

Fearless Innovation—Songwriting For Our Lives: Inspiring Learners with Arts-Based Practices That Support Creativity

James S. Cantor

As long as I can remember I've had songs in my head. A song will repeat itself over and over again until another one bumps it out. In fact, it took me most of my adult life before I realized that I could be a songwriter because I always had other people's songs playing in my mind. Most of the songs I grew up with were about relationships between man and woman, and the songs were written, performed, and recorded to entertain and provide escape. However, as I matured as an educator and a scholar, I increasingly became interested in the role of songwriter as minstrel, the artist who sings his or her take on contemporary life and times.

I began to explore ways that I could create entertaining musical op-ed pieces about my field, public school education. In addition, I looked for ways that I could develop a pedagogy that would result in teachers helping children to express themselves through songwriting. This is important because it expands the modes from which people can learn information as well as opening up creative ways for learners to express their knowledge and beliefs.

This article does not report on research. Instead I describe the evolution of a promising practice, my story of how I developed theory out of my teaching experiences. Using songwriting as an example, I articulate how teachers can inspire learners with arts-based practices that support innovation and creativity—promoting teaching and learning, and success for *all* children.

Quality education is currently being defined and regulated in narrow, restrictive

ways and retention of teachers is a growing concern as life in the schools is becoming increasingly mundane. It is important that we develop viable alternatives that bring relevance, pleasure, and satisfaction back into the classroom. I tell my story in support of educators who struggle to bring meaning, joy, and understanding to children who are currently being stifled by prescriptive and restrictive regulatory mandates that demand a one-size-fits-all approach to curriculum and assessment.

Please Understand That We're Not All the Same

In the name of closing the gap between rich and poor students, a 1,000-page piece of Federal legislation has profoundly affected teaching practices nationwide (NCLB, 2002). Teacher decision-making has become severely restricted as school programs are increasingly politicized and driven by scripted curriculums aimed at preparing students to respond with correct answers on decontextualized, standardized tests that narrowly focus on the mechanics of reading, writing, and mathematics (Meier & Wood, 2004).

Many educators fear that creativity and high levels of thinking are being sacrificed. They are looking for ways to bring meaning and joy back into the classroom (Kohn, 1999). One approach is to incorporate the visual and performing arts. A significant outcome of an arts-based approach to teaching and learning is increasing the likelihood that learners develop what Wiggins and McTighe (1998) call "deep understandings."

Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences (1993) provide teachers with a framework for incorporating the visual and performing arts as part of the different learning styles present in virtually all

classrooms. By allowing children to access and express knowledge in different ways, it is hoped that they will increase their comprehension and application, as well as develop higher levels of cognitive development. Arts-based teaching stimulates learners to break down concepts into component parts, combine parts into new and meaningful wholes, and make judgments about the worth of how ideas or materials are applied—what Benjamin Bloom labeled as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (1956).

Burnaford *et al's* rationalization for integrating the arts expands on the notion that we deepen instruction, while simultaneously engaging in collaborative and social learning experiences with peers, teachers, and the community (Burnaford, Aprill, & Weiss, 2001). According to Goldberg (2001), the arts are languages and expressions of cultures, and provide concrete opportunities to bring to life commonly held goals of multicultural education, such as equity, empowerment, cultural pluralism, empathy, and knowledge of others.

When well taught, the arts provide young people with authentic learning experiences that engage their minds, hearts, and bodies. The learning experiences are real and meaningful for them. While learning in other disciplines may often focus on development of a single skill or talent, the arts regularly engage multiple skills and abilities. Engagement in the arts nurtures the development of cognitive, social, and personal competencies.

Champions of Change (*Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning*, 1999) reports that learners can attain higher levels of achievement through their engagement with the arts. Moreover, one of their critical research findings is that learning in and through the arts can help "level the playing field" for youngsters from disadvantaged circumstances.

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Art is very, very powerful. It is for everybody in the world. Even some people who don't know how, are very good at art in their way... —Alberto, age 10 (Gee, 2000)

I knew I was not a gifted singer, but I kept on signing throughout my life, and now it is the foundation of my teaching practices. When I was growing up in the 1950s, there were tiny recording booths in train stations and airports where one could press a recording on cardboard and play it on a record player. Because I was wailing, “On the Street Where You Live,” around the house incessantly, my parents indulged me, and the next time we were at an airport, we made a record that only a mother could love. I never was a talented singer, but I sang constantly, and it only increased when I was seven years old and listened over and over again to Elvis’ first RCA album. I immediately greased up my hair, learned guitar, and began singing and mumbling like Elvis. Instead of stifling me, my parents supported my choice of creative expression.

