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## It'S Time to Face The Music: Singing the Praises of Popular Music in Today's Curriculum

Shannon Flatt Dasher

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IT'S TIME TO FACE THE MUSIC: SINGING THE PRAISES OF POPULAR MUSIC  
IN TODAY'S CURRICULUM

by

SHANNON FLATT DASHER

(Under the Direction of John A. Weaver)

ABSTRACT

This study explored the possibility of incorporating popular music into the curriculum in order to increase student motivation in a time of standardization. As a classroom teacher, I have witnessed students, time after time become uninterested in the present curriculum. I was curious to find out if by incorporating popular music into the lessons of teachers, students would be more apt to learn in school. Cultural inquiry was used as the main method to guide the collection and analysis of the information from the participants through a cultural studies theoretical framework.

INDEX WORDS: Cultural studies, Popular culture, Popular music, Standardization, Curriculum, Hip-hop

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by

SHANNON FLATT DASHER

B.S., Brewton-Parker College, 1998

M.Ed., Georgia Southern University, 2003

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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SHANNON FLATT DASHER

Major Professor: John A. Weaver

Committee: Ming Fang He  
Daniel Chapman  
Toby Daspit

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## DEDICATION

First and foremost I would like to dedicate this to the two best daughters in the world, Brooke and Cameron. Brooke and Cameron are the reasons I do so many of the things I do. You make me so proud and gave me the drive that kept me going through this chapter in my life. Thank you for letting me rush you around after school so that I could get to class. I hope you always remember just how proud I am of you. I hope you will always go after your dreams! I love you both so much!

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to my nephews Cooper and Gunner. Cooper, you have really kept me on my feet.

Gunner, I can't wait for you to keep me on my feet too. I love you both so much!

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of my descriptive and exploratory study was to explore incorporating popular culture and popular music into classrooms and curricula in order to raise student achievement and interest in school. This study allowed for teachers and students alike to give their opinions and offer them a voice on educational and popular culture matters.

I demonstrated how school can become more meaningful. It is my opinion that a meaningful school is one that seeks to truly educate its students. A meaningful education is not an education that teaches students how to become better test takers, but instead an education that strives to promote and enhance personal interests. A meaningful school does not turn its students into products that result from an assembly line type of education, but one that reaches out to individuals. A meaningful school promotes education for the sake of learning, and not simply as an outlet to make more money and get a high paying job.

#### Context of Study

The students I taught three years ago have ignited a fire within me that students of the past have been fueling. I have taught students in the Early Intervention Program also known as E.I.P., for four of the past five years in Southeast Georgia. The demographics of my most recent class were not so different from the others. There are typically about fourteen students in my second grade classes with the majority of them being black males. These students are typically labeled by some educators I work with as being slow, dumb, helpless, and bad. Some of these teachers have stated they do not want to teach these kinds of students because they are harder to teach and do not typically meet

standards on standardized testing. I have come to know these students as quite the opposite. Many of these students were considered bad because they acted out in class. Most of them acted out because they were bored and uninterested.

A great number of students are hindered from performing to their fullest capacities by ill-fitted curricula, unmotivating teaching methods, unwelcoming school buildings, and testing and tracking practices that prematurely identify and label them before they are given a chance to develop their own individualities and potentials. (Hanschke, 1998, 18)

My students were not exceptions to the rule. They just were not making connections with the information presented to them. School had not been personal enough for them, and they merely had not connected with the material the way it had been given to them. So why do some students "get it" and others do not? There are numerous reasons for this, but I want to focus on one in particular. School needs to be more meaningful, and I hope to uncover that it can be through the integration of popular culture with an emphasis on popular music. It is my belief that this will allow these students to make better connections with the material they are expected to learn at school.

I will never forget a time when my students helped to teach me a lesson instead of me teaching them. It was because of my students that I realized I needed to change my approach. One day in particular really helped me decide on how to improve my future lessons. My students were having a difficult time counting money. I had pulled out every trick in the book. I exposed the students to manipulatives, paired them up, and even gave one-on-one instruction. They were becoming frustrated, and I was too. Then out of the blue a student shouted out, "50 cents!" Then another one asked me if I knew

who 50 Cent (pronounced Fitty Cent) was. I did not really know, so I had the student tell me. I tried to correct him and asked, "Do you mean Fifty Cents?" He explained that it was without the letter s at the end. All of a sudden we were having a whole group discussion as the students just came to life. So I took full advantage of their interest and kept the lesson going. In order to keep the lesson going and make it meaningful I had to use popular culture and music to do so. The students explained that 50 Cent was a hip-hop artist. They began singing some of the lyrics to a couple of his songs. They kept singing, "I'll take you to the candy shop" from the song titled Candy Shop. They also kept singing, "Lil mama show me how you move it" from the song titled Disco Inferno. I recognized both songs from the radio. Because of this the students were all of a sudden interested in learning how to count coins. It was at this point that I realized I needed to learn more about popular culture and music for myself as well as for my students' sake. I finally figured out how to begin getting through to students who normally were not interested in school or passionate about it.

There were other instances where the students would sing and dance in the middle of working on an assignment. It did not bother me as long as they were still working and learning, even though I was taught as an undergraduate that children need to be quiet in order to learn. I knew what was going on in their minds. Many of them knew so much about music and the latest rappers and singers and kept up with all the latest releases. They were proud of their knowledge as well. Why not take advantage of this? The only obstacle in my way was my principal. She believes in sticking to the curriculum and getting high standardized test scores. She does not appreciate it when she walks into classrooms and they are not silent with students working diligently at their desks. I knew

that I could reach my students better and have them achieve more with music as a part of the classroom environment. This would require for there to be noise in the classroom and the students would need to be able to be out of their seats at times. It would also require adding a little extra to the curriculum. But this was a risk that I was willing and had to take. I took that risk and ended up having a wonderful year with those kids. But I still needed to learn more because I was just scratching the surface.

The reason for this is a result of standardization. There are a couple of different reasons for such standardization and accountability. One reason is because the government has forced it into the schools with *No Child Left Behind*. This act states that all students must meet standards by the year 2012. As a result, administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders are scrambling to ensure that students meet the requirements. Teachers are then forced to teach students how to become better test takers because standardized test scores are the determining factor. Another reason standardization is forced into schools is because there is so much competition. There is competition between schools, colleges, universities, and even between countries. Test scores are the chosen factors that represent how poorly or how well schools are preparing their students. It is my opinion that schools are leaving children behind because they are not receiving the proper education.

I am going to find more information in this area because I believe teachers can incorporate popular culture and popular music into the classrooms to help students become more successful. It is no secret that the more meaningful a lesson is, the more apt the students will learn from it.



### Reconnecting Schools to Students' Lives

The purpose of my descriptive and exploratory study is to explore the possibility of incorporating popular culture and popular music into the classrooms to raise student achievement and interest in school. Student achievement does not necessarily mean higher test scores. My interpretation of student achievement is when a student learns something new and can apply it to real world situations. This could be anything from shopping and spending money to problem solving. Students need to learn how to successfully be a part of their surroundings. They are successful when they give back. Students need to be able to think and reason for themselves. Problem solving skills need to be developed, as well as critical thinking skills. These skills can not be taught by multiple choice tests. Some schools teach character education now thinking it will teach students how to be better citizens. At my school it has become reduced to a bulletin board. Some teachers may briefly talk about what it means to be responsible, supportive, or understanding. More time should be spent allowing students to practice and truly learn these virtues; instead, they are being forced out of the classroom to concentrate on enduring understandings as students stare at standards posted verbatim on the classroom walls.

Real world situations are not multiple choice tests. In what job do employees take a weekly multiple choice test to measure their knowledge? Students are being taught that school is a place they need to go so when they grow up they can go to college to make a lot of money. School should not be viewed as a place children go so they can get a good job later in life. I have often times heard parents of my own students tell their children that they need to do well in my class so they can make a lot of money when they get

older. The students then believe their sole purpose for being at school is so they can be rich later in life. I have held discussions with my students on this topic and very few have expressed their reason for being in school is to learn for the sake of learning. Most students tell me they need to get good grades so they can either go to college to get a good job, or simply to be able to make more money. Money definitely seems to be the reason many of my students believe they are in school. I hope to show that by encouraging teachers to use popular culture and music in their classrooms so as to make lessons more meaningful, students will be provided a better opportunity to learn.

### Research Questions

I will focus on four main research questions in this study.

The overarching research question is:

- What educational value does popular culture and music have?

The specific research questions are:

- In spite of our era of standardization, how can popular culture and music be incorporated into classrooms?
- Why do students find popular culture and music so important?
- How can popular culture and music reconnect schooling to students' lives?

### Social Justification

Since music is a universal language that crosses borders of race, class, and gender, it allows itself to be a huge societal impact. "...Music is a universal language with a symbolic way of representing the world," (Jenson, 2000, p.4). Although there are different genres of music, there is still a common thread between all music because "...the musical arts allow us to communicate with others, while illuminating and

recording human insights,” (Jenson, 2000, p.4). It has the power to bring people together regardless of the numerous differences that exist. Christian Huygens also believes music is a universal language. “Huygens sees music as the same throughout the world because he locates the essence of music in sounds and proportions that are naturally reproduced in the human voice,” (Huygens, 1995, p. 37). The power of music gains the attention of listeners and allows them to make personal connections with lyrics. In addition to tuning in on personal time, schools are also great candidates to excrete the power of music. Children must attend school and since music is a powerful language, it could be used to provide a common language when learning in schools.

#### Standardization

Too often schools are distant from children’s interests and students become disinterested in the curriculum. The curriculum is not designed with students in mind. Instead, politicians take control and attempt to “fix” the problem as they see fit. This is apparent in recent changes taking place because the Right is convincing people that what they believe is true. Their views are being pushed into the curriculum.

What education is *for*, what and whose knowledge is considered legitimate, and who has the right to answer these questions; all of this is now being reconstructed during the conservative restoration. These transformations are occurring at the level of official policy and in the Right’s ability to convince a significant portion of the population that what is private is now good and what is public is bad inside and outside of education. They are witnessed in the increasingly effective attacks on teaching and the curriculum, on the needs of business and industry being seen as more and more the primary, if not the only, goals of schooling, the tighter

control of teaching in many states, and in the increasing integration of education into the conservative project. (Apple, 1993, pp. 9-10)

The conservative project takes the angle that schools need to prepare students for careers in business and industry. This goes against my idea of meaningful education. The conservatives also state that private is better than public, whether it be education or other parts of society. They do this by attacking the curriculum and saying that students are not prepared for the work force. Education is directed from the top down. Major decisions are being made by politicians who are far out of the educational arena. More focus is being put on standardization with an emphasis on reading, math, and language arts.

The arts, including music, are being forced out of schools to make time for the “more important” subject areas. As a teacher, I am torn between pleasing my principal and trying to have high test scores and teaching without standardization in mind. My principal has spent a large amount of money to purchase standardized testing practice material. I am expected to use it throughout the school year. In addition, all teachers are expected to have test taking skills displayed in their classrooms, as well as in the hallways throughout the school. The time spent on teaching to the test is so great that it takes hours of instructional time away from the students. Our art, music, computer, and physical education teachers stop teaching their material in order to work on test preparation with all of the students in the school. This normally begins in March and continues until the administration of the test. Teachers are faced with too much accountability as a result of the standardized testing. There are so many variables that are out of the teachers’ control. One example is getting a new student just days before the test, and the new teacher is held accountable for that student’s test results. After the test

has come and gone, teachers tend to get excited because they can begin teaching the way they should have all along. It is too bad the policy makers do not understand the importance of the arts and what constitutes a meaningful education.

These politicians are neglecting to see the importance of the arts in education. Standardized tests cover subjects such as reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. I have never administered a standardized test that covers music or any of the arts. Since these areas are normally not tested, the teaching of these subjects is often times seen as less important. The politicians want students who will be prepared for the work force. They have the mind set that school is for preparing students for the work force. They do not see the importance of the other areas. What message is this sending to the children?

However, there is one politician that understands the importance of music though. His name is Kwame Kilpatrick. "He was the youngest big-city mayor in the country and the youngest ever to hold the position in Detroit's three-hundred-year history. After winning the office, he became known as America's first 'hip hop mayor'" (Watkins, 2005, p. 188). Russell Simmons gave him this nickname. Kilpatrick became mayor in 2001, when he was only thirty years old. He has been known to quote Tupac, Run-DMC, and Eminem. Kilpatrick has started hip-hop's next step. "The urban culture has already succeeded in helping sell everything from fast food to SUVs. Now, many of hip-hop's heavyweights are looking to sell a more important line- their ideas" (Gamboa, 2004). This was demonstrated with P. Diddy's campaign titled "Vote or Die." Another campaign was titled "Citizen Change" and 50 Cent and Queen Latifah were involved with it. Both campaigns dealt with voting. Kilpatrick also let his interest in music

become known to the public. He was actually the inspiration for the movie titled, “Head of State.” Kilpatrick knew he must inspire and speak about the issues involving his younger voters. He spoke to a theater filled with young hip-hop fans about his message. Kilpatrick used hip-hop as a common ground to reach the voters. He understood the message and power of music whereas other politicians did not.

The basic message is that music programs in the schools help our kids and communities in real and substantial ways. You can use the following facts about the benefits of music education, based on a growing body of convincing research, to move decision-makers to make the right choices. The benefits conveyed by music education can be grouped in four categories.

- Success in society
- Success in school
- Success in developing intelligence
- Success in life

(MENC Staff, 2002)

The MENC is the National Association for Music Education. There are currently more than 130,000 active members. Members include music teachers, university faculty and researchers, college students preparing to be teachers, and high school honor society members. They believe in advancing music education by encouraging the study and making of music by all. The first benefit is success in society. Music helps students become aware of the world and how to connect with it. The second benefit is success in school. Research shows that schools that include the arts create more engaged, confident learners. As a result, they become better students and better people. The third benefit is

success in developing intelligence. Studies have shown that music students outperform their peers that are not music students. The fourth benefit is success in life. Research shows that children who have an education enriched in the arts grow up to have higher self esteem than those who do not. There are many areas in which students benefit when afforded musical experiences in school. Music should be taught for the sake of music and not as a tool to gain points on tests. Music also has intrinsic value as well as extrinsic value. Music helps students make connections to their own lives. It allows students to use their imaginations and not just give them preconceived perspectives. Studies such as mine could provide evidence decision-makers need when making crucial educational decisions.

Regardless of differences, music is able to open means of communication and make others aware through song. All cultures have their own form of music that others are able to learn from. Historically, music has allowed people to learn more deeply about certain cultures. “Music and history have a special connection” (Kramer, 2005, p. 248). It has played an important role in history providing much information about various time periods. Music has a way of facilitating expression and thus keeping the conversation going. I have found this to be the case with the students in my community. The majority of my students listen to hip-hop, and I enjoy listening to my students tell about what they know from hip-hop. “In any community, history draws borders; that is, in fact, one of its primary functions. Hip-hop is no exception” (Schloss, 2004, p. 57). It is these borders that allow the conversation to keep going. It allows for so much discussion and understanding. As a result, my study will focus on hip-hop. It is important to keep this type of dialogue open and public. “It is necessary to place music publicly where it has

always actually been, as constituent and interlocking part of culture and society” (Lipman, 1979, p. viii). Music incorporates both culture and society, thus having extreme importance. If it has a place in society, why try to take this aspect out of schools? It is a great tool to explore other cultures, thus allowing students a deeper understanding and respect for others. It has a place publicly, even in schools. By giving our children the type of education they need now, they will be better prepared for their adult lives in the future. It reminds me of the lyrics from Whitney Houston’s, *I Believe That Children Are Our Future*. She sings, “I believe that children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way.” We need to make sure we are teaching our children well so they can lead the way.

Popular culture plays an important role in the lives of youth. It is now available at convenience through a variety of means. “In a twenty-one year period, from 1975 to 1995, we greeted personal computers, home video games, CDs, home videotape systems, the World Wide Web, the Walkman, CD-ROMs. No other age, we assume, has seen anything like it” (Stephens, 1998, p. 88). Because there are now several different avenues to choose from, popular culture occupies several hours in the lives of people daily. This widespread availability allows popular culture to be very influential to those who tune in.

#### A Negative Note

It is here where children learn many of the values of the world. “It not only entertains us but also instructs us when it is not trying to do so” (Berger, 2000, p. 16). Although many look to forms of media for entertainment, it does much more whether it goes noticed or not. It allows people to see selected images and these images stick with



the viewers. One example can be found in television ads. Many females on television can be found wearing next to nothing, and then you find people trying to imitate the look. Stereotypical roles are often times portrayed in the media. This can be found with predominately women in ice cream commercials to predominately seeing men in the business commercials. Women are often times the only ones shown on television doing the cooking and cleaning, while men are sitting on the couch watching television and snacking. Even though the images and messages received are not always positive, children are surrounded by popular culture and generate their own opinions on various ideas.

Nevertheless, popular music has often served as the contested site for extensive debates on negative value. Cultural critics from Walter Benjamin to Susan Sontag have reminded us that the traditional divide between high and low culture was based primarily on the difference between unique and mass-produced objects, and that anything with mass appeal has typically been regarded as culturally suspect. (Derno & Washburne, 2004, p. 2)

Although the debate continues on the negative value of music, it is widespread and loved by many. There is not any regulation in hip hop, and it is a result of the pure capitalists.

The normal principle of commodity production is that the owner of the means of production owns the commodity produced; its value may reflect the labor that has gone into its production, but the laborers are paid directly for their labor time and have no legal claim on the product whatsoever. The capitalist can do what he likes with both it and any proceeds of its sale. (Frith, 1981, p. 130)

This could open up dialogue in the classroom and students could have a wonderful debate about this topic.

There is no doubt that music is mass-produced. It is so mass-produced it has even been used for residents who were going through therapy. “If using hip-hop music helps create a comfortable place for residents to share their life stories and challenge each others’ undesirable behaviors, then it is worth accepting profanity and objectionable song lyrics” (Ciardiello, 2003, p. 112). The negative aspects that arise are far outweighed by the positive in some situations.

Using hip-hop music to educate students also has some negative aspects. The first problem is that the lyrics may be unsuitable for children. Often times hip-hop makes references to drugs, violence, and sex. So teachers would have to use caution when incorporating it into their lessons. There are several ways to deal with this issue. One thing teachers could do is use the hip-hop music that has been rerecorded by children. These songs have the adult content taken out. Profanity has been replaced by more appropriate words. Another thing teachers would need to do is look carefully at the labels. Many times the music has been rated if it contains explicit material by the Recording Industry Association of America. The Parental Advisory Labels are found on music that has been deemed inappropriate for children younger than eighteen years old. These ratings could be used to help determine whether or not the music is appropriate to play in front of the students. Teachers could also use radio edited versions of the music. These versions of the music tend to be viewed as more suitable for the public.

Another potential problem that could result from using hip-hop in the classroom could be the parents. There are some parents who simply do not listen to hip-hop, and do

not want their children listening to it either. In order to persuade the parents, teachers would need to be ready to plead their case. Teachers would need to be able to explain their reasons, provide research, and reassure the parents that the children would not be exposed to anything that was not age appropriate. I would even suggest inviting parents in to observe the lessons for themselves and keep an open door policy. I would urge parents to give it a chance before they wrote it off completely. I would also encourage them to talk with their children and see what they have to say about it.

The third potential problem could be that some educators are not comfortable teaching with hip-hop because they do not listen to it themselves. It could be extremely hard for them to teach something they did not completely understand or was exposed to. Just like with anything else new to education, I would suggest staff development. Teachers should be given the opportunity to learn new approaches for their students, and have time to practice the strategies. Teachers should not be expected to walk in their classrooms and be able to implement this. This could take time, but in the long run could work out to be what is best for the students.

#### On a Positive Note

Students can often relate to pop culture; therefore I think it would only be fitting to incorporate it into the classroom. Although schools are widely viewed as the main educational setting for children, quite the opposite is true. Children learn from their environments. Students turn to means such as movies, television, and music for answers to their questions about society. It is here where students make connections to their world. “Young people today are using contemporary media to define themselves and to map their daily lives in ways that often confound adults” (Dimitriadis, 2001, p. 35).

Media is highly influential today as children use it to judge who they are and where they fit into the realm of things. Technological advances have allowed it to be practically everywhere and young people today are exposed to more aspects of the media than ever before.

Therefore, I believe it is crucial that music is not neglected in the classroom but used as a tool to develop critical, meaningful lessons. It would be ideal for teachers to take advantage of this connection and integrate it into their lessons. This would not only draw students into the lessons, but I think it could also show them how to further analyze an important piece of their lives. Popular culture is extremely powerful and could possibly be used as a great educational tool in providing meaningful learning opportunities for students. No longer are the days where teachers can read and teach straight from their teachers' editions behind their podiums, but instead, teachers need to seek other, more meaningful ways to reach their students.

There is a lot of research to help prove that music is important in the lives of children. I plan on incorporating the works of others to help with my research. One person's research I will use is Greg Dimitriadis'. Greg Dimitriadis conducted research on young people and their relationships with popular culture.

One of the most interesting dimensions of Dimitriadis' work is how he shows that young people read popular culture. The youth that he interacted with were very much interested in hip-hop. Hip-hop helped them understand their identities not only as African American youth but, for some of them, as Southern transplants to the Midwest region. Southern rap spoke to and often for them as they were trying

to understand why capitalist America showed little interest in their plights as young people growing up in the United States. (Weaver, 2005, p. 107)

Many youth have some sort of connection and identification with hip-hop which makes it extremely real for them. Some identify with it while others allow it to speak for them. It provides a voice that would otherwise be silent, but it also has other uses.

“Some forms of community are expansive in size and influence while others are often very personal and simply linked to memories and the music that helps to reanimate them” (Neal, 1999, p. x). No matter which way the students are influenced, the forms of community are still there. The learning has got to be more personal for the students because the push for standardization is not allowing that to happen. Is standardization what is best for individual students? People do not come standard, so neither should their education. Teachers need to be more concerned about the pedagogical impact they are making on their students rather than the disseminating of information. Often times this is not the case. The children are suffering because of this, and in the long run society will too. But it does not stop here.

“Plato, for instance, believed that music was a primary way to educate the young in understanding the harmony of the universe and their station in it” (Weaver, 2005, p. 62). If Plato realized this years ago, I wonder why those in control do not realize this currently. Music after all is the universal language. The media today has more of an influence on today’s youth than in Plato’s time because of all the technological advances. The media has control over a lot of popular culture now, but there is more to the story.

Popular culture is not only about media; it is also about identity and commodity (read brand) and its connection with the schools. Thus, not only do students at the

primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels of education get much of their education in popular culture contexts, but also the schools and universities in their structures and curriculums evidence the immersion into the brand-named order.

(Reynolds, 2004, p. 26)

I know the students I have taught have been very clued in to brand names. It is incredibly apparent by looking at what the rappers and hip hop artists are wearing, and then seeing the same styles on the youth. Many artists are coming out with their own clothing and fashion lines. I have seen many of my own students come to class proudly displaying these designer labels on their clothing. Many students have been quick to compliment those wearing the brand name clothing. Some of these clothing lines include Tommy Hilfiger, Fubu, and Roca Wear.

