

## Teaching Anthropology Concepts and Types of Text with Reggaetón

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### ABSTRACT

*This case study analyzes phases of collaborative exchange between teacher and two sets of students on how to best represent types of text in separate videos. The first phase emphasized 'digital-storytelling' lessons in an elective class, designed to provide charter high school students with practical experience in using Microsoft Photo Story© and Audacity©. The second phase was designed to prepare community college students for two final essays in a social science course. To accommodate a variation in academic level, the videos were critiqued by students at each school and re-developed for each level, i.e., charter high school and community college.*

**Keywords:** *types of text; Reggaetón; community college; charter high school; Microsoft Photo Story© and Audacity©*

### INTRODUCTION

Present-day students use online media and computerized technology within an ever-increasing globalized world. They are willing to share ideas on media and technology, which can provide critical feedback to teachers. As teachers have a responsibility to ensure that students acquire competency in writing and reading, this relationship should include educational exchange between teacher and students, beneficial to each. Teacher-students collaboration in this case study differs from insertion participation, such as teacher-as-moderator for Socratic Seminars.

I review two-phase development of Reggaetón videos representing types of text, first created at a charter high school. To represent one type of text (argumentation, informational, narrative) in each video, content was derived from publicly available music and images, augmented by my notations on Reggaetón. Charter school videos were generated with student feedback in an elective class.

When I transferred to teach anthropology at a community college, first-phase videos were adapted to instruct students on writing anthropologically in a course emphasizing intensive writing, culminating in two major essays. Both schools are located in the southwestern United States in a small city

with a university and a multi-campus community college.

The charter school quarter system is organized by 80-minute classes (block schedule), which reduces number of classes taken per day, but not time in class. Dependent on accumulated credits, students take an elective with a different teacher each quarter and spend a full year in advisory with the same teacher. Thus, I had a new elective class of students four times each year and the same advisory students for a full year. Similar to other areas of the United States [1-2], families opted for a charter school with individualized instruction and small classes. Receiving updates on educational strategies, parents had computer access to their child's grades. These strategies encourage families to support their child's schoolwork and the learning process [3], which supports the student as a person. A few students were living 'on their own,' usually in a group home, which requested weekly updates on academic progress.

In contrast to high school quarters, community college semesters are typically 3-credit-hours, guided by a state education curriculum, which emphasizes intensive writing, cultural diversity, and global diversity. Owing to first-day variations, sections of the same course vary by time in class (75 or more minutes). Classrooms

are equipped with tables or desks; learning activities are adapted to room architecture. Instruction is supported by technology at both schools, such as overhead projectors. Community college technology includes assignment submission-upload software. Teaching anthropology focuses on preparing students to meet academic requirements, especially intensive writing, by providing appropriate skills and knowledge to complete writing assignments, which include two end-of-the-term essays.

Many students at both schools were raised and/or live in households representing varied linguistic, national, and religious backgrounds. A few community college students in contrast are married and/or live in an apartment (leased/rented). Rare few have children. Students at both schools may work part-time or, occasionally, full-time. Teachers accommodate to these everyday realities [4-6] and the structural vulnerability that this generates.

Trained in ethnography, strengthened by formal teacher training on how students respond to educational strategies, I brought to this process a perspective of vigilance. As further impetus, as a young adult I lived in all but one place that were incubators for Reggaetón development, namely, Puerto Rico, Panama (twice), and New York City and southern Florida (U.S. Latinx projects). I generally recognize cultural forms across Caribbean musical genres. This does not place me in the same category as instructors who incorporate adolescent Hip-Hop experience in classroom teaching, but it facilitates work with Reggaetón materials and opens constructive communication with students who appreciate Reggaetón. By showing two ethnographic videos on Reggaetón, I distinguish informational text from argumentation. At the same time, I use the energetic enthusiasm embodied in its music through which I teach anthropology concepts.

### METHODS

This case study describes two phases in development of instructional media representing two types of text: 'informational' (announcements, guidelines, historic accounts) and 'argumentation' (persuasion, research results, theorized point-of-view). A third type of text, 'narrative' (utilized at the charter school), I exclude at the community college.

Data for analysis are derived from class materials and journal entries. I use Microsoft

Photo Story and Audacity to generate videos. This software can be downloaded to personal computers and/or as a school-wide application. Both programs are available at the charter school. Audacity is available at the community college. Each program is suitable for class instruction (teacher-centered), activity summaries (administrators, teachers), and assignments (student-generated).

### TECHNOLOGY

Differing from hand-held devices for movie-making, Microsoft Photo Story® is software for collating text, images, and sound (music and speech). Rather than shoot film and add text [4], the program builds a photo-essay by adding slides. Photo Story is academically suitable for writing conventions, as one cannot mix font styles, sizes or colors on the same slide.

