirely through the cognitive domain can feel boring to students and not create a peak learning experience.

It is therefore evident that teachers and students alike need a curriculum that provides foundational skills for ELLs that appeals to domains and intelligences that are traditionally neglected in education. The work of R. Caine and Caine (2011), Sylwester (2006) and Wolfe (2006) based on new developments in neuropsychology suggests that teaching should be done in a brain compatible manner. One of the crucial elements of

their methods is to stimulate emotional interest during teaching to create the attention and engagement in which learning best occurs. This project provides samples of a curriculum that uses rap and hip-hop music to appeal to the musical intelligence of students. At the same time, it provides a strategy which is appealing to youth and varies teaching input. Since music creates an emotional response, this curriculum is engaging and appeals to the affective domain.

### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this project is to create a sample of the Rapping English curriculum which provides foundational skills for ELLs through multimodal inputs. In particular, the curriculum teaches vocabulary, grammar, and spoken discourse through the use of rap music on audio and video mediums. By using original rap music to present lessons, the curriculum bypasses the traditional reading and writing methods, and instead presents content material through a popular form of music that is relevant to youth. Through rap, this curriculum provides a discourse approach to second language learning. It supplements the natural rhythm of spoken language with a modern musical form that is characterized by being conversational and using an informal register. This project will show rationale that teaching language through the medium of rap music is highly effective and in line with sound linguistic and educational theory.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This field project is based on some of the theories of Stephen Krashen (1981). Although some of Krashen's linguistic theories have been highly controversial, many of his ideas are still foundational in language teaching. The input hypothesis states that language acquisition only comes when comprehensible input is created. With the aid of

technology, this can be done through means that Krashen did not envision when he first introduced the idea. Additionally, Krashen's hypothesis of lowering the affective filter or the anxiety level in students in order to create optimum language learning has been consistently accepted, but, with new brain research, the concept of lowering the affective filter has become popular in teaching all areas of content. The theory on affective filter states that, when learning focus on content is not interfered with by self-consciousness, learning can occur unhindered by unnecessary psychological anxieties. New discoveries in brain research have taken Krashen's affective filter theory into new territories.

Geoffrey Caine and Renate Caine (2011) explain the state of the mind in which learning best occurs is one in which students feel safe when they make mistakes and take risks, but also feel challenged and alert. Wolfe (2006) expands on how emotion affects learning, tying it to memory:

Some of the most important findings from neuroscience have been in the area of the role of emotion in learning and memory. Two small but powerful structures deep within each hemisphere called the amygdala regulate our emotional responses. These emotional responses have the ability to either impede or enhance learning. (p. 10)

One of the more controversial elements of Krashen's input hypothesis (1981) is that for input to be truly comprehensible it must be at an "i + 1" level. In this model, the i stands for the learner's level and + 1 is one level above the level at which the learner is functioning. However, determining such a level can be problematic. Although trying to establish the i + 1 level is controversial, negotiating curricular levels to teach at a comprehensible level of input, as well as lowering the affective filter, is desired by most

teachers and can be accomplished through applying elements of Howard Gardner's theory (2006) on multiple intelligence (MI).

According to the multiple intelligence theory, there are seven identifiable intelligences people use for learning. In *Multiple Intelligences New Horizons*, Gardner (2006) states:

Most schools throughout history have been uniform schools: students are taught the same things in the same way and are assessed in equally similar manner. This approach is seen as fair—after all, everyone is being treated equal. Yet, as I have pointed out, this approach is fundamentally unfair. It privileges those who have strong linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences, whereas it makes school difficult for the many among us who exhibit somewhat different intellectual profiles. (p. 56)

Additionally, by teaching to different intelligences, teachers have another vehicle of making content easier for students to comprehend. Gardner (1993) suggests using “multiple representations of key concepts” in order to make input comprehensible to more students (p. 59). In this way, learning is differentiated so students with different intelligences can receive information through a modality that suits their individual dominant intelligence. Robert Sylwester (2006) explains that new imaging technologies that were just being explored when the MI theories emerged are now common practice. These new developments in neuroscience have affirmed Gardner's theories and caused them to be commonly applied in the practice of educational strategies.

### **Significance of the Study**

This project provides a sample of a curriculum that can be used to incorporate music into lessons without teachers having to be musical themselves. Many teachers want to add varied teaching strategies to their lessons. They know they easily remember phrases from songs and jingles they hear; they are convinced that incorporating music that is appealing to youth would enhance their teaching and engage their students, but they need a vehicle to do it. Theorists have demonstrated that tapping into students' emotion promotes learning. *Rapping English* provides emotionally engaging original rap audios and videos to teach English in a way youth relate to and like. These raps teach lessons on vocabulary, grammar and discourse that students will remember without having to read or write the language. It provides for learning prosody, pronunciation and informal conversational register without focusing on them directly. These raps can be used as sponge activities, as components of larger lessons or as stand-alone, fun activities in which students may participate. They do not require teacher expertise and since they are recorded, they are in a ready to use form.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Academic Vocabulary:** Vocabulary students need to be successful in classroom content knowledge, reading of textbooks, understanding academic lectures, taking tests and writing in a formal academic situation.

**Audio Lingual Method:** A language teaching method that emphasizes drills on oral production.

**Direct Method:** A language teaching method that places emphasis on using the target language in oral communication and grammar without translation.

**Din:** An involuntary mental replaying of language or song.

**ELL:** An English Language Learner who does not speak English as a native language.

This term is beginning to replace ESL, but both are still used.

**Jazz Chants:** A program by Carolyn Graham which uses jazz rhythms for making chants in order to learn English.

**Multiple Intelligence:** Seven innate and developed capacities to process information (Gardner, 2006).

**Prosody:** The metrical rhythm, stress and intonation of a language.

**Rap:** A genre of music which uses modern discourse in a speech-like form to express topics which are relevant (often politically) to society.

**TESOL:** Teaching English to students of other languages.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

Teaching methodology for English language learners has changed radically. Just as general teaching practice has moved from teacher centered activities to student centered activities, ESL teaching practice has moved from memorizing lists of decontextualized vocabulary (Audio Linguistic Method) to learning vocabulary that is embedded in context. Also grammar that was once explained with extended definitions of structures and forms (Direct Method) is now often taught inductively and communicatively. Methods that traditionally emphasized correcting usage and pronunciation of words have been replaced with communicatively focused methods. All of these developments have created better language teaching strategies, but there is still need for language learning approaches that teach grammar, vocabulary, prosody and other language skills without contrived and artificial content exercises. Instead, content should be introduced in authentic and natural ways. Although emphasis has shifted to communicative approaches, many of the methods of teaching speaking and listening are unappealing to students and should be taught in ways which are relevant and interesting.

Since Gardner (2006) first introduced the multiple intelligence (MI) theory, many educators have tried to apply his theory to improve teaching practice. Teaching to musical intelligence has proven to be effective in helping students learn English, yet there is little curriculum to help teachers incorporate using music in teaching English as an additional language. Therefore, students are often deprived of opportunities to use their musical intelligence for learning. Moreover, though the emphasis on communicative

approaches of learning a second language have brought a plethora of new strategies, teachers and students alike still need interesting curriculum that is based on educationally sound theories. They need curriculum that is relevant to students and that creates an environment which is conducive to learning. The *Rapping English* curriculum fills the gap of materials needed to incorporate music in curriculum without requiring teachers to have musical knowledge or preparation. It is a curriculum that is high interest and that is based on sound educational theory.

This review of literature explores articles and research which shows that rap curriculum for teaching English language learners is supported by empirical evidence. The review of literature is organized into three main categories. The first category of literature explores the reasoning behind using music to teach English language learners. The second area shows how music creates a learning environment that lowers the affective filter and that elevates student interest. The third demonstrates that rap music and video, in particular, fill the gap of needed curriculum for ESL teachers and learners alike.