Our county is switching to school uniforms this year. I am curious to see how the students will react when they are no longer allowed to wear the brands of clothing many are accustomed to wearing. The students will now have to wear clothing that does not show labels, have extra designs, and display logos. The problems do not just stop at the elementary level because I have spoken my opinion several times about the problem at Georgia Southern University.

My brother-in-law used to play for Georgia Southern's golf team. He was provided with a full scholarship and much of his apparel was furnished. He was provided with Tommy Hilfiger clothing for four years. He was also provided with name brand golfing supplies as well. So there is no doubt in my mind that students do pay attention to labels and are immersed into this trend. This also displays the connections made at the university level as well.

A change is needed in education; a change that is embraced by the teachers and students. Students need new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, and moving. This change in learning environments would be celebrated and welcomed by students. I hope this transformation can be done through the integration of popular culture and popular music within education because, "...education signifies an initiation into new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, moving" (Greene, 2001, p. 7). It is my belief that we are unfortunately moving away from a change that is embraced by teachers and students.

I would like to explore popular culture and popular music and find a way that teachers, administrators, and policy makers could make sure it is not pushed out of the schools and curriculums, but instead embraced and seen as a crucial part of the education system in a time of standardization and too much accountability. I want to be a part of the solution and not a part of the problem. Thankfully, movements such as the reconceptualization of curriculum are helping to make this possible.

#### Music and the Reconceptualization

"The 1970s reconceptualization of American curriculum studies was, among other things, a profoundly intellectual event" (Pinar, 2004, p. 171). This intellectual event lasted for a decade. No longer were the days of only learning about reading, writing, and arithmetic. So much more was being added into the curriculum. The arts were finally getting the much deserved credit they needed. This of course did not make everyone happy. Those who followed the Tyler Rationale were not impressed and voiced their disagreement with the reconceptualization. "As the reconceptualist movement succeeded, it came apart. To the extent the movement was cohesive, it was opposition to the Tylerian tradition that held the movement together" (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, &

Taubman, 1996, p. xvii). It is as if all the disagreement made the reconceptualists that much stronger and powerful. It fueled their desire even more to make changes. Change was taking place and there were those who were just not comfortable with it. I am the type of person that typically believes that change is good. I definitely believe that change was desperately needed in the curriculum then, and still is.

Pinar led the way down the path of reconceptualization. He was proving that the traditional curriculum was just not working anymore. Even Joseph Schwab stated “that the field was moribund...” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995, p. 193). The field was declining and others like Huebner and Foshay agreed as well. The Tyler Rationale had come to its end. Education did not need to be a means to get an end product or objective. The sole purpose of education is not to make more money and get a better job. The reconceptualists were voicing the fact that the meaning of education was being manipulated. People were speaking up and calling for changes through movements like those of the anti-war and civil rights, and not only in the curriculum field.

During the reconceptualization the idea that education needed to be more personal arose. Self-actualization was one way of achieving this humanistic approach. In order to get a humanistic education, it would be done by grouping the curriculum. It would begin with reading and writing, then move towards talents and abilities, and finally to societal problems and concerns. The reconceptualization was about moving away from areas such as implementation and evaluation. There is so much more to teaching and learning than that. There was a bigger picture that was being ignored...until the reconceptualization. The reconceptualization helped open up the curriculum field to do justice for the learners. The field needed to be revamped. “Literally, reconceptualization



means to conceive again, to turn back the conceptual structures that support our actions in order to reveal the rich and abundant experience they conceal” (Grumet, 1980, p. 24).

That is exactly what happened. Brilliant scholars fought the traditional beliefs and were able to go back to the drawing board to make the supporting structures of the curriculum stronger and more effective.

Curriculum development has a rich history with many different people voicing their opinions. At one point in time the focus for the educational system was curriculum development. During this period of time (1918-1969) the focus was on organizing and keeping order to the curriculum. Curriculum developers were more concerned with what should be taught and how to go about teaching it. One of the best examples of this would be Ralph Tyler. Tyler left out of his Rationale a major component. He left out human interaction and social interaction. These are key components to the development of children. Science and mathematics can only get you so far in society. Luckily...

Bobbitt (1918) recognized that the total range of human activity was so vast that no curriculum could encompass it all, but he found a solution to that problem in the idea of directed and undirected experiences. Some objectives, Bobbitt asserted, may be attained without conscious effort and although the curriculum-discoverer must be aware of these as well, he will be content to let as much as possible be taken care of through undirected experiences. Fortunately, the schools did not have to teach everything. Some things are simply learned through a natural process of socialization. (Kliebard, 1995, p. 100)

Children learn so much simply from interaction in society. There are also times in the curriculum when lessons veer off in a different direction than intended. This occurs often

in my own classroom. This has led to quite important lessons for my students. Unintended learning can be just as effective as the planned curriculum. Bobbitt understood the importance of allowing educators to lead the field. Now that the field has moved into understanding curriculum instead of the development it is very apparent that change has been wanted and needed. Those people wanting change are tired of being told what to do. Many educators know what is best for their students, but instead feel the urge to teach what the policy makers say is important. It is my opinion that many policy makers do not see the importance of including the arts in the curriculum because they are not as important as mathematics and science. I often times hear them refer to *No Child Left Behind*, as if it is the answer to the problems we are facing in education. When speaking of education they often use test scores to show progress. They also speak of advancing technology and mathematics, but I rarely hear them speak of the importance of the arts in the curriculum. I have a friend who just moved to California and teaches there. She stated that there is not a music or art program at her school. The students only get physical education twice a week. It seems as if more money is being spent for improvement in mathematics with a reduction of spending money in the arts programs.

There is absolutely no way that I would be able to conduct the research for my dissertation on popular culture and popular music without the effects of the reconceptualization. Before the reconceptualization occurred in the curriculum field, the arts and aesthetics were basically viewed as areas that did not have educational value. It was believed that real learning was not taking place. With the help of the reconceptualization, the arts are now being recognized as important and necessary components of the curriculum in some areas.

The ironic thing is that the arts were valued more then than they are now. There are a couple of different explanations for this. I believe one reason the arts are not valued as much nowadays is because the abundance of technology. Technology seems to be another major focus of education. Technological advances seem to be never ending, and one has to stay abreast of all the changes to keep up. Schools are pushing students to become more computer and technology savvy. The main reason the arts are not valued as much now is because we have now moved into the mindset of standardization and accountability. Since standardization and accountability are such important parts of our education system, the arts are being pushed out of the picture. The arts are more difficult to standardize. There are many times in the arts where there is not a right or wrong answer. I believe part of the problem also lies with some policy makers because they do not seem to understand this idea. Because of this problem, I think standardization is being forced into the curriculum and onto teachers.

In this notion of popular culture as a primary pedagogical site, there also needs to be a reformulation of the conceptualization of the work of curriculum studies and the connections with cultural studies. Cultural studies scholars and curriculum studies scholars have only just begun engaging in a multidisciplinary conversation, and that is something that would prove productive for both, since there are many issues that cross borders between curriculum and culture.

(Reynolds, 2003, p. 103)

Studies such as mine continue the multidisciplinary conversation between curriculum and culture.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature describes and explores the history of music, effects of music in society, and the importance of incorporating popular culture and popular music into classrooms in order to raise achievement and motivation. This will be accomplished through a cultural studies theoretical framework. The first body of literature will elaborate on the history of music. The starting point will be with Plato. I will continue the history of music to the present time. The second body of literature will elaborate on the effects of music in society. The third body of literature will be based on non-traditional forms of achievement by elaborating on the importance of incorporating popular culture and popular music into curriculums and classrooms in order to raise achievement.

#### Music History 101:

##### A Literature Review of Music's History from Plato to Present

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato is known for laying the philosophical foundations of Western culture. It should not be a surprise then to find out that Plato found educational value in music. "Plato included music alongside mathematics and astronomy in the curriculum for the future rulers of his state that he set out in his *Republic*" (Fowler, 2003, pp. 83-84). Plato believed that music had educational value just as mathematics and astronomy did. Music consisted of some mathematical equations and dealt a great deal with numbers, just as astronomy did. Astronomy used many mathematical calculations. I agree with Plato that music works alongside mathematics and astronomy because they have a common thread. His beliefs did not stop just there

because, “Plato, for instance, believed that music was a primary way to educate the young in understanding the harmony of the universe and their station in it” (Weaver, 2005, p. 62). Many people do not have the same opinion as Plato because they believe that education is a way to improve their way of life. Plato thought people should just accept where they are in life. I have to disagree with Plato about accepting one’s station in life, but I have to agree with him that music is a primary way to educate children. On the other hand I do believe that people do use music to tell about their station in life. It is comforting to know that Plato thought music was as important as math and astronomy and had educational value.

Putting mathematics and astronomy aside, Plato believed that rhythm and harmony touched the soul directly. Children were expected to learn to love what they know. This came in the forms of goodness and justice, and was encouraged to be sought in moderation. At the opposite side of the spectrum, children were expected to hate what they did not know. This usually came in the form of injustice. Plato also believed that children were expected to except what they were told without giving much free thought. This followed through his beliefs of music education. He thought that education in music was for the soul. Revelries and laments were forbidden, but serious melodies were not. Melodies that displayed courageous men facing danger and peaceful men were allowed. Plato believed that education was moral in nature, so the ability to think critically and independently was not emphasized. Although my beliefs of music education differ somewhat from Plato’s, I still agree that music is an important part of educating children.

Why then do some leaders in the educational field not realize its importance currently? Is it crucial for them to realize its importance? “We must therefore

ensure...that there is always someone like this in charge of education..." (Plato, 2003, p. 111). Music used to play a key role in curriculums and still should. "Music education always has had an important place in the curriculum of democracies. Over two thousand years ago music was a part of the education of every Greek citizen" (Mark, 2002, p. 157). It amazes me how over two thousand years ago the curriculum seemed to be better than it is today. Maybe it is because there was not so much standardization and accountability to worry about. I believe the decline is due mostly because of the push for high test scores in other academic subject areas. With this push for high test scores comes legislation such as *No Child Left Behind* that forces many teachers to concentrate on the tested subjects. Music does not seem to be so standard nowadays. Somewhat like Plato, the Pythagoreans, "...considered that a liberal education consisted of the 'quadrivium', or four divisions: numbers in the abstract, numbers applied to music, geometry, and astronomy" (Benson, 2006, p. 147). Until now I would not have grouped music with geometry/mathematics and astronomy, but I like the way these areas work together through the use of numbers. I appreciate that music was a standard part of education. "After the standard education in music and gymnastic the selected student passes on to the abstract subjects and thence to dialectic, with frequent tests on the way" (Rouse, 1999, p. 122). It was not until after passing music that students long ago were able to move on with their education. It seems as if today's students are moving in the opposite direction. Music is not always standard anymore, and it rarely comes before other subjects deemed as more important.

Plato was a dualist and believed in the just. Music played a central role in what he believed to be just. "In short, the foundation on which Plato's accounts of music are

built consists of an unwavering belief in the centrality of reason to the good life and the just society” (Bowman, 1998). Through music, Plato was afforded the opportunity to defend his stance on what constitutes a just society. Music allows for there to be light in the tunnel! Music, like geometry requires logical, deductive argument. Music often times allows the listeners to take away something different, but composure calls for some logical thinking.

It did not just end with Plato because throughout history, music has had other purposes.

For the greater part of recorded history, the thought that music is a representational art of some sort has been taken for granted. In ancient Greece, for example, the various modes or scales were held to represent (and to promote) various types of character: the Dorian mode, for instance, was said to “fittingly imitate the tones and accents of a man who is brave in battle and in every difficult and dangerous task”, while the Phrygian mode was said to “imitate a man in the actions of peace”. In the medieval period, the rhythms and intonations of plainchant were held to represent the voice and soul of a man at prayer, while in the eighteenth century it was widely thought that the “proper role” of music was to offer an “artificial portrait of the human passions” and, more generally, to “imitate nature.” (Ridley, 2004, p. 47)

From the Greeks to the present day, music has opened its doors to anyone who would lend an ear. Music has helped people cope during wartime, slavery, illness, sadness, and even happiness. Some famous people throughout history have spoken about music’s importance in society. Maya Angelou once said, “When members of a society wish to

secure that society's rich heritage they cherish their arts and respect their artists. The esteem with which we regard the multiple cultures offered in our country enhances our possibilities for healthy survival and continued social development." She is exactly right. In order for cultures to strive and flourish they need to view music and the other arts as important and essential components of their lives. By doing this, the cultures ensure a deserving respect of their arts. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt spoke at Temple University in 1936. He said, "Inequality may linger in the world of material things, but great music, great literature, great art and the wonders of science are, and should be, open to all" (Roosevelt, 1936). Because music has pretty much been open to all, so much history and information is now known about cultures of the past. One example of this is the juke joint. Although there are not many left, juke joints were thriving in the southeast about fifty years ago. There is one juke joint in Marigold, Mississippi called Poor Monkey's that is still in business. The man that runs the establishment is called Poor Monkey and as a tradition he changes his outfit every hour. Juke joints were mainly established by African Americans who wanted to relax and socialize. Although white people also went to juke joints, the name changed to honky tonks for them. With the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century came more technology that made music more readily available. Beforehand people had to meet in groups such as clubs, churches, and other public places to enjoy music. Then the eight track, record, cassettes, and compact disks were created. Music was not as limited. Music does not have to be considered as a material thing because it can be shared from person to person without having to have something concrete on which to hold. Martin Luther is quoted as having said,

I wish to see all arts, principally music, in the service of Him who gave and



created them. Music is a fair and glorious gift of God. I would not for the world, forego my humble share of music. Singers are never sorrowful, but are merry, and smile through their troubles in song. Music makes people kinder, gentler, more staid and reasonable. I am strongly persuaded that after theology there is no art than can be placed on a level with music; for besides theology, music is the only art capable of affording peace and joy of the heart...the devil flees before the sound of music almost as much as before the Word of God.

Within this quote is Martin Luther's assertion of the importance music plays in religion. Music has played an important role during church and religious services. Music can play a role in making people kinder and more reasonable. In order for this to happen, the music would have to be uplifting to the listener. Music may also make a person think about the way he or she is behaving. This could be a potential benefit for students because it may provide a springboard to make some motivational and educational changes. Music allows for people to make connections in their lives. I personally use music to help me cope with difficult times in my life. I listen to songs that are about something that is going on in my life and I connect to it. An example of this is when my youngest daughter was hospitalized for almost two weeks right after she turned three years old. There was a song that was about people being strong no matter what the situation may be. I really connected to it and it helped me to have a positive attitude during such a difficult time. Other examples are the songs titled *Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning* and *Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue*. These songs were written to show support for the September 11<sup>th</sup> victims and American soldiers. Some

songs are written for people to relate and connect to. There is a problem with this though. For many years, women did not have much of a voice in the music field.

Although music has provided much insight into history of cultures, there is a void. Music has given a voice to those who have been silenced, but it has taken longer for some people to get that voice. Some people were heard more than others. The trend had lent a hand to males and not females. Although much can be learned from music, much of what dominated the different decades was from males. Women were not heard as much as the men were. This all started to change around the 1920's. Women gained more success and broke down gender based barriers with the help of the Tin Pan Alley. The Tin Pan Alley was the popular music publishing center of the world and was located in New York. Also around this same time period, black women blues singers were becoming popular. The trend is definitely changing as more and more women are becoming so popular in the music industry.

But what about these women throughout history? For many years most recorded music was dominated by males. "There were hardly any women involved in all of this. It was mostly men" (Barber, 1996, p. 5). Times have changed and now many women's voices are heard in the music field. Women did, however, have to struggle to get their place in the field. This was especially true for female hip hop artists because they were viewed as inferior to the males. The women were thought of as weaker and not as hard core. It was bad enough that society viewed women this way but many male artists did not even take their female counterparts as seriously. They finally proved this to be false. Some examples of popular women hip hop artists are Queen Latifah, Salt-N-Pepa, and Lil' Kim. These women shared stories of oppression, sexuality, and racism through their

lyrics. It is crucial to include women's impact on music because they also have so much to say. So much can be learned from everyone's music.

### A Hip Hop and Jump Into the Past

The beginning of hip hop can be traced back to almost forty years ago. It all started in the early 1970's in the Bronx. It was influenced by reggae and African American and Latino street culture. Kool Herc is dubbed as the founder of hip hop. He was a DJ in the West Bronx of New York. Kool Herc started off with improvising rhymes over his reggae records, but his audiences were not too perceptive of this. So instead he began chanting over sections of the music that was popular, and this was a big hit with the crowds. Funk and disco music were especially popular in the clubs during this time.

It was at this point in time when the DJ became extremely popular because he had a great deal of interaction with the crowd. DJs were able to draw large crowds. Crowd goers would shout out their names so the DJ could shout it out for everyone to hear. This became so popular that the shouts became more and more elaborate. Let us pretend for a minute that I was at the club and I wanted to make a shout out. I might would say something to this extent, "Shannon D. is in the house and I'm gonna show ya what it's all about." People would try to rhyme or use alliteration. Kool Herc soon realized that he needed help on stage. This led to the rise of the MC (or emcee) in the club circuit. MCs came on the scene to introduce the DJ and whoever was going to perform that evening. The MCs job was to keep the crowd entertained before, during, and after the rappers took the stage. The MC kept the show moving smoothly and became popular in the club circuit.

Rap and hip hop became so popular because it allowed the New Yorkers to express themselves freely. There were not many boundaries involved and it was not very expensive. No formal training was necessary either. The sky seemed to be the limit. With this came break dancing and graffiti art. Hip hop became a culture with its own types of identification. It also reflected political, social, and economic issues. Some of the first hip hop artists were Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flash, and the Furious Four. But after awhile the thrill of them was wearing off and some believed that hip hop was a phase that was coming to an end.

Luckily the hip hop album was introduced in the 1980's. This brought the thrill right back hip hop. This allowed for more people to hear the music and gave it a more widespread appeal. I was a child living in Germany during this time. This was when I was personally exposed to hip hop. I can remember going shopping downtown and there were clubs nearby. The music was played so loudly that we could hear it from the parking garage. I was shocked to hear the German club playing what I called "American Music". It was actually hip hop that was blaring out from the clubs. I always wondered if the German people understood the words or even cared what was being said. My friends and I would sit around and listen to the albums together. We really enjoyed the rhythm and beat the music had to offer. I can remember listening to a lot of Kid N Play, Run DMC, and the Beastie Boys.

By the time the 1990's rolled around, the commercial power of hip hop was extreme. A new type of rap had emerged, and it was called gangsta rap. Gangsta rap was and is controversial because it took hip hop to a new level. It contains explicit lyrics that focus on drugs, sex, and violence. Gangsta rappers wanted to be seen and heard for their

forms of self expression. Gangsta rap can be so intense that it has to have a parental advisory label on it.

Now that it is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, hip hop continues to make strides in the music world. What started off in New York can now be found across the world.

### Music Makes the World Go Round:

#### A Literature Review of Music's Impact on Society

Music has no doubt played an important role in culture for thousands of years, and continues to do so. Its roles have changed as much as its styles. So much can be learned about people and cultures from studying music. It is essential to include the study of music when learning about cultures because it tends to give an understanding of who people are and who they have been. I will provide examples from the United States, Europe, Africa, and Asia.

There are many different musical genres found in the United States. Some of these include rock, pop, hip hop, jazz, rhythm and blues, country, and opera. One can learn so much through these different genres. One example is country music which is normally associated with the South. Country singers often times sing of hard times such as failed relationships or money problems, but they also sing about having good times and falling in love. Hip hop artists tend to sing about personal situations they have encountered such as racism, poverty, and injustice. Hip hop is now known world wide. There are even annual break dancing competitions in Asia and Europe.

Music is a very dynamic part of the European Union's cultural industries. It also plays an important role in our life: surveys show that over 60% of Europeans listen to music every day. The music industry is not only an important provider of

cultural goods, it also directly employs around 650 000 people. The number of those directly or indirectly involved in the various music activities is – of course – far higher than this figure. But music also bonds people and in this sense musical diversity helps to bridge cultural differences: it contributes to mutual understanding in a very unique way. (European Commission, 2008)

Even though European music is important to its culture, it does have a great amount of American influence. However, its roots are mainly classical.

Music is especially important in Africa. It is commonly used in daily activities. It is often times a part of childbirth, marriage, hunting, and political activities. It is also used for spiritual reasons such as warding off evil spirits, paying respects to good spirits, the dead, and ancestors.

In traditional Africa, music is an integral part of life and is linked with the worldview of the society in which it is produced. It has social, ritual, and ceremonial functions as well as some purely recreational purposes. Traditional art forms, including music, are rooted in mythology, legends, and folklore, and are associated with gods, ancestors and heroes. Musical activities are ritualized and intended to link the visible world with the invisible. Dancing is often an important part of the ritual and spiritual aspect of music. (Amoakua, 2007)

This can be seen in African tribal dances. Drums are also important to this culture so deeply rooted in tradition.

When some people hear Asian music they may think of what they hear in Chinese or Japanese restaurants. There is so much more to the music. Asian music has a deep history that goes back thousands of years. Asian culture is loaded with struggles,

tragedies, and triumphs. This history is told through their music. Composers have made certain to document these events in songs as well as the people's feelings.

Popular music allows for a more in-depth insight into people's cultures that would otherwise be unknown. "Popular music offers a unique view into the people's beliefs during particular time periods. Although one cannot rely on musical information alone, when combined with traditional scholarly inquiry, a clearer view of the mass people's attitudes, ideas, and fears can often be discerned" (Bindas, 1992, p. 8). I believe this to be true for a couple of different reasons. By studying past lyrics of songs sung by slaves, secret and hidden messages can be revealed. In the song titled *Oh Freedom*, the code words used in it were *darkness* and *glory*. Darkness referred to being closer to slavery, while glory referred to being closer to freedom. Another example can be found in the song *Let Us Break Bread Together*. Hidden in the lyrics of this song are coded calls for secret meetings to discuss concerns and plans for escape. Slaves would meet at or before sunrise because white people were watching too closely the rest of the time. This song was important because breaking bread referred to coming together. This let other slaves know there was going to be a secret meeting. Songs that were written during other difficult times reveal fears and unhappiness. This can be found in songs written during wartime. One example of this is in the song titled *Mother Would Comfort Me*:

If she were with me, I soon would forget

My pain and my sorrow, no more would I fret

This song tells me that this soldier would not worry or be sad if he could be with his mother. He turned to music to help him cope. The songs themselves are not enough to

uncover an unknown past, but when used in conjunction with other forms of inquiry so much more can be uncovered.

Robert Christgau is known as the Dean of American Rock Critics. He is also known as one of the leading popular music writers in the country. Before he was fired two years ago he worked for the *Village Voice*.