I never thought of writing my own songs, not even when the 1960s gave us those wonderful singer/songwriters like Bob Dylan, the Beatles, and the Rolling Stones. How could I have an original song if my head was always filled with songs that other people had written? I was happy learning how to play lead guitar like the Ventures and play “Walk, Don’t Run” at junior high school dances. By the time I started high school I formed a 5-piece band. We based our repertoire on the early recordings of the Rolling Stones and other popular dance songs of our time. All the local bands played covers of the hit records in those days.

By this time I had learned enough about music to know that basic genres of people’s music had simple and repetitive frameworks. The 12-bar blues were based on patterns involving three major chords. Doo-Wop music added a minor sixth. Hillbilly, Bluegrass, Country, and Folk manipulated the same chords to their own patterns. Even though I knew these basic frameworks of musical genres, I did not realize until recently that one does not have to invent one’s own music in order to be a songwriter.

Although I am an educator and not a professional musician, I have never given up my music. The visual and performing arts have been interwoven into my practices, first as a classroom teacher, then as

a school site principal, and since 1997, as a professor of teacher education. My student teaching experiences began in 1973 in multi-age, bilingual/multicultural classrooms, six miles north of the California/Mexico border. My master teachers encouraged me to capitalize on my music talents and support language learning with songs. My first full-time position was teaching a rural, one-room classroom in the woods of Maine. As I was wondering how I would organize learning for approximately 25 children between the ages of 5 to 14 years old, a wise mentor helped me understand that I could go deeper by organizing teaching and learning around themes supported by the visual and performing arts. This is how I began to incorporate my musical experiences and skills and bring my guitar into my teaching. I needed this encouragement, since my recollections of music in my own schooling were of teachers with autoharps or pianos, singing boring songs

from books that looked like the rest of my schoolbooks.

*Back In the Old Days,
There Was Music and Role Plays,
We Read the Words,
the Kids All Sang Along*

I began our school days singing the songs I loved—reinforcing the learning by writing out the lyrics to “Rockin’ Robin,” and “Johnny B. Goode,” as well as all the children’s songs I could gather. I found out at the first Open House that I had the support of the parents. They told me that it was great hearing their children sing the songs they grew up with and they were amazed that the children were learning to read by having lessons based on the song lyrics!

Soon I teamed up with a creative parent and we wrote a musical play, “Jack and the Beans Talk.” I used a 12-bar boogie-woogie blues progression to write the opening song, “You Gotta Know Your

Social Justice Educator

Words by Jim Cantor,
Sung to the tune of Woody Guthrie’s *Union Maid*

There once was a Teacher’s Aide, who never was afraid
To question the way we teach each day.
How come the teachers have no say?
The university got her thinking critically.
And when the Phonemic Police came ’round,
She always stood her ground.

Chorus:
Oh you can’t scare us. We’re singing about justice.
We’re singing about justice. We’re singing about justice.
Oh you can’t scare us. We’re singing about justice,
Social Justice, to change the world.

By the time she taught Third Grade, she still was not afraid,
To do her best, in spite of the tests,
and the mandates the curriculum made.
Her class was filled with joy, for every girl and boy.
They’d work and play throughout the day, and this is what they’d say:

Chorus
This classroom teacher was wise. She’d think and analyze.
She loved to debate and collaborate. She’d always organize the guys.
They went to the Union Hall, whenever there was a call,
To negotiate and communicate, PEACE AND JUSTICE FOR US ALL!

Chorus
These teachers led the way, in the struggle for fair pay.
Across the land, they took a stand. They never were afraid to say,
“The people must be free, to live democratically.
Every woman and man, you know this land
Is made for you and me!”

Chorus

Beans." Even then, I still did not realize that one does not have to invent his or her own music in order to be a songwriter.