### **Music Is an Effective Avenue to Teach ELLs**

Gardner (2006) completed his multiple intelligence (MI) theory in 1980 which had a significant impact on educational practice. He claimed education traditionally favored teaching to linguistic or logical mathematic intelligences, but that teaching to more intelligences improves student learning. He recommended using a multiple intelligence approach to teaching a topic. In this way, more students could learn because there would be more of a chance of approaching a topic in accordance with students' dominant intelligences. Additionally, students develop a better and fuller understanding

of a topic when it is explored using multimodalities. Finally, neural networks which produce long-term memory are activated when several areas of the brain are stimulated by targeting different intelligences (p. 60).

These are all significant reasons to present content using multiple intelligences and modalities. Since most English lessons already teach to linguistic intelligence, adding musical strategies for teaching ELLs creates another teaching modality which will reach students who have musical intelligence as one of their dominant intelligences. In a 1998 interview, Carolyn Graham, a musician, ESL teacher, and the creator of Jazz Chants, reported about her own experience in the United States educational system, affirming the need for new kinds of curriculum:

I think the western classroom is very left brain-centered... There tends to be more emphasis on left brain learning, whereas, in reality, there are many students (including myself as a student) who are more right-brained and who could perhaps be much more successful students if they were offered an opportunity to use things like music, dance and drawing, utilizing this other side of the brain. (p. 11)

Graham created Jazz Chants to bring music into ESL teaching practice, and her chants have been effectively used by many ESL teachers. However, many hesitate to try the curriculum because of a lack of personal musical ability.

### **Song Aids in Teaching Prosody and Pronunciation**

In addition to reaching students who have dominant musical intelligence, music provides an ideal way to teach prosody, the rhythm, pitch, and tone of a language.

Graham (1992) proposed that expressing meaning in the English language is not possible

without correct intonation, stress and rhythm. In *Music, Language and the Brain*, Patel (2008) explains that “within our own minds are two systems that perform remarkably similar interpretive feats, converting complex acoustic sequences into perceptually discrete elements (such as words or chords) organized into hierarchical structures that convey rich meanings” (p. 3). He notes “ability to form learned sound categories, to extract regularities from rhythmic and melodic sequences, to integrate incoming elements and to extract nuanced emotional meanings from acoustic signals” demonstrate that the domains of music and language use some of the same mechanisms (p. 4). Therefore, teaching the intonation, stress and rhythm of English can be authentically acquired when language is accompanied by musical phrases that reflect or represent the natural rhythm and tonality of English phrases.

Ilcuikiene (2005) performed a study of about 100 Lithuanian English teachers in elementary and secondary schools. Using questionnaires and interviews, Ilcuikiene surveyed the teachers about their views on the importance of rhythm in communication. “The majority (85%) of the respondents acknowledged that the rhythmic use of the language is one of the major problems that their students face in learning English” (pp. 68-69). Specifically the teachers explained that their students stressed every word equally, making their speech sound segmented and lacking the natural flow of phrases. Further, students did not understand how to group certain syllables together to facilitate the meaning of long sentences into small message units.

One of the objectives of Ilcuikiene’s research was to help Lithuanian teachers learn how to use Graham’s jazz chanting as a teaching tool. Graham developed Jazz Chants in order to create an authentic form to teach English prosody and other language

skills. Her chants are fragments of authentic speech in the naturally occurring rhythms of phrases set to very basic American jazz chanting, sometimes with musical accompaniment. Although 85% of the teachers surveyed acknowledged the problems students had using prosody correctly, about 40% of those teachers avoided teaching prosody in their English classes. Teachers reported they were apprehensive to teach English language rhythm because it “requires a certain level of competence by the teachers to perceive and model appropriate rhythm. The complexity to English rhythm makes it hard to explain” (p. 69). Therefore, the teachers in Ilcuikiene’s study neglected teaching prosody because they felt they could not do it well with the tools they had.

Although Jazz Chants are acknowledged by many ESL teachers as a useful tool for teaching prosody to ELLs, it is also commonly reported that many teachers are apprehensive to use chants in their classrooms for fear of doing them wrong, because they are not musically inclined. Additionally, many students do not relate to the genre of jazz or chanting. It is, therefore, evident that an additional alternative tool is needed with which teachers and students who are not comfortable using jazz chants can work.

Schon, et al. (2008) give several explanations for how songs might help English language acquisition.

First, the emotional aspects of a song may increase the level of arousal and attention. Second, from a perceptual point of view, the presence of pitch contours may enhance phonological discrimination, since syllable change is often accompanied by a change in pitch. (p. 975)

In a study by Schon, et al. (2008), it was noted that, when learning a language, one of the first distinctions that is hard to recognize is where words begin and end. To people with

little experience with a new language, the language sounds like a steady flow of meaningless sounds. Therefore, it is difficult for language learners to segment a new language into word divisions. The study hypothesized that when there was “a consistent mapping of linguistic and musical information (song)” people could better learn words than with just speech alone (p. 978). They conducted three experiments in which twenty-six native French speakers listened to seven minutes of 108 nonsense, three-syllable words and word-parts repeated in random order. The first experiment used a steady stream of monotone-spoken recorded words; the second experiment used the same content, but words were pitched by a synthesizer with matching tone contours for words; and the third experiment used words which were randomly pitched. Subjects were instructed to listen to, but not analyze, the recordings and to push a button on a computer to indicate what they believed were individual words. The research found that in experiment one, the spoken recording, participants correctly identified words 47% of the time; in experiment two, in which the words had pitched correlations, participants correctly identified words 64% of the time; and in experiment three, with random pitches, participants correctly identified words 56% of the time.

They concluded, the addition of music helped participants better discern between words and word parts; in other words, participants were better able to learn new words. From the experiment, they reasoned that, in experiment three, when there was simply random accompaniment of pitch to syllables, the arousal in the brain was higher due to music; therefore, participants attended better and learned words more accurately than with just spoken words. This correlates with the original idea that song adds to emotional content that comes from language paired with music and this creates more brain arousal,

resulting in better language acquisition. Moreover, in experiment two which had the words identified by pitched syllables in specific contours, and in experiment three which had the syllables randomly pitched, the researchers showed that established pitch contours made for better word recognition. If the pitched contours of words mimicked the way prosody works in language, the experiment reinforces the idea that prosody aids in the segmentation of phonics into words.

The problem with the Schon, et al. study is that music is used to reinforce word segmenting, creating a redundancy of auditory clues. It is possible, if any modality was used to create a redundancy, it would improve results of distinguishing word boundaries, so further testing would be necessary to obtain more conclusive data. However, the study does indicate that musical intonation, which creates redundancy, helps listeners' segment words; therefore, curriculum which uses song or rap to teach language can improve some of the most fundamental elements of perceiving phonics, syllables and words.

### **Music Helps Memory of Language**

According to Krashen (1983), *din* is an involuntary rehearsal of language which occurs mentally and "is a sign that language acquisition is taking place" (p. 173). Musical *din* is a common and well reported phenomenon. However, there have been few studies which have connected musical *din* with linguistic *din*. Salcedo (2010) did a study which investigated the effects of songs being added to instruction in foreign language. He studied whether text recall would be increased when text was learned through songs, if delayed text recall would be increased through the same means, and if *din* was stronger after listening to song or text. He tested ninety-four male and female students ranging

between the ages of 17-43, with a mean age of 23. They attended beginning level Spanish classes at an American university.

For the experiment, Salcedo used a spoken and a sung audio recording of three Spanish songs. Group A listened to text in song, Group B listened to a spoken version of the same song Group A listened to, and Group C was a control group which did not listen to the text or song version. While the recording was being played, Group A and B participants were allowed to see a written copy of the text, sing or speak along with the recording (depending on which group they participated in), and have some comprehension aids with lyrics. The groups were tested with a cloze test in which they were instructed to fill in missing words to the song after hearing the recordings six times during a semester. The data from the control group was used to ensure that cloze questions could not be randomly answered correctly.

