

New York State  
Teachers of English  
to Speakers of  
Other Languages



**Idiom**

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I dedicated the fall issue of *Idiom* to all TESOL educators for their tireless dedication to their students and stressed the theme of advocacy. For this issue, I'd like to extend the theme by highlighting activities and groups of professionals to demonstrate how advocacy can take place at varying levels.

I would like to thank Ms. Camille Embus Pérez and Ms. Genie Smiddy, Co-Editors, and the team for their hard work on the spring issue of *Idiom*. It took many hours of collecting, reviewing, editing, and formatting the articles into another impressive publication. In addition to the editorial team, I would like to extend my gratitude to the TESOL professionals who submitted their work for consideration and publication. We are honored that many of the articles were authored by renowned researchers, professors, instructors, lecturers, teachers, graduate students, and others, whose common goal is to share their knowledge and skills with the TESOL community.

We are proud that many of the authors were presenters at the annual Applied Linguistics Winter Conference (ALWC). The ALWC was held this year on April 1, 2017 at the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC). We are grateful to BMCC President, Dr. Antonio Pérez and Drs. Kenneth Levinson, Jennifer Delfino and Cynthia Wiseman of the Department of Academic Literacy and Linguistics for their support and hosting the event. Of particular note are Wen (Elyssa) Sun and Rachel Wang, Co-Chairpersons, and their team, along with Dr. Wiseman who was the conference committee advisor. They did a tremendous job in organizing the event.

You may be curious as to why I'm taking up all this space to thank the individuals noted above. The first reason is to bring to light the countless number of people who have full time jobs and care for their families, yet they volunteer their time to promote lifelong learning, advocate for our profession, and endeavor to uplift others intellectually through various venues. It is important for us to recognize that advocacy does not equate only to marches and demonstrations. It can be accomplished by providing high quality education to students on a daily basis and by giving a small part of ourselves to the greater good of the professional community as well as dispelling the misconceptions about the population we have been charged to teach. The second reason is the importance of recognizing volunteerism. Too often we sacrifice leisure time (and for some of us, sleep!) for altruistic reasons, yet our work is minimized and/or we go unrecognized. For many of us, this is just a fact of life, so we simply accept it and continue doing the work in which we deeply believe. But, I would like to ensure that I do my due diligence in conferring accolades on those who often get things done "behind the scenes." Without them, we would not be able to provide successful professional learning opportunities nor would we have research-based articles to share with you.

In closing, I hope that you had a fantastic school year and wish you a well-deserved summer break for reflection and contemplation. Happy reading!

Sincerely,

Anne Henry

Anne Henry  
President, NYS TESOL

**Promising Practices** – *This is an ongoing column featuring advice for effective teaching. Please send article submissions to the column editor, Ann C. Wintergerst at [promisingpractices@idiom.nysesol.org](mailto:promisingpractices@idiom.nysesol.org)*

### **Teaching Cultural Awareness through Critical Incidents\***

**By Ann C. Wintergerst**

Are you looking for a challenging activity to engage your English language learners (ELLs) and to bring cultural awareness into your classroom? One activity that has worked well in my credit-bearing writing or speaking courses at St. John's University and that has peaked student interest is having them discuss, write, or orally present a critical incident (CI) to the class.

Previous work has discussed the importance of intercultural awareness as part of language learning in the classroom, where CIs can be a valuable tool. As such, Wintergerst and McVeigh (2011) propose CIs or brief events that depict an element of cultural difference, miscommunication, or culture clash to promote discussion on differences across cultures, while Brown (2014) offers varied tips to illustrate how lessons and activities may be generated, shaped, and revised according to principles of intercultural language learning. This is given further exploration in DeCapua & Wintergerst's (2016) claim that CIs help develop a student's ability to analyze and understand how multiple perspectives of the same situation are rooted in differing culturally influenced beliefs, behaviors, norms of interaction, and worldviews.

#### **Getting started**

A CI presents a brief story or vignette in which some cultural miscommunication occurs. In such a cross-cultural problematic situation, students examine why miscommunication has occurred and how it could have been avoided, thus sensitizing them and making them aware of cultural differences. CIs can be adapted to any language and education level both in and out of the classroom and work particularly well for pre-writing or speaking activities.

The sample CIs that I distribute in my classes focus on different aspects of culture, such as culture shock, cultural perspectives, non-verbal communication, and societal roles, among others. The situation described in each CI presents a cultural dilemma or problem students analyze to determine how it could have been prevented. Students read, analyze, and discuss the situations and think about what cultural beliefs, behaviors, norms of interaction, or worldviews are influencing the actions described in the event. There is no right or wrong answer and no single solution. The intent of the exercise is threefold: to stimulate thought-provoking discussion based on the incidents, to increase awareness of and sensitivity to cultural differences, and to recognize how culture influences us.

Incorporating *culture shock* in a CI is how I start. The speaking or writing class as a whole is asked to define culture shock, a stage where individuals experience distress and unhappiness due to cultural differences, and

then students are asked three questions: Have you ever experienced culture shock? What was it like? How did you know that you were experiencing it?