Although I did not acknowledge myself as a songwriter, throughout my teaching career I continued writing songs with children. I developed expertise in getting children to write their own lyrics to well known songs or basic chord progressions. In the mid-1970s I was using half inch, black and white, reel-to-reel videotape to record the reflective and creative expressions of adolescents with histories of school failure.

A federal grant gave school districts the opportunity to provide something different for these youngsters, with the

goal of having them experience success in school. I had them write about their own experiences and they came up with songs like, "I've Been a Kid, Most All of My Life," and "CB Radio." These teenagers developed positive self-esteem as they viewed videotapes of their performances. Throughout my teaching career my students expressed themselves to well-known tunes like, "The Monster Mash," "This Land Is Your Land," or "So Long, It's Been Good to Know You." Now that I have almost a decade of experience as a scholar in the academy, I reflect on these practices and make sense of how they support teaching and learning.

How Woody Guthrie Taught Me That I'm A Songwriter

The more I research writers of popular songs, the more I find that their songs are based on simple music that they grew up listening to. The rock and roll that I grew up with was based on the blues and folk music of the early twentieth century. Blues singers like Muddy Waters and B.B. King grew up hearing blues or gospel sung in the churches, storefronts, fields, or juke joints of their communities. Those that were fortunate to record their songs were more famous than the others; however, live music, singing, and dancing was a regular part of people's lives.

In Okemah, Oklahoma, Woody Guthrie's mother, Nora, sang to him the songs that her mother had brought from Tennessee. These were songs describing momentous events in the lives of the Irish and English immigrants—lullabies, silly songs, as well as murders and jealous lovers, and natural disasters. Woody Guthrie spent his life crafting songs about the people he lived among, the common, hard-working, or out-of-work people of the Dust Bowl and Great Depression. Woody wanted to keep the songs closely connected to the people, and throughout his career he resisted writing songs in the more sophisticated jazz and pop styles that were heard on the radio. His intention was to support people during their hard times. He sang in their voice, articulating their issues, and keeping it simple by writing songs that fused musical frameworks from the old, rural folk culture with the local vernacular.

I hate a song that makes you think that you're not any good. I hate a song that makes you think that you are just born to lose. Bound to lose. No good to nobody. No good for nothing—because you are either too old, or too young, or too fat, or too thin, or too ugly, or too this, or too that. Songs that run you down or songs that poke fun at you on account of your bad luck, or your hard traveling. I am out to fight those kinds of songs to my very last breath of air, and my last drop of blood. I am out to sing songs that will prove to you that this is your world, and that if it has hit you pretty hard and knocked you for a dozen loops, no matter how hard it's run you down, and rolled over you, no matter what color, what size you are, how you are built; I am out to sing the songs that will make you take pride in yourself and your work. And the songs I sing are made up for the most part by all sorts of folks just about like you. (www.woodyguthrie.org)

Woody Guthrie was a songwriter who

Standardista-ville

Words by Jim Cantor, Sung to Jimmy Buffet's *Margaritaville*

Living on bank loans, feeling like worker drones,
We are the teachers who follow the script.
Open Court Reading, phonetic repeating,
Our schools and our classrooms are poorly equipped.

Chorus:

Wasting away in Standardista-ville
Searching for my long-lost creative thought.
Some people say that there's a Theo-Con to blame.
God knows, it's somebody's fault.

Don't know the reason, Whole Language is treason,
If you're bilingual, they tell you, "Go home!"
I'm a quality teach-ah, passed CSET and RICA,
Strugglin' hard to pay off college loans.

Chorus:

Wasting away in Standardista-ville
Searching for my long-lost creative thought.
Some people say the Business Roundtable is to blame
Ohanian says it's surely their fault.

Back in the old days, there was music and role plays.
Learning through arts, the kids' skills got real strong.
They learned to be readers, and community leaders,
Studying peace, and how to get along.

Chorus:

Wasting away in Standardista-ville
Searching for my long-lost creative thought.
Some people say the well-paid lobbyists are to blame.
We all know, politicians get bought.

Blew out our test scores, the kids cried out, "NO MORE!!"
Please understand, that we're not all the same.
Now we've slipped on our rankings, and they've hit us with sanctions,
Privatization—their unspoken aim.

