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3. MIX IT UP

*A Language Framework to Incorporate Popular Music and
Critical Conversations in the ELA Classroom*

INTERCONNECTED CONTEXTS: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

I am sitting in a downtown café with my friend Mike, a functional linguist, trying to explain my attempt at *language-based analysis* of two songs for this chapter (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). Mike is also a teacher and a poet; I can talk with him about mixing disciplines, mixing genres, and making sense of the creative beats thumping in my head. That day, even though Mike told me my language analysis was well done, the most valuable part of our conversation was exactly that: the conversation. In an educational atmosphere that has adamantly conceptualized teaching through a prescriptive and sometimes punitive lens, it is difficult to nurture support communities and even more challenging to make a case for curricula that diverges from what is regarded as the norm.

Music, *functional grammar* (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013), and critical conversations in the English language arts (ELA) classroom (Appleman, 2015), together, seemed to have that combined essence of creative disruption—I was excited about it! Having taught English, literacy, and multiculturalism in college for some years, I have learned to embrace a *dangerous education* that addresses and openly welcomes controversial issues (Ayers, 2014; Freire, 1973; hooks, 1994; Zinn, 2008). I have also learned of the tremendous amount of pressure and work English teachers face daily to engage students with unconventional and powerful ideas; further, I am aware of the resistance and backlash educators could face when bringing such complex conversations into their classrooms (Dover, 2013).

I write this chapter as an English educator who continues to confront the challenges of resistance and backlash to providing students with an education that openly addresses critical and social justice issues, and I anticipate experiencing these difficulties in the future. This chapter, much like this book, asks for a *recontextualization* of how we view music and language learning in schools while providing the mechanisms to integrate these areas with the necessary critical conversations. In my case, I envision a *mixed tape* of a classroom where multiple disciplines, approaches, and critical/social justice dialogues are invited. This chapter is *un mixeo* (i.e., a mix) that integrates a *language-based* functional frame (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; Schleppegrell, 2004) and popular music to actively engage both English language learners (ELLs) and

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mainstream students in the ELA classroom; in addition, it includes three secondary school lessons focused on unpacking linguistic structures, developing language arts competencies, and problematizing systemic inequities.

THE ACADEMIC CONVERSATION

Music and/or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners

Music is a testament of human inventiveness and expression, and an outlet for engagement and building connections. Brill (2011) explains that “music serves as the conduit for humans to express themselves, to identify to themselves and to others who they are, and to establish a sense of belonging” (p. 2); he further argues this sense of identification is crucial for underrepresented communities, as it provides the conditions for agency. With a myriad of genres to choose from and a diversity of people making those choices, we are bound to encounter multiple ways music helps in the telling of stories and in exploring issues of identity (Kelly, 2013; Lamont-Hill, 2009).

As explained in the introductory chapter of this book, it is in this confluence of choices and availability of popular *texts* that *intertextuality*, or ‘cross-referencing’ among *texts*, can serve as an additional mechanism for classroom communities to engage with intricate ideas and welcome the voices and perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (Hagood, Alvermann, & Heron-Hruby, 2010). Another resource to foster meaningful classroom engagement is *intersubjectivity*, which refers to a type of collective learning and understanding that honors students’ contributions (Matusov, 2001). With these tools in mind, consider the pedagogical possibilities when choosing songs whose multicultural content and complex discourse challenges a diversity of learners to think critically and at deeper levels.

Artists such as Rage Against the Machine and Puerto Rican urban ensemble Calle 13 have for years disseminated stories and socio-political critiques of mainstream society and its treatment of underserved groups. Such dissident voices serve an important goal: reminding us of our civil duty to question, rebel, uncover, problematize, and challenge the status quo. Shafer (2012) argues that songs can serve as anchor for discussing social and political messages, as they foster “a setting for multiple voices and an atmosphere that is more democratic and expansive” (p. 53). It is this democratic spirit and civic engagement that we hope drives teachers and students within and beyond the classroom.