I then distribute a handout which has a sample CI related to culture shock and which I read out loud to the class. This cross-cultural problematic situation is discussed by the class as a whole as to what cultural beliefs or behaviors might have influenced the incident. Let's do the first one together.

*You have a student who recently arrived from East Asia. Although his English is quite good, he speaks hesitantly and with a noticeable accent. Your class requires a great deal of student discussion and active participation, but you have trouble getting this student to join in. In fact, he will only speak if you directly call on him. Other students don't feel comfortable working with him in small groups, because they feel he doesn't contribute. As the year goes on, you notice that this student is becoming increasingly quiet and withdrawn. He is also beginning to miss class. \*\**

Students are asked to consider what the cultural dilemma is and how it could have been avoided. Should the class discussion not yield the desired outcome, then the teacher offers the following discussion:

*In many cultures, students are expected not to speak up and participate. The teacher is regarded as the expert and the one to impart important knowledge to the students. The combination of different classroom expectations and relatively weak speaking skills is causing the student in this incident to feel classroom culture shock. He may be missing classes to avoid having to speak up and getting involved in class in a way that makes him feel uncomfortable and embarrassed. \*\**

### Procedure for CIs

The procedure for presenting CIs is as follows:

1. Prepare different sets of 2-4 CIs. How many sets you prepare will depend on the total number of students (e.g., for a group of 12 students prepare 4 sets).
2. Break students into small groups of 3-4. Distribute the sets of CIs and ask them to brainstorm possible solutions.
3. As a full group, discuss the CIs, possible solutions, and the cultural values underlying the areas of cultural conflict.
4. Discuss how some of the CIs relate to their experiences.

Whether a writing or speaking class, writing a CI in class follows. Ask your students to write their own CI and to share it with a partner or the whole group, following the same procedure of discussing the CI, possible solutions, and the cultural values underlying the conflict. If it is a writing class, then students are assigned to write an in-class essay of 4-6 paragraphs on the topic of *Critical Incidents*, incorporating what they have learned from their classmates in the class discussions. Ferris (2014) gives students varied suggestions for strategies for self-editing, discusses the importance of editing, and explores some self-editing techniques which they can apply to their own writing. If it is a speaking class, students will be asked to give an oral presentation instead of writing an essay. Dale and Wolf (2013) in their textbook, *Speech Communication Made Simple*, give students many detailed suggestions for effective oral presentations.

CIs can be written for and adapted to any language level and any age group. Writing a CI in class or presenting it orally and examining why miscommunication has occurred allows students to experience different aspects of culture, understand each other better, and practice as well as demonstrate their writing or speaking skills. What better way to incorporate culture into a class than by using critical incidents!

## Sample Critical Incidents\*\*

### Culture Shock CI

*Mrs. Harberger has noticed that Ana, an immigrant student in her fourth grade class, who at the beginning of the school year seemed happy and excited to be in her classroom, has become quiet and withdrawn, frequently ill, and has increasing difficulty keeping up in class, despite receiving ESL support services. One day she finds Ana sobbing in the bathroom, saying, "I only want to go home."*

*Discussion: Discussions of culture shock often focus on adults and college-age students, but people of all ages can and do suffer from culture shock. Ana's symptoms and desire to "go home," – that is, return to her country, are common indicators of culture shock. Culture shock among children can be severe, especially if they are unwilling immigrants accompanying family members.*

### Cultural Perspectives CI

*The students in your class range from 18 to 50 years of age. Several of the older students have indicated to you that they think they should be in a more advanced class because they are older and that they don't like working with such young students. At the same time, several of the younger students have let you know that they find it very uncomfortable to be in class together with older students.*

*Discussion: In many cultures, age commands respect. It is inconceivable in such a culture to promote a younger employee over an older one, regardless of ability. Likewise, it is difficult to mix large ranges in age-groups in language classrooms, because of potential face-threatening situations, particularly when younger students perform better than older ones.*

### Non-verbal Communication CI

*Masahide, a Japanese student, met his new roommate, Antonio, an Italian student, in the university dormitory. Whenever the two engaged in conversation, Antonio employed his hands, arms, shoulders, and head to make his point. Masahide was concerned, because he thought Antonio must be very upset and angry with him to be so emotional and demonstrative.*

*Discussion: Certain cultures (e.g., Italian, Arab, and Latin American) employ body language that is often different from that found in other cultures (e.g., Pakistani, Malaysian, or Nigerian). Since body language plays a major role in communication, it is important that the parties involved understand its meaning unquestionably.*

### Societal Roles CI

*One of your students informs you that she will miss the next week of school because her cousin has died. You are taken aback but, wanting to be accommodating, suggest that she take along a homework packet that you and her other teachers can prepare for her so that she doesn't get too far behind in her classes. When she leaves you, she is visibly upset.*

*Discussion: In North American culture, cousins are generally not that close, but in many cultures, extended family ties are much tighter. Funerals in some cultures are more involved and require more active participation, even from more "distant" relatives. Suggesting homework, while appropriate in many cultures, could be seen in this instance as a lack of sympathy for the student, who has just lost a family member and will be spending important time participating in rites and grieving with the*

*family.*

\*This article is adapted from my conference presentations delivered at NYSABE, White Plains, NY, March 4, 2017; at NYS TESOL, Syracuse, NY, November 4, 2016; and at TESOL, Baltimore, MD, April 5, 2016.