In the findings, Group A, the music group, recalled the songs significantly better in two out of three songs. Group A also recalled the songs better after a two week delay, but the difference was not considered statistically significant. For the question of *din* (involuntary mental rehearsal), students were given a questionnaire that explained what *din* is and were then asked about the occurrence of *din* they experienced. The questionnaires revealed that 67% of the students who listened to the musical song experienced *din*, while only 33% of the group that listened to the spoken song experienced *din*.

This study shows, through a statistical analysis of *din* that it occurs in learning a language at a significantly higher percent when music is added to language learning. This clearly demonstrates that music increases memory in language learning. It is

especially notable that *din* is a naturally occurring involuntary mental rehearsal that, according to Krashen (1983) “is a sign that language acquisition is taking place” (p. 173). Therefore, curriculum that uses rap as a musical presentation of material will be more effective in increasing memory rehearsal and thus language acquisition than curriculum that does not give opportunity for musical *din* to occur.

### **Songs Communicate Culture**

According to Lopez-Rocha (2005), cultural differences, which are a framework which learners innately carry from their own culture, can create barriers to learning a new language. Moreover, as students learn about the culture of a new language, they can better understand subtle language indicators, especially those that are a part of conversational English. Explicit teaching about a culture may feel like an unnecessary burden to ELLs, even though educators realize it will aid in language learning. Schoepp (2001) says “Some songs are excellent examples of colloquial English, that is, the language of informal conversation” (Linguistic Reasons section, para. 1). Further, according to Li & Brand (2009),

Song lyrics are embedded within a culture, its values, symbols and beliefs. Thus, exposure to song lyrics...not only teaches vocabulary, grammar, the rhythmic speech, phrases, and means, but a song, as a sort of ambassador of a culture, offers ESL students lessons in grasping the nature and style of a particular culture. (p. 74)

Eng (2012) further states that “music, while universal, is culturally specific in that the musical content and style mirror a particular culture, acting as a cultural artifact that may both reflect and influence that culture” (p. 115). Therefore, by listening to

curricular music, students are inadvertently learning about culture. Songs are not exercises in informal conversation, but they are authentic models of the way people speak. Some would say songs present an elevated form of language because they often use rhyme; however, even though rap may use rhyme, it is not usually seen as an elevated style. In fact, according to Weinstein (2006), rap is known for being a form that is characterized by its lack of elevated language, but it is known for its ability to communicate in a deeply social manner. Thus, using original rap songs to teach English connects the audience with an authentic, socially relevant form that communicates culture. Folk songs have also been used to do this; however, many youth do not relate to folk songs because the style feels somewhat antiquated to them. Rap or hip hop music is a part of pop culture, making this genre of music more relevant to most students than other genres of music.

### **Music Creates a Positive Environment and Lowers the Affective Filter**

According to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis (1982), language acquisition best takes place when anxiety is low and confidence is high. Under these conditions, learners are likely to receive more input and produce more output. In recent years, neuroscience has strengthened Krashen's hypothesis on affective filter. According to Sylwester (2007), "emotion and attention, are the gateway to cognition [and] artistic arousal and focus help to maintain the vigor of our emotion/attention systems" (Arousing Phenomena section, para. 1). Accordingly, emotion is a driving force in attention which, in turn, drives learning. Moreover, emotion and attention relate to the here and now in brain function which creates the setting for learning. Rafiee, Kassaian and Dastjerdi (2010) suggest that using humorous song creates a positive atmosphere to extinguish

negative factors that raise the affective filter and create a barrier for language learning. Additionally, Rafiee, et al. posits that musical activities can aid in second language acquisition since song comes through aural sense which is activated for perceiving language. If pleasure is associated with the music, that feeling is activated while the language is being processed. The affective filter is, therefore, low, so learning can be high. Engh (2012) contends that song is a natural language input that occurs in all cultures in pleasurable events, ranging from karaoke to parties. Because of its pleasurable social associations, using it in ESL classrooms provides authentic activities to which all cultures can relate. Consequently, song in the classroom creates a positive learning environment which enriches receptivity to language learning.

### **What the Form of Rap has to Offer Curriculum**

According to Engh (2012), teachers who bring contemporary music into the class can also bring pop culture into a class. He explores the concept of pop culture as a global phenomenon which is part of the backbone of youth culture. He asserts that bringing music in the class not only brings exposure to the culture of the music, but it can serve as a bridge between generations and break down possible teacher-student role barriers, as well as bringing a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment into the classroom.

Susan Weinstein (2006) is an English teacher at Louisiana State University. She recently wrote an article for the *International Reading Association* in which she explained the value of using rap in teaching. She believes rap and hip hop have a voice in society that represents a political discourse that enriches a language class. Rap appeals as much to youth today as it did when it first emerged as a new musical genre in the language of the common man. As a musical genre, rap has had a reputation for bringing

a voice to the struggles people experience in contemporary society. It has been a form that has expressed some of the realities of life in real language. Weinstein (2006) has documented case studies of underperforming students improving in literacy skills as rap was introduced as a literacy for teaching and learning.

Understanding the ways that participating in rap as a writer, performer, or fan connects people to their peers; to histories of oral, musical, and political discourse; and to communities that have the potential for social action adds to the field of literacy studies. (p. 280)

Weinstein believes that introducing rap into language learning get students involved in literacy. The students in her case study liked using rap in school and wrote assigned original raps as a form of language expression. After having to write raps for class, the students reported that they continued to write in their free-time for their own pleasure. They felt successful writing in a familiar musical form which they owned. Weinstein felt that rap served as “a venue for identity construction and experimentation” in her students (p. 270). She taught at a school with a large population of minorities and disenfranchised youth. If her students connected with curriculum and found a pleasurable form of self-expression through rap, ESL students, who often feel like outsiders in the school system (especially if they are not identifying with the American culture) can likewise “find a venue for identity construction” through the use of rap as they try to find where they fit in American culture.

### **Summary**

Teaching English as a second language by using music is educationally and linguistically sound. It allows students who are more right brained to encounter an

educational approach that taps into their musical intelligence and right brain activity.

Adding music to language not only reaches students who have dominant musical intelligence, but it also creates an approach to teaching that uses multimodalities which help all students to learn material more fully. Moreover, using music while teaching language creates neural networks that aid in memory.

Music creates unique opportunities to teach important elements of language. Because prosody and music have tone, pitch and rhythm as common elements that define them, music can be added to teaching prosody to create a reinforcement of prosodic characteristics. According to the findings of a study by Schon, et al. (2008), many students, who might not recognize or detect some of these oral language characteristics with speech alone, are more likely to detect them when music is added to words. Ilcuikiene also established that many teachers who were convinced their students needed to learn prosody in order to be understood when speaking were apprehensive to teach it, in spite of their students' needs. This apprehension was because teachers were afraid they could not teach prosody well.

Carolyn Graham created Jazz Chants as both a curriculum and a method of teaching English learners many elements of language through authentic language fragments; however, many teachers do not feel expert enough in music to use this method of teaching. Rapping English, however, does not require any musical expertise for teachers to use because the teacher does not have to create or perform the rap, but, instead, only has to play the audio or video recordings.

In addition to prosody, music can aid language learners in having a more frequent occurrence of *the*, the phenomenon of having an involuntary mental replaying of

language or song, which Krashen (1983) explains is evidence that language acquisition is occurring. Not only is recall of language increased with music, but American culture is introduced authentically through music. American folk songs have been traditionally used to bring culture into classrooms, but, as with jazz chants, many educators do not feel qualified to use music because of a lack of musical expertise. Students may not feel like they relate to folk or jazz music; however, rap curriculum is relevant to students and does not require musical ability to present. It is more accessible to people who normally do not feel comfortable with their musical abilities since it is spoken and not sung, even though it does have pitch, tone and rhythm like traditional song.