Christgau's project at the *Voice* was to create a venue for popular-music writing that assumed a certain readership—one equipped not just with broad cultural knowledge but with a fluency in music history, the pop canon, and all the little meta-narratives of individual artists and their discographies. (Rosen, 2006)

Hopefully this is not a permanent loss, because venues such as this one could be a great benefit to educators when incorporating popular music into their lessons.

There is also the DJ Project which is one of many organizations that actually uses hip-hop to educate. Those involved believe it is an effective tool for youth empowerment. There are typically anywhere from eight to ten students who attend meetings several times in a week to work on producing hip hop tracks. They meet in a basement in San Francisco to accomplish this. Some skills that are taught by this are job readiness and creative expression. One of the participants in the DJ Project is known as Dice. He raps about what happens in the streets. Unfortunately, Dice does not get to perfect his skills in his high school. Dice stated, "Teachers don't like [hip hop]. They think it's bad. They think what we're saying is wrong" (Kim, 2004). I hope to be able to change this idea of hip hop and education. Dr. Dan Kelly is the president of the San Francisco Unified School Board and he stated that, "Hip-hop transcends political and economic boundaries. But it's easier to say we should integrate new forms of artistic



expression [into the classroom] than it is to do” (Kim, 2004). It is always easier to say something than to actually act on it. I believe it is time to act on it because it is time for a change, it does not matter how difficult the task will be. Recent C.R.C.T. scores for Georgia in mathematics are alarming. In my county alone, only 20% of students in AYP grades passed the mathematics portion of the test.

Kelly is optimistic about seeing a stronger hip-hop influence, but when you consider hip-hop’s notorious history of advocating violence, denigrating women, and glorifying gangsta-ism, it’s no surprise that many educators have only recently discovered there’s more to it than AK-47s and copious bags of weed. Some schools occasionally allow break dancing or rap performances during lunchtime functions and assemblies. But making the move into the public school curriculum may still be a bit of an impasse for hip-hop culture. Especially when budget cuts and a barebones teaching staff make integrating new modes of education nearly impossible. (Kim, 2004)

I am optimistic as well, and I agree that some teachers are now becoming aware of other messages portrayed from hip hop. I also agree that integrating new modes of education can be difficult, but with Georgia’s performance education it may not be so difficult after all. I think we really need to rethink what and how we are teaching so there will not be a lack of identification with what is taught in the classroom. There have been some educators to already take on this task. Two educators in New York City founded H2Ed. Their names are Martha Diaz and Tricia Wang. This is an organization devoted to advancing hip-hop into K-12 education. They brought up a good point. They realized that they are now more teachers in classrooms that have grown up during the hip hop

generation. But I would like to involve an entire county to come to this realization, not just a teacher or administrator here and there.

There was another teacher from New York City who started the project titled *Hip Hop Handbook: From Hip Hop to Wall Street*. This was a language arts unit based on exploring slang to help understand language. It was the first of its kind. The teacher of this class was a fifty year old white female. The class was typically half empty because the students were not interested in the material. By the time the project was finished the class was completely full. This public school was compared to what hip hop once was, under-resourced and ripe for social change. Songs, videos, and artist profiles were used as text.

They offer the missing commentary on the lasting effects of racism and classism—stories that are not typically found in mainstream history textbooks. Analyzing rap lyrics offers the opportunity to create rhyming dictionaries, expand vocabulary, and encourage poetry and creative writing skills, giving voice to students who often feel powerless in schools that aren't meeting their needs. (Runell, 2006)

Other teachers were even able to use case studies of young hip hop entrepreneurs to teach business strategies. To reach even younger students, educators used hip hop music to teach things such as multiplication tables. This idea kept spreading and even physical education teachers were able to incorporate hip hop into their lessons.

Hip hop in the K-12 classroom mirrors hip hop's takeover of the academy, representing growing numbers of hip hop heads turned hip hop scholars. Over two hundred courses on the subject are currently offered at colleges and

universities throughout the country. There are hip hop archives at both Harvard and Stanford. (Runell, 2006)

I think it would be a wise decision to also place this type of education in elementary, middle, and high schools. There are too many instances when children are not properly prepared for college. This more culturally relevant type of education could help better prepare students for the world. There was an interesting comparison in the article written by Runell about Romeo and Juliet. They were being compared to the Bloods and the Crips. There are several high schools in the country that are teaching from a hip hop point of view. Three of these schools are Intermediate School 109, Brooklyn Community Arts and Media High School, and Kuumba Academy. Work from I.S. 109 has even been featured on HBO. At this school alone the drop out rate has decreased. There was a 12% rise in their reading test scores, while there was an 8% rise in mathematics test scores. Their attendance is now up to 93%. They are using hip hop to create holistic learning experiences. At these schools the teachers do not have a choice but to learn hip hop. The teachers do not have to like it, but they do need to understand it in order to understand their students.

People have used music for several different reasons throughout the years. Some of these reasons include entertainment, religion, storytelling, and education. As the twentieth century began, music became very much associated with the United States of America. A huge impact was left by popular music by the way of jazz, country, blues, and rock and roll. Such diversity was seen through the songs as many different topics were raised such as racism, poverty, and sexism. I chose songs from Michael Jackson, Ludacris, and Queen Latifah to prove my point because they are popular artists. An

example of this with racism can be found in the song *Black or White* by Michael Jackson.

Jackson says:

I've seen the bright get duller

I'm not going to spend

My life being a color

I believe Jackson was stating that he would rather be referred to a person and not a black man. I think he was trying to say that no matter what race a person is, they should be seen as humans and not put into a mold of a certain race. I also believe he was saying that he does not see improvement in racism, and that people should not see things in terms of black and white.

Examples of poverty and sexism can be found in the lyrics from Ludacris. In a song titled *Slap*, Ludacris says:

I need some money please

I can barely make it on these streets

Cause I got a couple mouths to feed

My baby's in dire need

I believe Ludacris is driving home the point that there are many males who have not had a fair chance in life and are struggling to make ends meet. He is probably talking about black males who have been disadvantaged by society and ended up basically running on the streets. They are having a difficult time and can not even afford to feed their children. This song is about being angry about the current station in life.

He also sings about another serious topic, sexism. Another song by Ludacris titled *Girls Gone Wild* says:

Put 'em in the back seat of the 'Llac again

And rip off the magnum packagin

What's happenin, I'm lookin for some girls gone wild

Often times in hip hop there are examples of sexism. Ludacris is singing about finding some promiscuous girls to have sex with. He basically states that having sex in the backseat of the car is good enough. This is degrading to women.

Music has made its mark not only in the United States of America, but around the world. Even today, music continues to be a sounding board for those who would otherwise be silenced. Queen Latifah demonstrates this in her song titled *I Know Where I've Been*. In this song, Queen Latifah says:

There's a light in the darkness

Though the night black as my skin

There's a light burning bright showing me the way

But I know where I've been

Queen Latifah is speaking of the times when the world was against her, but there was always hope. She sees hope in the future, but understands her past. The past explains who people are and where they come from.

The children growing up in today's society have quite a different experience than that of children of past generations. Now homes are filled with plasma televisions, laptops, various electronic games, and other advances. Needless to say, children now occupy their time with these instead of resorting to outdoor activities or reading, such as I did growing up. Just a few years back it was

...estimated that the average American spends more than four hours of a day watching television. Four hours a day, 28 hours a week, 1456 hours a year. The number of hours spent in front of a television or video screen is the single biggest chunk of time in the waking life of an American child (Hazen and Winokur in Reynolds, 2003, p. 101).

Recently, playing videos games has passed watching television. With this much time being spent in the presence of popular culture; it is sure to play an important role in shaping their views and opinions. Music and popular culture are such driving forces in today's society.

#### A Shout Out to Popular Culture and Popular Music:

##### A Literature Review of Music's Place in the Curriculum

This third section of the literature review describes the importance of incorporating popular music into the curriculum to raise student achievement by making lessons more meaningful.

School life has fragmented into disparate orbits as unpredictable processes of self-fashioning have occluded any and all fixed narratives of pedagogy among teachers, researchers, and policy makers alike. As such, understanding youth culture and school life today demands that we look past traditional disciplinary frameworks toward more interdisciplinary ones, including those offered in cultural studies and its iterations in applied disciplines such as communication and education. (Dimitriadis, 2001, xi)

By looking at interdisciplinary frameworks, educators will be better able to understand youth culture and school life. Times have changed, so should teaching styles also

change? Possibly, two avenues to be explored in order to achieve this are those of popular culture and popular music. So many students, especially here in the South, are very much influenced by these two.

Popular music has occupied an unstable and uncertain place within the mainstream of cultural and media studies. More significant, however, the fact is that what were the accepted critical categories and grids of classification in this field of study are now urgently in need of revision. The world of popular music has moved rapidly and changed dramatically through the availability of new musical technologies and techniques. It has so forcefully been deployed in both these respects by subaltern social groups that now, particularly in dance music, in rap and in hip hop, popular music culture defines and redefines its own landscape of mutating types and tastes and styles at breathtaking speed. Music critics, never mind the academics, have to run to keep up. (McRobbie, 1999, p. 111)

This is why I believe it is so important to keep the research current. It is extremely difficult to keep up with all of the many changes. Nonetheless, educators need to stay on top of the game. Educators need to meet the students at least half way. “If we are to meet young people on this fraught and unpredictable terrain, I argue, we must take as open and expansive a disposition towards educational research and practice as possible” (Dimitriadis, 2003, p. 103).

Popular culture is all around, and there is no avoiding it. Cultural studies, “recognizes that if we are interested in the ideas, identities, and learning habits of young people, we cannot avoid the effect of popular culture” (Weaver, 2005, p. 103-104).

Popular culture’s appeal is ever growing and crossing borders among today’s youth.

“Rap music and the hip hop style have also managed to cross linguistic and cultural boundaries, testimony to their widespread appeal to youth” (Perkins, 1996, p. 262). This is evident in many diverse classrooms today. Children from different races, classes, and genders are listening to rap and hip hop. In short, the study of popular culture should also include the study of popular music” (McClary, 1994, p. 38).

Many youth have some sort of connection and identification with hip-hop which makes it extremely real for them. Some identify with it while others allow it to speak for them. It provides a voice that would otherwise be silent, as well as serve other uses.

...Rap’s multiple uses shows us all the ways young people are creatively coping with the vicissitudes of their increasingly difficult and dangerous lives—and to the ways we as teachers must rise to this challenge. Indeed, if texts and practices are always in performance, they are open to rearticulation by interested educators—the ultimate lesson... (Dimitriadis, 2001, p. 127).

Interested educators could provide the ultimate lesson by allowing this rearticulation to happen through the use of popular music. It is this alternative to the curriculum that educators could be including. “Rap...proliferates in such sites, serving as a kind of alternative curriculum through which often intensely disaffected young people have produced and maintained notions of community, history, and self” (Dimitriadis, 2001, p. 34). When students can produce and maintain notions of community, history, and self through education, the learning becomes meaningful. “Some forms of community are expansive in size and influence while others are often very personal and simply linked to memories and the music that helps to reanimate them” (Neal, 1999, x). No matter which way the students are influenced, the forms of community are still there.



### Critical Thinking and Popular Culture

Popular culture also reaches today's youth through other media. As a result, "...students and teachers take such popular culture icons as *The Simpsons*, *Roseanne*, and hip-hop music to create a critical understanding of what people are experiencing in the world" (Weaver, 2005, p. 103). It is crucial for students to create a critical understanding about what others in the world are experiencing because it helps them to understand how they fit into society. Critical thinking skills help children succeed in the real world. This is the real reason for education, and not the idea of going to school to get a better job or better paycheck. Critical thinking is about teaching students how to think and not what is often times found to be the case of what to think. I have witnessed numerous students not be able to think for themselves. It is becoming more and more of a problem. Educators need to come up with ways to reverse this problem. Due to the fact that popular culture icons and music help create critical understandings of what people are experiencing in the world, teachers should be able to use this to their advantage. I believe it would help students learn to think for themselves and stop them from expecting others to do the thinking for them. Ultimately it would help them become better prepared for their future. Students would be able to understand and evaluate more effectively when they become better critical thinkers, and this would cause them to be become decision makers. It is my belief that students could make better judgments and decisions when learning from what is going on in their world, and not what is taught to them from a textbook. It just makes so much sense to me that you teach students about life from examples from society such as those found in popular culture.

## Brand Names 101

Popular culture is not only about media; it is also about identity and commodity (read brand) and its connection with the schools. Thus, not only do students at the primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels of education get much of their education in popular culture contexts, but also the schools and universities in their structures and curriculums evidence the immersion into the brand-named order. (Reynolds, 2004, p. 26)

Students are very clued in to brand names these days. It is incredibly apparent by looking at what the rappers and hip hop artists are wearing, and then seeing the same styles on the youth. These styles become a part of individual identities through the help of popular culture and close ties with educational institutions.

With all of this hype also comes that of technology because electronics surround children throughout the day. Then they are able to connect with what they see. This is where they learn about the issues prevailing in the world and form opinions on what they see. Schools were once thought to be the place where students gain their education.

These technological advances have changed this to become a misconception.

“Television, movies, the new technologies of enhanced video/computer games, and of course, the ubiquitous internet have transformed ‘culture especially popular culture, into the primary educational site in which youth learn about themselves, their relationships to others and the larger world” (Giroux, 2003, p. 101-102). Schools have taken the back burner to what children find important in their everyday lives. “It is time to recognize that the true tutors of our children are not schoolteachers or university professors but filmmakers, advertising executives and pop culture purveyors. Disney does more than

Duke, Spielberg outweighs Stanford, MTV trumps MIT” (Barber, 2003, p. 101). What I have found through my years of teaching is that children can relate to lessons when popular culture is implemented. I have often focused on music as I have found it captivates students and hooks them into lessons. Music is all around. It is almost inescapable. By linking the lessons to something they find interesting, students are motivated to listen and participate. Thus, the message taken away at the end of the lesson far outweighs the traditional methods of teaching. Is that important to students and does it influence their way of thinking? I believe education needs to be personal and meaningful for students. By incorporating popular culture into daily lessons hopefully this can be the desired outcome. Students do not acquire real intellectual knowledge by simply memorizing facts, filling in bubbles correctly, or by having someone do the thinking for them. I aspire to see if indeed popular culture can be added into the classrooms so that more intellectual conversations can take place. Students must acquire better critical thinking skills.

Due to the fact that popular culture is very influential, then would it make sense for teachers to use it to their advantage?

If educational fields of knowledge are to remain relevant, more scholars will have to begin to account for the effect of popular culture on the learning experiences of students and teachers. This means educational psychologists, statisticians, administrators, and curriculum scholars will have to recognize the importance of popular culture in their research. They will also have to move beyond superficial issues such as how many scenes of violence the average child views on television.

Popular culture is much more sophisticated in its ability to teach young people and adults what and how to think. (Weaver, 2005, p. 108)

A change is needed in education; a change that is embraced by the teachers and students. “In embracing change, youth culture celebrates movement as well” (Lipsitz, 1994). Students need new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, and moving. This can be done through the integration of popular culture and popular music within education because, “...education signifies an initiation into new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, moving” (Greene, 2001, p. 7). This new wave in education could provide the motivation needed to turn the current educational conditions around.

The literature review supports the urgent need of having popular culture and popular music implemented into the classrooms. This is not an easy task because it is constantly changing at a rapid pace. Its appeal is world wide. Popular music, especially that of hip hop and rap, serves as a voice for many students. These students do not need to be silenced. Everyone’s voice should be heard, and everyone’s story should be told. Can music be the cure?

#### Curing Education

“When you’re sick, music is a great help...” (Burroughs, 1953/1977, p. 23). I listen to a variety of genres of music, and have found healing powers within each one.

Music, and another language dear to the indolent or profound minds which seek relaxation by varying their work, speaks to you of yourself and narrates the poem of your life; it becomes of one body with you, and you melt into it. It expresses your passion, not in a vague and indefinite way, as it does on those evenings you spend lolling at the opera, but in a detailed, positive way, every movement in the

rhythm indicating a movement familiar to your soul, every note transforming itself into a word, and the whole poem entering your brain like a dictionary endowed with life. (Baudelaire, 2002, p. 69)

Lyrics really speak to me. Often times I am able to relate to some of the experiences being sung about. I really depend on music when I am feeling down. It is music that becomes my form of therapy, “For music is an intellectual or a sensual pleasure, according to the temperament of him who hears it” (De Quincey, 1985, 45). It is more of a sensual pleasure for me because it helps me to feel better. Music has actually helped me to physically feel better. When I am depressed or feeling down I can always count on music to be there to help me feel better. Now that I think back, as far back as I can remember music has always been a form of therapy for me. But with music and therapy comes the topic of drugs.

I realized there were many references to drugs in the lyrics of many popular songs. “Drugs have always been a part of the music scene...” (Boon, 2002, 2). It appeared that drugs and music went together as well as cookies and milk did. It seemed as if they were a perfect fit. References to drugs turn some people against music because they believe it is bad, perhaps introducing youth to drugs and providing temptation. “Just as there is good music and bad music, there are bad drugs and good drugs. So we can’t say we’re ‘against’ music” (Plant, 1999/2001, 174). I agree with this statement because I can not say I am against music because there may be some bad music. Just as there is bad music, there is also good music. What I do believe is some music is inappropriate for children. Some of this inappropriate music gets played on radio stations for the general public to hear. Profanity often times is not edited out of the songs. My own two children

have told me several times that they know what words really belong in the songs they hear. I have inquired as to how they know this and they have stated it is because of the versions they hear on the radio. My daughters are fans of pop, country, and some hip-hop. I do not want to restrict them from what they like, but I do worry about what they might hear. There are other times they are listening to their music and simply do not understand what the music is really implying. One example is of Nelly when he is singing about taking a puff and passing it down. My husband made the mistake of singing Afroman's song titled *Because I Got High* in front of the girls. I do not think they really understood what it meant, but they have now been exposed to it. I was exposed to lyrics in songs as a child as well. I remember growing up singing Eric Clapton's *Cocaine*. I had no idea what cocaine was, but I loved the song. Thank goodness I just heard the songs and did not internalize their meanings. I also worry about my students listening to inappropriate lyrics.

I have found that many elementary students have been exposed to many lyrics that relate to drugs and drug use. While some students are aware of the meanings, others do not seem to understand what they mean. I have found this to be true with my own students who spend a lot of time singing in the classroom and at recess. Just recently on a field trip my students were singing on the bus. They were singing about taking a puff and getting high. They did not see anything wrong with what they were singing, but I simply told them to keep their voices down because they were annoying some of the other students sitting near them.

The mistake of most people is to suppose that it is by the ear they communicate with music, and, therefore that they are purely passive to its effects. But this is

not so: it is by the re-action of the mind upon the notices of the ear, (the *matter* coming by the senses, the *form* from the mind) that the pleasure is constructed: and therefore it is that people of equally good ear differ so much in this point from one another. (De Quincey, 1985, p. 45)

As I grew older I was able to listen to music and have more connectedness with it. I was able to make connections with what I was listening to. I believe this is why music becomes so healing for me. It allows for communication that I need. “Telephone, cinema, radio, television: parallel communication and representational systems exist as alternative prosthetic devices, lures, and prisons for our fears and passions” (Weiss, 2003, p. 169). Outlets such as the radio allow me to think about my fears and passions, and help me to relate to what is going on so that it does not stay bottled up.

There are other times when I just want to hear music for its rhythm and beat. It lifts my spirits. “The crowd likes works which impose their melody, which hypnotize, which hypertrophy its sensibility to the point of putting the critical sense to sleep” (Cocteau, 1930/2001, p. 81). Like the crowd, there are times I want my critical sense put to rest so I can just relax without being in deep thought. There are songs that hypnotize my sensibility to think about what is bothering me at the time, just like alcohol and other drugs do for some people. So where does this leave the children?

Schools are becoming more and more routine with the stress of standardization. “For many, if not most children, the school experience is a chronic stressor” (Breggin, 2001, 302). My own students are no exception to this rule. I taught three students who took medication daily to cope with school life.

The first student had a difficult time sitting still and being quiet during the school day. You guessed it; he was diagnosed as having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). His parents played with his medication three times during the year that I was aware of. His mother believed that he needed medication each day, and his father did not. His mother believed he could not help the way he behaved and his father believed he could. They were at total opposite viewpoints when it came to disciplining him. This student visited his doctor about every other month and normally his dosage got changed. He went from taking two pills to taking one pill, and then back to taking two pills again. The pediatrician had also changed the type of medication he took as well. If any of his grades began to drop, his mother took him back to the doctor for a change. I would usually get a phone call from her telling me that he may not behave for a few days while his medication got adjusted. His doctor had also sent in a list of modifications I could try in the classroom to help make him more successful. Needless to say, I had tried many of them. Nothing seemed to work because his medication turned him into a zombie. The only times I had seen his real personality was when he forgot to take his medication. He stayed to himself while on his medication though. He did not really talk a whole lot.

The second child on medication did not suffer from ADHD, but suffered from obsessive compulsive disorder and childhood depression (OCD). We started the school year off on the wrong foot. She was much more difficult to teach than the ADHD child. She wanted so much attention and she always wanted her way. She tended to be a very angry little girl. She refused to follow directions and did not have many friends. The other students in the classroom did not like her and she was well aware of it. She told me several times that she wished God would have made her a good girl. Her moods changed



several times throughout the day. One minute she was telling me she loved me, and then the next she was screaming at me. If another student tried to help her with her work she told them to leave her alone. She got upset even when people were being nice to her. She went to private counseling once a month, and was also seen for half a year by the school's counselor. Unfortunately I did not notice much of a change in her behavior then. I did not notice a drastic change in her behavior until her doctor changed her medication. She was not perfect by any means, but she was much better. She tended to have more positive days than negative ones. She made the honor roll. She had the grades for it all year, but not the behavior. She was very proud of herself and told me that her family was very proud of her too, although she had begun seeking more attention because her mom just had a baby. I just kept telling myself to be very patient with her and do whatever it takes to make her more successful.

The third student was the most extreme. This little girl started off the year on seven different types of medication. She was seeing a psychiatrist on a regular basis and Gateway counselors twice a week. She had physically hit me and a paraprofessional that was trying to help her on several different occasions. The paraprofessional explained to the child that she was a diabetic and that hitting her could be really bad for her health. The child just smirked and then dropped a chair on the paraprofessional's foot. She wore a pull-up because she urinated on herself at least twice a week. After she would wet herself, I would have to tell her to go and get cleaned up. She would not voluntarily do so. The other students had noticed this and laughed at her because they thought she was wearing a diaper. Come to find out, she urinated so frequently as a result of one of her medications. She was also a self-mutilator, but had made a lot of progress with it. She

used to hit herself and write all over herself. Her medication was changed several times throughout the year. She liked to throw objects around the room and at other children. She got frustrated easily and did not have much to say. I spent many hours worrying about her. One doctor told me that her combinations of medicine were very dangerous. My heart broke for her because she did not have any control over what was being done to her. I had to tell myself to remain calm when working with her, and remind myself that she could not help some of the things she had done. I was afraid that something dangerous could result. “More recently, there have been serious charges that manufacturers of SSRIs have suppressed data indicating that the drugs are not only ineffective but sometimes dangerous in children” (Angell, 2004/2005, p. 113). I do not want something to happen to her as a result of her medication intake. I also worried that something may happen to her later in life instead of immediately. I would hate for her to suffer some long term results or complications because of all this.

