



Territorio  
María Camila Largo

# Hip-Hop Project: A Tool for Developing Teamwork and Critical Thinking

Una Herramienta para Estimular el Trabajo en Equipo y el Pensamiento Crítico

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## Resumen

15 estudiantes, de grado 11, tomaron un curso de inglés de un semestre de duración, en una universidad privada de Bogotá, Colombia, entre mayo y septiembre de 2023. El objetivo central de este curso fue familiarizarlos con la vida universitaria que eventualmente enfrentarían cuando hubieran terminado sus estudios de secundaria. Además, buscó exponerlos al aprendizaje del inglés a través de un proyecto de cultura del hip-hop. En un lapso de 7 semanas, los estudiantes se involucraron en el mencionado proyecto, luego de elegir entre ser grafiteros o break-dancers. Al analizar su desempeño y productos, por medio de Grounded Theory, se descubrió que los alumnos no solo aprendieron sobre danza hip-hop y grafiti, sino que mostraron sus propias personalidades y trabajaron de manera colaborativa y cooperativa. Además, aprendieron a pensar críticamente sobre las canciones y la cultura hip-hop. Por último, este trabajo por proyectos resultó atractivo para los estudiantes, aunque exigió preparación, evaluación y retroalimentación por parte del profesor permanentemente.

Palabras clave: pensamiento crítico, grafiti, hip - hop, PBL, trabajo en equipo.

## Abstrac

15 alunos, do 11º, ano realizaram um curso de inglês semestral em uma universidade privada da cidade de Bogotá, entre maio e setembro de 2023. O objetivo central era familiarizá-los com a vida universitária que eventualmente enfrentariam quando terminassem os estudos. Secundário. Além disso, exponha-os ao aprendizado de inglês por meio de um projeto de cultura hip-hop. Num período de 7 semanas, eles se envolveram no referido projeto, após escolherem entre serem grafiteiros ou dançarinos de break. Ao analisar sua performance e produtos, por meio da Teoria Fundamentada nos Dados, descobriu-se que os alunos não apenas aprenderam sobre a dança hip-hop e o grafiti, mas mostraram suas próprias personalidades e trabalharam de forma colaborativa e cooperativa. Da mesma maneira, eles aprenderam a pensar criticamente sobre as músicas e a cultura do hip-hop. Finalmente, este trabalho de projeto foi atrativo para os alunos, embora exigisse preparação, avaliação e feedback do professor em todos os momentos.

Keywords: pensamento crítico, grafiti, hip-hop, PBL, trabalho em equipe

## Introduction

Newer pedagogies demand that teachers allow students to construct knowledge on their own. Students are no longer perceived as empty minded, into whom content is to be “poured”. Instead, it is recognized that their minds are filled with knowledge and their skills to be developed. Educators are expected to guide their students, so pupils can take an active role in constructing their own knowledge (Arslan, 2018). This requires students to “think hard”, given that they are constantly making notations and observations and acquiring new skills as they explore the world around them. To achieve this, teachers should do careful planning (Cambridge Assessment International Organization, 2020), as their classes should permit learners to be aware of their own progress. In the case of the hip-hop project, each activity was carefully planned, aiming to allow students to reach the goal of learning a second language and acquire newer skills for their lives.

The hip-hop-culture project emerged from the needs of the students, young adults between 15 and 17 years old, whose main interest was music. In class, it was discovered they listened to several rap artists, mainly in Spanish. Thus, it was decided that they could learn from hip-hop artists who sang in the target language, including about the history of the hip-hop genre, and the other aspects of the culture, such as graffiti. Students were given a set of possible projects to work on: being graffiti artists, break-dancers, embodying a famous rapper, or writing a rap song. Then they took a majority vote and decided to work in 2 groups, as break-dance choreographers and graffiti artists respectively.

After this, with the aim of instilling their

creativity, for seven weeks in class, students read articles regarding the history of break-dance, watched videos about rappers and their lives, and studied and completed worksheets filled with ideas for the songs and the phrases they would draw. To facilitate the students’ work in the two teams they had split into, the teacher made sure they had the correct space, instructions were laid out clearly, the evaluation criteria were explained, and tools were given to complete the assignment. At the end of the project, it became clear that the presentation of the final products would not have been possible if teamwork, critical thinking, and research on the underlying culture had not taken place.