Language content presented through rap music is relevant to students. It engages them since they feel relaxed in a classroom environment that uses materials they are familiar with and enjoy outside of school. Students' affective filter is lowered, their arousal is raised, and learning is increased. Students can also negotiate finding their own social constructs through this genre which has been identified as a form where social groups can express their emerging identities in context to a society in which they may not know where they fit. English language learner's cultural barriers can unconsciously be lowered as they focus on youthful music that is cross—cultural and is accompanied by the English language. This project will present examples of teaching grammar, vocabulary and discourse through rap music which is easy to use. It bridges the need for a musical curriculum that is non-threatening to teachers and students alike. It also brings a genre of music into the classroom that is recognized by linguists, teachers and students as a form of expression that youth relate to and with which they feel enabled to construct their emerging identity.

### **CHAPTER III THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Description of the Project**

This project is a sample of *Rapping English*, audio and video raps which teach grammar, academic vocabulary and discourse in order to help English language learners learn foundational English skills in an engaging manner. The raps are not intended to be used as complete stand-alone curriculum, but they are engaging, fun and easy to remember presentations of grammar, vocabulary and discourse. Therefore, this project will first provide an overview of objectives for the students and assessment ideas for the teacher for the lessons. Second, it will provide a guide for how the teacher can incorporate and use the raps in a teaching program. Third, it will describe some lessons using the rap. Finally, the appendix of the project will include lyrics, CDs and DVD's of the raps.

#### **Development of the Project**

In my many years of experience as an English language arts teacher, I have encountered many English learners who struggle with foundational skills. They need practice and explicit teaching in the areas of vocabulary and grammar. Moreover, my ELLs need additional help with conversational skills and prosody. My students have struggled with understanding many grammatical concepts even though they have been taught grammar and have done practice exercises. I believe the problem has been that the concepts are not interesting enough to be remembered. Additionally, my ELLs typically memorize vocabulary from lists, but best remember vocabulary that they have multiple exposures to and have learned in context. Therefore, they learn conversational

vocabulary, but their academic vocabulary is weak, and they need the academic vocabulary to succeed in school. Finally, my ELLs do practice conversational skills and succeed in role plays and other discourse exercises, but become intimidated when they need to speak to native English speakers, and they underperform because of fear.

I have taught with traditional methods and materials to address these common problems in my English language arts class, and especially with my ELLs, but I have not been satisfied with the outcomes. I have found that the ELLs that are most successful are those whose lives become consumed with study. I have wanted to provide a more interesting way of teaching rudimentary skills in which students can be successful without exceedingly long hours of study, and without the boredom that is typically reported from studying vocabulary and grammar and doing enough practice to incorporate them into long term memory.

To find an answer to these problems, I came up with the idea of teaching a grammar concept through rap. I worked with my son on writing a script, and he created a provocative beat and recorded it. The next day, I brought it to school to use for part of a lesson. When I presented the rap part of the lesson in class, it brought an atmosphere of excitement and interest to my classroom environment that I have rarely seen. After class, I heard students rapping pronouns down the hall. I had students from other English classes come in during lunch to hear the grammar rap. I had never before had students ask to hear a grammar lesson during their free-time. Rap definitely brought a new vitality to my teaching. After I was done with my lessons on pronouns, I still had kids who wanted to listen to the pronoun rap. Because of popular demand, I played the rap while I took attendance and discovered my students were effortlessly learning and they wanted to

continually review. Many students came to me requesting more grammar raps and asking if I could teach more things with rap. Then I noticed my ELL's prosody problems were not apparent when they rapped. Additionally, their apprehension about talking out in class was forgotten while the whole class was involved in rapping together. My students' excitement gave me an interest in making more raps to use for teaching.

When I started graduate work in TESOL, I found that there is empirical evidence supporting my classroom observations, that using music to teach English is a highly effective method. I knew I had a way to use music that worked and was easy. I also saw that research supported my findings that music helps improve ELL's prosody. Finally, I realized that my ELLs improved participation in classroom discussions and conversations was most likely due to how rap brought their affective filters down. This set me on the task of writing a whole English curriculum using rap so it can be available to other students and teachers.

### Overview

T= Teacher and Ss = Students

Topics	Grammar Words	Grammar Teaching	Vocabulary	Discourse Conversations
Content Objectives	Ss will be able to recall and recite words using prosody that are examples of grammar categories / concepts and use the words in discourse	Ss will be able to recall and recite raps using prosody and apply grammar concepts to discourse.	Ss will be able to recall and recite raps using prosody; and use and understand vocabulary.	Ss will be able to recall and recite raps using correct prosody and use the scripts they learn to apply to real time conversations.
Language Objectives	Ss will be able to draw from their memorized grammar lexicon to use in their discourse and to analyze discourse for improved comprehension.	Ss will be able to apply grammar concepts for improved writing and speaking and to analyze discourse for improved comprehension.	Ss will be able to use vocabulary in writing and speaking and understand meaning of vocabulary from reading and spoken discourse.	Ss will be able to use standard prosody for conversations and use standard scripted discourse to apply to real time conversations.
Language Assessment	T will listen to Ss recite raps in groups for prosody and recall;	T will listen to Ss recite raps in groups for prosody and recall;	T will listen to Ss recite raps in groups for prosody and	T will listen to Ss recite raps in groups for prosody and recall;

	identify and categorize grammar words in read and spoken discourse for improved comprehension; and use grammar words in written and spoken discourse for improved communication.	identify grammar concepts in read and listened to discourse for improved comprehension; and apply grammar concepts in written and spoken discourse for improved communication.	recall; and monitor Ss' writing and speech for use of vocabulary words from raps.	and observe improvised role plays for application of scripted discourses.
Materials	- Audio and video raps - Lyric handouts - Reading, writing, listening and speaking materials from other curriculums to check for application	- Audio and video raps - Lyric handouts - Reading, writing, listening and speaking materials from other curriculums to check for application	- Audio and video raps - Lyric handouts - Reading, writing, listening and speaking materials from other curriculums to check for application	- Audio and video raps - Lyric copies - Reading, writing, listening and speaking materials from other curriculums to check for application

**Guide for Incorporation of Raps into Curriculum.**

<b>Rap used as sponge or warm-up activity the first few times</b>		
Time	Procedures	Materials
2-4 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- T instructs Ss to listen to rap</li> <li>- T plays rap video for students</li> <li>- T instructs Ss to try to follow the tone, pitch and rhythm of rap as they rap with recordings or videos</li> <li>- T plays raps while T and Ss rap along</li> </ul>	Rap recordings / videos
<b>Rap used as sponge or warm-up activity after students are familiar with it</b>		
Time	Procedures	Materials
2-4 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- T plays rap video for students</li> <li>- T instructs Ss to try to follow the tone, pitch and rhythm of rap as they rap with videos</li> <li>- T plays raps while T and Ss rap along</li> </ul>	Rap recordings / videos
<b>Rap used as a review</b>		
Time	Procedures	Materials
2-4 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- T instructs students to rap along with video while teacher plays it</li> <li>- After students have done it once with recording, T instructs students to rap without recording</li> <li>- T can start students off and then drop out</li> <li>- (This can be done at the end of a lesson or the last few minutes of a period for a close)</li> </ul>	Rap recordings / videos

<b>Rap as a model for student raps</b>		
Time	Procedures	Materials
2-4 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- T instructs Ss to take out rap lyrics</li> <li>- T plays rap while students listen</li> </ul>	Rap lyrics and recordings / videos
10-20 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- T puts students in groups of 3-4</li> <li>- T teacher gives mini-lesson on grammar, vocabulary, or scripted discourse</li> </ul>	Teacher made or curricular lesson materials
15-30 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- T has groups work together to write an original rap that applies or teaches the concept</li> </ul>	Rap lyrics and recordings / videos
10-20 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- T has groups perform their original raps for class</li> </ul>	

**The Project**

**Description of Lessons**

There are two different kinds of grammar raps: one explains the function and use of certain grammar forms, while the other presents examples of those forms or grammar words. For example, the curriculum presents two lessons on pronouns: one explicitly explains what pronouns are and how they are used in sentences, while the other lists eight subject, object and possessive pronouns as lexical grammar words. These lessons do not just have content information; they also have extra lyrics to create a clever discourse and a beat to present the information in a musical rap style.