\*\*Sample critical incidents were taken from: DeCapua, A., & Wintergerst, A. C. (2016). *Crossing cultures in the language classroom*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. ©2016 UMP. Used by permission.

Brown, H. D. (2014). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). White Plains, NY: Pearson Education, Inc. (Chapter 7)

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## Enhancing Curriculum Access and Classroom Equity through Academic Language

By **Scott B. Freiberger**

Academic language is utilized in all classrooms, and as students ascend, its frequency tends to increase by grade level (Breiseth, 2014). As we challenge our students to delve into higher-level cognitive processes, sentences become more complex and vocabulary tends to become more arcane (Hill & Miller, 2013). As we now understand the concept, academic language includes professional dialogue, complex conversations, and academic text specked with key vocabulary terms.

### Academic vs. Social English

What confounds educators is when students demonstrate mastery of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), or “social English,” but have difficulty with Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), or academic language. Research conducted over the past 30 years supports the notion that most English language learners (ELLs) take 5-7 years “to approach grade norms in academic aspects of English (e.g. vocabulary knowledge)” (Cummins, 2008). Dr. Cummins provides a common-sense rationale as to why many ELLs may not be on grade-level norms with their native English-speaking peers after only a few years.

Thus, ELLs struggling with academic language may, *ipso facto*, be struggling with language in their core content classes.

### Academic Language by Discipline

In all classrooms, academic language tends to vary by subject. In order for students to succeed academically, they must be introduced to and become familiar with subject-specific classroom language. Delve deeper than presenting an intermittent smattering of vocabulary cards, and utilize academic language by discipline via apropos conversational discourse rather than common, everyday speech (Hill & Miller, 2013).

### Instructional Strategies

*Use graphic organizers to clarify meaning.*

Model for your students what academic language looks and sounds like. Write the heading “Classroom Language” on a two-column graphic organizer. Label the first column, “Social English,” and pen, “I like,” “I think,” “I pick,” “But,” and “I help.” Under the opposite column, “Academic English,” depict, “I prefer,” “I conclude,” “I select,” “Upon further reflection,” and “I assist” (NYC DOE, 2016). Distinguishing can be done across disciplines. Under “Language Arts,” write a “Social English” column, “This book is good;” under “Academic English” write, “This story captivates far more than the previous one” (Breiseth, 2014). A similar chart in “Social Studies” could read, “They were brave” under “Social English” and, “What valor! The undaunted soldiers continued to fight in the face of tremendous adversity” to illustrate “Academic English” (Breiseth, 2014). For “Science,” the “Social English” column could read, “It rolled,” while the “Academic English” column could depict, “The convoluted object spiraled sideways” (Breiseth, 2014). In a move toward less “academic” fields, demonstrate the stark contrast in language employed in business communications compared with everyday personal usage. Get students thinking about academic language with professional reviews of their favorite books compared with pubescent fans’ enthusiastic reviews on social media (Breiseth, 2014).

### Continue to Clarify

Educators must use academic language and its distinct features in order to reach all students (NYC DOE, 2016). School leaders should therefore take careful steps to ensure that educators are informed of how standards-based instruction and tiered questioning techniques enhance academic language for all. Educators, in turn, should carefully select academic vocabulary words to teach across disciplines. Providing authentic visual and verbal supports will not only make academic language accessible for all learners, but it will also help students become college and career-ready.

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## Interacting with Journalistic English: A Critical Language Awareness Project

By Xi Chen

This project is designed to raise critical language awareness among English as a foreign language (EFL) college students in China, with regard to their understanding of the social, cultural, and political connotation of journalistic English. Framed by Janks’ (2000) critical literacy education, this project, described by three sample lessons, introduces six analytical scales to students to decode media discourse: commendatory/derogatory, nominalization, code names, person, voice, information structure.

### Conceptual Orientation

Janks (2000) defines **critical literacy education** as education “particularly concerned with teaching learners to understand and manage the relationship between language and power” (p. 176). However, many EFL students in China have been receiving exam-oriented English education, lacking opportunities to develop contextualized language use and critical literacy. As a result, students tend to hold a structuralist view of language as a fixed set of codes, rather than a dynamic discourse “maintaining and reproducing relations of domination” (Janks, 2000, p. 176).