## Review of Literature

### Project Based Learning (PBL)

The philosopher and educator John Dewey is amongst those who proposed PBL as a teaching method. He believed that students should be exposed to authentic experiences, such as simulation of real-world situations, to ensure they had long-lasting effects (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2014). Science teachers were among the first to adopt his proposal and begin working with PBL. Educators discovered that students played a central role in the educational process, formulating questions with their teacher, drawing conclusions from their own observations, and actively engaging in the making of the final product, by working simultaneously with their peers. From this point on, the teacher’s role shifted towards that of a guide rather than an information giver. Due to the multiple benefits that were observed, educators in other areas, such as in language learning, began using the method in their classrooms too.

Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2014) propose that the following features make PBL uni-

que: First, there must be an Anchoring Experience, where the teacher poses a Meaningful Situation (relevant situation), to begin the project, and which functions as a motivation for learners to participate. After this, the project may start, and it should consist of six stages:

1) Driving question, where there is an enquiry, generally chosen by the teacher. Also, there must be a learning performance, which students are expected to learn.

2) Situated learning, which is the multiple observations and reasoning during and after the initial stage, at which students are being exposed to the activities the teacher has prepared. This prepares students to face the experience, and gives the teacher an opportunity to take notes and draw conclusions. There must be a claim or hypothesis. In this regard, evidence is obtained by means of experimentation and lastly, reasoning is employed to prove or disprove the initial hypothesis.

3) Collaboration, which is one of the distinctive characteristics of PBL, where students work in groups, delegate tasks, and/or work simultaneously to respond to the question initially posed.

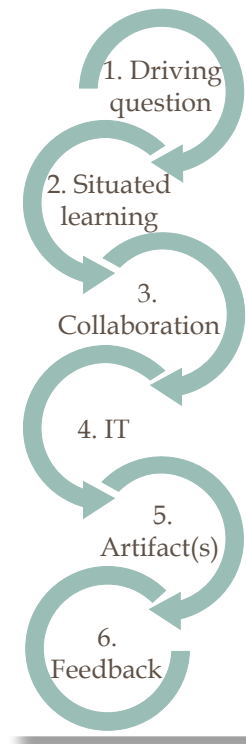
4) Information Technology (IT), when in certain situations lab equipment, computers, tablets, apps, etc., are used responsibly to help students reach their goals and aid the reasoning process they have to undergo.

5) Artifacts, which are the result of the work that was carried out, which is either a report, presentation, artifact or play, and it comprises the question and the conclusions students came to.

6) Feedback, where the teachers and stu-

dents reflect upon the process that was carried out.

Figure 1. *PBL Features as explained*



Source: *Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2014)*.

Gómez-Pablos et al. (as cited in Almulla, 2020) noted that the PBL approach brings multiple academic benefits as it considers the interests of students, thus encouraging them to participate actively in their learning, making it a student-centered approach.

Bearing in mind the fundamentals of PBL, in the case of this study, students worked towards the making of choreograph and graffiti after having participated in multiple tasks that made them reflect upon what it meant to dance as break-dancer, draw words or phrases as a graffiti artist would do, think critically about the songs they liked the most and select which songs would become their

background music for the final performance, and overall, work in teams to reach the final goal of presenting their choreograph and graffiti as a unified project. Students took a central role in understanding what hip-hop culture entail, by doing homework, making comments, showing initiative, disagreeing, and showing concern. Their teacher guided them in this process, and made comments and adjustments when necessary.

## Method

### Grounded Theory

Pupils who took the class, 15 through 17 years old, met their English professor twice a week for two hours each. On the first day of class dedicated to the project, students were told about urban tribes and asked to indicate one tribe they identified with. However, in the seventh week, after careful consideration, it was determined that the groups that were initially suggested did not match the students' likes or language needs. As such, after making the necessary preparation, the hip-hop project was announced. It began once the students voted on whether to participate as a break-dancer or graffiti artist.