The first verse of the pronoun rap, which presents a list of 21 pronouns, is quoted below.

*Gót-ta léarn the pró-nouns / These are pró-nouns*

*Gót-ta léarn the pró-nouns / Sé-vén pró-nouns*

*Gót-ta léarn the pró-nouns / Per-so-nal pró-nouns*

*, , , , , , , , , , , ,*

*Got-ta learn the pro-nouns / Listen to me flow now*  
*Še-ven sub-ject pro-nouns / That are ea-sy to me*  
*Í and we / He and she / It, they and you*  
*Yeah, se-ven sub-ject pro-nouns / I know you can see*  
*Í and we / He and she / It, they and you.*  
*Še-ven sub-ject pro-nouns / You can say them with me*  
*Í and we / he and she / it, they and you*

This rap starts by introducing the task at hand, learning pronouns. Then it lists the first category of pronouns, subject pronouns. The seven subject pronouns are repeated three times. In later verses, the object and possessive pronouns are presented in the same fashion. This rap helps students memorize the personal pronouns in an organized and fun way. The rap uses a lot of repetition which helps create din. According to Richards (1969), “Rote repetition induces boredom. The teacher’s task is to see that repetition is meaningful, and songs provide a means of increasing the amount of repetition possible without losing the learner’s interest” (p. 161). The rap also teaches reductions in phrasing because the dialogue “Got to learn the pronouns,” is actually rapped, “Gotta learn the pronouns.” All of the raps use reductions and modern colloquial diction to present the grammar ideas. Additionally, the beat of the rap emphasizes the correct prosody of stressed and unstressed syllables in an obvious way. Students who have had a hard time hearing where accents fall in regular speech can clearly hear it in the rap. When they practice rapping, along with the recording, the emphasis of the accents on the recording along with the reinforcement of the musical beats in the

accompaniment, make it easy for students to both feel and perform the correct syllabic accents of prosody.

When I used this rap for a lesson, I did not start the grammar lesson by giving the objective or essential question; I saved that for when I got into the content of the mini-lesson. Without introduction, I played the video which has the recording of the rap with animated words. My class became silent, except for a few nervous laughs, as something new was introduced in the classroom environment. The rap grabbed my students' attention and kept it. While they were listening, I passed out a handout with the words so students would have something to take home with them. This rap was not only the hook into the lesson, but it acted as a model for what they would soon have to perform. Then I asked students to rap with the video. I started rapping with the recording and students soon joined me chanting along. This was our guided practice. I then presented a mini-lesson from my regular curriculum on subject pronouns. I ended the lesson by having students rap along with the video without me. This was a more independent practice, even though it was guided by the video. The next day we did the same process, but my mini-lesson was on possessive pronouns. The students had already heard the list of possessive pronouns the day before, so some rapped along from the beginning. I was able to assess student participation easily, as I was letting the video do the teaching of the pronouns, and I was free to observe. During the mini-lesson, students were animated and relaxed. This had not been the usual response to grammar I had experienced from my students in the past.

For a regular English language arts program, grammar lists are no longer traditionally taught. However, with the number of English language learners that are in

most classrooms, the grammar lists of types of grammar forms serve a dual purpose. They serve all students as an example of the grammar form. But for my ELLs, they are also academic vocabulary they need to succeed in grammar. Native English speakers acquire pronoun vocabulary authentically from the normal language exposure of life they have experienced since infancy. However, ELLs need this grammar vocabulary presented to them explicitly before explanations about usage and rules are taught.

The chorus of the other pronoun rap that teaches about pronoun usage follows:

*Boring, without pronouns English is boring.*

*But use them right, and your language is soaring.*

*But the pronouns have to match the antecedent,*

*In gender and quantity there has to be agreement.*

*Personal pronouns need to use the right case*

*Subject, object or possessive pronouns in their rightful place.*

*Don't make your communication boring.*

*Use pronouns and your conversations are soaring*

Notice that the explanations are embedded in the rap song. So students are listening to content taught in an informal, fun register. I usually play the rap as a focus to start the lesson because it grabs student interest fast. Then it can be followed up with several different types of mini-lessons. Inductive lessons work well after a teaching rap. The teacher can write several sentences on the board that use pronouns incorrectly. Students can then use the rap to help them identify pronoun errors, and then they can identify the rule from the rap. Another type of mini-lesson might have several lists of words on the board. There can be a list of plural and singular nouns, masculine and

feminine nouns, and a list of plural and singular, and masculine and feminine forms of pronouns. Students can be instructed to work in pairs and make sentences that agree in gender and quantity using the some words from the list. While the pairs are working, the rap can be playing quietly in the background. After the students have time to work in pairs, the pairs can present their sentences to the class, and the class can then discuss the pronoun usage in the sentences. These are just a few ideas of mini-lessons that can be introduced by pronoun raps. Playing the rap in the background can also make the atmosphere of a grammar lesson more engaging and fun.

The vocabulary raps have vocabulary words used in context in a rap style narrative on a topic which is easily associated with the vocabulary; however, in addition to the words being used in context, they are also defined in the rap. The repetition of the definitions presented with rhyme and a beat make the vocabulary meanings memorable because of musical and linguistic din. Consequently, the vocabulary is remembered without much effort as students have a hard time getting the content lyrics accompanied by beats out of their heads. The boredom of rote repetition is avoided, but a high frequency of repetition of definitions is accomplished each time the chorus of the rap plays.

The vocabulary raps can be used as the introductory presentation of vocabulary words, but students should later have a chance to practice using the words in several kinds of exercises. Exercises might include traditional cloze vocabulary sentences, or word busting exercises where students examine sound, structure and context of words to try to figure out the meaning. Students can also practice using the words in sentences because they have a model of the word in context and the definition in the rap. The main

advantage I have found for using rap to teach vocabulary is that students like studying their words through rapping along with the recordings. Following is an example of an academic vocabulary rap that focuses on instruction vocabulary and vocabulary for writing. The target vocabulary words are underlined.

*I have to do a test and I'm ready to try,  
But the work is so hard that I don't wanna comply,  
Well I don't have to worry, and I don't have to cry,  
Cuz I've got simple steps that I can apply,  
The first step is that I've gotta comprehend,  
I gotta understand the directions at hand,  
That's the first step, the next is to analyze,  
Which means to look at close and careful, no lies,  
Then I identify, you know I mean,  
So when I start this test, flawless and clean.  
That's how it is and that's how you learn  
Now everybody sing along if you know the words*

*Apply: to put into action, to make use of,*

*Comprehend: to understand the nature or meaning of,*

*Analyze: to break into parts and examine pieces,*

*Identify: to match a thing with a meaning.*

*So now I'm done with my test but there's still more to do,*

*I have a paper to write that's creative and true,  
I gotta think of a thesis to get in the groove,  
Which is a statement I need to discuss or to prove,  
I start with the intro to give it a good sound,  
An introduction is a catchy beginning that gives the background,  
The thesis, the claim, the assertion in sight,  
Now I support it with evidence to prove that it's right,  
And last is when the conclusion comes in,  
It sums it all up and brings the paper to an end.  
And that's how it is, and that's how you learn  
Now everybody sing along if you know the words*