In filling this gap, a critical language awareness pedagogy is considered helpful. Clark et al. (1987) and Fairclough (1989, 1992, 1995) describe **critical language awareness** as the ability to deconstruct texts by inquiring how language choices arrived at the writer’s intended meanings. “Texts are constructed. Anything that has been constructed can be deconstructed. This unmaking or unpicking of the text increases our awareness of the choices that the writer has made” (as cited in Janks, 2000, p. 176). In other words, instead of taking what is given in the text, readers with critical language awareness should be able to see the intentionality behind the text that constructs meaning. My students seem to experience similar struggles of knowing the dictionary meaning of English words but cannot make sense of the whole passage. Targeting this weakness, the project guides students to deconstruct the text, to inquire why certain language choices are made, and to make better sense of both the text and context. In this EFL curriculum, I chose the media discourse because of the political role that media increasingly play in publicity and communication in the late modern era. According to Cameron (2007), “Media are deeply imbricated in relations of power and ideology

given that “the representation of any issue for a mass audience has implications for the way it is understood” (as cited in Johnson & Milani, 2010, p.5). In other words, linguistic choices in the media discourse, by which political institutions exert their power, constantly shape the mass audience’s understanding. Therefore, awareness of those power relations is needed in order to “tease out the social mechanisms through which particular ideas or beliefs about linguistic practices are produced through meaning-making activities under particular conditions” (Johnson & Milani, 2010, p. 4). To equip students with such critical language awareness, I ask students to explore questions including:

- Why language is about power? Whose language has power?
- How is journalistic language political?
- How does certain news language benefit some and hurt others?
- Why did the journalist make these choices?
- Whose interests do they serve?
- Who is empowered or disempowered by the language used?

### Three Sample Lessons

In the first lesson, in “**Building the framework**”, the teacher introduces the first three scales — commendatory/derogatory, nominalization and code names, by explaining sample news excerpts and scaffolding reading. In “**Interacting with text**”, students examine the lexical features in two news reports by answering, for example: *How do you feel when the US government is referred as “Uncle Sam”? How will readers interpret it when journalists call these people ‘protestants arrested’ vs. ‘thousands arrested’?* Students will be able to see how a simple lexicon can intentionally tease out the expected understandings. Lastly, in “**Further inquiries**”, a group assignment applies the three analytical scales in a student-chosen text. This freer activity “opens the possibility for students to act on their own knowledge” (Christensen, 2000 p. 105).

The second lesson follows the same strands of “Building the framework” “Interacting with text” and “Further inquiries”, but moves up to a syntactic level. By comparing two news reports about China reforming the One-Child Policy, students use three analytical scales — person, voice, and information structure — to examine how different use of pronouns, narrative persons, and active/passive voice implies different agencies and different perspectives of the same event. Similarly, students read two news reports written in different structures and compare the different emphasis of the meaning group, seeing that facts can be “distorted or maligned by the media and historical, literacy, and linguistic inaccuracy” (Christensen, 2000, p. 113).

In the final lesson, students, in small groups, conduct a mini-study in English news to present to the whole class. Using at least three of the six analytical scales, students analyze the linguistic/rhetoric features and examine the contextualized meaning of the news reports. The role of students is two-fold. As critical readers, they read “words” as well as “worlds” (Gee, 1986, 1990, as cited in Janks, 2000). As authors of their own projects, students are independent researchers of journalistic English, what Griffith et al. (2014) call “linguisticians”, who collect data in authentic social discourse(s), interpret data, and produce meaningful findings. The final projects demonstrate students’ abilities to use contextual cues to construct meanings. As language learners, students not only read the dictionary meaning of the words, but also make sense of the text by looking at the socially constructed connotations of the language. Equipped with heightened critical



language awareness, students will engage in more contextualized EFL reading experience.

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## **Press Record: How Collaborative Podcast Creation Improves Student Speaking**

**By Michelle Kaplan**

English as a Second Language teachers search for innovative and engaging ways to provide students with the best education possible. One unique way to help students improve their listening and speaking skills is by having them collaborate to produce a podcast based on a class theme.

### **Project Rationale**

Because self expression in language occurs not only through the words we say but the manner in which they are said, students can benefit by creating a podcast because audio recordings isolate the voice. Here, students are unable to rely on body language and facial expressions and must focus solely on their vocal production, where they must work particularly hard to improve their stress, intonation, pronunciation, and projection. This, coupled with the project’s high volume of audio recordings and constant self-evaluation aimed at increasing students’ awareness of their speaking ability, can ultimately enhance their ability to speak intelligibly (Aoki, 2014). . This project works towards and helps them express themselves in their second language.

Finally, this project places a large emphasis on student collaboration. Students have the responsibility of making their own choices during this project, as collaboration and learner autonomy benefit students and provide them with ownership over their language learning (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003).

### **Overview of Project**

In a class that meets for less than four hours per week, this project takes approximately six weeks to complete. If you do not have the time for this in your classroom, there are modifications you can make to complete the project in your teaching context. Students begin this project by researching several different podcasts and unpacking them to understand what most podcasts entail. They use critical thinking skills to discuss what makes an effective podcast and an interesting interview. After this scaffolding period, students create a proposal for an original podcast episode based on the class theme. The 10-12 minute long podcasts must include small talk and natural conversation, research on a chosen topic, and storytelling. Additionally, students must use class and self-learned vocabulary in their episode to practice using vocabulary in context.