English Language Learners

The U.S. English classroom has undergone a cultural and linguistic *recontextualization* of sorts. The number of ELLs has gone in steady crescendo, reaching 9.1% of the entire U.S. public school population in 2012 (National Center for Education Statistics: English Language Learners, 2014). These students are both

linguistically and culturally diverse and bring with them a repertoire of practices and notable experiences that rarely align with mainstream classroom tenets and values (Valdés, 1996, 2001; Delgado Gaitan, 2004; Delpit, 2012). As a review, an ELL “refers to a nonnative English speaker who is acquiring English” (Graham & Garshick, 2006, p. 118). Spanish speaking ELLs are a majority in the United States; but this information is not surprising, as Spanish is the country’s most spoken second language (Batalova & McHugh, 2010; Ryan, 2013).

Music can serve as a means to address the needs of diverse learners, including ELLs. In fact, scholarship shows music’s effectiveness in the teaching of ELLs (Lems, 2005; Murphey, 1992a, 1992b) and their language and literacy development (Medina, 2002; Schunk, 1999; Pane & Salmon, 2011). In his cogent scholarship on pop songs and their discursive power to teach language learners, Murphey (1990b, 1992a) theorizes about the *song-stuck-in-my-head-phenomenon*, which he claims is a naturally occurring experience among individuals after listening to a musical piece; the scholar also claims this phenomenon might aid in language acquisition. Moreover, songs that showcase a story, i.e., “story songs,” can improve vocabulary learning while facilitating understandings of genre conventions (Medina, 2003). Educators of CLD adults explain that music with lyrics can boost teaching and foster a distinctive engagement that enhances learning environments (Lems, 2005). With younger students, music has proven to advance literacy skills in *inquiry-based* contexts (Pane & Salmon, 2011). Overall, scholarship on popular music and English learning supports community building, connects schooling and community knowledge, and offers a unique scope into diverse discourses (Engh, 2013). The aforementioned qualities make songs a versatile pedagogical tool: one that, according to Murphey (1990b, 1992b), our students just will not forget.

Although these scholars address theoretical, pedagogical, and research-based approaches to incorporating, understanding and using music, language, and literacy in different environments, none of them offer a specific functional, framework through which the *language features* of songs can be deconstructed and examined as “linguistic objects” (Lukin, 2008, p. 85). It is with this premise that *language-based pedagogy* (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008) is shared with English teachers aiming to remix their classes with popular music.

A Rationale for a Functional Language Approach

With its alluring quality and multisensory components, music can be an exceptional resource when addressing the needs of ELLs in the ELA classroom (Murphey, 1992a, 1992b). In fact, it is well documented that the literacy identity of many CLD students and their families includes experiences such as music-related practices and religious traditions; thus, as teachers consider the how, when, and what of music in their classroom, they must remember the plethora of literacies to draw upon in and outside school environments (Compton-Lilly & Greene, 2011; Delgado Gaitan, 2004; Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

The integration of music and *language-based* approaches may present some challenges for literacy teachers—thinking about it in a broader scope, it is almost a venture into a new territory that might be seen as diverging from national and statewide mandates. One of the biggest challenges when choosing to integrate songs into a mainstream classroom may also stem from perceived hierarchies among genres. For instance, for some education stakeholders, music and song may ring as ‘fun and games’ when compared to more highly valorized genres in national initiatives, such as research papers and other non-fiction *texts*.¹

In this case, *systemic functional linguistics* (SFL) can serve as a powerful framework to study songs as *linguistic artifacts* that showcase unique, culturally-bound, and genre-specific knowledge while building academic competencies (Martin & Rose, 2007; Martin & Rose, 2008; Schleppegrell, 2004). Drawing on critical traditions, SFL focuses on how individuals construct and shape discourse according to suitable language options for a *type of text*; such text types are the “primary medium through which disciplinary knowledge is produced, stored, communicated, and critiqued” (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008, p. 9; Martin & Rose, 2008), a crucial lesson for both teachers and students. In contrast to ‘traditional’ grammar, SFL recognizes the functional nature of language, in addition to its social situatedness and continual change (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013; Martin & Rose, 2007; Schleppegrell, 2004)—SFL “does not separately address language and content, but instead sees the language as the realization of meaning in context” (de Oliveira, 2015, p. 2). Such a stance is well-aligned with general understandings of *literacy as meaning making* (Harste, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Luke, 2003; National Council of Teachers of English, 2014), an anchor to thoughtful and effective English teaching.