*Thesis: a statement that guides the whole thing,*

*Introduction: brings interest and makes it begin,*

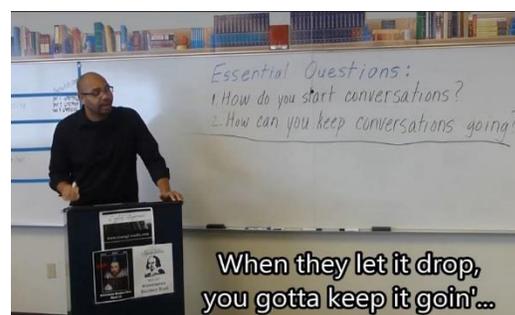
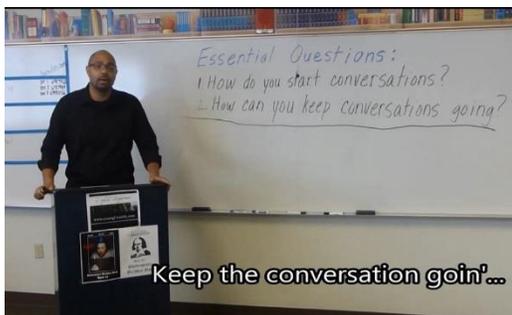
*Claim: a statement that must have support*

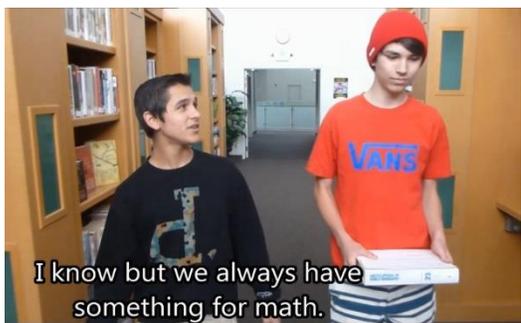
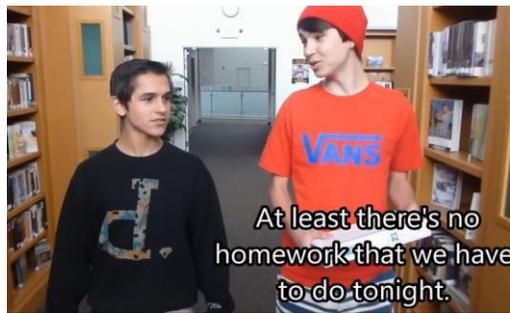
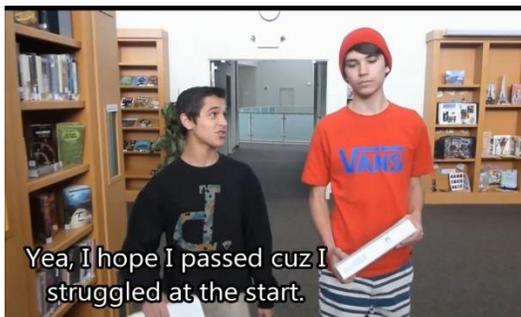
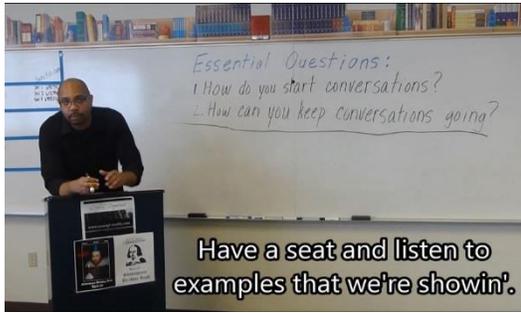
*Conclusion: sums it up the end phase.*

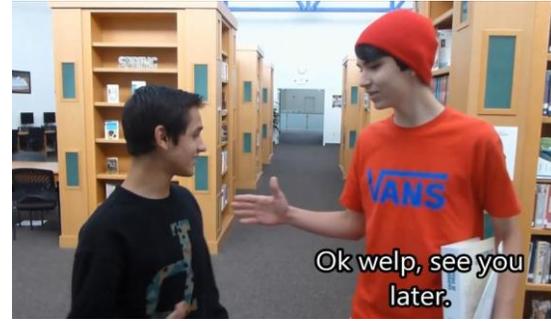
Finally, Rapping English has scripted discourses embedded in rap songs which are acted out in video performances. In this way, students learn ways to do greetings, apologies or requests in realistic contexts. The discourses are set in narratives and performed in a visual context where the typical props and images that might be associated with a conversation are included. This helps students understand the social context of scripted discourse. The prosody and timing of scripts are memorable since they are

learned in raps which are engaging. The affective filter is lowered because music is a vital part of the presentation of the linguistic content. Moreover, most youth listen to music and watch videos as a favorite pastime; therefore, listening to music and watching videos in class makes activities more fun, and thus arousal makes the brain function in ways that are most conducive to learning.

Following are some pictures of a scripted discourse video on how to keep a conversation going. The pictures are an example of the opening of a discourse video. It starts with the objective, to keep a conversation going, which is embedded in a rap chorus. The next part of the video is an example of a casual conversation between two students at school. The video images, rap script, and scripted conversations all work together to create a short, entertaining teaching with examples of how to extend a conversation. The prosody, cultural context and register are a necessary ingredient of an authentic rap video. Although prosody is not directly taught, it is naturally acquired as students must match rhythm, pitch and tone in order to rap in unison with the musical material. Also, the informal register of language is an identifying component of rap which typically emphasizes colloquial phrases.







These lessons are not intended to be stand-alone curriculum, but can be easily incorporated into curriculum as warm-up, review or reinforcements. The vocabulary and discourse raps can introduce new vocabulary and scripts to students and then be accompanied by student centered practice. Students can be asked to collaboratively create their own raps to make new applications of ideas. Then students can perform their raps for the class and share their creative linguistic and musical ideas with others, introducing a sense of community and creativity to the classroom environment.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Conclusions**

Research from Gardner (2006) calls for curriculum that teaches to intelligences that are traditionally neglected. Further, to continue to neglect these intelligences creates an unfair disadvantage for students who do not learn through the educationally popular logical mathematical reasoning or linguistic intelligence. Moreover, neuroscience suggests that teaching that creates strong positive emotions for students is conducive to improved learning, but students who are not taught in their dominant intelligences are less likely to experience positive emotions while learning. Using music in teaching is one way to teach to the traditionally neglected, as well as add strategies that are emotionally appealing to students.

There is also empirical evidence that music aids in learning a language. Schon, et al. (2008) conducted studies showing that students who learned a new language with musical accompaniment could discern separate words better than students who listened to sentences (lyrics) unreinforced by music. The rhythm and intonation of song caused learners to hear prosody that is subtle and understated in speaking. Furthermore, when learners sing or rap, they must connect words and stress certain syllables in order to follow the musical pattern; thus music helps language learners in both listening to and producing prosody. In another study (Salcedo, 2010), students were able to recall texts better when they learned language which was accompanied by music. In this study, the involuntary playback of a phrase (din) that often occurs from listening to music aided students in memorizing text. Likewise, students who learn language with rap would be

aided in memory of vocabulary, grammar and scripted discourses. Finally, the fact that all cultures have music that people enjoy makes music a common ground. On the other hand, music reflects the values and social contexts of the culture it comes from; thus music can be used to bridge cultural differences for ELLs while, at the same time, it can bring awareness of the second culture as a by-product. Although most teachers would agree that using music would benefit their teaching of ESL and EFL, many are reluctant to use it because they consider themselves not musically inclined or do not know how to effectively incorporate music into their teaching methods or materials.

The *Rapping English* curriculum provides a means for teachers to easily incorporate music into their teaching. It requires nothing more than the teacher playing the audio or video rap and allowing students to listen, speak along, and learn. Teachers do not need any expertise in music or much preparation time to work with the raps. Other curriculums that bring music into the class generally require teachers be able to perform music on some level. However, *Rapping English* does not require teachers to be musical because rap is spoken and not sung. Furthermore, teachers uncomfortable with music do not need to perform because the recordings provide everything needed. In this way, the curriculum fills the gap of providing language teaching using music for teachers who are not musically inclined.