In order to help my students in the classroom setting, I try to incorporate as much music as possible. I believe that music in the classroom helps students in several different ways. The first way is that it helps auditory learners. Another way is through its healing powers. When students are having a bad day, music tends to help them feel better. My students often times ask me to turn the music on. Unfortunately, my principal does not see the importance of music and the arts at school. She believes they are not as constructive as reading, writing, and mathematics. She has a very strong personality and is difficult to talk to. It is hard to raise the topic with her when all she is worried about is high standardized test scores. “Merely raising the topic with any attitude other than condemnation is itself bound to create problems. Talking/writing about drugs, in

academia, as well as in any other situation where a job, a career, a reputation, are at stake, is no easy task” (Viano, 2002, p. 153). I know it is not an easy task because I have tried having this conversation with her. We have such varying opinions on so many topics, but I want her to know where I stand. Like it or not, drugs are a part of the school day for some students.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The importance of integrating music into the curriculum is not a new investigation in the educational arena. However, I will incorporate qualitative measures in an attempt to gain more insight with this concept focusing on both teachers and students. I feel that it is important to give these often silenced individuals a voice in this study. To do so, I will implement interviews as well as classroom observations. These qualitative means will be furthered explored and will stem from the research questions posed in this study.

In addition to interviews, I will also observe in various classrooms in order to see if music is being used in the classroom and how the students respond to it. I will observe in both regular classrooms as well as music classrooms. From these observations I hope to be able to provide specific examples of how students use music to their benefit and further enhance their education.

#### Sample Population

This study will focus on two schools and gain insight from both teachers and students in a Southern Georgia town.

*Teachers:* Although held to strict guidelines, teachers have the choice of how to relay and teach information within the walls of their classrooms. This study will allow teachers to voice their opinions whether or not they believe popular music is influential in the educational arena and if it should be incorporated in lessons. A total of four teachers will be interviewed. Two teachers will be regular education teachers and two will be music teachers. This will allow input from those who concentrate on music and those who do not.

*Students:* Ideally, schools and curriculums are created with the wellbeing of the students in mind. Who better to relay the success of education and motivation to learn than children themselves? Four children, one from each class, will be interviewed to gain more information for this study. They are the ones who are directly impacted by practices implemented within the classroom.

*Coastal County Schools:* As a teacher in Coastal County, I am particularly interested in the students within. I will conduct interviews and observations at my school (Coastal Elementary) along with one other elementary school in the county. This will allow for convenience and the ability to revisit classrooms and participants if necessary. Coastal County is growing quickly due to its affiliation and close proximity to Fort Stewart. Therefore, the student population in schools is highly transient and consistently changing. “The Coastal County School System has eight elementary schools that are located throughout the county. These schools serve nearly 5000 students in primary education” (Coastal County, 2006). It is from a small sample of these 5,000 students that I hope to find valuable information on music implementation in schools. The ethnicity of Coastal Elementary consists of approximately 51.5% African-Americans, 26.6% Caucasians, 6.6% Hispanics, 13.1% multiracial and less than 2.1% Asians and Indians. The student population has .9% of students identified as gifted while 10.7% are receiving special education services which include speech. The total enrollment is 617 students with approximately 68.9% on free or reduced meals. The school houses grades kindergarten through fifth. Approximately 50% of the student population transitions in and out during the school year. There are also a significant number of children from single parent homes, foster parents, and extended family homes. Most of the students live within the

city limits and a few live in rural communities on the outskirts of the city. Student motivation is a factor believed to affect student achievement at this school.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is cultural studies. The term cultural studies was coined by Richard Hoggart in 1964. Hoggart founded the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Stuart Hall became the director after Hoggart left.

In the early years, when it was being established in the Universities, Cultural Studies sat rather uncomfortably on the fence between these two conflicting definitions-culture as a standard of excellence, culture as a 'whole way of life'-unable to determine which represented the most fruitful line of enquiry. (Hebdige, 1979, 7)

The debate about whether cultural studies defines culture as a standard of excellence or as a whole way of life has been resolved. Grossberg & Pollock (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) explain that:

Cultural studies research is historically self-reflexive, critical, interdisciplinary, conversant with high theory, and focused on the global and the local, taking into account historical, political, economic, cultural, and everyday discourses. It focuses on "questions of community, identity, agency and change". (p. 250)

Cultural studies researchers include Stuart Hall, Dick Hebdige, and Angela McRobbie. Self-reflexive works tend to openly reflect upon their own processes of artful composition. Cultural studies research is critical because it is characterized by careful

evaluation and judgment. It is interdisciplinary because it involves two or more academic disciplines that are normally considered distinct.

According to Stuart Hall, cultural studies developed in the United Kingdom as a result of the dissolution of classical Marxism in its Eurocentrism in the 1950s. The idea that the financial support has an effect on the cultural superstructure was also a reason for the development. With all of this came ideas from the left wing and some ideas from the Frankfurt School. With the political arena changing so much in the United Kingdom with the middle class in decline, the scholars then turned to Antonio Gramsci because he had been concerned with similar issues in Italy. Britain's manufacturing industries were fading away, but the citizens still moved away from the Labour Party and towards the Conservative Party. In the United States, cultural studies dealt more with understanding the skewed and unbiased reactions to mass culture, as well as the uses of them. The bottom line is that cultural studies deal with the meaning and practices of everyday life.

Because cultural studies is so significant and focuses on both global and local issues it becomes crucial to my research. I want to use this type of information and intertwine it with curricular issues. The chosen framework will allow me to take a global issue and narrow in on a local level focusing on selected schools in Coastal County. Education and curriculum are global issues. Some Asian countries seem to be advancing in fields such as technology and mathematics, while other countries hardly have the materials necessary to educate their children, much less effective curriculums. I plan on taking this issue and narrowing in on my county and school. Legislation such as *No Child Left Behind* has really impacted the education of my students and something needs to change. Within this framework, popular culture, popular music, and curriculum will

be reviewed. Cultural inquiry will be used as the main method to guide the collection and analysis of in-depth information about the participants. Through this curriculum theory will be explored.

Curriculum theory is the interdisciplinary study of educational experience. It is about discovering and articulating for oneself and with others, the educational significance of the school subjects for self and society in the ever-changing historical movement. It rejects the current “business-minded” school reform, with its emphasis on test scores on standardized examinations, academic analogues to “the bottom line” (i.e., profit). It rejects the miseducation of the American public. (Pinar, 2004)

My experience in the public school classroom for eleven years is the driving force for my dissertation research. I have witnessed student after student become overwhelmed with popular culture. I hope to find that there is some way of including it in the classroom. I chose to use cultural inquiry because it will allow me explore the everyday lives of my students and make meaning from it. From that point, I hope to be able to use these practices and put them to use in the classroom to raise student achievement while making education more meaningful.

#### Data Collection Methods

I will collect data from conducting interviews and observations of the eight participants. Four participants are teachers and four are students. Three of the teachers are female and one is male. They are all elementary teachers. Two teach music, one teaches first grade, and one teaches fifth grade. I will refer to the teachers as Ms. Smith, Ms. Walls, Ms. Jones, and Mr. Black. Of the four students, three are male and one is



female. I will refer to the students as John, Mike, Robert, and Angela. They are from kindergarten, first, second, and fifth grades.

Interviews allow for researchers to get answers to their questions in more detail. Before beginning my interviews I plan on establishing a rapport with my interviewees. In order to find answers to my questions, I will use two separate interviews. The first round of interviewing will focus on students in the classroom. It is with this group that popular culture is very powerful and I will establish conversation that allows them to explain their view on if it is or is not beneficial in the classroom. The second round of interviewing will spotlight teachers' feelings on the importance of music in the classroom. The interviews will be designed around the four research questions for this study. The interview questions for the students are:

1. Describe a normal day at school.
2. How does music make you feel?
3. What is your favorite kind of music?
4. Do you get to hear your favorite songs at school? If so, during which class(es) do you hear them? If not, would you like to?
5. Does music help you learn? How? Can you give me an example?
6. How much time do you spend listening to music each day? When do you listen to music?
7. How do you think music can help you prepare for a test?
8. Do you think music is important? Why or why not?

The interview questions for the teachers are:

1. Describe the place of music in the overall educational program.
2. Do you use popular music in your class for educational purposes? If so, would you please give examples? If not, could you think of times when it would be appropriate to include it?
3. Describe how standardization has impacted the curriculum you teach.
4. Describe times you have seen or heard students talking about popular culture and popular music.
5. Do you believe popular culture and popular music have educational value? Explain.
6. Describe ways popular music could be incorporated into the curriculum.
7. Do you think popular culture and popular music could raise student achievement? Explain.
8. Do you think popular culture and popular music could increase student motivation if incorporated into the curriculum? Explain.

If the participants would like to add any more information I will record that as well.

There may be questions that I ask that are not preplanned based on the way the interviews are going. I will schedule dates and times with the students and teachers that are convenient for them. By interviewing teachers and students in Coastal County I hope to uncover more information about popular music and the curriculum. I will remind the participants to be honest and to not answer the questions the way they believe I want them to be answered. I plan on interviewing all of the participants in their own classrooms where I believe they will feel more comfortable. However, they will have the

option to choose where they would like the interview conducted if they do not want them conducted in their classrooms. The interviews should last anywhere from fifteen minutes to about thirty minutes. I will also audio record the interviews to help prevent any misconstruing of information. If needed, I will conduct a follow up interview. All field notes that I take, as well as the recordings will be locked in a filing cabinet. I will also assign the participants numbers in order to keep from revealing their identities. The participants' actual names will not be used at all in this study. At the conclusion of the study, all documentation will be destroyed.

After conducting the interviews, I will then observe all the participants or vice versa, depending on scheduling. My purpose in observing is to see how the students react when music is and is not used in the classroom. I will look for things such as the students' willingness to participate, facial expressions, correct and incorrect answers, motivation, and other ideas. I will compare the results to see if any trends stand out. I will also observe to see if any popular music is played or spoken of, and if any other popular culture topics come up during instruction. Another reason I would like to observe is to see if the teachers use music for instruction, and what kind of music they play. I would also like to see if a couple of the teachers will play some popular music to see how the children react. I plan on observing each participant one time. If that does not result as being sufficient, I will conduct more observations. I plan on observing for about thirty minutes each time.

Then I will compare the results of the interviews and observations and look for any trends that may occur. I hope to conclude that the selected teachers and students will

prove that popular culture and popular music do help students increase motivation and achievement.

CHAPTER IV  
GIVING THEM A VOICE:  
INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS OF FOUR TEACHERS AND FOUR  
STUDENTS

This chapter allows for four teachers and four students to give their opinions about education as it involves standardization and popular culture and music. All of the teachers and students are from elementary schools in Coastal County. All participants have been given pseudonyms. Three of the teachers are White. Two of these teachers are female and one is male. The fourth teacher is a Black female. Of these four teachers, two teach music and the other two teach first and fifth grade. Three of the students are male. Two are White males and one is a Black male. The fourth student is a White female. The students have been given pseudonyms that will consist of first names.

Mrs. Walls' Interview

Mrs. Walls is a 35 year old White female who teaches elementary music. She teaches every student in the school from kindergarten through fifth grade. Other than music, she has also taught second grade. Altogether she has been teaching for twelve years.

When asked about the overall place of music in the educational program she had a number of strong feelings. She felt that music for the most part has been seen as a sidebar or frill of the overall educational program. She explained that it had taken a backseat to the core academic subjects. Mrs. Walls stated that she was, "Not sure how or when the readin', writin', and 'rithmetic curriculum came to be 'the' curriculum of an American education, but it seems to be the one in which we truly believe makes us

‘educated.’” She went on to say that music education is a part of the curriculum but it is limited to usually one teacher per elementary school and two to five per high school. She went on and guessed on the percentages but thought that about 2% of the overall curriculum is considered music education, and that maybe about 10% is arts in general with the remaining 90% core areas such as math and reading. She hoped she was wrong about the percentages, but did think that music was being used in the classrooms as a way to help students with memorization. She went on to say that music can be a wonderful mnemonic device. For example, think about having to learn your ABC’s with the “ABC song” which is actually set to the tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.” Mrs. Walls mentioned how teachers have caught on to recent studies about how classical music promotes brain activity, which she believed was called the Mozart effect. As a result, she had noticed teachers playing classical music during the day.

When asked to describe how standardization has impacted the curriculum she taught, Mrs. Walls thought she was in a unique situation. She explained that she started teaching in the regular education classroom and was fortunate enough to get the opportunity to teach elementary music. As a result, this has allowed her to see both sides of the fence. She spoke about her first year teaching. “I was forced to take a hard look at standardization during my very first year teaching the third grade. Our test scores ended up being very bad and we were asked to give a faculty meeting to explain what exactly we did wrong. It was extremely humiliating. I ended up getting a bad taste in my mouth about standardized tests. Still, I decided that as a regular classroom teacher that I had better start learning how to produce high test scores or end up feeling ineffective and possibly face losing my job.” It was not until after she moved from her first school that

she started researching and looking for ways to assure that her students did well on their tests. One tool she found to help her was test preparation songs. But she revealed that she mostly had her students complete practice tests after practice tests. She also used classical music during transitional times in her classroom and while students were working on seat work. She knew from her musical background that music was a motivator and sometimes helped students to relax and think more clearly. “Now, as a music teacher, I find that there is very little time for music placed into the curriculum because of standardization. I have been asked to teach lessons geared towards standardized tests, especially right before the tests occur. I have used different songs and dances specifically designed to teach concepts covering all the core academic subjects and concepts.”

We then spoke about using popular music in the classroom for educational purposes. Mrs. Walls was very adamant about her answer. She told me that she does use popular music in her classroom for educational purposes. “As a music teacher, I constantly research new ideas and music to teach to make music learning more relevant to my students. A couple of resources that I have found to be beneficial to including more popular music is a magazine called Music Express from John Jacobson, and Music K-8 magazines by Plank Road Publishing. They often include articles and songs from popular movies and shows such as Shrek, Finding Nemo, popular Disney movies, Spongebob, High School Musical, etc. They also include music from popular children’s artists like Aly and A.J., Hannah Montana, and Jonas Brothers. These offer ‘safe’ opportunities to include popular music in the curriculum. To be perfectly honest, some popular music frightens me because of the lyrics, and even if the lyrics are not blatantly

provocative, they may have an underlying meaning that is completely inappropriate. I do use rap and pop style songs in my classroom, but they are redesigned for classroom use, for example, I use a song called 'The Rules Rap' to teach basic classroom rules. I have also used the Multiplication Raps to teach times tables."

Mrs. Walls then described times she had heard and seen students talking about popular culture and popular music. She stated that students often discuss and ask about popular music in the music classroom. She also stated that the students frequently ask if they can listen to "their" music: rap and hip hop. "I can recall hearing students ask if we could do the 'Soulja Boy.' Initially, I had no idea what they were talking about, but later I heard the song at a school dance, and saw the dance that goes with it. I had always heard the 'clean version' and until recently had never heard the actual lyrics which include the word 'ho' over and over again throughout the song. This is kind of disturbing, especially since my son and daughter do this dance at school dances. They have not heard, nor understand the actual lyrics to the song, well, neither do I. Still, as a mother and educator, I should perhaps be more vigilant against this kind of music. It is obvious that the students really love it, and I have often considered developing a dance like the 'Soulja Boy' to teach academic concepts. Students have so much vigor and excitement and motivation from this type of music that it would almost certainly be successful. Other artists that I have heard students mention are Ludacris, The Franchise Boys, and Chris Brown. I have not done a lot of research on these artists, but I do listen to pop stations on the radio, so I am familiar with some pop music. I actually like some pop music, which is probably unusual for a music teacher. Many of my music teacher colleagues would definitely frown on my listening to and being open to pop music. I



have reviewed some pop music with my colleagues and they had never heard the songs of the popular hip hop and country artists of today. I get the feeling that they do not consider this type of music to be authentic or valid music and should be kept out of the music classroom entirely. As I said, I have a different approach. I try to have an open mind. I believe music can be anything from a toddler banging pots in the kitchen to a full symphony orchestra.”

When asked if she believed popular culture and popular music have educational value, Mrs. Walls gave an extremely loud “yes!” “Of course popular culture and music have educational value. This is who we are, how could it not have value? I do think that it must be screened and researched before it is included in the classroom. Throughout history, there have been parts of the popular culture that have been deemed inappropriate or wrong in some ways. Jazz and rock styles of music were seen as provocative and inappropriate, but since then have been used in the classroom in many different ways. We need to see ourselves for who we are and what we are. By not including popular culture and music in our curriculums, we are sending a very strong message to students that what they like is somehow wrong and invalid. Popular music today is much more provocative and so this makes this question extremely difficult to answer. Is there validity and benefit in music produced today? Yes. Is it hard to find? Yes. Still, this is the society we have become, and it is our responsibility to find the value and assist our students in becoming who they really are and want to become, not forcing our likes and dislikes and attitudes on them without giving them valid reasons. Our cultural beliefs are no more right and valid and valuable than theirs are. They are products of their environment and their environment is valid and real and valuable and is deserving of

respect and consideration. This is a way that we can and will reach them and educate them more successfully.”

Mrs. Walls then went on to describe ways popular music could be incorporated into the curriculum. “As stated earlier, I would love to take some of today’s popular dances and songs and change them as a way to teach academic concepts. That would be one way to incorporate pop music into the curriculum. The way that I personally use popular music is through kid-friendly periodicals that include popular music and biographies of popular artists. Students are motivated to read and research popular music and artists because these are things they are interested in and already know a lot about. Teachers could take the instrumentals of popular songs and have students write songs about concepts they are working on. Students could develop dances that show concepts such as the water cycle, or a plant’s growth with popular music. Students could take the lyrics of a popular song and pick out all the nouns, verbs, complete or incomplete sentences, types of sentences, words that start with ‘s’, poetic devices, rhyming words, or perhaps the underlying narrative or moral of the song. I believe there are many ways to use popular music in the classroom, but it takes an imaginative teacher who is willing to develop and research these ways.”

Mrs. Walls also thought that popular culture and popular music could raise student achievement. She said that her most successful classes are usually the classes deemed as “high-risk” or “low-achieving.” “The Early Intervention Classes are usually the most musically-talented and musically-motivated classes that I work with. These classes produce the most soloists and actors for programs. They often start asking to add to things to our performances. They ask, ‘Can we add movements? Can we change the

words?’ As soon as the performances are done, ‘Can we do it again?’ This phenomenon leads me to believe that with some students a focus on popular culture and music could raise student achievement. In fact, I have read some research that has proven in arts-focused schools achievement scores have been raised partially because of the focus on arts. I have not done any actual research, but based on my observations of low-risk classes I believe that student achievement could be raised simply by focusing more on pop culture and music as an overall addition and enhancement to the curriculum.

Mrs. Walls loudest ‘yes’ was when she was asked if she thought popular culture and popular music could increase student motivation if incorporated into the curriculum. “Students are motivated and validated by the addition of popular culture and music into the curriculum. My students are motivated when I incorporate music that they are familiar with into my lessons. Even music from their parents’ generation is motivating because they are familiar with it, and often have a fondness towards it because of the personal connection with it. Teaching is often about connections. Bridging the gap between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is very important in making students feel like you care about who they are and what is truly important to them. Teachers need to use anything and everything to reach their students. It is becoming more and more difficult to reach students because we are competing with so much media: television, computers, video games, etc. Whatever works...do it! (Well, within reason). As stated earlier, a teacher should research anything that she decides to use in the classroom, but if students are motivated by it and feel more connected then why wouldn’t a teacher use it? It would be extremely beneficial to teachers for textbook and curriculum writers to assist them with the inclusion of popular music and culture within textbooks and curriculum. This is why

I use periodicals, because they are up-to-date and someone else has done the time-consuming research to assure me that what I teach will not be offensive or inappropriate for the classroom. The answer to the inclusion of popular culture and music is increasing student motivation is—in my opinion—a resounding YES!

#### Mrs. Walls' Observation

Mrs. Walls was observed teaching twenty second grade students. These students were from a regular education classroom, but two of the students were gifted females. Eleven of the students were male and nine were female. There was not a paraprofessional or other adult in the classroom. The observation was conducted from 11:00-11:40 A.M. Mrs. Walls greeted the class at her door. I entered the classroom with the students. She sent in five students at a time to find a seat. There were not any desks in this music classroom, but there were about twenty-five chairs arranged in a large circle. She had a Smartboard hung up over her chalkboard. The part of the chalkboard that was still usable had a treble clef and staff on it. The LCD projector was on and displayed Sarah Vaughn's picture. The Georgia Performance Standards for music were displayed on a very large bulletin board in the back of the room. There were markers pointing to the standards that she was currently working on with her different classes. Her desk was located near the front of the room near a window. In the corner near her desk was a television. Her daily schedule was posted near the door, along with her classroom rules and consequences. Next to those was a poster of composers. From the ceiling hung different music notes made out of black construction paper.

As the students entered the classroom, they walked in to Sarah Vaughn's music playing, as well as her picture being displayed on the Smartboard. Along with her

picture, facts about Sarah Vaughn were listed. She asked the students if they knew who they were listening to. They did not recognize the music, but were able to read her name off the board. Once the teacher explained who Sarah Vaughn was she reviewed the rules. She did this playing a song called "The Rules Rap." The students were able to stand up. Before the music began to play the students began rapping and dancing in anticipation. It was apparent that the students were excited about this lesson. They made comments like, "Freaky, freaky fresh" and "I'm doing the robot." Then the music came on from a C.D. The song began with, "The rules, the rules, the rules of the classroom." It was a very lively lesson. I observed as most of the students participated in the rap. Three of the twenty students did not sing along though. These three students were smiling and watching everyone else. After the song was finished, the students sat back down in their seats. Underneath their seats, Mrs. Walls had placed a purple magazine. The magazine was titled *John Jacobson's Music Express*. She was using the August/September 2005, volume 6, number five edition. She directed the students to turn to a certain page. What they found on the page was the Spongebob Squarepants theme song. Every single student immediately began reading it and singing. Mrs. Walls then began playing the Spongebob theme song. Most of the students started shouting with excitement. However, one male said, "You've got to be kidding me." After the song ended, the teacher passed out a sheet of paper with facts about the theme song on it. Mrs. Walls explained to the students that the song was called a sea shanty. She then directed the students to read the paper independently. Only one student asked for clarification for one of the words. After the students had read the paper, Mrs. Walls asked if any of the students figured out what a sea shanty was. The students could answer the question in a

roundabout way. Mrs. Walls went on to clarify what a sea shanty was and the importance behind one. She explained that a sea shanty had to have a good sense of humor and a good voice. The students then shared other facts they had learned from the paper. Mrs. Walls then realized that the students did not understand all of the terms they had read on the paper. She went over each fact and explained everything in detail. When she was finished with that she played another sea shanty. This shanty was titled *Haul Up the Anchor*. The students did not appear to be as interested in this shanty. After listening to the second sea shanty, Mrs. Walls had the students read more about them. She then introduced another sea shanty titled *Cape Cod Shanty*. This shanty had three verses. The teacher took the time to explain what the words refrain and solo meant because they were parts of the shanty. She explained that a refrain was a repeated part and a solo was when one person was singing. The students began talking when they were not supposed to. Mrs. Walls displayed a class list on the board that was titled *Star Students*. She began removing letters in the students' names, one at a time, for those students who were not following the rules. Those students became quiet again and waited for Mrs. Walls to play the next sea shanty. Not one of the students had ever heard this song before. I noticed five of the students swinging their feet to the music, but the other students were not moving at all, but they were singing along. Following the shanty, the teacher asked the students questions about it. She explained that she found the shanty humorous, but several students disagreed with her. The students did however have several questions about it such as, "What is a cod fish?" and "Where is Cape Cod" and "What are heavy gales?" The teacher explained the answer to each question.