Scholars have studied music from a *social semiotic* perspective and SFL (both of which are connected) to approach music and songs as linguistic artifacts that are socio-culturally determined (van Leeuwen, 1999; Caldwell, 2009). For instance, Caldwell (2009) draws on Halliday’s (1970) “phonological stratum of language,” van Leeuwen’s (1999) work on multimodality and other scholars to study *rhythmic synchronicity*—i.e., beat and rhythm synchronic coordination—of six hip-hop artists collaborating with Kanye West (p. 62). He found that these artists’ *synchronicity* ranged from ‘low’ to ‘high’ and that such information could reveal aspects of the identity of both the rappers and West himself as producer. Overall, these works provide a broad understanding of how *social semiotics* and SFL have been used to study music in connection to functionality and identity.

Functional grammar has also been employed to advance classroom practice. For teachers, this is an ideal opportunity to develop discipline-bound knowledge while promoting language learning (Achugar, Schleppegrell, & Oteiza, 2007; de Oliveira, 2008; Lock, 1996; Schleppegrell, 2004) and offering guided support “in the context of shared experience” (Rose & Martin, 2012, p. 58). Through these approaches, students engage with, say, poems or songs as *linguistic items* they appropriate, unpack, and repack (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; Schleppegrell, 2004); the premise here is

that learners will have the tools for and agency in critical scholastic engagement. In classrooms where social justice is greatly needed, looking at discourse as socially constructed and revealing of disenfranchisement makes for a powerful and necessary aptitude to nurture among students (Martin & Rose, 2007). As a teacher, I am interested in *language-based pedagogy*, which draws upon functional grammar and focuses on providing teachers with pedagogical strategies to support both the learning of disciplinary knowledge and language (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). This chapter centers predominantly on ELA and CLD students' understandings of songs as *texts*.

The choice of music as *text* and the critical theme of immigration are highly influenced by the timeliness and need of both subjects in the U.S. classroom, the former being addressed by this book and the latter a topic of much controversy in the media and our socio-political arena. The choice of two songs, one in English and one in Spanish, also connects with functionality, linguistic conventions, and criticality. For instance, each of these selections should be understood as a unique genre ingrained in the cultural context in which it was developed (Christie & Martin, 1997; Martin & Rose, 2008). Overall, critical conversations go beyond discussing controversial topics, as the very resources we select and their language should also play a part in these dialogues, thus signaling a commitment to diversifying our ELA curricula.

Critical Topics in the ELA Classroom

As teachers, we understand the inherent complexity and importance of critical ideas and social justice dialogues in the classroom (Appleman, 2015; Dover, 2013). In fact, professional organizations have long been advocating for their overt inclusion across disciplines (e.g., National Council of Teachers of English, National Association for Multicultural Education), while scholars have called for the fostering of *multicultural competencies* among learners (Sharma, Phillion, & Malewski, 2011). Nieto and Bode (2012) and hooks (1994) have made a career of advocating for equity pedagogy, one that uncovers injustices, gives voice to marginalized communities, and aims to disassemble the status quo. As an education community, we agree that schools should offer students access to a multiplicity of ideas and agency to enact social change (Ayers, 2014; hooks, 1994). Let's continue on this path!

What's in the Mixed Tape? Functionality, Music, and Critical Issues

Language-based pedagogy is used to anchor the discussion of two songs and encourage a general exploration of U.S. immigration, especially from a Latin American perspective. I specifically draw upon literature on language arts that moves away from misconceptions of the *language of literature*, or in this case the *language of songs*, and instead focus on language and functionality (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; Lukin, 2008). In addition, language pedagogy provides targeted

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means to navigate discourse; by giving students these tools, we are inviting and preparing them to be active participants in and consumers of academic knowledge (Schleppegrell, 2004). This is one way to foster inclusion while validating multiple artistic and cultural traditions.

The first song chosen is “Without a Face” by Rage Against the Machine (RATM, 1996, track 8), an insurgent rap-metal ensemble originally from Los Angeles, California. With more than two decades of robust socio-political commentary through their music and lyrics, the band has earned a reputation for tackling oftentimes-controversial topics.² This very identity of theirs is what lured me to this song in the first place. In particular, the chosen *text* focuses roughly on the experiences of undocumented immigrants who are victims of a system that profits from their labor but continues to criminalize their identities. It is important to note that English teachers assessing this song for use in their classroom might find that it is overall suitable for high school students and less so for middle school. The lyrics are powerful—they showcase a rhetorical complexity that deserves a closer examination, because they offer learners a comprehensive take on immigration stories and the highly debated figure of the immigrant. This is not a safe choice for a song; it was not meant to be.