After the proposals are approved by the teacher, students complete a written outline. While the podcast should not be scripted, an outline helps students smoothly transition from one topic to another and reminds them what benchmarks they need to meet during their episode. In the subsequent weeks, students develop their recorded rough and final drafts, which are evaluated by their peers and the teacher. During their final presentation, students share an introduction of their episode which includes a brief summary and the vocabulary words used. As an option, students may present to a larger audience of students, administrators, and the general public. Podcasts are graded based on a teacher-provided rubric.

### **Collaboration**

Students have many opportunities to work in groups as podcast groups consist of two to three students. Students work with these groups for the entirety of the project, but they also collaborate with the class as a whole. The class must create the name of the podcast, and students are broken up into different groups to develop a logo, choose music, and write a description of the class podcast. These aspects of the project further allow for student creativity with minimal teacher guidance.

### **Audio Journals**

During the project, students produce one audio journal per week, which helps them improve certain language functions they will use in their podcasts. This audio journal is based on the teacher's prompt to elicit certain language functions. After their journal is recorded, students evaluate their work based on the teacher's questions. These journals allow students to take control over their own language learning, find ways to improve their speaking, and become comfortable listening to the sound of their own voice. The students may not script their audio journal responses, as they should be producing completely natural language that is unplanned. This allows them to hear the most accurate version of their performance, which will lead to more productive self evaluations and progress.

### **Exercises in Projection, Stress, and Intonation**

Students learn to record their podcast on the free computer program, Audacity. During the class, students use a microphone to practice interviews with classmates. Students are able to view the soundwaves they are

creating on Audacity. If the soundwaves are too small, this may indicate that the student is not projecting enough or varying their stress and intonation. I encourage the student to make a change in their speaking to make the waves larger and more varied. Students also perform celebrity interview roleplays where they practice their fluency and move around the room to experiment with projection and suprasegmentals. These activities allow students to practice making physical changes to produce clear language.

### Outcomes and Technology

This project has been successful in the five semesters I have conducted it at The New School. Student fluency improves, as well as their stress, intonation, pronunciation, and projection. As the podcasts are lengthy, students overcome any mistakes naturally and fluently. The students comment that they were worried about the project at the beginning but are now confident and proud of their work. One student remarked, “I learned how to organize content, make a plan or an outline, and learn from making a mistake.” She also enjoyed practicing stress and intonation. “I started using it in my real life and it’s very helpful when I want to express my emotions or my feelings to people who I talk with, and it would be easy for them to understand me...” I recommend conducting this project in your classroom in order to engage the students, help empower them when it comes to self evaluation, and improve their speaking skills. Please feel free to visit the following sites:

[RWaveFM](#)

[The Magnifly Podcast](#)

[RelationTrip](#)

For more information on how to create your own podcast project, please contact Michelle Kaplan at [michelle.kaplan33@gmail.com](mailto:michelle.kaplan33@gmail.com)

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## Why Hip Hop for ELLs?

By Christian Perticone

It is not uncommon to find a teacher incorporating music and the musical performance in class. At my school, guitar cases rest against the wall in our shared office, and the light plink of a ukulele often floats from the doorway of an integrated skills classroom. In Marilyn Abbott's 2002 article *Using Music to Promote L2 Learning Among Adult Learners*, the author provides sound reasoning to support what many teachers know intuitively – music enlivens the classroom and lends itself to the development of L2 listening and speaking skills in students. Most famously, Carolyn Graham, creator of *Jazz Chants*, has popularized the recitation of authentic language with features of connected speech in conjunction with the rhythms of traditional American jazz. The lesson that I will outline below has its predecessors; however it also challenges students to produce features of connected speech in a slightly different way. In this Hip Hop for ELLs lesson, students develop their abilities as writers/composers as well as speakers and listeners.

Abbott (2002) expands upon previous research in providing guidelines for using music with college-age ELLs. In order to help students achieve the proficiency to recite song lyrics in sync with a beat, using the appropriate rhythm and stress, Abbott suggests having the students read the written lyrics, and then count the beats and syllables in each line. After that, the teacher should pause the music and let the students read the lyrics while emphasizing the rhythm and stresses that they have annotated. The students repeat and accelerate their recital until they have matched the original song. At this point, the teacher can play the music and let the students sing along with the artist.

In this Hip Hop for ELLs lesson, I prepare the students to compose and perform their raps by first familiarizing them with the relationship between beats per line, and syllable-count per lyric. I explain these elements of hip hop in two ways. I do a cloze exercise of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air theme* (Smith, Jones 1992), and/or I show the Vox Documentary *Rapping, Deconstructed: The Best Rhymers of All Time*. The Vox documentary is invaluable because it informs students about the cultural and aesthetic context of hip-hop and provides several visually diagrammed hip-hop verses that are color-coded to illustrate rhyme patterns and syllable stresses. Once the students feel reasonably comfortable reciting the hip hop lyrics of well-known rappers in time with instrumental beats, I begin the composition phase.

I show the class my brief youtube video, "Why Hip Hop for English Language Learners (ELLs)?" which defines connected speech with respect to the lesson, explains how to compose a simple rap, and shows real students performing their own raps. The video reveals that this lesson draws inspiration from the

composition technique of legendary rapper Rakim – as I provide each student with a sheet of paper on which I have printed a four-by-four table. Each horizontal box on the table represents a beat within a “bar”. Students then compose their lyrics within the boxes. They must choose one syllable or word within each box which they will stress. The students are invited to follow a simple rhyme scheme like AA BB, or AB AB, but it is not necessary. The diagram below is an example of a student’s composition.