Pupils read about the history of hip-hop and about the lives of notable hip-hop artists, studied and mimicked the basic dance moves of break-dance choreography, copied the fonts graffiti artists usually use for their drawings and murals, and later created their own. After having considered the background of the genre, and studying the basics of the music and lettering, they chose the dance moves for their final choreography, and the fonts they would use in their graffiti. This was the teacher's raw material for analysis, which was captured with a cell

phone camera, as photographs visually capture the activities that take place in the classroom, including the production of students' artifacts and their behavior (Elliott, 1991, p. 79.) Students' parents signed a consent form agreeing to the taking of the photographs in the classroom, with the acknowledgment that their offsprings' names or face would not be part of the article when it was published (Annex 1)

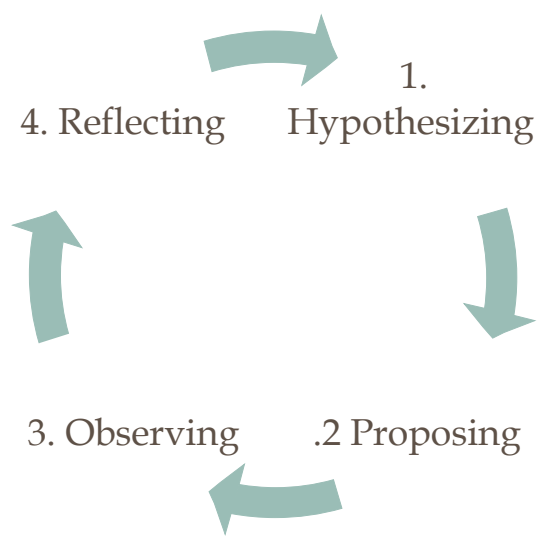
Consistent reflection during and after each lesson was key for making necessary adjustments, such as the one that occurred within the first weeks. Burus (2003) comments that teachers must remain aware of what is taking place in the classroom, including decisions that are being made and how students are reacting to activities. In this respect, teachers play a pivotal role as they ensure that unique situations are identified when necessary. Hence, due to observation and reflection taking place, further adjustments were made during the execution of the project, as the events that take place within the classroom are never static (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p.5.)

Additionally, students' behavior, comments and artifacts (such as the paper where they wrote the group they wanted to be part of; the roles they would be playing in the choreographic process or in creating the graffiti) became subjects of analysis. All the above were grouped by similarity and then contrasted to check the veracity of the conclusions that emerged, which is known as Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). With the aid of Grounded Theory, students' reactions, artifacts, and final products were studied throughout the duration of the project and later the data emerged. The purpose of this was to build a theoretical explana-



tion to describe their root causes, namely, how students reacted and interacted among themselves and the consequences that resulted (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Figure 2. *Grounded Theory model*



Source: Based on Corbin and Strauss (1990).

## Discussion

### Hip-hop culture

Students heard about the Learning Performance and the Driving question, centered on urban tribes, on the first day of class (Annex 2). Pictures of activities that they might identify with were put on display. However, this was done before the teacher had actually studied their (language) needs. As classes progressed, the teacher realized it was necessary to maintain the main idea about urban tribes but narrow it down to a more specific urban tribe. As the students indicated a strong interest in (rap) music, hip-hop culture was selected. Later, they were sent home and told to select an activity they wanted to be part of: embody a famous rapper,

write a rap song, be a break-dancer or be a graffiti artist (Annex 3). Two groups emerged: 1) Graffiti artists and 2) Break-dancers. There was only one student who hesitated about joining one of those groups, preferring to 3) Write a rap song instead. However, he declined as he felt no other partner would be working alongside him. The project completion started then.

The Meaningful Situation (relevant situation) was introduced. The teacher had them view the NFL Super Bowl, streamed on YouTube, in 2022. During the event, some famous rappers performed live. Immediately, pupils became critical observing that more women could have been part of the show. Furthermore, they initially considered having female artists be part of their soundtrack when dancing to hip-shop music (Annex 4). From these early stages, students demonstrated having a critical standpoint about hip-hop culture, which would later lead the teacher to do an activity about a critical review on the lyrics of rap songs.