The second choice is a Spanish number by Calle 13 titled “Pa’l Norte” (2007, track 10). Having enjoyed the music and unique style of these urban Puerto Rican artists since college, I have come to appreciate their overt, anti-establishment lyrics that often expose inequities while inviting a new generation of Latino/a Americans to embrace resistance and understand the complexity of our realities. The group’s artistic risk-taking includes language alternation, anglicisms and culturally-situated expressions, and richly dense discourse. “Pa’l Norte” is a candid and well-developed title about Latin American immigration from the South to “the North” (i.e., presumably the United States) that positions border crossing as an organic movement that is at the core of human identity. In the song, this idea is juxtaposed with contemporary (and highly controversial) policies on border demarcation. Calle 13 offers a unique perspective on immigration from the viewpoint of a collective Latin American consciousness. The group then expands it to a global one, thus decentering it as a purely American issue.

Music descriptions and *language-based* strategies are effective means to *dissect texts*³ and showcase how language patterns, including rhetorical devices, can support learners in navigating content area topics (Lukin, 2008). By focusing on the critical unpacking of language, teachers are offered a set of strategies for developing linguistic, ELA, and social justice conversations in a confluence of best practices and with the potential for *intertextuality* (Hagood et al., 2010) and *intersubjectivity* (Matusov, 2001). Teachers will also have an opportunity to break away from restrictive definitions of genre as ‘suitable’ or ‘unsuitable’ for schooling, while validating the language and culturally significant messages of underserved peoples within their classroom and school communities (Kelly, 2013). For these particular lessons, one recommendation is for ELA teachers to partner

with the school’s ENL/ELL professionals or Spanish teachers. The following lesson excerpts aim to model activities and strategies for English (and all) educators of diverse students. All song excerpts have been paraphrased and translated from the original texts.

LESSON EXCERPT I: TRANSITIVITY, CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT, AND IMMIGRATION IN “WITHOUT A FACE”

In the song “Without a face” by Rage Against the Machine, the topic of immigration can be unpacked through the various *processes* that support a more in depth understanding of the main character’s development and transformation as he/she enters an unknown territory; in this case, the *experiential meanings* analysis, i.e., meanings about experience, (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) is predominantly understood from the perspective of the main character, the immigrant.

Focus on Language (adapted from Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008)

Processes are “constructed in verb groups” (p. 11); when unpacking and labeling processes, context is very important. The teacher should offer accessible definitions to students before delving into the language-based exercise. Fang and Schleppegrell (2008) explain the various types of functional processes students must learn:

- *Doing*: engaging in/performing an action
- *Being*: signals a state of being, existing
- *Sensing*: involves perceiving, feeling, thinking

Focus on Content

Learners must also have access and be able to engage with the ELA competencies addressed in the lesson—in this case, the literary analysis of *character development* (Lynch-Brown, Tomlison, & Short, 2011).

Focus on Social Justice

Critical conversations that connect students with larger inequities within systems and directly relate to power imbalances in our communities are an essential component of any discipline in the 21st century, but particularly ELA and literacy (NCTE, 2014). The topic of immigration is a particularly important one. A recommended resource to prepare for this conversation is “Immigration myths” by Teaching Tolerance (link: <http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/immigration-myths>), which has connections to other valuable materials and guides. When using these sources, it is also important to ask students to conduct their own research, be informed about the issues, and move beyond responses that focus solely on their perspectives.