<b>B A R 1</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Every— Sounds like “urry”</b>	<b>— thing</b>
<b>B A R 2</b>	<b>That’s Sounds like “Dats”</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>Do</b>
<b>B A R 3</b>	<b>Gimme</b>	<b>yUr</b>	<b>Num—</b>	<b>—ba</b>
<b>B A R 4</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>wanna</b>	<b>no</b>	<b>U</b>

To compose their raps, the students are placed in groups to brainstorm rap ideas and practice lyric recital. As the students write, I play a rap song without the lyrics to help the students internalize the pace and beat at which they have to ultimately perform their raps. At the same time, I move from group to group clapping my hands to the beat of the song. I also demonstrate how to sync my speech up with the beat of the song. It should be noted, I do not feel the need to rhyme my speech while I speak with the beat; rhyming is not of great pedagogical importance for the success of the lesson.

A teacher can decide to do one of two things during group work—either explicitly explain some of the features of connected speech or allow students to generate them as they accelerate the pace of their rap to sync with the instrumental beat. If the teacher chooses to explain assimilation, reduction, weak forms, or other aspects of connected speech that affect stress and rhythm, it is advisable to take a phonetic approach. Scaffold the weak form, reduction and assimilation of “What is up?” to “What’s up?” to “Whad’up?”, and explain how middle t’s often become d’s, but avoid the linguistic terminology. If the teacher decides to put off an explanation of connected speech until after the students have performed for the class,

then the teacher can draw on the student-generated examples of connected speech and extract rules and principles via reflection.

When the class is ready, play the instrumental track and let the students perform their amazing raps! This music lesson challenges ELL’s in a slightly different way than those mentioned in Abbott’s article. As writer/composers, students are led to naturally generate features of connected speech when they are faced with the economy of sounds permitted within the four-beats-per-bar structure.

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## Sounds of Learning: Teaching Pronunciation through Song to ELLs in Vietnam

By Rachel Weber

### Background

Quynh Thanh, a rural village on the North Central Coast of Vietnam, is home to many underserved and impoverished adolescents. In 2010 the average monthly income for the North Central Coast was 902,900 VND (roughly \$40 USD) compared to the whole country of 1,387,200 VND. About 17.3% of the population completes upper secondary school and only 5.2% go on to university (Nguyen, 2017). The Vietnam Education Project (VNEP), a start-up organization that consists of American public school teachers and Vietnamese student-teachers, helped create and implement educational resources and opportunities for middle and high school aged children during a one month long English language summer camp in 2016. One of the primary learning tools used to teach pronunciation was American pop music. While incorporating musical lyrics into the curriculum provided many engaging learning opportunities and cultural exchanges, some challenges still arose.

### Research

Language and music have several common, recognizable features. Neurologists have found that musical and auditory language comprehension occur in the same area of the brain (Broca's area), and there are connections in how musical and linguistic syntax are processed (Maess & Koelsch, 2001). Songs can be considered the “middle ground” between linguistics and musicology since songs possess both “the communicative aspect of language and the entertainment aspect of music” (Jolly, 1975, p. 11). Additionally, songs serve as an instrument for introducing EFL learners to the cultural nuances in language use (i.e. slang, idioms) and reveal to learners how rhythm, stress, and intonation affect the pronunciation of English in context. Performing a group or individual reading of a song’s lyrics can benefit learners during pronunciation practice due to the phonemic differences between English and other languages (Moriya, 1988). An analysis of a large corpus of popular songs determined that pop music has many common linguistic features that aid ELLs. These features include: common, short words, personal pronouns (94% contain first-person “I”), imperatives and questions (25% of sentences in the corpus), and repetition of vocabulary (Murphey, 1992). Lyrics also underscore certain universal themes that bring cultures together and allow for learners to identify and interpret the song based on their life experiences. Ultimately, pop music provides an authentic, real world

link to curriculum that allows learners to hear language produced naturally and fluidly and to engage in communicative language learning.

### **Learning Environment and Curriculum**

Students attended class 5 days a week for approximately 50 minutes a day. The class consisted of 20 students between the ages of 15 and 17. There were two teachers in the classroom: one American public school teacher and one Vietnamese student-teacher. The class was mainly taught in English; however, when complex directions needed more explanation, the student-teacher would translate. Students also had access to Oxford English-Vietnamese dictionaries. The students understood English at variable proficiency levels, which were determined by a written baseline exam at the start of the summer camp. The curriculum included 3 thematic unit plans: “In the Classroom,” “Self-identity,” and “The World Around Us.” When choosing a song for a thematic unit, the musical artist and lyrics were considered. According to Lems (1996), lyrics should be clearly audible, have a “manageable” lexile complexity for learners’ proficiency levels, contain enough repetition for oral practice, and be culturally appropriate (i.e. no explicit language) for the selected population. For these reasons, Michael Jackson’s “Heal the World” was used in the last thematic unit.