On that same day, a talk about the famous rappers students had chosen took place. Students discovered they were actually part of this culture, participating not only by listening to rap songs (mainly in Spanish) but also by wearing clothes and relating to people who liked this same type of music. "Hip-hop is never simply a genre of music but a comprehensive culture that is still evolving and cannot be easily defined." (Im, 2022). Raising students' motivation at this point was key not only to keep on learning the language (Ali and Kassem, 2018), but to keep them working collaboratively. For instance, the last day of class students considered wearing durags, but ultimately chose not, deciding instead to wear black baggy pants

and black and white kerchiefs, as they all wanted to look equally like rappers, and all stand equally by dancing to break-dance. Hence, they learned to work in groups and because of this, they made decisions like these together.

### Collaboration and cooperation

Students worked in two groups during the semester: graffiti artists and break-dancers. They were always in the same classroom, which set a precedent for them, as they could listen to what the others were saying and consider each other's comments. Teamwork, though, took different forms as tasks varied. When the results of the projects they wanted to be part of were known (break-dancer or graffiti artist), Situated Learning began immediately.

They got together in groups and started brainstorming ideas for their graffiti or break-dance projects. The teacher facilitated their getting together and reading about the history of break-dance, identifying the fonts for graffiti by having a printed version of some color samples, learning the key dance moves by imitating a break-dancer who demonstrated them on a YouTube video, and listening to the songs they wanted to dance to and illustrate respectively, as part of the selection process. As a result, they ended up reading: the history of break-dance as a group and discussing amongst themselves which song and font were the most appropriate. In separate groups, the sketches were made and the final versions of the graffiti were painted, while the break-dancers mixed the tapes to dance to and the rehearsed the break-dance steps. The teacher guided and assisted the groups, making comments and suggestions when necessary, but the students themselves took the lead when it came to working simultaneously, collaboratively, or distributing the tasks to work towards the final goal, cooperatively (Kozar, 2010).

Figure 3. *Students reading the history of break-dance, collaboratively*



Source: *Own elaboration*

Regarding collaboration, some examples that led the students to work together included making decisions as to which song they were going to dance to, illustrating the song, and dancing along with some of the dance moves. Students came to realize it was necessary to do so. However, this would not have been possible if they had not been instructed to work together, as they may have not been used to this type of work. In contrast, in some situations they worked cooperatively. For instance, some students focused on sketching and painting the graffiti,

while others were responsible for mixing the tapes and choosing the dance moves. It was discovered that these tasks were divided organically, without the teacher needing to assign them; they might have been used to doing things this way, which made it easier for them. Nonetheless, they also recognized the importance of working simultaneously too, which in the end, is one of the essential life skills (Siregar and Harahap, 2023).

Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Source: Figures 4 and 5 illustrate students sketching and painting their graffiti, cooperatively. Own elaboration.

Figure 6. Students' song selection

Song name:	Hip Hop police
Artist:	Chamillionaire
Year:	2007
Reason:	I like it because it's a song that talks about racial discrimination and police brutality in the black community. And it also has a good rhythm.

## Critical thinking

Through the use of IT, students watched videos, heard songs, mixed tapes, found fonts, and studied and selected lyrics. Specifically, with this technology, the teacher had their students view the raw material for the choreography and the graffiti that later would be executed collaboratively and cooperatively. It was observed that students referred to what they had previously studied in class, both as part of the course contents and as the prompt for the project they were expected to create. It was noted that they revisited the video that had been shown to them earlier in order to set up the choreography. Additionally, the lettering exercise conducted in class helped students bring to class the graffiti by themselves to be drawn and painted. Thus, they exercised not only teamwork but decision-making and engagement in the completion of the tasks, as shown in other PBL contexts in the English classroom (Cosgun & Deryn, 2021).

When talking about the songs students were thinking of selecting, the teacher deemed it necessary to analyze the songs they had selected: Hip hop police by Chamillionaire and Without me by Eminem. They started the selection of Hip hop police was based on the song themes of for their dealings with racial discrimination and egocentrism (Figure 6).