Chorus:

Wasting away in Standardista-ville
Searching for my long-lost creative thought.
Some people say the teacher educators are to blame
We all know, it sure ain't our fault.

did not write musical notes. He relied on his memory as he archived songs that he heard everywhere he went, and he wrote down his own songs and performed them in ways that kept him close to the people that he sang about.

I won't say that my guitar playing nor singing is anything fancy or on a stick. I know that my voice is not one of the smooth-riding kind, because I don't want it to sound smooth. None of the folks that I know have got smooth voices like dew dripping off the petals of the morning violet, and still they can and do sing louder, longer, and with more guts than any smooth voice that I ever heard. I would rather sound like the ash cans of the early morning, like the cab drivers cursing at one another, like the longshoremen yelling, like the cowhands whooping, and like the lone wolf barking. (www.woodyguthrie.org)

Woody Guthrie was in a convalescent home suffering his slow death from Huntington's disease when I was growing up. I did not know anything about him when in school I sang the commonly known verses of "This Land Is Your Land." The Weavers, Pete Seeger, and other folk singers put Guthrie songs into my consciousness without me knowing anything about the author.

Bob Dylan was the first recording artist who showed me it was okay to purposefully perform with a rough singing voice. He also taught me to listen to and think about the words in the songs. I too became a student of Woody Guthrie's when I became aware that as a teenager, Dylan came to New York to be at Guthrie's bedside, and learn from Guthrie's contemporaries how to imitate his performing style.

I started learning as many of Woody Guthrie's songs as I could. I incorporated many of his children's songs into my classroom repertoire. Currently, as a teacher educator, I bring social justice education to life using Guthrie's songs as engagement activities in my arts-based Social Studies methods classes. The next step for me occurred naturally. I began to write my own lyrics to Woody Guthrie songs. Rather than directing the songs towards children, the audience for these songs is teacher educators and classroom teachers. I incorporate humor and cynicism and use simple songs to communicate my ideas about the current issues in my profession.

*The University Got Her Thinking Critically,
And When the Phonemic Police Came 'Round,
She Always Stood Her Ground*

"Social Justice Educator" is my vision how an educator develops from beginning

as a classroom aide to her transformation as a leader in the profession. Set to the tune of Guthrie's "Union Maid," the song is inspired, in part, by Jeannie Oakes' "Teaching to Change the World" (Oakes & Lipton, 1999).

Now I realize that I am a songwriter and any song I grew up with could be the musical foundation for my lyrics. Jimmy Buffet's "Margaritaville" became my "Standardista-ville," my vehicle for addressing the current educational context, as well as incorporating some of Susan Ohanian's views (Emery & Ohanian, 2004; Ohanian, 1999).

Two old Sam Cooke songs inspired my next songs, "Here Comes Another Standardized Test, And It Won't Help My Students," and "Everybody Has To Cah-Cah-Cah." When I was asked to provide the entertainment at a state conference of teacher educators, I decided to design a lesson in song writing and try the songs out with my students at the university.

*Well, You Showed Us a Method,
Taught Us a Way,
To Integrate Music Into Our School Day.
Oh, We Don't Even Need to be Able to Play,
Piano, the Bass, or Gongs—*

The goal of my visual and performing arts methods class is to help credential candidates develop multicultural methods, materials, and strategies for facilitating arts-based learning experiences in urban elementary classrooms. The credential candidates are either preparing to teach, or currently teaching in classrooms where approximately 70% of the children are from Spanish-speaking countries in the Americas, and the remaining 30% of the children are African American. All live in poverty or extreme poverty, and many are learning the English language as a second or third language.

Many of my students, especially the ones who went to school since the 1980s, have little or no experience with the visual and performing arts in their educational backgrounds. My challenge is to convince teachers that an arts-based education is essential for the students that they teach, and that one does not

Another Standardized Test, And It Won't Help My Students

Words by Jim Cantor, Sung to Sam Cooke's *Another Saturday Night*

Chorus:

Here comes another standardized test, and it won't help my students.
They've got some knowledge, but it sure don't show.
Now how I wish I had some time to teach them.
And let them show what they know.

School started up one month ago,
I've seen a lot of kids since then.
If I could teach 'em, I could learn 'em, as yet I haven't taught 'em.
That's why we're in the shape we're in.

Chorus

Another teacher gave me, a thematic unit that worked so fine,
With no time for deliverance, and testing taking preference,
It's gonna have to wait in line.