A typical class would begin with minimal pair pronunciation exercises in whole class and group sessions. Students would pronounce a list of words (i.e. TANK-THANK; DAY-THEY) that focused on the problematic phoneme. They would listen to sentences that incorporated the minimal pairs and complete the sentences with the correct form of the word. The phonemes were then observed in the song. The song was introduced in logical “chunks” of text. Gap exercises were incorporated and focused on nouns that were repeated in the choral refrains and throughout the song. The nouns were often rhymed pairs (e.g. tomorrow, sorrow), so students could concentrate on the sound of the words and easily hear the words sung in the song. They could also hear how words were pronounced in a fluid manner. The lyrics also served to build vocabulary and helped students distinguish between abstract and concrete meanings. To underscore the song’s theme, students were asked to brainstorm current problems that they find in their village and solutions that could help “heal” their community. Examples of current American concerns were used as models in order to familiarize students with American culture. The students’ examples included: environmental pollution, poverty, and educational inequalities. They then had to develop possible ways to remedy the issues and explain their role in “making the world a better place.”

### **Results and Limitations**

“Heal the World” was introduced in the second week of the summer class. The students practiced the song daily for two weeks and performed as a group at the end of the third week. By this time all 20 students had not memorized the song and needed to read from the song sheet. Individual assessments of pronunciation were not given. Although the students were engaged in learning, more time needs to be devoted to track student progress and provide targeted feedback on a consistent basis. One possible solution is to develop a rubric that includes a scale for evaluating specific language features such as pronunciation of minimal pairs, grammatical endings, rhythm in sentences, and word stress. Additionally teachers can record individual student performances and have students assess their own progress.

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## **Student Self-Publication: Zines as Reflective Writing Portfolios**

**By Sarah A. Custen**

I have been captivated by the power of zines for a long time, and in many capacities--as a casual reader, amateur producer, librarian/archivist, and community outreach educator. Zines offer a window into another person's world through the mediums of text, art and design, in a way that feels at once more private and more accessible than traditional forms of publication. Teaching others to make zines gives them access to tools for both expression and dissemination of their ideas. As an ESOL teacher, I use zines as a resource for integrating multiple skills in a task-based, cumulative writing project, allowing students to express themselves beyond the boundaries of their classroom.

### **A Bit of Background**

"Zine" (short for "magazine") generally refers to a narrowly-circulated, self-published work, usually reproduced via photocopier (University of Texas Libraries, 2017). Zines are often defined by what they are not: they are not books, nor magazines, nor even mini-magazines, as the word "magazine" carries stylistic implications, which may not be true of any particular zine. Rather, zines are "productions of creative minds; they may be written, drawn, painted, printed, or pasted.... [T]he essence of a zine, much like that of a poem, is that a zine is anything that calls itself a zine" (SLC Alternative Press). As a form of alternative press, zines "democratize the world of publishing...[opening] the playing field to ideas and imagery that otherwise may never have the opportunity to circulate using traditional means" (SLC Alternative Press). Self-publication allows for the exploration of different forms for communicating information and personal narratives, making



it an excellent resource for those seeking to find and express their voice in writing.

### **ELL Classroom Applications and Benefits**

Zines are a way for ELLs to showcase their writing, as a capstone project or portfolio, while also offering a means of productive reflection on their learning experiences and growth as writers in English. As Donato and McCormick (1994) have observed, portfolios are “directly connected to the material products of one’s learning” and therefore “the reflection is anchored in concrete evidence of learning experiences,” rather than serving as an isolated form of introspection (p. 457). Zines are a way of mediating reflection through student-generated evidence.

Additionally, zines provide an excellent way of collecting what might otherwise be disparate, one-off writing exercises. By creating zines, students are able to gather their written assignments--from self-introductions and descriptive paragraphs, to personal essays, poetry, recipes and even fiction--into a cohesive, tangible and memorable booklet. Furthermore, and this is the crucial element, students’ zines can be submitted to library collections throughout the US and the world, available for perusal by the general public, as opposed to students’ typical audience of teachers and classmates. This gives students a real and specific context for their writing, as well as a strong sense of motivation to revise and present their best work.

### **Methodology and Resources**

In order to produce zines, students must know what zines are--they need to see examples. The best way to accomplish this, as a teacher, is by accumulating a collection of past students’ work. However, in advance of that, there are many excellent resources, both locally and online. Barnard College, Brooklyn College, and The New York City Public Library are among the many places students and teachers can go to browse zines up-close and in person. There are also many online resources, with access to downloadable, printable PDFs of zines. For a more complete listing of zine libraries and other resources, please visit the Barnard Zine Library at [zines.barnard.edu](http://zines.barnard.edu).

The zine portfolio project can be introduced early on in the course, setting the stage and conceptual framework for all writing assignments up front, or it can be introduced at the end, which requires students to identify themes in their own writing, rather than plotting a thematic course in advance. Either way, it is imperative that students or teachers hold on to completed writing assignments, as these form the content for their zines.