Mrs. Walls then explained to the students that they were going to make up their own verse to the sea shanty. The students were excited about this. The teacher shared a verse that some students in another class had come up with. She pointed out the fact that the example was funny and that it rhymed. Afterwards she read two more verses made up from students in other second grade classes. Right away there were ten students who were ready to share a verse they had come up with. She did not let the students share just yet; instead the entire class came up with a verse together. The verse to the shanty is as follows:

Cape Cod lions they have no claws,  
Heave away, heave away,  
So they use their paws,  
Heave away, heave away

The students were instructed to replace the first body part and then come up with another word that rhymes with it. They could also come up with different animals. The students began coming up with many rhyming words. The students were then instructed to come up with a new verse by themselves. Each and every student was then allowed to share their new verse. Some students had chosen the same thing as other students. One example of a student's new verse is:

Cape Cod cows they have no nose,  
Heave away, heave away,  
So they have to sniff with their toes,  
Heave away, heave away

After all the students had shared their shanties, Mrs. Walls played the Cape Cod shanty again. The class sung all three verses with the C.D. Then Mrs. Walls explained what a cappella meant, and the students sang the Cape Cod shanty with the new class verse. The students enjoyed hearing their own version being sang. One student drummed to the beat, while another student clapped. A third student danced.

As the lesson was coming to an end Mrs. Walls had the students close their books and put them underneath their chairs. She explained that the students were going to get to play the drums with the Spongebob Squarepants theme song, but they had run out of time. The students were disappointed. Mrs. Walls called the students one at a time to line up, and let the Spongebob theme song play. The students began singing along too loudly so she told them to get quieter and then replayed the song.

#### Mike's Interview and Observation

Mike is an eight year old second grade student. He is a white male. I observed Mike during his music class with Mrs. Walls during fourth period. I noticed he was very excited about going to music class. During my observation I noticed that Mike stayed on task the entire time. He followed all directions and participated well. He appeared to be the most excited when Mrs. Walls played the Spongebob Squarepants theme song. He danced and sang along with the CD. Mike was also one of the ten students who immediately came up with a new verse for the sea shanty, but was not allowed to share it. He was very engaged to the lesson. He laughed at the other shanties that were created because he thought they were funny. When he realized music class was coming to an end he was disappointed. Mike said, "Is it time to go already?"



I interviewed Mike at the end of that school day. I began by asking him to describe a normal day at school. Mike replied, "First, I do my journal. In my journal, I write about what I did on weekends, and on free choice days, I get to write about whatever I want. So I write about 'fake stuff' like once upon a time, and sometimes I write about my family. Then we do all the normal subjects like reading, language arts, math, social studies, and science. My favorite subject is reading because it is fun. Sometimes it's make-believe and sometimes it's true. I also go to recess. We also go to specials. The specials are music, art, P.E., and computer lab. My favorite special is art because you get to glue and cut and stuff. We also go to lunch, and then we go home." Then I asked him if he ever heard his favorite songs at school, and if so which classes he heard them at. Mike stated, "Yes, sometimes but not very often. Music class is when I get to hear them. Once we listened and played instruments to Bob Marley."

Then I asked him how music made him feel. He said, "Music makes me feel happy because you get to listen to old songs. I like some of the old music like Bob Marley because these are songs my dad always listens to. Some of the other music my dad listens to is rock 'n' roll, like ACDC, Credence Clearwater Revival, Sting, the Rolling Stones, and the Doobie Brothers. These songs are very fun to me."

Then I asked him what his favorite kind of music was. He said, "Rock is my favorite kind of music. I also like country."

Then I asked him how much time he spent listening to music each day. He explained, "I spend maybe a half an hour listening to music when my dad is not here. My mom teaches music so she kind of likes it quiet when we are riding in the car because that is what she does at work all day. But my dad has music playing ALL THE TIME. He

has an iPod that is completely full. He listens to music when he is working in the garage and always has it very loud in the car.”

So I asked him if he had ever learned about a topic from a song. Mike said, “Yes. I learned about test-taking preparation, continents, times tables, money, subtraction, and other math topics.”

Then I asked him if he thought music could help him prepare for a test. He said, “Music makes me remember things better.”

My last question was whether or not he thought music was important. Mike stated, “Yes, I think music is important because when I grow up I will already know a lot about music. Listening to music makes me feel happy and relaxes me. I love to listen to music with my dad, it’s ‘our’ thing.”

#### Mrs. Smith’s Interview

Mrs. Smith is a 52 year old White female who teaches elementary music. She teaches every student in the school from kindergarten through fifth grade. She was recently the Teacher of the Year for her school. She mentioned to me that she was surprised that a music teacher would be chosen to receive such an award. Altogether she has been teaching for twenty six years.

I interviewed Mrs. Smith during her planning time between second and third period. When I walked in she was setting up her classroom for the next class of kindergarteners. She was laying three xylophones on the floor. Her classroom had a piano in the front corner. On the opposite side of the room were two rows of students’ chairs, as well as on the adjacent side. There were about thirty chairs in all. Her room had music notes hanging from the ceiling. Her bulletin board consisted of charts of all

the classes in the school with the students' names on them. Most of the students in the school had rows of stars by their names. On the rest of the wall was a music word wall. Scattered throughout the room were posters of famous composers. She also had posters of several musicals hung up throughout the room.

We sat in the corner of Mrs. Smith's class for the interview. We sat on the students' chairs for awhile, and then she began moving around the room during the interview. She was still trying to prepare for her next class. She told me to carry on, that she could work and talk at the same time.

When asked to describe the place of music in the overall educational program she shared her displeasure. She stated she was not allowed to give homework to any students in the school, and that made her feel that her work was less important. She was explaining that she assigns class work to the students, but that she is not allowed to grade any of it. This leads to a difficult time trying to come up with a grade for the students' report cards. Although she then went on to explain that the grades she gives are an E, S, N, or U. The E stands for excellent, the S stands for satisfactory, the N stands for needs improvement, and the U stands for unsatisfactory. Another frustration she shared was that when students did earn a N or U, she had to have the principal's approval before putting it on a report card. She also cannot pass out progress reports although regular classroom teachers can. She ended her responses by simply stating, "I just don't feel as if everyone else thinks what I do is really important. Most teachers don't seem to care what I am doing as long as they get their planning time while I'm teaching."

Mrs. Smith then shared her views on how standardization has impacted the curriculum she teaches. She explained that she was still teaching from the Quality Core

Curriculum (QCCs), and that she had not switched over to the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). She said that music would be the last subject area to switch over to the GPS. She mentioned that she has asked her administration if she could go ahead and make the switch, but she was declined. She said she really focuses on teaching the national standards and that there are only ten of them. She finished explaining by saying, “Here again, what I have to teach is pushed on the back burner because the other subjects are being implemented first.”

When asked about using popular music in her class for educational purposes, Mrs. Smith stated that she did occasionally use popular music in her classroom. She said she used to have a pop hit of the week. She explained that she did this for only about five years because the lyrics became more and more vulgar as time passed by. She mentioned that she tunes in to the radio station 97.3 when she wants to incorporate popular music because she thought the radio versions of the songs were usually decent enough to use in school. She mentioned other ways she incorporates popular culture and music into her lessons. She said she likes to use Christmas cards to help the students make associations. She said she likes to play Christmas music in December. The most important popular music she focused on was musicals, especially those from Broadway. She explained that she did not feel comfortable using hip-hop because she was not too familiar with it. She did go on to say that she does like to use music that rhymes and her students have made connections to some hip-hop songs. She stated that there is a fine line when using hip-hop in the classroom. Mrs. Smith did say that she does use music from *Porgy and Bess* that mentions hell. She said that she has never had a parent complain about it either.

Mrs. Smith then described some of the times she had seen or heard students talking about popular culture and music. She said she mainly notices this during her chorus classes. She teaches chorus once a week. The most popular music she hears the students sing is the Spongebob Squarepants theme song. She said her chorus students always want to sing it. She does allow them to sing it and she said they love it. Another popular culture topic that comes up is *American Idol*. She said she is actually able to bring up issues for discussion based on what is happening on the show. She discusses things such as the abilities of the competitors, judges' comments, fairness of voting, and song choices. She watches the show weekly so she can have these conversations with the students. A third topic she has heard her students talk about is a radio character named Freddy off of radio station 97.3. She explained that the hosts of Kidd Craddock in the morning spotted this guy named Freddy, and they liked his singing abilities. So they thought it would be cool to promote him on their show and try to make him famous. They would follow him around to different gigs and then have him on their talk show to discuss his successes. She said that her students would follow this story and discuss it in class.

When asked if she believed if popular culture and popular music had educational value, Mrs. Smith stated that she believed anything with rhythm had educational value. She thought that popular music did have educational value. The problem was in the lyrics. One way around this problem was to use new instrumentals. She stated that the instrumentals added so much to education. She really liked the fact that she could even get many of them for free off of the internet. She also liked the fact that with so many

new technological advances, using instrumentals was so easy to use in the classroom. She stated that she does try to use popular music in her room, but does so very cautiously.

Mrs. Smith then went on to elaborate on those times she had used popular music in her classroom. She explained that she liked to use classical music and tie it into movies that her students had been watching. Another way was by using the music used in popular commercials. Some of the best ones to use were sports related commercials. She said they really grabbed the students' attention. She also likes to teach different music styles such as blues, jazz, gospel, etc. Her favorite way to incorporate popular music was through the use of musicals. Her favorite musical to use is the *Nutcracker*. She even takes her chorus classes to watch the *Nutcracker* every December. She mentioned that regular classroom teachers could also use popular music the same way she does to help reach their students. She said it is really a never ending cycle.

When asked if popular culture and popular music could raise student achievement, Mrs. Smith stated that she thought it could and that it does. She stated, "A very simple way to achieve this is to just allow the students to listen to it while they are working." She believes that music alone raises achievement. She said children need music every single day. The only thing that needs to be done is to change up the styles of music. One change she likes to make is using quartets that she finds on iTunes.

When asked if she thought popular culture and popular music could increase student motivation if incorporated into the curriculum, Mrs. Smith said, "Oh yeah!" She really believes it increases motivation during the times the classroom environment is quiet. She thinks teachers could use it best when students are finishing up independent assignments. She further explained that popular music could be used to teach from, but

that it could also motivate students to complete their work and stay on task if played at an appropriate volume.

#### Mrs. Smith's Observation

I observed Mrs. Smith teach a class of fourteen kindergarten students. The regular classroom teacher walked the students in to Mrs. Smith's class and explained that he needed to take one male student back to the classroom with him because he had been having some behavioral problems with him. It was around 9:45 in the morning. The students came in and sat down in a semi-circle on the floor. Mrs. Smith reminded the students how to sit correctly, and that was crisscross applesauce with their hands in their laps. She then led a discussion and review on high and low sounds. She used examples from dance music to help her. The students were very attentive and eager to join in the conversation. The students were very interested about discussing the elephant that had visited them the previous week. They talked about how the elephant came and made low sounds because he was so huge. That was when Mrs. Smith reviewed the high and low rule. She explained that the bigger the instrument the lower the sound, and then the opposite was true of the smaller instruments. She then used her Smartboard to help talk about things that were found outside above and below. She illustrated what the students answered so the students could have a visual aid. One of the objects the students said that are found below the ground is a submarine. Then that reminded the students of Spongebob Squarepants and they started talking about him and singing the theme song from the show. Mrs. Smith allowed this conversation and singing to continue for a couple of minutes and then directed their attention back to the board.

She numbered the board one through four. Beside each number she drew a mountain and submarine. She used this to help the students take a listening test. Before beginning the test she explained the rules. She explained that the students needed to circle the mountain if the sound was high, or circle the submarine if the sound was low. She then assigned the students to chairs. The chairs were numbered. She then had a student pass out pieces of cardboard to put their papers on to help them write, and crayons to circle their answers. The students were then directed to put their names on their paper. She then spread the children apart. Mrs. Smith played a C.D. with the sounds the students had to listen to. There were four different sounds/songs that played three times. I noticed that two students tried to look onto their neighbor's paper. They had marked their answers, but seemed to be looking for reassurance. She then collected their papers and had another student collect the cardboard and crayons.

Mrs. Smith then placed the students into groups of three. The groups represented high, middle, and low sounds. She assigned the parts to the students based on their height. The tallest student in the group represented high sounds. The shortest student in the group represented low sounds. The student that had the middle height represented middle sounds. The students were given little instruction because she wanted them to use their imaginations, but they had to demonstrate high, middle, and low sounds with their bodies, but without sounds. The demonstration came from the positioning of their bodies. Mrs. Smith walked around the room to observe the progress of the students and realized there was only one group of students that understood what to do. She then told the students to stop what they were doing and watch what this particular group was doing. The shortest student lay on the floor. The middle student got on her knees. The



tallest student stood up. She instructed the students to try again without copying what the demonstrating group had done. The students struggled with this somewhat. She ended up having to coach the students through the activity. One group had a student do a backbend, one curl up in a ball, and the third student stand with his arms stretched straight up. Another group had one student do the splits, one bend over like a bridge, and the third student bent over the bridge. The students then explained how they represented the three levels. The students loved explaining how the other students represented high, middle, and low sounds. After allowing all the groups to demonstrate to the class, Mrs. Smith connected that part of the lesson to using the glockenspiel. The students worked with the students they were already grouped with. They made chords out of high, middle, and low sounds. The tallest student in the group played the high notes, the middle student in the group played the middle notes, and the shortest student in the group played the low sounds. Each student had his/her own glockenspiel to use. There were three of them placed at the front of the classroom. The students practiced their own notes and then made chords when they all worked together at the same time. She allowed all the groups to complete this part of the lesson, while the other groups watched and listened. She discussed with the students what was going on. The students were very anxious for their turn. One student was extremely playful during this, so he was not allowed to use the glockenspiel. Another student was given his turn. As she was wrapping up the lesson, Mrs. Smith referred to Papa Bear, Mama Bear, and Baby Bear from the children's story *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. She told the students that she thinks about the bears when talking about high, middle, and low sounds. She let the students demonstrate their voices, and then she compared the size of the bear to its voice. She explained that it

was the same with musical instruments. The regular classroom teacher arrived to get his class. The students were lined up and led out.

#### Robert's Interview and Observation

Robert is a white male kindergarten student that I observed during Mrs. Smith's music lesson. He is six years old. As Robert came into the music room, I noticed he was very well behaved. He came and sat right down the way he was told to crisscross applesauce. He greeted Mrs. Smith too.

When Mrs. Smith reminded the students about the elephant that visited the previous week, Robert began acting like an elephant. He also made elephant sounds. Mrs. Smith had reminded the students that the bigger the instrument the lower the sound. The students then brainstormed things that are found below the ground, and Robert said a submarine is found below. The mention of a submarine being below the water made the students think of Spongebob. The students started discussing Spongebob Squarepants because he stays below the surface of the water too. Robert became very talkative when Spongebob came up. He was one of the students that began singing the theme song from the show. He also told his neighbor that he likes to watch Spongebob on T.V. and that he has a Spongebob C.D. When Mrs. Smith redirected the students, Robert got quiet and right back on task. When questions were asked by Mrs. Smith, Robert did raise his hand and wait to be called upon before answering. Every time he was called upon he answered correctly. When the students were taking their quiz over sounds, I sat where I could see Robert's answers. He got all of his answers correct. I did notice him glancing at his neighbor's paper. His neighbor had one problem incorrect. He looked back and forth at his paper and hers, but did not change his answer. He listened very attentively while the

music was being played. When the students worked in groups of three and demonstrated high, middle, and low, Robert was one of the students who demonstrated low. Robert was the student who laid flat on the ground. When playing the glockenspiel, Robert again played the low notes. He was also the student who was chosen to have two turns because one student was playing around and lost his turn. This time Robert was allowed to play the high notes. He was happy about the change. Near the end of the lesson when Mrs. Smith was talking to the students about Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Robert changed his voice accordingly to the sizes of the bears. He laughed when he was talking like Baby Bear and Mama Bear. He kept imitating Papa Bear's voice over and over again.

I interviewed Robert after school that day. The first thing I asked him to do was to describe a normal day at school. He said, "I go eat breakfast and do my morning work. Then I do all of my work and go to specials and lunch. At the end I get to go home." Then I asked him if he got to hear any of his favorite songs at school. Robert answered, "Sometimes I get to hear them in music class. Sometimes my teacher plays music too." Then I asked him how music made him feel. He said, "Music makes me feel like having fun. I like it a lot." So then I asked him what his favorite kind of music was. He said, "I like kid songs like Spongebob." Then I asked him how much time he spent listening to music each day. He said, "Um...like thirty minutes. My sister takes dance classes so I hear a lot of her music." Next I asked him if he had ever learned about a topic from a song. He said, "Yes, my ABC's and the planets in the solar system." Then I asked him if he thought music could help him prepare for a test. He said, "Yes, it could help me

remember things.” My final question was whether or not he thought music was important. He said, “Yes, music is important to me because I like it.”

#### Mr. Black’s Interview

Mr. Black is a 35 year old White male first grade teacher and grade level leader. He has only taught first and second grade. He has been teaching for fourteen years. He has been grade level leader for three years now.

When asked to describe the place of music in the overall educational program, he expressed that music has a very important place in the educational program. “Music stimulates students. Music can be used to involve the reluctant learner. Kinesthetic and auditory learners are more involved through the use of music and movement.”

We then spoke about how standardization has impacted the curriculum that he teaches. Mr. Black felt that, “Standardization has tunneled the scope of teaching. The classroom is so focused on making certain that students can choose a, b, c, or d that we sometimes forget to add the more meaningful, insightful, life learning that students need to be successful. It neglects the teaching of the whole child.” He then mentioned that he regrets the fact that even he has been caught up in standardization. He explained that the pressure to achieve high test scores is so high that he feels like he too needs high test scores.

When asked if he uses popular music in his class for educational purposes and to provide examples if so, he explained, “I use music to introduce new skills and to review skills by going back and including previously learned knowledge in new learning. I use music as a chance to allow students to interact and move. I strongly believe in

incorporating teaching strategies that allow different learning styles to be used. I use popular music to teach to the whole child.”

Mr. Black was then asked to describe times he had seen or heard students talking about popular culture and music. He stated, “Students talk about music, movies, and television all the time. I observe it at recess, in their writing journals, and when they are sharing what they did overnight or over the weekend with me. Popular culture permeates students’ lives.”

I then asked Mr. Black if he thought popular culture and popular music had educational value. He stated, “Of course popular music has a place in education. All learning has to begin with students’ previous knowledge and students’ interest. As teachers, we can use music to catch students’ attention, to motivate them to want to participate in learning. This is also the learning style of many students in the classroom.”

Mr. Black then described ways popular music could be incorporated into the curriculum. “Music can be used as a transition. Music can also be used to review skills. Music can also be used as anticipatory setting. Music can also be used as a way for students to share their learning.”

I then asked him if he thought popular culture and popular music could raise student achievement and to explain. Mr. Black stated, “Yes, popular music and culture can be used to raise student achievement. Students learn what they are interested in, so if you can use music to capture a student’s attention and hold his interest, he will be involved, meaningfully, in what you are teaching in the classroom.”

Finally I asked him if he thought popular culture and popular music could increase student motivation if incorporated into the curriculum and to explain his answer.

Mr. Black stated, “Yes, students are motivated to learn the songs they hear on the radio. They can tell you the plot of their favorite movies, TV shows, etc. They don’t have to be coerced, threatened, or bribed to learn these things. If educators include these interest areas as part of the curriculum, students will be as motivated to participate in what is going on at school as what is playing on the radio.”

#### Mr. Black’s Observation

I observed Mr. Black teaching a language arts lesson during his second period. There were twenty students in his class. His classroom was very lively and bright. He had students’ artwork hanging from the ceiling. He also had their work displayed around the room and outside in the hallway. Above his chalkboard was an alphabet chart and clock with the numbers labeled clearly for telling time. His desk was in the front corner of the room with artwork displayed on it that was clearly given to him from his students. Near his desk was a chart stand with spelling and vocabulary words written on it. The back wall of the classroom had two bulletin boards. One board was also used to display student work, and the other one was used for calendar time. It consisted of a calendar, place value section, money section, and a weather section. There was a rug for the students to sit on in front of the bulletin board. In another corner of the room was a fish tank with a real fish in it. Near the fish tank was a shelf with books on it and a place where the students’ backpacks were hung up underneath. To the right of the rack was a counter with a sink. A breakfast and lunch menu was posted above the sink. Next to the menus was a class helper’s poster. The students’ desks were set up in pairs.

He began his lesson by playing a song about five little monkeys. Mr. Black sang along with the C.D. and his students. He started acting out the song and his students

began laughing. So the students began acting out the song at their desks. The song went as follows:

Five little monkeys hanging on a tree

Teasing Mr. Crocodile

You can't catch me

You can't catch me.

Along came the crocodile as slow as can be

As slow as can be

And SNAP!

Four little monkeys hanging on a tree

Teasing Mr. Crocodile

You can't catch me

You can't catch me.

Along came the crocodile as slow as can be

As slow as can be

And SNAP!

Three little monkeys hanging on a tree

Teasing Mr. Crocodile

You can't catch me

You can't catch me.

Along came the crocodile as slow as can be

As slow as can be

And SNAP!

Two little monkeys hanging on a tree

Teasing Mr. Crocodile

You can't catch me

You can't catch me.

Along came the crocodile as slow as can be

As slow as can be

And SNAP!

One little monkey hanging on a tree

Teasing Mr. Crocodile

You can't catch me

You can't catch me.

Along came the crocodile as slow as can be

As slow as can be

And SNAP!

No more monkeys hanging on a tree.