Table 1. *Transitivity analysis and character development*

Language support for ELLs	ELA focus: Character development	Transitivity Analysis: Processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who is telling the story/ sharing perspectives? Who is this person? How does the immigrant describe life before the crossing? 	<p><i>Before crossing (told in retrospect in the song):</i></p> <p>Few specifications; nostalgia for the past; family ties; hints at more rounded sense of identity (take time to explain difference between <i>flat</i> and <i>round</i> characters, for instance (see Lynch-Brown et al., 2011);</p>	<p>No discourse associated with the before crossing the border</p> <p>[This section can be connected with the discourse on Calle 13's "Pa'l Norte," which focuses largely on immigrant identities before the crossing. It also breaks the monolithic perception of these community as only immigrants and depicts them as agents.]</p> <p>Sample questions to invite <i>intertextuality</i>: What other <i>texts</i> come to mind that specifically focus on immigration? Whose perspective is highlighted? Why do you think that is? E.g., a politician's rally speech, a slogan on a t-shirt, a movie, a social media platform</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mention some actions the character does when trying to 'cross' the border. What is the immigrant's perception of the crossing? How can you tell? 	<p><i>Crossing (mostly in the chorus; see song lines 12–17): changes the narrator</i></p> <p>A myriad of life-altering circumstances causes the character to change (e.g., extenuating commute, hiding, enduring an inhumane journey, witnessing 'graves' of deceased immigrants).</p>	<p><i>Doing (material)</i>: trespassing, commuting, enduring e.g., I <i>attempted to go through</i> a border; [I] <i>commuted</i> unnoticed by others.</p> <p><i>Sensing (mental)</i>: perception e.g., I <i>engaged</i> in a deadly mission.</p> <p>Sample questions to invite <i>intersubjectivity</i>: How would you feel if you faced the difficulties expressed by this character? What types of life circumstances would prompt someone to take such dangerous journey? As a democratic nation, how can we improve our approach to immigration.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who is faceless? What does it mean to be faceless? Is the immigrant really 'incarcerated'? What happens when you are 'behind bars'? Why is the narrator comparing 'existence' to 'incarceration'? 	<p><i>After crossing/current context (most of the song):</i></p> <p>The beginning of a new, 'faceless' context is documented at the end of the chorus. In fact, most of the song focuses on the conditions endured and the 'existence as incarceration' dynamic.</p>	<p><i>Being</i>: state e.g., [I] <i>am</i> faceless. (<i>participant</i> is career) e.g., <i>Existence is</i> jail. (<i>participant</i> is token)</p> <p>Various processes: (see line 1) e.g., [I] <i>have</i> no documentation (<i>being</i>), <i>Sensing</i> therefore I <i>do not have</i> humanity (<i>sensing</i>).</p>

Character development of the immigrant can be explored by looking at three stages in “Without a Face:” pre-crossing (told sporadically in episodes of nostalgia and familial concern), crossing (mainly developed in the chorus), and current context/post-crossing (most of the song’s lines). In the song, after all the *doing* processes associated with the crossing (border trespassing and undocumented entering into the country), the narrator transitions into ‘*being*’ faceless, i.e., which could be interpreted as becoming invisible amidst the dominant structures of the U.S. political and social landscape. Yet, the immigrant’s invisibility is tied to both his/her survival and the deprivation of identity by a system designed to bank on their work while maintaining them in that very ‘faceless’ state.

Emphasis on Critical Issues

Teachers must provide a context for the terms immigration, immigrant, and migrant or do a debriefing of the terms to ensure students understand the subject matter (de Oliveira, 2015; Fang & Schleppregrell, 2008; Schleppregrell, 2004). When discussing some of the *doing*, *being*, and *sensing* processes in the song, ask students to try to distinguish between processes and what that reveals about the message (Fang & Schleppregrell, 2008; Rose & Martin, 2012); also, ask them to think deeply about the different lenses or sides of the immigrant’s story and how that might (dis)connect with what they know about immigration (e.g., from the news or social media platforms). Moreover, in the song, the crossing contains predominantly *doing* and *sensing* processes; upon crossing, two major *being* processes are then present: becoming faceless and comparing ‘existence’ to ‘incarceration.’ Thus, the citizen of ‘X’ country migrates and then is a ‘prisoner’ with a prescribed identity. Meanwhile, the teacher can posit some of the questions in [Table 1](#) to invite *intertextuality* and *intersubjectivity*.

Also, teachers can consider using specific excerpts from Foucault’s Panopticism (1995) to begin a conversation with students about the connection between existence and imprisonment; as we know from best practices, both mainstream students and ELLs can and will be receptive to delving into this type of academic conversations if offered meaningful scaffolding from the teacher (Bailey & Butler, 2002; de Oliveira, Maune, & Klassen, 2014). Consider comparable traits or images in the song and Foucault’s work, such as being under constant surveillance/scrutiny, having limited rights, being faceless/invisible, behaving in certain ways to avoid trouble, lacking agency, and understanding who has power (Foucault, 1995). You can begin the conversation with Lesson I, then continue with a more in-depth dialogue during next class.