Later, we dug deeper into the lyrics by analyzing them in class. They reinforced how

Source: Own elaboration



police brutality is a despicable act, which was talked about on the day of the presentation. Additionally, they mentioned how media sends empty messages. Thus, their first graffiti proposals were words that carried these deep meanings (Figures 7 and 8). Andrzejewski (2023) states that, unlike popular music, rap music deals with social issues with distinct frequency and depth.

Figure 7. Words sketched by students from the song 'Without me'



Figure 8. Words sketched by students from the song 'Hip hop police'



Source: Own elaboration

In the end, it can be understood that having worked for 7 weeks on the development

of the project allowed both, the teacher and students to view the songs they selected for their graffiti and break-dance performance from different angles, thereby, uncovering these deeper meanings behind these catchy songs. Furthermore, it encouraged students to work towards the goal of creating artistic artifacts, with a real purpose.

## Conclusions

Working on the hip-hop culture project permitted the teacher and students to develop a sense of ownership, as they were able to select the group they wanted to join: break-dancer or graffiti artist. They also took responsibility for sketching the words they would draw and the colors they would use in the graffiti lettering. Furthermore, they also chose the dance moves for the choreography and the clothes they would wear. As a result, they worked simultaneously or divided the tasks, depending on the activity, to achieve their common goal. Students learned to work in collaboration, develop autonomous habits, and think critically (Issa & Khataibeh, 2021) thanks to the role that decision making played in this type of learning process.

At the onset, the teacher had to narrow the leading question and objective as the former plan was too big. Hence, it was seen that flexibility played a key role in the execution of the project. Had the teacher not noticed they were more into hip-hop, they would not have felt as affiliated as they did. This was observed in the final feedback given to them after their presentation: "You were the one who suggested the idea of the graffiti"; "Your leadership skills come easily, and you positively impacted the group"; "Your ideas were heard by the group, I could tell" (Annex 5, 6 and 7). Similarly, at times stu-

dents used their native language, Spanish, to make decisions about dance moves, and the colors they would use. Even though it was not the target language, this allowed them to speak confidently, which in turn helped them make better decisions (Song et al, 2022).

Finally, when students were given feedback, after the execution of their break-dance performance and graffiti display, the audience demonstrated to be captivated by their presentations. As a result, they received positive comments regarding their compliance, attention to detail, and execution (Annex 8). Nonetheless, it is important to mention that project-based learning is time-consuming and requires teachers to dedicate considerable effort to writing comments, sourcing appropriate materials, aligning activities with students' language levels, and assessing both their commitment and progress in the project and the language. Regarding the latter, it is of utmost importance to monitor students' involvement, as not everyone may feel part of the project or contribute equally, which may inevitably happen (Andriyani and Anam, 2018).

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## Annex 1

## CONSENTIMIENTO DE PARTICIPACIÓN

Estimado acudiente:

Reciba usted un cordial saludo.

Su hijo/a hizo curso un semestre de inglés en las inmediaciones de la Universidad del Rosario, en el periodo académico 2023-II. Como producto de las sesiones, se hizo un proyecto en torno a la cultura Hip-hop, el cual resultó una presentación de break-dance y la firma de un graffiti; todo previamente hecho por los estudiantes. Con el ánimo de difundir los resultados y alcance que se tuvo, se cumplió dicho en un artículo con el nombre *Hip-Hop Culture Project in A College Setting: A Tool for Developing Teamwork and Critical thinking Skills on 11th Grade Students (Proyecto sobre la Cultura Hip-hop 11° en Un Entorno Universitario: Una Herramienta para Desarrollar Habilidades de Trabajo en Equipo y Pensamiento Crítico en Estudiantes de Grado 11.)*. Comedidamente le pido me permita utilizar las muestras fotográficas que dan cuenta de lo anterior. Para ello, lea los detalles a continuación:

Solicitud actual:

1. El profesor investigador utilizará **fotografías** sobre los **graffitis** que se hicieron en clase, así como las **notas** escritas en clase por su hijo/a.
2. Los **rostros** o **nombres** de los estudiantes **no aparecerán** en el artículo en mención; únicamente sus espaldas.