The students were the most enthusiastic when they were able to clap their hands together for the 'snap' of the crocodile's mouth. After the song was over, Mr. Black had a discussion about subtraction with the students. They talked about how the crocodile eating the monkeys was taking away from the total group. He then allowed the students to act the song out in front of the class. He asked for volunteers. He first asked the students who wanted to be the crocodile. Most of the students raised their hands. There were only two students who did not raise their hands. He then asked for five people who wanted to be the monkeys. This time only one student did not raise her hand. He chose



five students to come up to the front of the room. The monkeys stood away from the crocodile. Mr. Black explained that the crocodile would come and get the monkeys one by one. The monkeys would then return to their desks once they had been ‘snapped.’ He then turned the song on again and encouraged the students who were watching to participate in the singing. The crocodile did as she was told and ‘snapped’ her monkeys one at a time. She would go over and pretend to eat each one, and then the monkeys would return to their seats. Each monkey laughed when they were eaten. After the song ended, Mr. Black praised the students for a job well done. Some students were upset because they were not chosen to be the crocodile or a monkey. So he decided to choose another crocodile and five more monkeys. The students were very excited about this. So they went through the song one more time. The students who were not chosen participated again from their seats. After going through the song one more time, he told the students how smart they all were.

Mr. Black then placed the students into four groups. Some groups contained four students, while some groups contained five students. He explained that they were going to come up with songs of their own. He told the students they needed to come up with a song that was set up like the crocodile and monkey song. So they brainstormed some predator and prey relationships. Some of the relationships the students came up with were a lion and monkeys, an alligator or dingo and kangaroos, a snake and ducks, a tiger and zebras, and a python and koalas. He explained that they did not have to use the examples on the board if they came up with another one they liked better. The students then got into their groups. They spread out to spots on the floor around the classroom. The first thing the groups needed to do was to agree on the predator and prey. They also

had to come up with a new way the predator would eat its prey. He encouraged the students to use terms other than snap. They had discussions until they came up with what they wanted to use. Mr. Black walked around and listened to the discussions. He also answered any questions the students had. He encouraged the students to work together and try to answer their questions within the group instead of relying on him. After the groups had made their decisions, he passed out large sheets of white paper for the students to write their songs on.

One group came up with the following song:

Five little ducks sitting in a pond

Teasing Mr. Python

You can't eat me

You can't eat me.

Along came the python as slow as can be

As slow as can be

And SWALLOW!

Four little ducks sitting in a pond

Teasing Mr. Python

You can't eat me

You can't eat me.

Along came the python as slow as can be

As slow as can be

And SWALLOW!

Three little ducks sitting in a pond

Teasing Mr. Python

You can't eat me

You can't eat me.

Along came the python as slow as can be

As slow as can be

And SWALLOW!

Two little ducks sitting in a pond

Teasing Mr. Python

You can't eat me

You can't eat me.

Along came the python as slow as can be

As slow as can be

And SWALLOW!

One little duck sitting in a pond

Teasing Mr. Python

You can't eat me

You can't eat me.

Along came the python as slow as can be

As slow as can be

And SWALLOW!

No more ducks sitting in a pond.

Another group of students created the following song:

Five little mice running in the field

Teasing Mr. Cat

You can't catch me

You can't catch me.

Along came the cat as slow as can be

As slow as can be

And SCOOP!

Four little mice running in the field

Teasing Mr. Cat

You can't catch me

You can't catch me.

Along came the cat as slow as can be

As slow as can be

And SCOOP!

Three little mice running in the field

Teasing Mr. Cat

You can't catch me

You can't catch me.

Along came the cat as slow as can be

As slow as can be

And SCOOP!

Two little mice running in the field

Teasing Mr. Cat

You can't catch me

You can't catch me.

Along came the cat as slow as can be

As slow as can be

And SCOOP!

One little mouse running in the field

Teasing Mr. Cat

You can't catch me

You can't catch me.

Along came the cat as slow as can be

As slow as can be

And SCOOP!

No more mice running in the field.

After all the groups finished, Mr. Black hung their finished products on the wall outside of the classroom. He told the students he was going to save them for next year's students to use as examples because they were so good.

#### Angela's Interview and Observation

I observed Angela in Mr. Black's first grade class. Angela is a seven year old white female. Angela appeared to be a very well behaved child that did not like too much attention. She was one of the students who did not want to volunteer to be a monkey or the crocodile. She paid attention in class, but did not raise her hand to be called on. I noticed her singing under her breath sometimes. When the students were put into groups to create their own versions of the song she became much more vocal. She jumped right on in and started coming up with ideas. Her group came up with the cat and mice song.

When Mr. Black came by her group to check on their progress, I noticed that she became withdrawn again. As soon as he walked away, she began participating again. When her group finished writing their song down she was all smiles and waited quietly for the next set of directions.

I interviewed her later the same day. She appeared to be more relaxed than she was earlier in the day. I first asked her to describe a normal day at school. Angela said, "I write in my journal. I do my class work. If I finish it all I get to go to recess. Then I go to lunch and then specials." Then I asked her if she got to hear her favorite songs at school and if so where. She said, "I get to hear my favorite songs sometimes. I get to hear them in music class and when I was in kindergarten." So I asked her how music made her feel. She said, "Music makes me feel happy and excited." Next I asked her what her favorite kind of music was. She said, "I like pop music the best. I really like Christmas music. I listen to it all year long. My mom and dad get tired of listening to it when it's not Christmas time." Then I asked her how much time she spent listening to music each day. "I'm not sure. I go to dance and cheerleading and hear music a lot. My mom and dad play my CD's in the car too. I get to listen to it on my iPod too." Then I asked her if she had ever learned about a topic from a song and to explain. Angela explained, "Yes. I learned my vowel sounds from song. I also learned the months and days of the week from a song." Then I asked her if she thought music could help her prepare for a test. She said, "I don't really take many tests. But I guess it could help me if I learned a song about what my test is about." My last question was whether or not she thought music was important. She said, "Yes. Music is important to me."

### Ms. Jones' Interview

Ms. Jones is a black female teacher who teaches fifth grade. She has been teaching for eight years. She has two students in elementary school, and is recently widowed. She is twenty-nine years old.

When asked to describe the place of music in the overall educational program, Ms. Jones felt that music should be incorporated into the curriculum. She said, "I think that certain music (instrumental/lyric-based) should be incorporated into the educational program at the appropriate times. Instrumental music can be incorporated throughout the day to provide a calm and soothing feel in the classroom. Appropriate lyric-based music should be incorporated less frequently. This should be reversed for special occasions. For example, the CRCT anthem should be used because it has a popular beat that all the students were familiar with, but the lyrics were changed to reflect a motivating message for students to be successful on this major assessment."

I then asked Ms. Jones to describe how standardization has impacted the curriculum she teaches. She explained, "It really has not affected my teaching because I have always given my students an opportunity to demonstrate the content objectives in multiple formats. I am more conscience now that I MUST include the performance assessments as opposed to just assessing the students for general understanding."

I then asked her if she uses popular music in her class for educational purposes. If so, please give examples. If not, could she think of times when it would be appropriate to include it? She said she does not use popular music on a regular basis. "I have used the CRCT anthem, but popular musical beats with altered lyrics can be incorporated with any subject to enhance student achievement."

Ms. Jones then shared times she had heard or seen students talking about popular culture and popular music. “My cell phone accidentally rang once and I had one of Alicia Keys’ songs set as my ringtone, and their eyes glimmered with joy because I liked the same music they liked. It was almost as if they wanted a lesson on my personal music preference. If music can be integrated into the curriculum, students would retain MAJOR concepts longer than just introducing the concepts in a lecture based format.”

Next I asked her if she thought popular culture and popular music had educational value. She again spoke about using the CRCT anthem around test taking time. She reiterated the idea that using it for special occasions would be a good idea. An example she provided of this other than the CRCT anthem was for pep rallies, parties, and class wide achievement.

I then asked Ms. Jones to describe ways popular music could be incorporated into the curriculum. She stated, “The main way to incorporate popular music into the curriculum is when teaching major concepts. The key is to have the lesson written and sang to that popular beat. So, when the students hear the beats, they will automatically think of those concepts. I have used this idea when teaching multiplication facts. I have witnessed my students tapping out the beats when working independently on seat work, so I know it works.”

So I then asked Ms. Jones if she thought popular culture and popular music could raise student achievement. She replied, “Yes! It would help with the retention of major based knowledge concepts that students learn in the primary grades. By the primary grades, I mean kindergarten through second grade. This would help them in order to master more complex skills covered in the intermediate grades.”



At the conclusion of the interview I asked Ms. Jones if she thought popular culture and popular music could increase student motivation if incorporated into the curriculum. She exclaimed, “Absolutely! Students will remind you that you have not reviewed those concepts because they want the music. This also allows the lesson to become a little less structured and the students think that they are just goofing off, but actually are learning and retaining more information than they would have in a traditional lecture based lesson.”

#### Ms. Jones’ Observation

I observed Ms. Jones teaching a language arts lesson on present and future perfect tense to twenty-two fifth grade students. This was during her second period. Her students were sitting in groups of four at their desks. Three students were isolated from the groups. Two of the students were male and one was female. One of the boys was white and the other was black. The female was black. The students were working out of a textbook on page 206.

Her classroom had several educational posters hung up on the walls. There were not many decorations in the room because the school year was almost over. Ms. Jones told me that she took most things down just before the administration of the CRCT. There was a table and small desk in the back corner of the room where I sat. I noticed many stacks of books, papers, and folders all over the table and desk. There was a behavior light at the front of the room. It stayed on green when the noise level was appropriate. When the noise volume rose the light turned to yellow. When it got too loud the light turned to red. When I entered the room, the light was on green. There was

a television by the door that was sitting on top of a cabinet. Just beside that was an American flag.

As Ms. Jones started her lesson on present and future perfect tense, she stood behind a podium at the front of the classroom. She read the directions from the book to the students. The students were instructed to write their answers on dry erase boards. Each student had his own dry erase board and marker. They also had their own erasers. As each student finished, he flashed his dry erase board at Ms. Jones. If the student was correct, she would instruct him to move to number two. If the student was incorrect, he was instructed to try it again. After all of the students had the answer correct, she would review the answer. The students would share their reasonings with her. If a student was really struggling, and there was one of them with this particular lesson, Ms. Jones had him move to pencil and paper. This way he was able to show more of his work. She walked over and gave him some one-on-one help. The lesson continued this way for problems one through six. She explained that problems one through six were for review. The students were then told to complete problems seven through ten independently. At this point she told all of the students to complete the rest of this assignment on paper. If a student was struggling, he was allowed to ask his neighbor for help. This happened three times with three different students. Then the classroom phone began ringing. As Ms. Jones was walking towards the phone, she told the students to work solely independently.

After she got off of the phone, she set a timer. She set the timer for three minutes. Every thirty seconds, Ms. Jones reminded the students of the time that was remaining. The students were on task the entire time and worked very quietly. There was an occasional whisper, but it appeared to be minor. While the students were working, Ms.

Jones was writing the next part of the assignment on the board. What she wrote on the chalkboard looked like this:

<u>Table 1</u>	<u>Table 2</u>	<u>Table 3</u>
11	12	13
14	15	16
17	18	19
20	21	22
23	24	25

When the timer went off, Ms. Jones expected all the students to be ready to move on. She praised those students who were. Most students were ready.

She told the students to complete the work on the board on their dry erase boards. Again, she set the timer for three minutes. While the students were working she wrote another assignment on the board. The students were in groups, but worked out the problems independently. The students worked through their problems and then put down their markers when they were finished. Ms. Jones then randomly called upon different students to call out their answers. When a student called out an incorrect answer, Ms. Jones reviewed the correct answer with the students. Once all of the students understood, she moved on to more independent work. Again she set the timer for three minutes. The assignment was written on the board again. This time the students put up privacy dividers. The students worked on problems one through five from a different page in their textbooks. Ms. Jones explained that the students would have time to go back and finish if they did not finish on time. When the three minutes were up, the teacher instructed the students to complete a workbook page about contractions and pronouns.

Ms. Jones reviewed the definitions of the words contractions and pronouns. She read from the workbook page and the students followed along. As a mini review, the students wrote contractions and the two words that made up the contractions on their dry erase boards. After this review, Ms. Jones had the students work independently on their workbook pages.

#### John's Interview and Observation

John is a fifth grade student from Ms. Jones' class. He is a ten year old black male. I observed him during a second period language arts lesson. During this observation there was no mention of popular culture and popular music. John only spoke a couple of times during my observation. He only spoke when called upon. When Ms. Jones called on him to give his answers he was correct. The classroom was mostly quiet. The traffic light stayed on green the entire time. I never noticed him laugh or even smile. He appeared to be bored and uninterested. He was slouching in his chair. He was one of the students that was fortunate enough to be sitting among a group of peers.

When I interviewed John, he did not have much to say. I began the interview by asking him to describe a normal day at school. He said, "I have teachers, work, lunch, and P.E. It's boring." So then I asked him if he ever got to hear any of his favorite songs at school. If so, during which class? If not, would he like to be able to hear them? John said, "No. They never play that kind of music. I like R and B music. If I am the only person listening then I would like to hear it." So then I asked him how music made him feel. John explained, "Music makes me feel regular. It's just music." Then I asked him what his favorite kind of music was. He said, "I like R and B and rap." Next I asked him about how much time he spent listening to music each day. He told me, "I listen to about

twenty minutes a day on my iPod.” The next question was if he had ever learned about a topic from a song, and if so to give an example. John said, “No.” So then I asked him if he thought music could help him prepare for a test. He answered, “I don’t think music can help me prepare for a test.” My final question to him was whether or not he thought music was important. John said, “No, it’s just music. It’s just for entertainment to make people feel happy.”

The participants in this study have shared their thoughts about popular culture, popular music, standardization, and their place in the curriculum. Each participant has been affected one way or another by popular culture throughout their lives. Making meaning of their ideas is no easy task. Through their words, actions, and my own reflections from observations I had of them, I humbly attempt to provide some measure of how they feel, teach, and learn in an age of standardization through a cultural studies theoretical framework. I also share my personal thoughts, concerns, and classroom experiences as they relate to this study.

#### Reflections of Mrs. Walls

When I first contacted Mrs. Walls about participating in this study, she was somewhat hesitant. She explained to me that she was nervous about being observed and audio-tape recorded. I explained the purpose of my research, and she agreed to be a part of it. I told her not to worry about telling me what she thought I wanted to hear, but to just be honest. I explained that her honesty would be of more value to my research than telling me what she thought I wanted to hear. I wanted to hear the truth, and nothing but the truth.

During our interview, I felt that Mrs. Walls was nervous at first. As the interview continued, she loosened up and really became passionate about her answers. She had a lot to talk about. It appeared that she was elated that someone actually took interest in her field during these times. She brought up some great points. She answered the way I thought she would, but then offered so much more. Her passion about education is contagious.

I assumed that Mrs. Walls would feel as if music was a sidebar or frill of the educational program. I figured this would be her response because I have personally seen it happen time and time again. I get frustrated with this and I do not even teach music. I feel frustrated for her and for her students. Until she brought up the fact that many schools, especially elementary schools, only have one music teacher, I never really thought about it. What an immense pressure to be the only one responsible for educating an entire student body. How lonely that must also be at times. When she started giving her percentages, I thought she may be a little off, but I do believe she was in the ballpark. I also have to agree that music is being used in classrooms as a means to help with memorization. I was not at all surprised when she mentioned that teachers play classical music throughout the day to promote brain activity. These two reasons are the main ways I see music being implemented into regular education classrooms.

When Mrs. Walls started describing how standardization had impacted the curriculum she taught I was appalled at what had happened to her. However, I was not actually surprised. Mrs. Walls was humiliated by her administration after not having high enough test scores. As a result, her focus for the next school year turned to improving test scores. Unlike most teachers, Mrs. Walls turned to music to assist her.

She did admit however, that she mostly used many practice tests. What I found to be degrading was the fact that she had been asked to teach lessons geared towards standardized tests right before the students took them. This is exactly what Hanschke (1998) was talking about. She spoke of “ill-fitted curricula” and “unmotivating teaching methods.” Practicing for standardized tests is unmotivating. Although it would be difficult to do, I believe her administrators might understand the importance of her sticking to her curriculum if she would have discussed her concerns with them. Instead, she taught lessons for the tests and her administrators were not even aware this was against her wishes. The administrators appear to have the mindset the Apple was discussing. They must have believed the increasingly effective attacks on teaching and curriculum that have businesses and industries on their side (1993). I guess her way around some of this was to incorporate music into her lessons.

I was hoping Mrs. Walls would tell me that she has used popular music in her classes for educational purposes. I felt she was being honest with me when she discussed this issue with me. I was impressed when she began rattling off different magazines she had used in her classes. I had never read those magazines before she introduced me to them. I was pleased that she mentioned that these magazines were a safe way of raising the popular music issue with elementary students. I would be worried otherwise. I am glad she mentioned that some popular music is appropriate, because that is a concern of mine. There are times when music is not appropriate. This typically is because the lyrics are too adult like for children. This is supported by Derno and Washburne (2004). They stated that “popular music has often served as the contested site for extensive debates on negative value.”

I was excited when Mrs. Walls started describing times she had heard or seen students talking about popular culture and popular music. She stated that the students frequently asked if they could listen to “their” music. She went on to say that “their” music was rap and hip-hop. The majority of the students at Coastal Elementary listen to hip-hop. Hip-hop is extremely popular with today’s youth. Weaver (2005) explains that Dimitriadis interacted with youth who were very much interested in hip-hop. Dimitriadis is interested in the importance of non-traditional educational curricula like that of popular culture. It was exciting for me to hear that Mrs. Walls’ students thought hip-hop was their music because that has also been my experience. The part that was of most interest to me was when she mentioned the Soulja Boy. I too did not know what the Soulja Boy was at first. I first heard it from students at school. Mrs. Walls said the first time she heard it was at a school dance. She mentioned she heard the clean version of the song at the dance. The actual lyrics use the word “ho” over and over again. I am glad to know the school used the clean version. The problem I have is that both versions mention doing something called the “Superman.” What some do not realize is that it is referring to something sexual. This is a lot like the day I was teaching and the students were referring to the “candy shop.” The students were singing it out loud and did not realize they were saying something that was inappropriate.

Another interesting part of her interview was the part when stated that she liked pop music, but that most music teachers probably did not. I would have thought that many music teachers would be open to all genres from an educational point of view. One of my favorite parts of the interview was when she stated that, “music can be anything



from a toddler banging pots in the kitchen to a full symphony orchestra.” That was music to my ears.

I believe Mrs. Walls when she stated she thought popular culture and music have educational value. I also believe it should be screened and researched before it can be included into the curriculum. I believe she had very valid points. What really stood out to me was when she mentioned that one person’s cultural beliefs are not more valuable than another’s. She said it best when she said, “by not including popular culture and music in our curriculums, we are sending a strong message to students that what they like is somehow wrong and invalid.” She is exactly right; it is what we are not teaching that is the problem. As Pinar led the way down the path reconceptualization, this is what he had in mind. Back in the 70’s, he saw that the traditional curriculum was not going to cut it anymore. It was also during the reconceptualization that the idea that education needed to be more personal arose. This is where popular music comes into the picture through a cultural studies theoretical framework.

I was probably the most curious to see how Mrs. Walls thought popular music could be incorporated into the curriculum. What I liked best about her response was the fact that she explained ways the students could actually learn concepts and not just listen to the music for pure enjoyment. She gave ideas for teachers and students. I have to agree with her that it would require teachers to do more research, and ultimately think outside of the box. This idea was supported McRobbie. She said, “Music critics, never mind the academics, have to run to keep up (1999).” It is not an easy task, but a task that needs to be taken on. I also made a connection between what Mrs. Walls was saying to the DJ Project. It was this organization that used hip-hop to educate.

Since I have taught E.I.P. classes for several years, I was so happy to hear Mrs. Walls validate what I had been seeing in my classes. I believe she made very accurate observations when she noticed the students in the E.I.P. classrooms as the students who were really turned on to popular music. What I did not realize was the fact that many performers for school programs come from E.I.P. classrooms.

My final reflection for Mrs. Walls deals with the possibility of student motivation being increased by incorporating popular culture and music into the curriculum. I like the idea of popular music being able to bridge the gap between “us” and “them.” I agree with her 100% when she says that teachers are competing for their students’ interest. We need to get their interest and get them motivated. Some parents try to help their unmotivated or deficient children by giving them medication to get through the hustle and bustle of an education. This could be dangerous and not exactly curing the situation, but covering it up. Why not use music instead? Music can be healing.

When I went in to observe Mrs. Walls teaching music to second graders, I was under the impression that she was nervous. Her nervousness seemed to wear off as the observation went on. I believe she did a great job teaching and incorporating popular culture and music. The problem I had was that I believe she tried to squeeze too much in. She mentioned to me that she hoped she was teaching what I wanted to see. I told her not to do anything out of the ordinary. It just seemed as if she jumped around from lesson to lesson. I still believe she did a good job with her lessons; I just think they were a little crammed together. A good example of this is the Rules Rap. I observed her near the end of a school year, so it was a little strange for her to be teaching the rules. So I do feel like she added that part of her lesson in to make me happy. On the other hand, I feel like she

really taught a great lesson that the students benefitted from. I especially enjoyed the fact that she allowed the students to read about popular music, hear popular music, and write about it too. Overall, I feel as if she did a great job incorporating popular culture and music into her lesson.

#### Reflections of Mrs. Smith

When I went into Mrs. Smith's classroom for an interview, she was very energetic and seemed excited to be a part of my research. I could hardly wait to interview her because of all the participants, she was the one with the most experience. The interview started with her complaints about music's place in the overall educational program. I was not at all surprised that Mrs. Smith had some of the same feelings as Mrs. Walls. She complained about her administration and other teachers feeling as if music was not as important as the subjects taught in regular classrooms. It is unfortunate that her career is viewed this way, especially by others in education. I could really sense her frustration. I was frustrated for her. I could not imagine being a certified teacher and not being able to send home progress reports and homework. It upset me that she was not able to send home grades that were not satisfactory or above without clearing it with administration first. But just like I stated earlier, this same problem occurs at my school. Maybe more teachers need to be aware of the benefits conveyed by music education. The benefits were grouped into the following four categories by the MENC staff, success in society, success in school, success in developing intelligence, and success in life (2002).

When she started sharing her thoughts about how standardization has impacted the curriculum she teaches, I had a feeling she would have only negative thoughts to share. I was right. She was frustrated because the county had switched to Georgia

Performance Standards, but music teachers were still teaching from the old and outdated Quality Core Curriculum. I was thrilled to hear her say that she had asked if she could teach the new standards instead of the old QCC's, although she was declined. It is a shame that music will be the last subject area to implement the new standards. This is a direct effect of *No Child Left Behind*.