COMPARISON OF ACADEMIC AND EVERYDAY DISCOURSE IN “WITHOUT A FACE” AND “PA’L NORTE”

In the song “With a Face,” the immigrant sees his *existence* in the U.S. as *imprisonment*. In “Pa’l Norte” (Calle 13, 2007, track 10), the narrator also dwells

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on this idea by calling himself a *recluso*, i.e., an inmate. In this follow up lesson, two aspects are highlighted: first, the showcasing of the term metaphor as a concept for students to deconstruct by comparing an *academic language* definition, one that pertains to schooling language, with an *everyday language* definition, which refers to language used outside of school (Bailey & Butler, 2002); second, an example of how the metaphor is showcased through discourse in both songs. To establish a connection between the schooling definition and how it is used in everyday contexts, teachers can create a visual component that allows for such comparison. For example, create a PowerPoint slide or use the blackboard to write down both definitions next to each other. The table below is an example of how I have presented this comparison to my students to support their learning.

Table 2. Language unpacking through everyday and academic discourse

<i>Everyday discourse</i>	<i>Academic discourse</i>
<p>A <i>metaphor</i> is commonly known as a comparison where one idea is used to express another idea (through language, visuals).⁴ You do not need to say that something is like another.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comparison • ideas ‘disguised’ as other ideas 	<p>A <i>metaphor</i> “is an implied comparison without a signal word to evoke the similarities” (Lynch-Brown, Tomlinson, & Short, 2011, p. 60).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rhetorical figure • rhetorical device • figurative or literary language
<p>Example: “A monster tornado is coming!”</p>	<p>Example: “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player, / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, / And then is heard no more.” (from Shakespeare’s <i>Macbeth</i>)</p>

Functional Elements of Comparison and Intertextuality in Both Texts

Text 1: RATM. In “Without a Face,” the narrator expresses that “Existence is incarceration.” The metaphor or comparison between an immigrant and a prisoner is an important statement representing shifts in perspective. For instance, the narrator is detached from his own existence as an undocumented immigrant working and undergoing a series of mistreatments and incidents that lead to marginalization in the United States. In the song, the related jail metaphor is enhanced by pointing to the immigrant’s lack of “control” and agency, in addition to his tapped phone. The mention of “jura” or jury is also significant in understanding the narrator’s experiences. The immigrant in this song is a victim of societal corruption and abuse. As part of this short lesson, teachers can ask students to carefully read the lyrics, identify language patterns that facilitate their learning, and keep an eye for additional metaphors and what meaning they convey (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008).

Text 2: Calle 13. Meanwhile, in “Pa’l Norte,” the narrator claims “Yo soy un invasor con reputación de convicto. / I am an invader with a convict’s reputation.” While Calle 13’s rendition of the incarceration metaphor is less tragic and undermining than RATM, it is still indicative of a larger ideological stance on the criminalization of the immigrant. The “convict” line is followed by a transformation, almost a magical one, which empowers the immigrant to become a miner who can delve and traverse underground to border cross. This added sense of agency is embodied in the charismatic figure of the miner whose reliance on spiritual protection takes him to “el Norte” (i.e., the North). The immigrant in “Pa’l Norte” is a strong, adventurous traveler who, like the indigenous people of Latin America featured on the music video, sees no boundaries.

BRIEF EXPLORATION OF GRAPHOLOGY AND AGENCY IN “PA’L NORTE”

Emphasis on Language

This analysis focuses on graphology, which are layout patterns that showcase meaning in a broader scope (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013).

Emphasis on Content

The patterns help map the discourse following a path or events leading to the crossing.

Emphasis on Critical Issues

In the song, there is development of identity and agency rooted in Latin American cultures and traditions.

CONCLUSION: REWIND THE MIXED TAPE

The allegory of the *mixed tape* is intended to call on English teachers to continue to diversify and creolize their classroom practices with fresh (critical) conversations, in addition to different genres and frameworks; the aim is that, just like rhythm and song, we reframe the way we educate in order to meaningfully incorporate the diverse voices and identities in our classrooms. No longer can we afford to dwell in nostalgia or remain unchanged when our schools continue to transform. Rather, like *recontextualizing* and *remixing*, we must plan accordingly—never afraid to reclaim language arts as a field that openly embraces diverse literacies and knowledge (Moll et al., 1992).