Text is copied to each slide or typed manually. Each image occupies one slide and can be imported in bunches or individually. Photo Story reads images in JPG, PNG, TIFF, but not PDF. Thus, one can use images from the Internet, digital photographs, or those created via Power-Point. Images can be cropped and their order re-arranged.

Each slide's motion (e.g., expand, pan, shrink), transition (e.g., circle, flip, turn), and on-screen duration to tenth of a second, can be fine-tuned to fit a music clip, and/or narration created with Audacity or spoken into a microphone.

Music is added from audio files or customized by one of 50 choices from twelve genres (includes non-sound 'silence'), adjustable by instrumentation, intensity, mood, tempo, and volume. Unlike slide-constrained imagery and text, customized music or 'silence' continues, until another choice is made. One can preview a work in progress to explore and make changes in timing.

Audacity® is a sound-editing, assistive technology program that allows editing and re-arranging sound tracks from music and spoken narration. These are saved in one format, and a completed file is exported in a format (MP3) that Photo Story can read.

One can zoom-out to a whole track or zoom-in for fine-tuned editing. For effects, one can adjust speed or tempo, create an echo, fade-in and fade-out, among alterations. One can work with one clip or open several files individually (re-naming each clip to avoid overriding the originals).

Splicing multiple clips allows uniform loudness and smooth transitions in sound.

### RECOGNIZING TYPES OF TEXT THROUGH REGGAETÓN

Participatory instruction was essential to the two-phase case study. Merging images, audio and video [5], digital-storytelling is reflectively and critically engaged, and socially-oriented [6-7], which fit the elective class. As writing enhancement is the community college focus, teaching students to tell the story through argumentation, rather than report ideas with informational text, is emphasized in videos that contrast argumentation and informational text, respectively.

The informational video showcases anthropological concepts for four stages where Reggaetón blended cultural traditions, language forms, and musical rhythms. The argumentation video makes the case that Reggaetón is grounded in ‘home culture’ (identity by neighborhood/street as place-of-origin for singers) and represents ‘newness,’ such as meeting unknown people at dances that generate new relationships. Contrastive ‘home culture’ and ‘newness’ characterize an early experience of young people in urban environments, for example, when they encounter the newness of age-appropriate school culture [8]. Apart from assemblies of age-similar persons at clubs and dances, Reggaetón merges music traditions and technological innovations by “a mix of genres,” to quote Reggaetón pioneer, Daddy Yankee [9]. Through video content, students learn anthropological concepts: ‘revitalization’ (update practices), ‘innovation’ (improve what is already invented), and ‘syncretism’ (blended sustainability), among others. Beyond musical incorporation of singer and listener identities, the development of Reggaetón as a musical genre represents ‘home culture’ (Caribbean music traditions) and ‘newness’ of innovative technology for re-mixing sounds (instrumentation and voices) in previously unavailable forms.

### PRECURSOR VIDEOS

For training in Photo Story and Audacity another charter school teacher and I accompanied 12 students to a two-day training at the county’s educational resource center. The final training activity was preparing a three-minute video in 90 minutes. Four student teams generated a video that each group verbally described on the final day of training, while

presenting it to the full group. Topics were contributions to North American society, emphasizing individuals from protected populations. Three teams chose a woman (Latina astronaut; U.S. civil rights activist). One team chose a historic event (1930s Dustbowl Refugees). Thus, 12 students after a two-day training were able in 90 minutes to integrate varied elements (images, music, text, transition) into team videos created from Photo Story and Audacity. None reached the three-minute goal. Possibly, compiling and coordinating slides challenged them for “critical content interpretation and validation” [10, p. 455], when putting together their video materials. These, then, were the digital-storytelling skills that students brought back for the last weeks of school.

This core group of students trained in Photo Story and Audacity made it possible to incorporate digital-storytelling in elective classes the final weeks of school and with a new group of students the following year. I incorporated *student voice* [11], whereby I asked each student to use the student rubric to assess Reggaetón videos that I had created. Nearly everyone returned the form (clarity, content-sequence, media-audio, narration, pacing). Feedback recommended fewer slides with text fading-in/fading-out, more time to read slides, and slower pace for main ideas. Students agreed that the media was audible, text narration was legible, and images were appropriate.

Reflecting on feedback, I recognized I had over-used narrative-historical materials. To this time, I was using Reggaetón clips to introduce classroom expectations. Recalling student requests to play “that music” in Biology and Earth Science classes, I recognized that I had tapped into a “common ground” for collaborative sharing [12] to take lessons past *print decoding* [13-14]. But I minimized argumentation. As a premier academic skill, argumentation is “social” [15, p. 554] and “epistemic” [p. 555]. I soon learned that teaching argumentation requires consideration of what students need in a particular course linked to what they receive through school curriculum.