Mrs. Smith became much happier during the rest of the interview. I was ecstatic that she used popular music in her classes. I was not so happy to hear that she had stopped using a lot of popular music because of the lyrics being too vulgar. As I stated previously, I have come across some of these problem lyrics from Ludacris and 50 Cent (Fitty Cent). I really related to her discussion about Freddy off of 97.3 because I also listened to that morning show. I thought that was a wonderful way for her to bring popular music issues back to her classes. In my opinion, her suggestion of having a pop hit of the week is an excellent idea. She could even expand beyond pop and include other genres of music as well. Songs passed down from slaves have much to offer, such as *Oh Freedom* and *Let Us Break Bread Together*.

It was not surprising at all to hear that Mrs. Smith's students talk about SpongeBob SquarePants. My own students bring SpongeBob up quite frequently, as well as my own children. SpongeBob is very popular because the show has a broad appeal. SpongeBob SquarePants is the only cartoon to consistently make the top ten list in the Nielsen ratings. It is also broadcasted around the world. The childlike nature of SpongeBob and his best friend Patrick is appealing to children. Like most popular things, after awhile they become replaced by something else new and exciting. This was expected to happen with SpongeBob when the mention of cancelling the show after

turning it into a movie. The fans were so outraged they protested and SpongeBob continues to be popular and produced. SpongeBob is a part of their culture. Weaver's notion that we cannot avoid the effect of popular culture (2005) is right on target. SpongeBob SquarePants is a prime example.

She also brought up discussions of American Idol. I think using American Idol discussions in the classroom would be a great way of grabbing the students' attention. As I stated previously, due to the fact that popular culture icons and music help create critical understandings of what people are experiencing in the world, teachers should be able to use this to their advantage. Teachers such as Mrs. Smith help prove this point. Because Mrs. Smith shared this information with me, I was not shocked when she stated popular culture and music have educational value. I would have been stunned if she would have claimed otherwise, since she tends to understand their importance. This is exactly what I was talking about when I mentioned earlier that studies like this one could continue the multidisciplinary conversation between curriculum and culture.

I was hoping she would share more ways to incorporate popular music into the curriculum. I agree with the ways she did share such as teaching different music styles, tying classical music into movies and commercials, and by using musicals. This reminds me of Intermediate School 109 that uses hip-hop to create holistic learning experiences. If you will recall, their statistics were very promising too. I was hoping Mrs. Smith would share ways she would use the above suggestions.

Mrs. Smith really impressed me with her overall concerns and knowledge of the music program. She seemed very sincere and honest with her answers. I do not believe that at any time she gave me answers that she thought I would like to hear. I found her

ideas to be beneficial to my research. Her ideas were beneficial because popular culture is all around. Cultural studies recognize that if we are interested in what the young people are interested in, we cannot ignore the effects of popular culture (Weaver, 2005).

When I observed Mrs. Smith teaching, I again felt as if she was portraying her true self. She did not seem to cram too much in to her lesson. She really acted as if I was not even in the room. I was hoping to observe her teaching a lesson that incorporated quite a bit of popular music, but that was not the case. It was great to see that she did not exclude popular culture and music altogether though. The one thing that really bothered me was when the regular classroom teacher brought his students into her classroom and explained he would be taking one of the students back with him because he had been misbehaving. I felt that he was indirectly stating that what she had to teach was not as important, and he needed to teach this student a lesson. I was hoping that Mrs. Smith would tell him that she needed this student during his assigned music time because she was also responsible for his proper education. I guess that is easier said than done.

#### Reflections of Mr. Black

I was excited to interview Mr. Black because he was the only male teacher interviewee included in my research. Male elementary teachers are few and far between. I really felt as if I had to find at least one male teacher to give a voice to in this study. It was also important that I find a teacher who had taught in the regular classroom, as well as teaching E.I.P., which he had previously done. I really was not sure what to expect from him, but ended up being quite pleased. Beforehand, I thought his views may greatly differ from the female teachers, but that really was not the case. I could tell right away that Mr. Black speaks exactly what is on his mind, so I really did not think he would try

to tell me what I wanted to hear. I believe he answered honestly. He seemed especially in tune with the issues of standardization.

At the beginning of the interview, Mr. Black stated that he believed music had a very important place in the educational program. What really interested me was that he thought music could be used to involve reluctant learners. I absolutely agree with this. This was one of the reasons I wanted to conduct this research; to help my reluctant E.I.P. students. I must also agree that music helps the kinesthetic and auditory learners. This ties back into the critical thinking I spoke of earlier. Popular music can help create critical thinkers. It does so by helping students develop critical understandings of the world around them.

Unfortunately standardization has tunneled the scope of teaching. Mr. Black was absolutely correct; standardization neglects the teaching of the whole child. I am so glad he mentioned that when teachers focus on teaching to the test the end result is that students are missing out on life lessons. This is exactly what I talking about when I said this goes against my idea of a meaningful education.

What I found to be interesting was that Mr. Black uses music to introduce skills, review skills, and to go back and tie in previously learned material. I found this to be interesting because this demonstrates that he uses music in different ways. He does not necessarily use music just for transition or while students are working independently. I think it is important to change it up.

Mr. Black mentioned that students write about popular culture in their journals. While I am sure they do, I wonder exactly how much the students write about it when they are only in the first grade. I am sure it is probably minimal due to the students'

young ages. Mr. Black also gives his students journal topics so they probably do not get too many opportunities to write about exactly what they want. But on the other hand, it is also important to help guide the students. I know my own second grade students tend to write quite a bit about popular culture in theirs. I require daily journal writing with complete paragraphs that contain descriptive supporting details. Usually my students write about movies they saw over the weekend or what they watched on television. And yes, SpongeBob SquarePants has come up many times.

As a teacher, I have often times become frustrated when students could not tell me about their weekly reading selection, but could tell me all about their favorite movie, or sing all the words to a song. Mr. Black had noticed the same trend with his students. He was correct when he said that educators needed to use those interest areas to their advantage and add them to the curriculum. I agree that students do not need to be coerced into this type of learning. What a great day it will be when students will be as motivated to participate in what is going on at school as what is playing on the radio. Turn the radio on! Even Plato thought music was a primary way to educate the young (Weaver, 2005). Teachers could be more like MCs and keep everything running smoothly, instead of scripted robot like instructors cramming facts down students' throats.

When I went to Mr. Black's classroom to observe him teaching I was really in for a treat. I was amazed at just how much his students could do. I really enjoyed his enthusiasm. When he played music in his classroom, he sang with his students. His students had a fun time, and you could tell Mr. Black was having fun too. He seemed as if he was a child too. He was full of life and energy. I enjoyed watching how he mingled



with his students. He seemed to have a great relationship with them, and they really aimed to please. It was also obvious that Mr. Black had been using music throughout the school year, and not just for my observation. I say this because his students cheered when he told them what they were going to do. The students' comments let me know that this was nothing new.

Although Mr. Black did not necessarily use popular music in his lesson, the song he used went to the tune of *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*. I also liked the fact that his lesson taught across the curriculum. He tied the arts, writing, math, and language arts all together. The common thread among these areas was music. This reminded me of the *Village Voice*. It was in the *Voice* where popular music writing was created to expound into different areas. It also reminded me of the *Hip Hop Handbook: From Hip Hop to Wall Street* because hip-hop was used to teach about topics that were not typically found in history, reading, and language arts textbooks (Runell, 2006). By teaching across the curriculum in this way, Mr. Black's lesson was creative and the students were engaged. The way the students worked together in their groups was phenomenal, and as an observer I could tell this was nothing new to them either. It was good to see that Mr. Black practiced what he preached.

#### Reflections of Ms. Jones

When I first contacted Ms. Jones about being a part of my research, she seemed interested, but asked me a couple of questions. She wanted to know why I needed to conduct this research, why I had chosen her, and how much time it would take. I explained that I would work around her schedule. Unfortunately, my interview and observation of her was last because she ended up taking quite a bit of time off of work.

Her husband had been killed in an accident shortly after we spoke. She also had two young children to take care of. Upon her arrival back at work, I told her I would give her some time and for her to let me know when she was ready. After a couple of months went by, she approached me and we set up a date and time for the observation and interview. Her interview ended up being the shortest one of all the teachers.

When I went in to interview Ms. Jones, I really did not know what to expect. She did mention to me before we started that she came back to work because she was worried about her students being taught by several different substitutes. I understood where she was coming from. Then I began the interview by asking her to describe the place of music in the overall educational program. I did not personally agree with her comments completely, but value them just the same. She stated that instrumental music could be incorporated throughout the day, but that lyric-based music should be incorporated less frequently. This reminded me of the student named Dice in the DJ Project. He thought teachers did not like hip-hop because it is bad (Kim, 2004).

Ms. Jones then went on to say that standardization has not impacted her teaching. As a classroom teacher, I find that hard to understand. I do believe that she gives her students every opportunity to learn, but I can not grasp how standardization has not impacted her teaching styles at all. It just seems impossible to me. I wonder if it has something to do with teaching older students.

I got really excited when Ms. Jones was telling me about her cell phone ringing during class one time. I was excited because she said her ringer was set to an Alicia Keys song, and that her students were excited about that. She said she thought her students wanted a lesson on her musical preferences, but I do not believe she gave them one. This

could have been a perfect opportunity to really connect with the students. I wish she would have taken advantage of it. Sometimes these teachable moments are the best moments. But this just goes to show the gains women have made in popular music. We went from a field that was dominated by men, to times where women's songs are now downloaded as ringtones for cell phones. Alicia Keys ranks up there with Queen Latifah, Salt-N-Pepa, and Lil' Kim.

I was disheartened when Ms. Jones said she did not use popular music on a regular basis, although it should have been expected. I figure there are not too many teachers who actually do incorporate it on a regular basis. She only gave one example of incorporating popular music and that dealt with a CRCT anthem. And that ties right back into standardization. Go figure. Again, this is a direct effect of *No Child Left Behind*. Hanschke (1998) spoke about ill-fitted curricula, unmotivating teaching methods, and testing and tracking practices that identify and label children prematurely. This is what is going on in Coastal County. However, I do agree with Ms. Jones' statement that musical beats with altered lyrics could be used. I would not recommend only using them, but it is one way to incorporate it. I also agree with her about using music to teach major concepts. I think she sees the importance of using popular music in the classroom, but is not quite sure how to implement it on a more regular basis. You can not rely on popular music alone, but if you combine it with traditional inquiry much can be learned (Bindas, 1992).

When I went in to observe her teaching I could tell that she was overwhelmed. There were stacks of ungraded papers everywhere and her room was very cluttered. Her walls were pretty much bare. However, her students were on task when I arrived and

they appeared to be engaged in their lesson. It appeared that she ran a pretty tight ship with her students. They were very quiet and I did not notice any major behavior problems.

I was somewhat disappointed during my observation because the lesson she taught was teacher centered almost the entire time. The children did not really have time to collaborate. It was very much a routine. She moved quickly through the lesson and the students appeared to be bored. It was almost robotic. There was no mention of popular culture or music. As a matter of fact, there was not any discussion time. I was beginning to get bored watching the lesson to be honest. It lacked emotion and motivation. I feel as if Ms. Jones would have used popular culture and music in her lesson the students would have been able to make personal connections with it. While sitting in her classroom I thought about the project called *Hip Hop Handbook: From Hip Hop to Wall Street*. I thought about this because a teacher took an unmotivated group of students, incorporated a language arts unit based on slang, and made a difference in the lives of the students. She also used songs, videos, and artists' profiles as text. I believe this would help Ms. Jones' students too.

Since the interview and observation of Ms. Jones were conducted, her life has changed somewhat. She wanted to leave the fifth grade and move to second grade where she did not think there was as much pressure. She thought there would be less pressure teaching second grade because it was not a year that the standardized test scores counted towards adequate yearly progress, also known as A.Y.P. She began moving into a second grade classroom and was then moved to a third grade position. She was not happy because third grade is another A.Y.P. grade.

### Reflections of the Children

Mike was the second grade student I interviewed. He appeared to be relaxed and ready to talk with me. He was the most talkative of all the children. Before I began my interviews, I assumed the oldest student would have the most to say, but that was not the case. It was actually quite the opposite. When Mike was describing a typical day at school, I was hoping he would mention listening to popular music, or at least listening to music, but he did not. A normal day at school for him sounded like a normal day at school for most children. It involved reading, writing, arithmetic, and specials. He did mention later on that he sometimes gets to hear his favorite songs while at school. I was happy to hear that, but he mentioned that he gets to hear them in music class and not in his regular classroom. Mike also mentioned that music makes him feel happy. I was amazed when he started telling me who he listened to. He mentioned older artists and bands like Bob Marley, Sting, and the Doobie Brothers. I was curious as to why, but then he told me his dad listened to them. He tended to like what his dad liked. His said his favorite kind of music was rock and then country. When Mike started telling me about how much time he spent listening to music, he brought up his father again. I assumed from what he was saying that he really learned a lot from his father. His father was in Iraq, and had been gone for awhile. I was happy to hear that Mike had learned from a song. It did not surprise me when he mentioned test-taking preparation songs. But from what he said about what he has learned from music, I think he was correct when he said music helps him remember things better. But it is like Barber said, the true educators of students are not schoolteachers, but instead pop culture purveyors (2003).

When I observed Mike during his music class, he appeared to be very happy. He was on-task and appeared to be having a good time. It was entertaining watching him sing the SpongeBob SquarePants theme song. He appeared to enjoy singing the best. He was involved in creating a new verse to the shanty, but seemed to be motivated the most when music was playing.

Robert was the kindergartener I interviewed. He seemed to be relaxed and he smiled at me a lot. Since he was in kindergarten I thought he may actually listen to a lot of music at school. Many of the kindergarten teachers I know use music quite a bit in their classrooms. I was pleased to find out that he was able to listen to some of his favorite songs in his classroom and in his music classroom. He told me his favorite music was kids' songs. So I am sure he probably did get to listen to them at school. I got the idea that he really enjoyed school. He mentioned he had learned his ABC's and planets because of music. Just think about how much more he could learn from popular music. Weaver (2005) explains if educational fields of knowledge are to stay significant, then scholars will have to recognize the effects popular culture has on learning experiences for students.

During my observation of Robert, I noticed he was very well behaved and on-task. He worked well independently as well as in his small group settings. He was very attentive when music was playing. I was amazed at just how much the kindergarteners had learned about music. He really seemed motivated when the mention of Goldilocks and the Three Bears came up. He seemed like he just came to life. I believe the reason for this is because he was familiar with the story. This was meaningful to him.

Angela was the first grade student I interviewed. I was really looking forward to her interview because she was the only female student included in this study. I was curious to see if her answers would greatly differ from the males. For the most part her answers were not too different. She was by far the most shy of the students I interviewed. My favorite part of her interview was when she was telling me about listening to Christmas music year round. She thought that was really funny. I could not help but to laugh either. It seemed as if music would be an important part of her life since she takes dance classes. Music has to be meaningful to her.

When I observed Angela I saw more of her shyness. She did not volunteer in class, but she did stay focused. It appeared as if she liked the lesson with the music, but that getting up in front of her peers would put her out of her comfort zone. I noticed that when she was able to work in a small group she was much more vocal. She helped her group brainstorm and write ideas down. I also noticed she was the only female in her group. I wonder if she would have wanted to act in front of the class if it was Christmas music instead.

John was the oldest student that participated in this study. I assumed since he was older he would have more to talk about, but that was not the case. During our interview he was very short and to the point. He did not really smile, and did not seem thrilled to be meeting with me. His input was valuable just the same. Some of John's answers differed from the other three children. John was the only student who stated school was boring. Like I said earlier, schools are becoming more and more routine with the stress of standardization. Breggin stated that the school experience is a chronic stressor for most children (2001). John's belief was that music was simply for entertainment. He

was also the only student who did not think music could help prepare for a test, and the only one who stated he had not learned anything from a song. John was also the only student who said music did not make him feel happy. This is the mistake DeQuincey was talking about when he said some people just listen to music with their ears and become passive to its effects (1985). I was shocked at some of his answers because I assumed that most students would claim music made them feel happy. I got the feeling that John liked to be alone. He did not even want to hear his favorite music at school unless he could hear it on his iPod. John's iPod serves as an outlet for him. Weiss also stated that gadgets like iPods exist as outlets for our fears and passions (2003).

When I observed John it was a lot like his interview. He was pretty quiet and to the point. There really were not many times for him to talk though. Because of the type of lesson I observed, there really is not a whole lot to conclude. Since John stated he would like to listen to music on his iPod at school, I am not sure if Ms. Jones would have incorporated popular music into the lesson that John would have shown different results. I do believe he would have been more motivated, but I am not sure he would have shown it.

This concludes my interviews and observations. There is no doubt in my mind that standardization has forced teachers to adjust their teaching methods to prepare students to be better test takers. I also believe that students desire a more meaningful education and teachers want what is best for their students. "If we are committed to understanding the minds, needs, and desires of our students, we will embrace cultural studies as a vibrant alternative to the problems modern, scientific scholarship has



created,” (Daspit & Weaver, 2005,92). I think standardization is causing a lack of commitment. In the next chapter I will give my findings and final conclusions.

CHAPTER V  
EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES FOR POPULAR CULTURE AND MUSIC IN  
EDUCATION

Findings

Through the interviews and observations I conducted, several common threads stood out. I found five common threads for the teachers. The common threads are:

- Music teachers felt as if their jobs were viewed as less important than the regular classroom teachers and were treated differently (Teacher finding 1)
- Music should be a part of the curriculum (Teacher finding 2)
- Standardization has hampered the curriculum (Teacher finding 3)
- Popular music has educational value and can raise student achievement (Teacher finding 4)
- Popular music can increase motivation (Teacher finding 5)

Music teachers felt as if their jobs were viewed as less important than the regular classroom teachers and were treated differently (Teacher finding 1). Mrs. Walls and Mrs. Smith both felt as if their jobs were viewed as less important than the regular classroom teachers. This was bothersome for the two of them. I came to this conclusion based on the interviews of Mrs. Walls and Mrs. Smith and through the literature. Of course not stated in the exact same words, they basically said the same thing. Their explanations were different of course based on their own personal experiences. Mrs. Walls really felt that music was a “sidebar” or “frill” of the education system. She felt that “reading, writing, and arithmetic” became the curriculum that really counted. Mrs. Smith felt more

discouraged because she was not treated like regular classroom teachers. She did not have the same freedoms or opportunities they did. Whereas classroom teachers could send home progress reports, she could not. Classroom teachers could send homework home, she could not. Classroom teachers could send home failing grades, she could not. For the greater part of recorded history, the thought that music is a representational art of some sort has been taken for granted (Ridley, 2004).

Music should be a part of the curriculum (Teacher finding 2). The two regular classroom teachers agreed that music should be a part of the curriculum. While the music teachers quite naturally felt music should be a part of the curriculum, the two classroom teachers gave varying reasons. Mr. Black leaned more towards music stimulating students and involving reluctant learners, but Ms. Jones felt it should be used for special occasions or to provide a soothing environment. Mr. Black felt it was beneficial for kinesthetic and auditory learners, but Ms. Jones thought it could be used as a motivator before a standardized test. The research has shown that a music education can benefit students by providing success in society, school, developing intelligence, and in life (MENC staff, 2002).

Standardization has hampered the curriculum (Teacher finding 3). Three of the teachers (Mrs. Walls, Mrs. Smith, and Mr. Black) stated that standardization has hampered the curriculum. The fourth teacher, Ms. Jones, stated that no matter what, she does what is best for her students with or without standardization. As a classroom teacher I also feel like standardization has hampered the curriculum. Mrs. Walls had a difficult time with standardization her first year teaching third grade. Her scores were low, she was put on the spot about it during a faculty meeting, and then changed her way

of teaching to ensure higher test scores. She admitted to using many practice tests with her students. Now that she teaches music she feels that there is even less time for music because of standardization issues. Mrs. Smith was upset that she still had to teach from outdated QCCs and was not able to teach from the GPS. Mr. Black felt that standardization has tunneled the scope of teaching. He claims teachers are forgetting to teach the more meaningful, insightful, life learning the students need to be successful. This is the reason I explored curriculum theory. Pinar suggested that curriculum theory rejects the emphasis on test scores on standardized examination (2004).

Popular music has educational value and can raise student achievement (Teacher finding 4). All four teachers thought popular music had educational value and could raise student achievement. Yet again, they all had different reasons to support this. Mrs. Walls thought popular music had educational value because it is who we are as people. She thought it could raise student achievement especially in classrooms where E.I.P. or lower achieving students are taught. It has been observation that those classrooms produce the most musically talented students who really focus in on popular culture and music issues. This was supported by Runell who stated that hip-hop used in the classroom offered opportunities to students who often feel powerless in schools that aren't meeting their needs (2006). Mrs. Smith thought popular music had educational value because it had rhythm and anything with rhythm had educational value. She thought it could raise student achievement by allowing students to listen to it everyday. She said students could listen to it while working. Mr. Black thought popular music had educational value because teachers could use it to catch students' attention, and then in turn motivate them to want to participate in learning. He thought it could raise student

achievement because it captures a student's attention and holds his interest. It also keeps him involved so the lesson can be meaningful. Ms. Jones thought popular music had educational value because it could be used to help the students retain major concepts longer. She thought it could raise student achievement because it helped with the retention of major concepts the students learn in primary grades that would carry over and help them master skills covered in the intermediate grades. As a classroom teacher I agree with all of them. There are now over two hundred courses on hip-hop being offered at colleges and universities throughout the country (Runell, 2006). Now we just need to get it into our school systems.

Popular music can increase motivation (Teacher finding 5). All four teachers also thought popular music could increase student motivation. I also believe popular music could increase student motivation because I have seen it happen in my own classroom. Mrs. Walls felt that students were motivated and validated. She felt that students are motivated by it because they have a personal connection with it. Mrs. Smith thought it could motivate students because they could listen to it during quiet work time and while finishing an assignment. Mr. Black thought it could motivate students because they are already motivated to hear the songs they hear on the radio. If teachers use this as part of the curriculum, the students would be motivated to participate in the lessons. Ms. Jones thought it could motivate students by using it as a review and the students would want to review material because of it. She thought the students would not really even think they were learning when they really were. Music helps students remember things. Music helps reanimate memories (Neal, 1999).

I found six common threads for the students. The common threads are:

- Lack of music in a normal school day (Student finding 1)
- Favorite music heard during music class (Student finding 2)
- Music makes students happy (Student finding 3)
- Students have learned from a song (Student finding 4)
- Music can help prepare for a test (Student finding 5)
- Music is important (Student finding 6)

There is a lack of music in a normal school day (Student finding 1). Based on what all four students told me, I noticed there was a lack of music during a typical school day. When describing a normal school day, Mike did not bring up music as being a part of it. Robert did not bring up music when describing a normal day at school. Angela did not bring up music when describing a normal day at school. And John did not bring up music when describing a normal day at school; as a matter of fact he said it was boring. This could be a direct result of the unmotivating teaching methods Hanschke was referring to (1998). The unmotivating teaching methods come from the pressures of standardization.