English language learners continue to be an underserved population in U.S. schools, and it is our duty to find effective and just mechanisms to support their

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Table 3. Graphology of “Pa’l Norte” by Calle 13⁵

<i>Language and ELA: Layout patterns and sequence</i>	<i>Questions to support ELLs</i>	<i>Critical issue: agency</i>
After the first chorus, affirmation of identity and statement of purpose: to journey Stanza 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is <i>this</i> immigrant? • What do you think the “pezuña” or hoof represents? 	Strong sense of self (e.g., animal characteristics as a sign of strength)
Reminiscing on the journey’s meaning and preparation Stanzas 2–3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is C13’s immigrant similar to the one portrayed by RATM? How so? • What does the journey mean to the immigrant? 	Strong adherence to cultural roots—lyrics showcase significant rituals and traits
Reflection on the lessons learned from journeys Stanza 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some lessons learned from previous journeys? • How are the lessons learned indicative of the immigrant’s connection with his/her culture? 	Lessons rooted in traditional practices: scribing, religious practices, resistance to oppression
Re-affirmation of purpose and engagement in journey to the North Stanzas 5–8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does “the North” stand for? Is this use of the term significant? Why or why not? 	Voice is purposeful and assertive; there is hope and a strong sense of self; valorization of indigenous/native way of life is strong (e.g., connection to the natural environment)

academic success and growth as members of our community. We can begin by integrating resources that resonate with their identities as adolescents, language learners, and culturally diverse individuals. By offering *language-based pedagogy* as an effective framework when working with a multicultural group of students (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; Rose & Martin, 2012), including ELLs (de Oliveira, 2008), teachers can appropriate and draw upon strategies that ensure access to complex discourse and to even larger systemic conversations. Back in the café, I wonder what would happen if all teachers were allowed to remix education and their teaching. I would think the sounds would be as awesomely complex and alluring as the best playlist one could ever put together.

NOTES

- ¹ See Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards: http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf
- ² See <http://www.ratm.com/> for more details
- ³ See de Oliveira and Dodds (2010) for more detailed information on *language dissection*.
- ⁴ See Purdue OWL for definitions and examples of the term *metaphor*.
- ⁵ For my analysis, I used this online iteration of “Pa’l Norte:” <http://genius.com/Calle-13-pal-norte-lyrics>

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I. CORTÉS SANTIAGO

COMPREHENSIVE LESSON PLAN: “WITHOUT A FACE” BY RAGE
AGAINST THE MACHINE AND “PA’L NORTE” BY CALLE 13

Instructional Goals

ELA: Students will identify and critically analyze metaphors related to the topic of immigration as portrayed in two popular songs, one in English and one in Spanish, and a music video. In addition, they will unpack the figurative language used to construct the figure of the immigrant in each song and compare and contrast them during an intertextuality exercise. They will also write a reflection to engage with systemic conversations on the topic.

Language: Students will learn the *everyday* and *academic language* definitions of the term metaphor (Bayley & Butler, 2002); they will also demonstrate knowledge of these definitions and of figurative language features as they engage in class discussions and craft a reflection.

Standards

Sample ELA standard: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines *faction* in *Federalist* No. 10).

Sample language standard: World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) English language development (ELD) standard: English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of LANGUAGE ARTS (Grade Level 9–12).

Introductory Hook

Think about a popular *text* whose main idea (or one of them, at least) is to expose injustices—for example, *V for Vendetta*, a César Chávez “*sí, se puede*” sign or you can also show posters of the movies.

What are some traits of such *text*? What makes the *text* powerful?

What type of language and/or images the author uses to share compelling messages in or about the *text*? (consider both linguistic features, figurative language, visual elements)

Ask students to debrief in pairs. Then, write down some of their answers on a PowerPoint slide or the board.

Teacher Tasks

Share printed song lyrics of “Without a Face” (in English) and “Pa’l Norte” (in both English and Spanish). If lyrics in English are not available, partner with the school’s

Spanish teacher or a school paraprofessional who can offer support in finding or developing excerpt translations. If possible, purposefully pre-assign students in groups where at least one of them speaks or is familiar with Spanish. For Activity #2, have the music video of “Pa’l Norte” ready on the computer.¹

CRITICALLY ANALYZE POPULAR MUSIC TEXTS: UNPACKING METAPHORS ON IMMIGRATION

Activity 1: Song #1 – “Without a Face” (WAF; song)

Academic language unpacking exercise: What is a metaphor? What comes to your mind when I say this term?