In terms of actual production, there are many options, each with its own benefits. Students can produce individual zines, creating a highly personalized representation of themselves and their work, or they can work collaboratively, which has the added benefit of encouraging language use through negotiation and teamwork. Group zines can be organized by author or by writing assignment and may center on a pre-chosen or discovered theme common among group members. Zines may be hand-written or typed, depending on the technology available, and students are encouraged to add photos, drawings, and any other elements that complement their written work. Additionally, it is beneficial, though not necessary, that students revise and edit their work for a final time. They can also add to their written assignments with paragraph-length writing exercises that form an integral part of the zine, such as author biographies, introductions and conclusions. A table of contents is also highly recommended.

### **Conclusion**

Zines as ELL writing portfolios use self-publication to integrate written work and mediate self-reflection. Knowing their work will be read by others provides students with a real and specific context for their writing, serves as strong motivation, offers a sense of cohesion, and yields a meaningful, tangible capstone to any course.

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## **Magic Yet Mundane: The Social Creativity of Language**

**By Gwen Lowenheim**

As humans, we have the mundane yet magical capacity to be who-we-are and who-we-are-not simultaneously. Tapping into this capacity can enhance language learning. Let's look at how we first learn language. No matter where we are born, we become speakers by playing with language and making meaning with adults and other speakers. Adults relate to babies as fellow makers of meaning before babies know how to speak. In other words, infants are related to as who-they-are (non speakers) and who-they-are-becoming (speakers) simultaneously and infants join in by creatively imitating the speakers around them.

In this process, we suspend "reason" and talk to infants even though we know that they don't understand us. This very ordinary activity is what is magical to me. It begins as relational, social performance with the experienced language user relating to the inexperienced language user as an "equal" player. It does not matter to us in the speaking community that we have no idea what a baby is saying or even if she is saying words. And it ends with a new speaker.

Likewise, in the TESOL classroom, we relate to students as both non-speakers of English (who-they-are) and fluent speakers of English (who-they-are-becoming).

## **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**

Lev Vygotsky, the Russian developmental psychologist whose socio-cultural theory has been influential in language teaching called this kind of activity the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Lois Holzman (2014) developmental psychologist and linguist, characterizes the ZPD, as follows: "People construct "zones" - the space between who they are and who they are becoming – that allow them to become. What is new here...is the acceptance of, and attempt to understand human beings as both being-and-becoming. From this perspective, the ZPD is the ever emergent and continuously changing "distance" between being-and-becoming."

Yet once children become adept at using language, they typically become alienated from this creative capacity. According to Ken Robinson (2001), we do not grow into creativity. Rather we grow out of it. We are often we are educated out of it

My goal as a TESOL teacher is to reconnect my students to this creative capacity and put it to work. My classroom activities are designed to create ZPDs putting teachers and students in touch with our capacity to be who-we-are and who-we-are-not at one and the same time through performance and improvisation.

### **In the classroom: Let's Improvise!**

Picture what actors do on a stage. They become someone else, and at the same they never stop being themselves. Language teachers have long used performance-based approaches, particularly improvisation, for developing classroom interaction in the target language. I am suggesting that performance is more than a classroom technique; it is a lens for seeing our students and ourselves (like infants) not as only as acquirers of new vocabulary but as active social, relational, makers of meaning.

Improvisation is particularly valuable because it requires "creating the ensemble." In my experience, this promotes an especially rich environment for harnessing students' ability to do things they don't know how to do, mitigating the fear of making a mistake becoming immersed in the moment and taking responsibility for the classroom "ensemble." Together we create a stage (the ZPD) where linguistic risks are not avoided but embraced and celebrated.

Here's one example of how I use this understanding of performance. On day one, I ask students, "how do babies learn to speak?" We investigate the environment co-created by speakers and non-speakers. We notice the support that the baby is given to be who they are -we express pleasure; we do not correct or get annoyed - and who they are becoming by continuing to speak to them. I tell them that the baby and the parents are creating a "stage" on which the baby can perform as a speaker. We consider the fact that babies are the best language learners we know and we explore what we can use from that early language learning performance to create our own language learning stage in class, which we rebuild each time we meet.

While they are not pretending to be babies and parents, they have the similar experience of creating a stage on which they can all perform as speakers of English! The teachers I have trained have found this new lens, and a wide array of activities designed for the classroom, to add to their expertise as instructors. They are able to co-create performatory, fun environments, which tap into students' very early language learning experiences, and in very little time, they report that they are collectively creating new activities with their students. This always inspires me.

In the Reference and Resources sections, you will find academic as well as practical books, articles and websites about the approach, including activities such as, building ensembles in the classroom, making pronunciation fun, activating careful listening, and relating to academic essay writing as a pedagogical resource.

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Holzman, L. (2009). *Vygotsky at work and play*. London: Routledge.

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Vygotsky, L. S. (2004). Imagination and creativity in childhood. *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology*, 42(1), 7-97.

### Resources:

[East Side Institute](#)

[Improv Activities for Teachers of English](#)

[Improv Encyclopedia - Classroom Activities](#)

[Performing the World](#)

[Performance of a Lifetime](#)

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