Su consentimiento me permitirá visibilizar este proyecto mancomunado con la sociedad. De estar de acuerdo, ponga su firma a continuación.

Gracias de antemano

YENSI PILAR SALINAS MIRANDA

Nombre del acudiente



Firma del acudiente

Daniela Fernández Antía

Nombre del profesor investigador



Firma del profesor

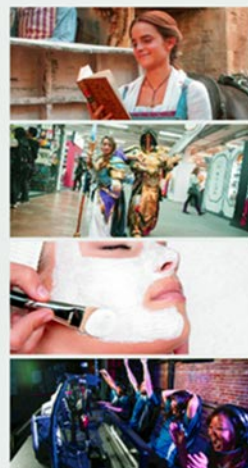
## Annex 2

## Final project: My urban tribe

**Objective:** To put up stand in a fair and talk about the tribe I feel the most affiliated with, by describing the products, music, posters, etc. we have on display.

**Leading questions:**

- What community do I feel part of
- What communities/people I follow on Instagram/TikTok/You Tube?
- What activities I enjoy when I am alone or gather with people from my community?





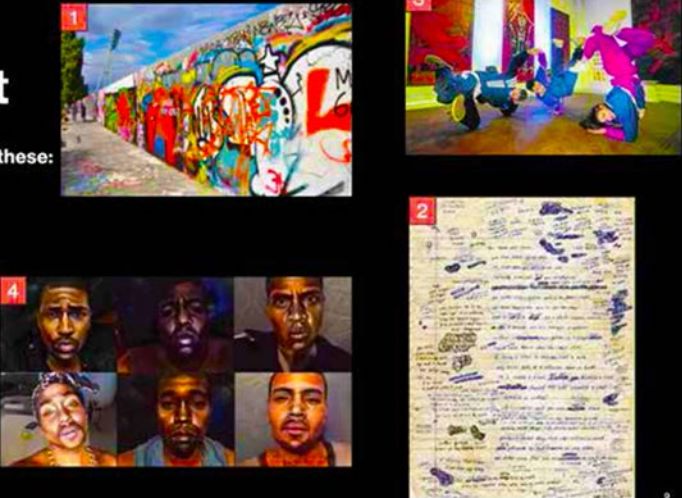
### Annex 3

12/24/2023

## Final project

You can choose to do one of these:

1. Do a graffiti
2. Write a rap song
3. Perform a break-dance
4. Embodify a (famous) rapper



### Annex 4

V.

Song name: We found love

Artist: Rihanna

Year: 2011

Reason:

The song talks about self-love from a rather exhausting couple's story and that there are moments when it is better to let go

### Annex 5

<p><b>DETAILS (30 points)</b></p> <p>The student demonstrated being committed in the perfecting of the presentation, by either sketching or rehearsing multiple times.</p>	<p><u>Your leadership skills came naturally and you positively impacted the group</u></p>
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## Annex 6

<b>DETAILS (30 points)</b> The student demonstrated being committed in the perfecting of the presentation, by either sketching or rehearsing multiple times.	You were the one who suggested the idea of the graffiti.
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## Annex 7

<b>EXECUTION (40 points)</b> The student showed having been IN the presentation, by either dancing or completing the final graffiti, thus, having an impact in the audience. (20 points)	Your ideas were heard by your partners, I could tell.
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## Annex 8

 **FINAL PROJECT**  
Evaluation form

CRITERIA	COMMENTS
<b>ATTENDANCE-INTEREST (30 points)</b> The student demonstrated being engaged by attending to all sessions devoted for the execution of the Final Project.	You missed some lessons, unfortunately.
<b>DETAILS (30 points)</b> The student demonstrated being committed in the perfecting of the presentation, by either sketching or rehearsing multiple times.	I could tell you were committed the entire time. Good job.
<b>EXECUTION (40 points)</b> The student showed having been IN the presentation, by either dancing or completing the final graffiti, thus, having an impact in the audience. (20 points)	Your ideas were heard by your partners, I could tell.
The student was part of the video by being heard by the audience (20 points)	Your recording was neat.
<b>TOTAL</b>	98
<b>TEACHER COMMENTS</b>	