The teacher notes students’ responses for all class to see. Check if the students refer to language predominantly connected with literature, as it shows what they have learned about it (e.g., that metaphors are “literary language”). To establish a connection between the *schooling definition* and how it is used in *everyday language*, create a visual component that allows for such comparison (Bayley & Butler, 2002). For example, create a PowerPoint slide or use the blackboard to write down both definitions next to each other, with examples. In this chapter, [table 2](#) provides an example of how I have presented this comparison to my students. As part of this short lesson, teachers can ask students to carefully read the lyrics, identify language patterns that facilitate their learning, and keep an eye for in-text metaphors and what meaning they convey (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008; Rose & Martin, 2012).

Prompts/questions:

As you listened to the song, what language features drew your attention?

Did you notice any *comparison of ideas* in the song? Mention two main ideas that are *compared* in the song, e.g., “Life is _____.”

Why do you think the immigrant says “life is _____”?

Why do you think the broad concept of ‘immigration’ is compared to ‘imprisonment’?

What type of immigration story are the metaphors in the song conveying? Are these messages positive or negative?

What do you think is the author’s point of view about immigration in the United States? How do you know?

Note for teachers:

In “Without a Face,” the narrator expresses that “*Existence is incarceration.*” The metaphor or comparison between an immigrant and a prisoner is an important statement representing shifts in perspective. For instance, the narrator might be detached from his humanity, as he works and undergoes a series of mistreatments and incidents that lead to marginalization in the United States. In the song, the related jail metaphor is enhanced by pointing to the immigrant’s lack of “control”

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and agency, in addition to his tapped phone. Overall, in this song, the immigrant is a victim of societal corruption and abuse.

Activity 2: Song #2 – “Pa’l Norte” (song and music video)

For this second activity, the students will identify figurative language in textual and visual forms. After the students have listened to “Pa’l Norte” and seen the video, ask students to identify metaphors in the lyrics and the visuals as they work in small groups, then they share with the whole class.

Did you notice any *comparison of ideas* either in the lyrics and/or the images presented in the video?

Mention one main “*implied comparison*” in the video (visuals, language) (e.g., immigration as spiritual/religious procession; oligarchs walking opposite to the immigrants may symbolize how governments are not working for/with their people; sunrise and hands up to the sun might stand for beginning and hope; sunset might be defeat, death).

Why does the author *compare* the immigrant to an ‘invader,’ a ‘convict,’ and a ‘miner’? Why does the author employ these *rhetorical devices*? (briefly unpack these terms for students)

Note for Teachers

In “Pa’l Norte,” the narrator claims “Yo soy un invasor con reputación de convicto. / I am an invader with a convict’s reputation.” While Calle 13’s rendition of the incarceration metaphor is less tragic and undermining than RATM, it is still indicative of a larger ideological stance on the criminalization of the immigrant. Yet, the “convict” line is followed by a transformation, almost a magical one, which empowers the immigrant to become a miner who can travel undetectable as he/she border crosses. This added sense of agency is embodied in the charismatic figure of the miner whose reliance on spiritual protection takes him to “el Norte” (i.e., the north). Calle 13’s immigrant is a strong, adventurous traveler who, like the indigenous people of Latin America featured on his music video, sees no boundaries.

Activity 3: Intertextuality: Comparing songs 1 & 2

Students will break into small groups and will answer and discuss the following questions. The teacher must first debrief students on the meaning of social justice.

Why do you think the broad concept of ‘immigration’ is compared to ‘imprisonment’ in both songs?

What are some major differences in context/setting between WAF and “Pa’l Norte”? How do these differences offer a unique perspective and point of view on immigration?

MIX IT UP!

Compare and contrast the figure of the immigrant in WAF and “Pa’l Norte.”

Brief reflection paper (Students brainstorm ideas in class, then work on individual assignments for a later submission)

When it comes to the topic of immigration, whose perspective is often portrayed by the U.S. media? Why?

Whose voice is often present? Whose voice is silenced?

Why do you think the authors of WAF and “Pa’l Norte” provided these perspectives?

What social justice message do they want to share?

NOTE

- ¹ A clean lyrics video of “Pa’l Norte” is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SBYO1ZfxxSM>. The official (explicit) song is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-n5Krh_8j0Q