Favorite music heard during music class (Student finding 2). Three of the four students (Mike, Robert, and Angela) said they sometimes hear their favorite music in music class. Mike stated that he sometimes gets to hear his favorite music in music class. He gave an example of listening and playing instruments to Bob Marley. Robert also said he gets to hear his favorite music in music class. Angela said the same thing. John's answer differed from the other students. He said he never got to hear that kind of music at school. This goes back to the fact that teachers need to learn how to incorporate popular music into the curriculum. More studies like those from Dimitriadis could be

beneficial. His interest in the value and importance of non-traditional curricula is important.

Music makes students happy (Student finding 3). Three of the four students (Mike, Robert, and Angela) stated that music makes them happy or feel like having fun. Music makes Mike feel happy because he gets to listen to old songs. It also makes him happy because it is fun and he gets to listen to what his dad listens to. Robert said music makes him feel like having fun. Music makes Angela feel happy and excited. Music makes John feel normal. As a teacher, music makes most of my students happy. They get so excited when I turn music on in the room, especially when it is songs from the radio that have been remade for children. My students really connect with the music. Music is healing and can become of one body with you (Baudelaire, 2002) which in turn brings about happiness. You are more likely to be motivated when you are happy.

Students have learned from a song (Student finding 4). Three of the four students (Mike, Robert, and Angela) said they have learned from a song. Some of the things Mike has learned from songs are the continents, times tables, and subtraction. Robert has learned his ABCs and the planets through the use of music. Angela has learned her vowel sounds, days of the week, and months of the year from songs. John claims he has never learned anything from a song, but I bet if he really thought about it he could come up with at least one thing. As a teacher I have taught multiplication through the use of music. I have also taught other topics such as the oceans, continents, and presidents.

Music can help prepare for a test (Student finding 5). Three of the four students said that music can help them prepare for a test. Mike said music could help him prepare for a test because it helps him remember things better. Robert said the same thing as

Mike. Angela said music could help her prepare for a test if the song was about what was going to be on the test. John said he did not think music could help him. I have witnessed students hum their way through the continent song I taught them when taking a map test.

Music is important (Student finding 6). And three of the four students (Mike, Robert, and Angela) said that music is important. John's basic idea was that music was just music. Mike said music was important because when he grows up he will know a lot about it, it makes him happy, it relaxes him, and he loves to listen to it with his dad. Robert said music was important because it makes him happy. Angela said music was important. Music is so important because it gives silenced people a voice and is the universal language with a symbolic way of representing the world (Jenson, 2000). Without it, it would be extremely quiet.

#### Possible Limitations

While I believe all of the participants involved in this study were honest, there is still a chance that they were not. Since the participants knew my focus was on popular music, they could have given me answers they thought I wanted to hear. I would think this would be truer of the adults than the children. The adults saw the importance of my research more so than the children. Another possible limitation could be that the participants may have felt uncomfortable sharing negative feelings about education and administration. A third possible limitation could be time. Since the participants were asked these questions on the spot, the participants may have stated what first came to mind and not think their answers through.



Since I was a visitor into the various classrooms, the students and teachers may have acted differently. They may have been “putting on a show.” The teachers did have time to tell their students that I would be coming in to observe and may have warned their students to act accordingly.

#### The Problem: Testing, Testing, 1, 2, 3

All students are entitled to a free and appropriate education. On the surface it may seem that education is free, however that is far from the truth. Public schools are funded through tax payers’ dollars but many of these people are unaware of where the money is actually spent. Millions of dollars are dumped wastefully into the pockets of testing corporations. And who determines what is appropriate? It seems that this is being answered through tests. Testing corporations produce tests for all levels of education. It has become a norm in our country and is often left uncontested. People have accepted the multiple choice test as a part of our education system.

#### Show Me the Money

Parents have fallen into the mind trap that as long as their children are succeeding on these tests, they are doing well in school. Not only are parents convinced that high scores equal high achievement, but administrators tend to think along these lines as well. Through my own personal experiences in the public school setting, I have witnessed this statement as factual. My principal puts a lot of emphasis on the Criterion Referenced Competency Test. She really starts focusing on it in January in numerous ways. After we return from winter break, the physical appearance of our school changes drastically. All bulletin boards are required to be related to the C.R.C.T. Our principal displays each grade’s previous scores down each hallway. Every grade level is required to host a

parent workshop that explains about the test and gives them resources to practice at home. In addition to this we have motivational speakers come in to help students feel confident about taking the test. The C.R.C.T chaos does not stop there. The teachers from each grade level then have to come up with a cheer for the big C.R.C.T. pep rally. We have to teach this cheer to every student in the grade level. Needless to say this is a very time consuming task that takes away from valuable time that could be used for learning. After the students are done reciting their cheers, they are able to dance around freely while loud music blares in the background. The teachers sit back and watch and hope that all students return at the end. How this prepares them and motivates them for the test I am unsure. The students are so worked up at the end of it that no teaching is productive for the rest of the day. Additionally, specials teachers (those who teach music, art, physical education, and computers) are required to gear their lessons toward the test. Why is so much emphasis put on this test? Are the students the ones who benefit from numerous days spent wasted as teachers teach to the test?

The answers to these questions are easy. The students are not the ones who benefit from the testing. The big testing corporations benefit in a vast way.

If you think somebody, somewhere is getting rich off all this testing, you'd be right. Indeed it is possible that Americans may be taking as many as 600 million standardized tests annually, or more than two tests per year for every man, woman, and child in the United States. (Sacks, 1999, 221)

Testing takes over the school in the early fall and once again for the big finale in spring. These tests equal big money for test makers. Those people who have chanced their luck in the business area have struck it rich in the testing industry. One founder of a testing

company stated, ““We said we wanted to be a \$25 million company in five years. We wanted to be a \$50 million dollar company in 10 years. So far we are right on target to hit the five year forecast”” (Olson, 2005). The profit being made off of testing is ridiculous and figures such as these are often unknown to the public. So why are they able to get away with such overpricing of their services?

“Once again, we see that schools are not isolated but rather a part of a sociopolitical context that must always be taken into account” (Nieto, 2004, 391). Politics are the main reason companies are able to overprice their services and rip off tax payers. George W. Bush has made this possible with the passing of No Child Left Behind. This law states that all students should be performing on grade level. Who determines what it means to be performing on grade level? The geniuses in the testing businesses are the ones who supply the answer. The third, fifth, and eighth grades are the testing landmarks. If students do not pass the test at the end of these grades, they fail for the year. It does not matter if the student has maintained an A average for the year. This test weighs so heavily that it is the sole determining factor in promotion or retention in Coastal County.

Renamed No Child Left Untested by critics, the reform places high priority on accountability, tying what little federal monies schools receive to improved test performance. For additional financial support, public schools are left no other meaningful option than engaging in public/private partnerships, like the highly publicized deals cut with soft drink giants, which provide schools with needed revenue in exchange for soda machines in cafeterias. Similarly, media giants who own the major publishing houses will benefit from the 52 million-strong market

of public school students now required to take tests every year from the third grade on. (Giroux & Giroux, 2004, 200)

As noted by the Giroux, because of the pressures of testing, schools spend money in various ways to raise their scores. In Coastal County, summer school is typically offered to those students who need additional support before going to the next grade. This year it was only offered to those students in third, fifth, and eighth grades who have failed the C.R.C.T. Teachers were hired to reteach tested concepts and the students retake the test upon completion of summer school. In addition to this, several thousands of dollars are dumped by purchasing test preparation books and other testing supplies. “However you slice it, the unambiguous beneficiaries of all this testing have been business enterprises themselves, which have invested heavily in the nation’s testing obsession and reaped its financial rewards” (Sacks, 1999, 221-222). Not only do the actual testing companies benefit from legislation such as No Child Left Behind, but other businesses who claim to help students prepare for the big tests.

“At the turn of the twenty-first century, we cannot ignore corporations and the state because knowledge is not easily separable from the new economy. In the information society, knowledge is raw material to be converted to products” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, 15). Knowledge can even be bought for a price. The education received at schools, universities included, can be supplemented with various learning tools. These range from test prep books to class notes required for classes. “...profit itself has become a significant imperative within the professoriate” (McSherry, 2001, 33-34). Teachers are now able to play into the testing scheme by providing additional resources at an

additional cost. It seems as if making a profit is more important than helping students obtain an education.

The testing arena has affected the world negatively as seen in our school systems. Often times American students' test scores are compared to other students across the globe. I believe that testing does deserve a spot in educational systems, however not when the bottom line is to make a huge profit. The bottom line is money. Money equals power. In school, those who do well on tests are the ones who are set up for success. In turn, these will be the ones with power and money. "Is it surprising that corporations resemble Universities, health-care facilities, and international organizations, which all resemble corporations?" (Readings, 1996, 29). It is not about getting the best education; it is about attaining a well paying job. The tests that are used to determine success only reproduce the existing social classes that already exist in the country. The cycle continues while the big men reap the benefits. "Currently, college and universities follow a market rather than a social welfare logic" (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, 332). The emphasis placed on money making strategies far outweighs helping students obtain thinking strategies. As long as money is the main concern, meaningful educations will suffer the consequences.

#### Voted Most Popular

The children that are growing up in today's society have quite a different experience than that of children of past generations. When I was growing up it was not common to have an abundance of technology like it is today. We had the normal tube television and Atari. Now homes are filled with plasma televisions, laptops, various

electronic games, and other advances. Needless to say, children now occupy their time with these instead of resorting to outdoor activities or reading, such as I did growing up.

It is estimated that the average American spends more than four hours of a day watching television. Four hours a day, 28 hours a week, 1456 hours a year. The number of hours spent in front of a television or video screen is the single biggest chunk of time in the waking life of an American child. (Hazen and Winokur, 2003, 101)

With this much time being spent in the presence of popular culture, it is sure to play an important role in shaping their views and opinions.

Because these electronics surround children throughout the day, they are able to connect with what they see. This is where they learn about the issues prevailing in the world and form opinions on what they see. Schools were once thought to be the place where students gain their education. These technological advances have changed this to become a misconception. "Television, movies, the new technologies of enhanced video/computer games, and of course, the ubiquitous internet have transformed 'culture especially popular culture, into the primary educational site in which youth learn about themselves, their relationships to others and the larger world'" (Giroux, 2003, 101-102). Schools have taken the back burner to what children find important in their everyday lives. "It is time to recognize that the true tutors of our children are not schoolteachers or university professors but filmmakers, advertising executives and pop culture purveyors. Disney does more than Duke, Spielberg outweighs Stanford, MTV trumps MIT" (Barber, 2003, 101). What I have found through my years of teaching is that children can relate to lessons when popular culture is implemented. I have often focused on music as it

captivates students and hooks them into lessons. Music is all around. It is almost inescapable. By linking the lessons to something they find interesting, students are motivated to listen and participate. Thus, the message taken away at the end of the lesson far outweighs the traditional methods of teaching. This is what is important to students and this is what influences their thinking. Education needs to be personal and meaningful for students. By incorporating popular culture into daily lessons this can be the desired outcome. Students do not acquire real intellectual knowledge by simply memorizing facts, filling in bubbles correctly, or by having someone do the thinking for them. It is crucial that popular culture be added into the classrooms so that more intellectual conversations can take place. Students must acquire better critical thinking skills.

Due to the fact that popular culture is very influential, it only makes sense that teachers use this to their advantage.

If educational fields of knowledge are to remain relevant, more scholars will have to begin to account for the effect of popular culture on the learning experiences of students and teachers. This means educational psychologists, statisticians, administrators, and curriculum scholars will have to recognize the importance of popular culture in their research. They will also have to move beyond superficial issues such as how many scenes of violence the average child views on television. Popular culture is much more sophisticated in its ability to teach young people and adults what and how to think. (Weaver, 2005, 108)

Weaver states the importance for all school personnel to understand the importance of pop culture. With more people aware of the positive effects, the more it may begin to creep into the lessons of teachers.

It is not uncommon for students to know more about popular culture than material taught at school. This is what they are interested in and spend their time doing. When teaching a difficult concept, I find a way to relate it to popular culture. Students often times have a hard time with elapsed time. I use a television schedule to help demonstrate this concept. For some reason, when I am able to teach using shows students are familiar with, they grasp the concept more readily. There are so many ways to incorporate popular culture into lessons. Students' favorite songs, television shows, video games, and films can be used to hook them from the very beginning of a lesson. Lessons can be taught from the content of the popular culture issue as well. A meaningful education is not necessarily one that comes from a textbook.

Students are very knowledgeable when it comes to popular culture. They can often sing the lyrics to several songs yet are unable to remember things such as multiplication facts. Concepts as simple as this can be put into song to help students recall them. Teachers can use media that is already done for them, or students can create it themselves. Involving students on a new level would make the learning more interesting.

Although students would benefit from learning where popular culture is implemented, standardized testing creates quite the opposite learning environment. Teachers are pushed for time to dump the information into the minds of their students. Teachers rely on manuals that are often times scripted, even the expected students' responses. Real learning is not predictable. All students are not the same. What works for one group of students may not work for another. I have found this to be especially true of E.I.P. students. Teachers should be given the freedom to determine what works



best in their classrooms. This would create an environment where students are interested and motivated. This situation would most likely not leave any students behind rather than what is being resorted to presently. Teaching to make intellectual students can not be achieved through teaching for a test. The emphasis on these tests simply takes away any chance of incorporating popular culture into meaningful lessons, as well as critical thinking.

### More Money, More Problems

The baggage that has come along with No Child Left Behind has had many negative effects. For teachers it has equaled more tedious paperwork. When testing time approaches, several hours are spent verifying information and signing our lives away as we state it is correct. Students are not allowed to fill out the information on testing booklets and answer sheets like they used to do. I remember filling out all of my testing booklets throughout my school days. The chance of students making a mistake is too great nowadays. Our county actually got cited for having a mistake on a testing booklet. Teachers are pulled out of the classroom to fill in the appropriate information and even more valuable teaching time is lost. My principal even went as far to threaten the teachers if they made a mistake filling in the testing booklets they would be written up. Meetings are held with my principal to discuss students who may be at risk of failing. She then pulls these students out of instructional time to have a face-to-face meeting with them. This actually terrifies some of the students even more about the test. So much added pressure is put on the students. It is mandatory that we teach evening school to help prepare at risk students. A special clause was actually added into our contracts about this for this current year. Teachers are becoming tired of the added pressures and

many good teachers are lost in the cycle. Teacher shortages are apparent now more than ever.

We have been so ridden with tests and measurements, so leashed and spurred for percentages and retardations that the machinery has run away with the mass production and quite a way back bumped off the driver. I wonder that a robot has not been invented to make the assignments, give the objective tests, mark the scores, and chloroform all teachers who dared bring original thought to the specific problems and needs of their pupils. (Cooper in Pinar, 2004, 20)

Teachers often feel helpless and unable to turn the situation into a positive one. Through all of this excess baggage, the outcome would be much more positive if teachers were only given the freedom to teach students the way they wanted.

Although teachers feel the pressure and suffer, the real ones who suffer are the children. Ironic as this may sound with the title No Child Left Behind, it is doing just that. It is neglecting the individual learning styles of students and forcing them to sit through hours of pointless learning.

And judging from the 2004 State of the Union Address, the Bush administration will continue to allocate funds for 'educational reform' intended to strip young people of the capacity to think critically both by teaching them that learning is largely about test taking and by preparing them for a culture in which punishment has become the central principle of reform. (Giroux, 2004, 39)

Now that the Bush administration is on the way out, Giroux could not have been any closer to the truth. Teachers have resorted to assembly line teaching. Here, students come to work as we fill their minds with the information and strategies necessary to

achieve the standards. They may be able to choose the correct answer from four choices, but they lack critical thinking skills. “Perhaps the sorriest part of No Child Left Behind is the fact that the total emphasis is on standardized testing results and offers no incentives for the creative” (Haskvitz, 2005). The truly gifted children may suffer at the hands of these standardized tests. Creativity is not in the least a part of standardization.

I have always considered myself to be pretty intelligent. However, I am not the best test taker. The results of a test weigh too heavily on the face value of educational success of students. This reminds me of the situation where two students are sky diving. One student has passed all tests with the highest scores. The other student failed the tests but is a good hands-on learner. Which student would you want to pack your parachute? We are producing students who can achieve well on tests but lack the skills to think critically. As illustrated in the example above, the outcome can be very dangerous.

Students are also falling victim to the thought that good test scores equal success. This is far from the truth. One of my previous students (not a year I taught E.I.P.) was in gifted because of her high test scores. However, in every day situations in the classroom she performed lower than most other students. The high test score that qualified her for gifted was not a true indicator of her knowledge. There is so much more to education than testing.

When teaching students, I try my best to provoke critical thinking skills. The students do not respond well at first. They like for material to be straight forward. This is what they have become accustomed to through testing. If creative thinking is required, they turn away. They look for the simplest way out and do not put forth much effort.

Students are not interested in the material; they merely go through the motions to be finished. This vicious cycle continues throughout high school.

What is represented to youth in the classroom in the form of testable, discreet forms of pre-packaged knowledge becomes increasingly insignificant to them. It is only something to be suffered through, memorized, recalled, and promptly forgotten on the way to the real currency of the post-industrial, global, corporate order, and or as I have called it elsewhere, Gateism (Reynolds 1999), popular culture. (Reynolds, 2003, 102)

When all is said and done, the material learned at school is dismissed and they go out to gain their own education. One such way is through popular culture. Why then not take what students are interested in and inject it into the curriculum?

Popular culture serves as a forum to raise issues that are of concern for young people, and schools should permit these issues to be developed within the confines of daily school activities. The cultural studies of education can play a vital role in creating new approaches to learning that invite young people and their cultures into the dialogue about what knowledge matters most. Such an approach to learning need not be done at the expense of eliminating traditional subjects but rather popular culture can be incorporated into the current curricula core subjects. (Weaver, 2005, 108)

As Weaver notes, traditional subjects do not have to be abandoned. Instead, teachers should learn how to incorporate popular culture into the lessons provided. Standardized testing is affecting the way teachers teach in a negative way. Teachers feel that there is

no way to incorporate other ideas into the lessons and the students are left to pay the price.

From the moment we awake to the moment we go to sleep, we are bombarded by the popular culture of the day. To remove the popular out of the educational system, a system that defines itself by preparing youth for the world of tomorrow, defeats its purpose. (Hahn & MacRorie, 2001)

Once again, we are preparing our youth for a world that is not very realistic. The day to day operations that must be made are not in the form of a multiple choice test. To strictly limit students to this way of thinking is not only providing a disservice to them, but to society as a whole. We are robbing them of a meaningful education that will enable them to be successful in life, more than on only tests.

Such deprivation can be found in the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. In this film young girls were taken away from their families by the Australian government. They were taken away on the account that one parent was Aboriginal and the other was white. The government captured them in order to train them to become servants. “Destroying their identities, beating culture, knowledge, language, and memory out of the skins of native kids, emptying them completely in order to fill them up with the better stuff, breathing ‘whiteness’ into them-all of this was ‘for their own good’” (Ayers, 2004, 2). This is exactly what is being done through testing. We are demolishing their childhoods. Tests are also culturally biased. Schools have become a dumping ground where children are fed knowledge and are expected to regurgitate the information.

### Please Don't Stop the Music (Thanks Rihanna)

Testing has made its way to the forefront of education. Although people within the educational field understand that too much emphasis is placed on the results, it continues to be the factor that determines students' success. The way a student performs on tests weighs heavily on the opportunities afforded to him or her. It determines if they are placed in an E.I.P., regular, or gifted classroom. In the upper grades it determines if they are able to graduate or not, regardless of grade point averages. It also is a large determining factor in the colleges or universities that will or will not accept them. Once in college, a test can also decide if a student can further their education in graduate school.

This is a factor that I have often pondered. Upon completing this program, I have come to realize more and more the importance of a meaningful education. Learning to take a test is not meaningful and provides no real life connection. Why then is it a factor in being accepted into this program? One criterion that must be met is a passing score on the Miller Analogies Test. I still do not understand why one must be able to complete analogies in order to be accepted in to this program. This has no real indication of how well one might perform in the program. Once again testing companies are making big money off of tests that are of no importance. Why is this a cycle that seems to be unbroken?

Politics affect everything. The political agenda of George W. Bush focused largely on education. While to the naked eye *No Child Left Behind* seems great, it is very unrealistic.

We need only consider George W. Bush's electoral victory in 2000 over Albert Gore, Jr., which was reminiscent of Dwight D. Eisenhower's victories over egghead Adlai Stevenson in the fifties, for evidence that American anti-intellectualism is not in danger of extinction. (Graff, 2003, 40)

This type of anti-intellectualism is going to produce more anti-intellectuals through legislation such as *No Child Left Behind*. This is exactly what Apple was talking about when he mentioned the Right's conservative restoration (1993). With Bush winning two consecutive terms in office, Graff was implying that those on the Right are anti-intellectual and have been and will continue to be. In many states, they are also pushing for tighter control of education. This is causing schools to lean towards businesses to show the direction education should go in. Remember, schools are not supposed to be set up to insure students better, higher paying jobs. With added emphasis on test scores, students are robbed of an education that allows them to be creative. Certain areas are taken out of the curriculum such as the arts and more time is allotted for rote learning. Discussions are not found in classrooms. Music is being filtered out as well. The areas that children are interested in are not neglected as multiple choice tests dominate the field. Is this helping prepare children for a world that is changing daily? No, instead it is helping make richer the people that risked starting a testing business. A law entitled *No Child Left Behind* has robbed teachers of the freedom of teaching and students the right to a meaningful education. Instead of developing critical thinking skills which can be stimulated through interests such as music, students are learning how to choose the correct answer from a list. We owe students like Mike, Robert, Angela, and John more

than that. The true beneficiaries of *No Child Left Behind* are the ones making the money in the testing corporations and not the children.

A way to help cure education is by incorporating popular culture and music into the curricula. Although the four students I interviewed did not claim hip-hop to be their favorite genre of music, it is the most popular in Coastal Elementary. By bringing popular music, especially hip-hop into the curriculum, we can stop leaving children behind.

Rap is a site where cultural studies and education can converge. Yet, few people are willing to transcend their academic cultures. It is this lack of transcendence and understanding that causes many of the problems in public schools today.

While students see the value and significance of rap and other cultural manifestations like films, comic books, and fashion, professors, teachers, and administrators, with their inflated hierarchies of knowledge, dismiss these sites as insignificant and interpret these sites as proof of the malaise youth today embrace. The tendency of adults is to quickly condemn youth cultures like hip hop and then blame the youth for being too pessimistic and aimless. Yet, it is with our brutal efficiency that academic work and schooling murders the general economy of meaning in rap and other cultural movements. (Daspit & Weaver, 2005, 100)

I hope studies like mine will open up the eyes of those who do not understand the importance popular music could have in education. From my research I conclude that teachers see that education is lacking the quality it needs from outlets such as popular music. Students are tired of boring, unmeaningful lessons that they are being taught day in and day out. From Plato's time to the present, music has played an important role in



people's lives. It is time we face the music, do what is right, and stop leaving our students behind. It is like Shannon (not me) said in the early 80's, "Let the music play!"

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