It provides materials for teaching grammar, vocabulary, and discourse that intrinsically incorporate examples of prosody and culture. Finally, it provides fun activities which lower the affective filters of students and create a relaxed and inviting classroom environment. In every culture, young people listen to music in their free time; therefore, introducing music into the classroom is a way to add variety to teaching

method to which students naturally respond. This curriculum creates a way for students to engage in learning and become active participants. *Rapping English* is an alternative to teaching through lecture, reading a text, or doing practice exercises. With rap, youth learn through activities they enjoy and find culturally relevant.

### **Recommendations**

*Rapping English* is not intended as a stand-alone curriculum, but is to supplement main lessons that are taught in class. As a supplement, this curriculum should be used in accordance with the teacher's needs for extra material to support main lessons and learning. If a teacher does not use music in teaching at all, this musical curriculum can be used as a strategy to bring down students' affective filter. Since music is generally something that is a part of students' recreation and free-time, music in the class can bring associations of positive free-time experiences. Music brings a relaxed classroom atmosphere and evokes positive feelings in learners. In a relaxed classroom environment, difficult learning tasks can be introduced with less learner anxiety. In order for the curriculum to work best, it is helpful for teachers themselves to become comfortable with the materials.

Teachers do not need to know the raps perfectly, but they should be familiar enough with the raps that they can perform them with the recording without making many errors. This requires teachers to spend some time listening to the raps before presenting them to the class. This does not mean, though, that teachers need to take much extra preparation time practicing the raps. When teachers make some mistakes while rapping along with the recording, it does no harm. As the teacher raps along with

students, the recording acts as the teacher while the teacher takes the role of facilitator and co-learner.

It is best to teach one or two raps at a time. Even when students request to do more, it is not advisable to introduce many raps at one time. Although the raps are supplemental material, they present strong content. Only one or two raps deal with a specific content area, so presenting too many raps at one time addresses several content objectives at once which could confuse students. The raps can be used as a pre-lesson strategy to introduce material in a way that grabs students' attention and interest. They can be used during a lesson to present concepts with an additional modality, or as a post-teaching strategy to reinforce concepts. The only time that several raps covering different content should be played at once is for review of many language components of grammar or vocabulary before a summative assessment.

*Rapping English* can be used by language teachers who do not devote much attention to teaching prosody. This curriculum is a way to incorporate practice with English prosody, especially reductions and stress work. Teachers of EFL sometimes do not feel confident with the exactness of their own pronunciation and prosody; consequently, they often neglect teaching this component of language learning. Although the raps have no explicit teaching of prosody, students performing these raps will naturally improve their production of prosody, especially if teachers specifically tell students to try to imitate the rapper's rhythm, stress and intonation so that the learner is in perfect unison with the raps.

The metacognitive strategy of making students consciously aware of what they are learning is effective for learning prosody through the raps. Explaining to students that, in doing raps, learners are practicing American style speech and prosody helps learners identify and monitor their learning of prosody through music with language. Teachers should explicitly state a learning objective of accomplishing correct prosody. The teacher will not be teaching to this objective, but the learner will pick up on correct prosody by trying to match sounds to create a unison with the vocal rap. Although prosody is an important element of this curriculum, it does not require the teacher to do additional teaching beyond explaining what prosody is and asking learners to be intentional and aware of following the examples of prosody from the raps. Although no formal study was done regarding improvement in prosody from using this curriculum, I personally witnessed an unexpected by-product of improved prosody in my students when they used *Rapping English* to learn other language skills.

The raps in this program can be used for an alternative purpose. They can be used for lessons with the objective of teaching students to write their own raps on any element of language learning. In this case, the raps should be used as a model. Although students can create raps independently, when students work collaboratively on creating raps, it can create a fun, task-based communicative group project. Teachers will have to make a lesson plan in which they or the students decide on a language concept to teach. Then students will have to go through the steps of confirming they understand the concept, creating a script, creating a beat, and practicing the script and beat together as rap. The teacher then can have students share/perform their raps with the rest of the class. They also can teach their raps to the class or record them. If the raps are recorded, an audio

recording is sufficient to present the rap; however, some students or teachers may prefer to use a video recorded performance. If a class is assigned a variety of content areas to focus on, the raps can be used to reinforce and review learned concepts. In my experience, students usually feel proud of original projects of this sort, boosting self-esteem which is vital to English learners trying their identity and social position in a new culture.

The most typical problem that teachers may encounter with using Rapping English is technical difficulties since the curriculum must be played on a computer or CD player. Teachers who have no access to classroom technology, could upload raps on their phone and play them from there. Although the raps are intended to be done with the recorded materials, if a teacher has technical difficulties and knows the raps well, the teacher can lead the class in raps without playing them on media equipment. If teachers do not feel comfortable leading the rap, a student who is comfortable with the genre can lead the class without media equipment. In the same manner, teachers who feel out of their element doing raps with their class can compensate for this by using students to help lead the rest of the class in rapping with the music.

Using music to teach English is not a new concept. Carolyn Graham's *Jazz Chants* (1992) have been used by ESL teachers for two decades. I personally remember informally learning grammar through the *School House Rock* songs that aired on television on Saturday mornings. I have also seen elementary students happily chant along to a whole program of a grammar jingle curriculum. These curriculums are established materials that have successfully added music to teaching and learning in years past. At this point in time, however, rap curriculum adds a more contemporary and

relevant style of music to teach English learners. It is a style that is popular with today's youth, and yet it does not intimidate students with difficult melodies or formal sounding poetry since rap is a spoken song in an informal register. Hopefully, in the future, educators can use this rap as framework to build new curriculum in a more modern and popular musical style when a new genre of music emerges in future generations.

Although *Rapping English* is primarily targeted to reach learners in elementary, middle and high school, it can be used for adult learners and independent learners outside a formal school program. Research, pedagogy and my personal experience in using the curriculum provide evidence that it is effective in teaching English language arts and English as a second language. However, the human element of teaching makes the effectiveness of the materials and methods of any curriculum less than a perfect science. With that said, in my use of the curriculum, there were some informal measures and observations that have led me to believe the curriculum will be generally successful in most learning situations. Following are some of the criterion that I used to evaluate the effectiveness of the *Rapping English* curriculum. I believe the criterion can be generalized to establish the effectiveness of the curriculum across many applications.

If after the curriculum is introduced, the atmosphere of the classroom environment appears energized, engaged and relaxed, then the curriculum has probably contributed to lowering the affective filter of the group of students and creating an emotionally conducive experience for learners. This is a subjective measure; nonetheless, it is one that most experienced teachers are constantly informally evaluating in order to set students up for a strong learning experience. Additionally, after several exposures to the material, if students can be heard singing, speaking or repeating raps

outside of lesson time, then the raps are creating din, and thus these repetitions are moving information into long term memory. Finally if students are able to do the raps accurately with recorded material, students are achieving correct prosody at the time of practice. The transference of using correct prosody during authentic speaking situations is a further test of the effectiveness of the rap. Evaluating the achievement of any of these criterion, however, does not prove that the rap program was the variable that brought about the accomplishments.

At this juncture, it is important to remember that this program is created to be a supplement to other teaching strategies and materials. Therefore, it is assumed that the accomplishment of any of these learning outcomes (or criterion, in this case) should be accomplished by the combination of *Rapping English* and other materials and methods. Finally, reciting the raps verbatim unaccompanied by the recorded voice, can serve as a formal assessment of memorizing the teachings, vocabulary or prosody; however, it certainly does not show evidence of application of the concepts.

Again, since this program is supplemental, higher performance on other activities and assessments that apply the concepts taught in *Rapping English* can be used as indicators of the curriculum's success, but it could also be said they are more indicators of the success of the other materials used. The curriculum not only teaches grammar, vocabulary, and scripted conversations, but the understanding of these materials should improve the learners' reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Therefore, the curriculum should affect improvement in all of the four skills in general. Validity of assessing students for specific learning outcomes based on one measure is always questionable. I would mainly evaluate the effectiveness of this program based on the

criterion of lowering the affective filter and creating a positive and creative learning environment. Other evaluation of the curriculum based on formal student assessment is not valid for attributing success to *Rapping English* alone since the curriculum is supplemental.