Chorus

It's hard on a teacher, when they script you what to do and say.
But if you follow the money, it won't be very funny.
This testing craze must go away.

Chorus

We don't want another standardized test, that won't help our students.
They've got some knowledge, but it sure don't show.
Now how I wish I had some time to teach them.
And let them show what they know.

have to be an artist, musician, or dancer in order to facilitate arts-based learning experiences for children.

I start by de-emphasizing my background as a musician and by teaching several drawing lessons in visual arts, in which I have no talent or professional training. The only music I do in the beginning of the course is a call-and-response song without musical accompaniment. The song "I Am A Pizza," by Peter Alsop, reinforces the idea that mistakes happen and life goes on. I have the students stand up and follow my humorous body movements as we sing. The combination of the song, community-building activities, and exploratory visual arts experiences results

in a class that is beginning to trust and take risks.

Several class sessions later, I begin the songwriting class by explaining the background and purpose of my songs, and then I perform three or four of them. This serves to engage the students and motivate them to want to learn to write their own songs. After conducting a question and answer session on songwriting, I begin a simple instructional sequence with only two criteria for writing original words to known songs:

- (1) Match the syllables. Tap them out. Be conscious of the syllabic patterns in the original song, and do not make

the common mistake of crowding in more syllables to match the words. Work with the words and maintain the same syllabic pattern as the original.

- (2) Match the rhyming pattern. Identify, become aware of, and match the rhyming pattern in the original song.

Before having the students work in groups, I check for understanding by having the class create a rubric for writing words to songs. Then I allow them to form groups and explore songwriting. I used to have each group write a verse to the same song ("This Land Is Your Land"), but I have found that in this exploratory phase the students enjoy it more and are more productive if I allow them to choose whatever known song they want to write their own lyrics to. I only give them about 20 minutes before each group performs their song for the class. Keeping it short and simple minimizes expectations, and lowers the affective filter. Building community and trust for several weeks before attempting this activity assures that students have the confidence to joyfully perform with and for their peers.

*I'm Telling You From the Heart,
They're Such a Tiny Part,
These Test Scores...*

Reflective journals help me get a sense of the effectiveness of my classes. Several times during the semester I have students select an activity to write both a summary and a reflection upon. The following is from a student's reflective journal. Angela Uribe took it a step farther by writing her own song about test scores, sung to the tune of the Motown song, "My Guy."

III. Summary of Activity

The VAPA activity that we did in class this week is song writing. I absolutely enjoyed this class and the activity. In class, we listened to examples of famous songs in which new lyrics had been created. We were able to sing along and even had an example of one song that required audience participation. After the songs were modeled, we got into groups and began creating lyrics to a song. We had to make sure that the rhyming pattern was correct and then rehearsed and performed our songs for the class.

IV. Reflection on the Activity

This activity was great! It was a lot harder to come up with lyrics that actually stuck to the original rhyme

Everybody Has To CAH-CAH-CAH

Words by Jim Cantor,

Sung to Sam Cooke's *Everybody Loves to Cha-Cha-Cha*

I started teaching back in seventy-five, when teaching was a delight.
Combining Whole Language and the Phonics Frames,
We taught them how to read and write.

Chorus:

Now everybody has to do the CAH-CAH-CAH
Everybody has to do the DAH-DAH-DAH
They have to BAH-BAH-BAH
They have to TAH-TAH-TAH
Everybody has to CAH-CAH-CAH

Constructive teaching was such a joy, Integration made so much sense.
Then they started with the Phonics Wars,
And things haven't been the same since.

Chorus

I told the teachers not to worry. This fad will be over and through.
But the Pacing Plans and the Open Court Police
Restrict everything that we do.

Chorus

We keep complying—delivering and doing what we're told.
Everybody, let's get up and take a stand
All children don't fit into one mold.

Chorus:

We all don't learn by doing the CAH-CAH-CAH
Not everybody learns with the DAH-DAH-DAH
No need to BAH-BAH-BAH
Let's stop the TAH-TAH-TAH
We all don't learn by doing the CAH-CAH-CAH

EVERYBODY, LET'S DO THE CAH-CAH-CAH! HERE WE GO!
Now, CAMERA!—CAH-CAH-CAH!
DINOSAUR!—DAH-DAH-DAH!
BASKETBALL!—BAH-BAH-BAH!
TIMER!—TAH-TAH-TAH!
CHIPMONK!—CHA-CHA-CHA!
HOUND-DOG!—HAH-HAH-HAH!
Everybody has to CAH-CAH-CAH!

pattern. My partner and I chose to do a song about being an intern teacher. I was able to see how by creating a song, we were able to share our feelings with the class. It showed me that there are many different ways that students can effectively express themselves and they should be given the choice and opportunity to use music as one of them. I haven't been able to get the songs out of my head and I sing and share them with whoever will listen, especially "Standardista-ville;" my thoughts exactly. I think that this is also a great teaching tool, meaning that if I can come up with songs to help my students understand and remember specific concepts/procedures, it would increase interest and retention. (Angela Uribe)

Kids Can Write Words to Songs

Lauren Friedman, another student showed me more possibilities. She wrote her own lyrics to Billy Joel's "Only the Good Die Young," however the words are her reflection on the songwriting lesson that I taught. She then searched the Internet and selected a MIDI version of the instrumental, downloaded it and recorded herself singing the lyrics to her song, "Kids Can Write Words to Songs." I asked Lauren to outline her technique because I think this could become a wonderful tool for teachers who cannot play musical instruments themselves, but want sing with children. They can download professional recordings to accompany the class' musical activities!

*And They Say Teach the Basics,
All Else Can Wait.,
I Say It's Better to Incorporate.
I'd Rather Mix in the Music
and See Kids Create,
Connections That Are So Strong—*

By incorporating Wiggins and McTighe's (1998) framework into my analysis, I can discuss how songwriting develops depth in understanding. My songs, as well as the songs that my students have written, are powerful expressions of our experiences. They help us to explain and interpret our current circumstances. We apply what we have learned and create something new, from our own perspectives.

Songwriting gives us opportunities to express empathy for the characters we sing about. By putting our thoughts in verse and fitting the verse into the framework of a song, we show what we know, but in an entertaining and sophisticated man-

ner. If we practice and perform the song, it deepens the learning even further.

We need to support our budding artists. Supportive parents nurtured my development as an arts-based educator. They took me to make my cardboard recording. They paid for music lessons, and gave me my first guitar. They tolerated my taste in music and they never stifled my expression.

When I was a child, my school provided art and music experiences, and though it was uninspiring, the fact that we were given time and instruction is a powerful message, something that is lacking in contemporary classrooms. Today's schools, in general, do not provide materials, permission, or time for the arts. Many teachers have not experienced the arts in their own education and have neither the inclination nor the knowledge of how to bring the arts into their teaching. Those that feel that they can are then worried that they will

be caught doing something that is not in the pacing plan and not on the test. Arts-based teaching seems to have become a subversive activity, and successful teachers are protecting themselves with standards-based rationales.

We need to find ways to help arts-based teachers garner support from their administrators and colleagues. Arts-based practices address issues of equity and diversity by providing a range of ways for children to learn and show what they know. These are excellent learning experiences for *all* children. We need to empower teachers to reach the children who are learning English as a second language, and help them achieve greater levels of expression, participation and self-esteem.

Finally, scholars need to design studies that truly break down the variables, so we can see clearly the effects of arts-based approaches to teaching and learning. As

Test Scores

Song Lyrics by Angela Uribe,
To be sung to the tune of *My Guy* by Mary Wells

Every single day
I teach my heart away, for test scores.
Everything I teach
Had better help us reach, our test scores.

My principal gave me
guides to follow
To keep pacing
And I'm on 'em
I'm telling you from the heart
They're such a tiny part, those test scores

Nothing our kids do
Could ever be in lieu, of test scores
Nothing that we say
Can make them look away from test scores

I gave my kids my word of honor
To keep trying and I'm gonna
You best be believin'
my kids are achievin', don't test more

As a matter of opinion I think it sucks
My opinion is it's all about bucks
As a teacher today
I'm here to say
Doesn't really matter- no one asked anyway

No muscle bound man
could steal my plan to teach them
No merit pay
could ever change the way I reach them
He may be some big movie star
But being qualified to educate- WE are
I think it's time to say
The time has come today to teach more.