*Rapping English* is intended to add two to four minutes of supplemental teaching materials to lessons. The raps can be added in various parts of a lesson (pre-, during, post) to establish different purposes. They can be used intermittently in teaching to accompany specific lessons, or on a more ongoing basis to review concepts that are expected to be learned within a class or unit of study. The implementation of how often the raps should be used depends on the way the teacher uses them to support the main curriculum.

If the raps are used as a model for a lesson in which students are expected to create their own raps, the guide for incorporating rap into curriculum suggests that students can accomplish writing a short rap in a long class period; however, most likely teachers will want to give students several class periods to accomplish a strong rap product.

Finally, this curriculum is a sample of what will be a larger body of raps covering more areas of content. At this point, there are several samples of grammar raps; however, more raps will be added to address a wider variety of frequently used forms and concepts that ELLs often struggle with. There is also a sample of an academic vocabulary rap that teaches academic words that are general to all subjects, but, in the future, the curriculum will be expanded to include academic words specific to classes like U.S. History or

Biology. Currently, there is only one sample of a video of a scripted discourse which teaches one of the most basic needs of ELLs which is how to keep a conversation going. However, in the future, more scripted discourse raps will be added to create a greater body of examples from which students may draw. Therefore, this project presents a current sample of raps that are a part of the developing *Rapping English* curriculum.

## References

- Aniruddh, P. (2008). *Music, language, and the brain*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Bloom, B. (1978). New views of the learner: Implications for instruction and curriculum. *Educational Leadership*, 35(7), pp. 563-576.
- Caine, R. and Caine, G. (2011). *Natural learning for a connected world: Education, technology and the human brain*. New York, N.Y.: Teachers College Press.
- Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2012). Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/assets/application-for-english-learners.pdf>
- Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. (2011, June 16). Issues A-Z: English-language learners. *Education Week*. Retrieved July, 10, 2014 from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/english-language-learners/>
- Engh, D. (2012) Why use music in English language learning? A survey of the literature. *English Language Teaching* 6(2), 113-127. doi: 10.5539/elt.V6n2p13
- “English-language learners.” *Edweek.org*. Published: August 4, 2004 Updated June 16, 2014. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/english-language-learners/>
- Prator, C., & Celce-Murcia, M. (1979). An outline of language teaching approaches. Celce-Murcia, M & McIntosh, L (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 3-5). N.Y., New York: Newbury House.
- Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Gardner, H. (2006). *Multiple intelligences: New horizons*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Graham, C. (1992) *Singing, changing, telling tales: Arts in the language classroom*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents.

Ilciukiene, G. (2005). (Pedagogika), Teaching English rhythm through jazz chanting.

*Pedagogy Studies* (78) pp. 68-72.

Krashen, S. The din in the head, input, and the second language acquisition device.

*Foreign Language Annals*, 16, pp. 41-44, 1983.

Krashen, S. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Oxford:

Pergamon Press.

Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis*. New York: Longman.

Li, X., & Brand, M. (2009). Effectiveness of music on vocabulary acquisition, language

usage, and meaning for mainland Chinese ESL learners. *Contributions to Music*

*Education*, 36(1), 73-83.

Lopez-Rocha, S. (2005). Stereotypes to communication styles. *International Journal of*

*Learning*, 12(5), 51-59.

The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, The growing numbers of

English learner students, 1998/99-2008/09. Retrieved from

[http://www.ncela.us/files/uploads/9/growingLEP\\_0809.pdf](http://www.ncela.us/files/uploads/9/growingLEP_0809.pdf)

NCES US Dept of Ed, Institute of Ed Sciences NCES 2004-035 Issue Brief. English

Language Learners in Public Schools: 1994-2000. August 2004

Rafiee, M., Kassaian, Z., Dastjerdi, H. (2010). The application of humorous song in EFL

classrooms and its effects on listening comprehension. *English Language*

*Teaching*. 3(4). 100-108. doi: 10.5539/elt.v3n4p100

- Richards, J. (1969). Songs in language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 3(2), 161-174.
- Richards, J., & Rodgers, T. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosenthal, M. (1998). Caorlyn Graham: A conversation with the creator of jazz chants. *ESL Magazine: The information source for ESL/EFL professionals*. 1(5), Sept./Oct. 1998.
- Schoeep, K. (2001). Reasons for using songs in the ESL/EFL classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 7(2), Feb. 2001. Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Schoeep-Songs.html>
- Schön, D., Boyer, M., Moreno, S., Besson, M., Peretz, I., & Kolinsky, R. (2008). Songs as an aid for language acquisition. *Cognition* 106(2), 975-983.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2007.03.005>
- Sylwester, R. (2006). Cognitive Neuroscience discoveries and educational practices. *School Administrator*, 63 (11). Retrieved from <http://aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=7384>
- Weinstein, S. (2006). A love for the thing: The pleasures of rap as a literate practice. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 50(4), 270-281.  
[doi:10.1598/JAAL.50.4.3](https://doi.org/10.1598/JAAL.50.4.3)
- Wolfe, P. (2006). Brain-compatible learning: Fad or foundation? *School Administrator*, 63(11), 10. [doi: 10.1016/j.cognition.2007.03.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2007.03.005)

## Appendix

**Introduction**

Welcome to educational raps,  
 Academic raps, grammar raps  
 Pronouns and nouns. Get it all right.  
 Just quote these. You can't go wrong.  
 All you need is this.  
 Grammar's the structure of language.  
 Correct it makes a clear message.  
 It shows where the words should be placed.  
 It shows how the forms should be used.  
 It makes your ideas understood.  
 It makes writing proficient and good.  
 I said it makes your ideas understood.  
 It makes writing proficient and good.

Learning grammar's nothing to fear.  
 When correct, it makes language clear.  
 So don't just memorize the rules,  
 But know these raps as helpful tools.  
 That way you'll stand out from the rest  
 When your grammar is the best.  
 I said you'll stand out from the rest  
 When your grammar is the best.

**Nouns, Verbs, Adverbs and Adjectives**

Uh, everybody get ready for the raps I play  
 A noun is a person, place or thing  
 A noun is a person, place or thing and sometimes an idea, yeah  
 Spitting these nouns is a snap  
 Check out the sounds of the nouns that we rap  
 Shops, trees, schools and bikes  
 Kids, cars, streets and bikes  
 Hey get ready for the raps I bring  
 A noun is a person, place or thing  
 A noun is a person, place or thing and sometimes an idea, yeah

We're doin' nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives  
 No question, gotta respect this

We do it nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives  
And verbs is up next kid

Next up,  
There are two kinds of verbs  
The action verb and the linking verb  
The action verb and the linking verb?  
What's that? Well let me explain  
The action verb tells action  
Like run, jump and crawl  
The action verb is always doing  
Let's run, let's jump, let's crawl  
A linking verb's about being  
Like am, is, are, was and were  
Looks, smells, tastes and feels  
Looks, smells, tastes and feels  
Linking verbs are connecting words  
They tell what the subject is  
He is a rapper and he sounds tight  
He is a rapper and he sounds tight

We're doin' nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives  
No question, gotta respect this (two times)  
Nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives  
Adverbs and adjectives

### **Adverbs and Adjectives**

We're doin' nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives (two times)  
Adverbs and adjectives  
An adverb describes a verb, adjective or another adverb  
Gotta find and ask to get your adverb  
To get an adverb  
Follow these two steps  
First step is  
Find the verb, adjective or adverb  
Second step is  
Ask how, when or where  
The answer is  
An adverb, an adverb

How does this sound  
An adjective describes a noun or a pronoun  
You gotta find and ask to your adjective  
To find an adjective  
Follow these two steps  
First step is  
Find the noun or the pronoun  
Second step is  
What kind, which one, how many  
The answer is  
An adjective, ad adjective

Nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives  
No question, gotta respect this (three times)  
Nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives  
Test is up next kid