Kids Can Write Words to Songs

Lyrics by Lauren Friedman, sung to Billy Joel's *Only the Good Die Young*

Come on, Professor, sing me a song,
If I feel brave I might just sing along,
Oh, I won't even worry if I sing it wrong,
I'll focus on having fun...

Well, you showed us a method, taught us a way
To integrate music into our school day.
Oh, we don't even need to be able to play
Piano, the bass, or gongs –

Kids can write words to songs,
That's what you said,
Kids can write words to songs,
Kids can write words to songs.

You might have heard of someone who they call Weird Al.
He ain't a teacher but he knows how
To change the words that somebody else worked out
Aw, and make them a brand new song...

So, he's making a living from parody.
What an example for our kids to see
How fun and funny songwriting can be.
You know it won't be too long—

'Til our kids can write words to songs
Woh woh woh woh woh
I tell you kids can write words to songs
Kids can write words to songs

Well, it's a real nice way to pass along some vital information
You've got to help them know
Mmmmusical lingo
But the best thing about it is that kids can use exploration
To learn about the key,
The structure, rhythm, and the melody
Woh woh woh

And they say teach the basics, all else can wait.
I say it's better to incorporate.
I'd rather mix in the music and see kids create
Connections that are so strong—

When they can write other words to songs
Woh woh woh woh woh
I tell you kids can write words to songs
Kids can write words to songs

The kids can write about the planets or Emancipation Proclamation
Or a probability
Or favorite character from history
Woh woh woh

Come on, come on, come on, Professor, let's sing more stuff,
Us musical types can't get enough.
Sooner or later it won't seem so tough,
And it won't even take that long—

To show the kids they can write some songs
Tell you, hey hey
I wrote my reflection as a song
(Hope it was not too long)
Kids can write words,
Kids can write words to songs

a teacher educator, I want to know the long-term effects and find out the degree to which my students keep their commitment to arts-based teaching in the years to come. If they stay in challenging, urban classrooms for five years or more, will arts-based teaching have contributed towards teachers staying in the profession? I expect so, because it is fun for both the teacher and their students, and people tend to keep doing what they are successful at and enjoy doing.

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Recording MP3's of Original Parodies Using GarageBand

Instructions by Lauren Friedman

STEP ONE: Get Ready

- (a) Gather the following materials
 - (i) Microphone, headphones, a computer with software to record and mix audio (such as Apple's GarageBand)

STEP TWO: Get Your Music

- (a) Find and download a MIDI file of the song you wish to record
 - (i) Use a search engine, such as Google
 - (1) Include keywords, such as "free," "midi," and the title and artist of the song
 - (ii) Other options
 - (1) Create your own MIDIs using software, like Encore
 - (2) "Sequence" directly, using a MIDI compatible keyboard, (or other instrument), and USB-to-MIDI converter
 - (3) Record audio directly from your instrument using a microphone or via an audio-in cable
 - (4) Purchase Karaoke CDs

STEP THREE: Get Started

- (a) Create a new GarageBand project, choosing the key and tempo
- (b) Drag and drop the MIDI file onto the main mixing window
- (c) Mix and adjust the MIDI's tracks as desired

STEP FOUR: Get Going

- (a) Create a new track
- (b) Double click on the new track's icon to access the Track Info screen. This lets you choose the type
- (c) Make sure to select "real instrument" at the top and a vocal option, and turn the monitor on

STEP FIVE: Get Your Groove On

- (a) Record your vocal track(s)
 - (i) Make sure the track is "armed," (the track's red recording light should be on)
 - (ii) Using headphones will prevent "bleed," (recording the sound you playback)
 - (iii) Have fun. You can be your own backup band by creating additional vocal tracks
- (b) Some Helpful Hints
 - (i) The icon that looks like a speaker will mute tracks you don't want to hear
 - (ii) The icon that looks like headphones will "solo" tracks
 - (iii) The "zoom slider" on the lower left allows you to edit your track more precisely
 - (iv) Save frequently!

STEP SIX: Get It Together

- (a) Using the File menu, export your file to iTunes
- (b) Using the Advanced menu in iTunes, convert your selection to MP3
- (c) You can now burn your track to a CD

You are all done! Now get out there and impress your friends with your musical prowess!