Revision continued, emphasizing three types of text, particularly that of argumentation. All three videos became works-in-progress. Attending a state conference, I participated in a workshop on Richard Mayer’s *The Cambridge Handbook of Multimedia Learning* [16]. Considering the

three videos, I could conjure Photo Story's procedures to Mayer's principles of 'sequencing' (simple to complex in steps), 'signaling' (critical ideas highlighted), and 'contiguity' (concepts organized by spatial and/or temporal proximity), among others. For example, to add time to read slides, suggested by students, I concurrently clustered pertinent music clips, images and text to help the viewer to focus on central ideas. I retained images of effective pixel proportions (840 X 480), recommended by a workshop participant. Given concerns for thematic content in Reggaetón (e.g., [17]), I generated the videos. I explained to students that I was taking a teacher's challenge to create a digital-story – at that time, three videos. This allowed each student to develop and share a project with classmates, as closure to the class. None chose a Reggaetón counterpart, which avoided style copying. Students learned by doing projects [18] requiring self-critique and peer review to validate their creations. Generating videos allowed me to model effects, respond to inquiries, and demonstrate in class how I handled their feedback by explaining Photo Story and/or Audacity choices displayed in the videos.

Student feedback switched from written to verbal over remaining weeks of school. The following year each elective class was offered the rubric form to assess a teacher-created video-in-progress. Combining written and verbal feedback emphasizes transactive discussion. Across the reviews (individually by paper; verbally by full class), comments were thoughtful, sensible and helpful. Based on one comment that music was mostly in Spanish, later versions of Photo Story gave translations or interpreted themes with color transition. Global interest in Reggaetón (e.g., [19]) and one precursor genre, Hip-Hop (e.g., [20-21]), goes beyond Spanish.

"That music" incorporated into class instruction, and students' discovery that I had attended a local Reggaetón concert ('narrative' video displayed an image of the concert ticket), led to a surprise. As my second year was ending, several students announced a small Reggaetón show they were organizing with a Reggaetón duo from New York City. Acquiring experience over two years when he was not in school, one student led this effort. When students showed me the promotional poster, professionally printed, I was awestruck. As my third year began, I attended the event in a small-venue

club, as did a few parents, invited adults, and students. Students were ticket-takers, room attendants, ushers, soda dispensers, technicians, and occasional parking lot attendants (no one wanted to miss the show). Similar to rap and Hip-Hop as what one does and how one lives [22], this show took place "in real life" [23], allowing students to demonstrate complex organizational skills. Rather than work with an expert on a chosen academic topic (e.g., [24]), or exchange mediated communications with same-age adolescents in another setting (e.g., [25]), charter school students enacted interest, voluntarily, and shared their varied expertise by producing a musical show outside the classroom.

### CONSOLIDATING VIDEOS

During an interlude of teaching English one year each at two public schools, I had time to consider the Reggaetón videos as instructional media. Given curriculum-determined instruction, I never used them for lessons. But I continued reflecting how assignments might be enhanced by multi-model educational tools. This two-year experience continued to strengthen my skills in *teaching ethnographically* through participatory observation, guided questions and collaboration, which ground fieldwork [26, p. 116-140], as much as they are useful in a classroom.

Offered a position to teach anthropology at a local community college, I spent my first weeks in designing lessons, which staff call "building a course." The first term that I taught anthropology, I showed videos in alphabetical order and asked for feedback. Students agreed as a full-group that the first (argumentation) "jumps around too much," "it's too choppy," and "it's not tied together." Thus, comments focused on coherence-comprehension appropriate for college students, not the secondary school students with whom I created it. The second video (informational) "has better flow," "it has something to say," and "sound goes with writing." This one, I recognized should go first to provide the background on where-and-when Reggaetón developed into a globalized phenomenon. Students also recognized my efforts to teach citation and bibliography, even in the videos.

Because intensive writing is required, the final two assignments are essays. To prepare students for writing anthropologically, I utilize four tools: (1) Excerpt from documentary film, *Obit.: Life on Deadline* [27], that identifies



professional strategies for writing short assignments, typically two-three paragraphs in length; (2) How-to-write-for-an-anthropology-journal recommendations, prepared by the editor-in-chief and copyeditor of *American Ethnologist*, appropriately titled, “Tell the Story” [28]; (3) discussion of first paragraphs in chapters from the anthropology textbook, *Cultural Anthropology: Global Forces, Local Lives* [29], which illustrate the basics of effective anthropological writing, i.e., ‘insider view’ (local language) and ‘inductive reasoning’ (transforming particular cultural concepts into pan-human generalizations), by showcasing a single ethnography on the chapter topic; (4) two revised videos that represent multi-modally two types of text – the focus of this case study. Three tools are presented separately as a computer-assisted lesson in the early weeks of the anthropology course (i.e., 1, 2, and 4). First-paragraph discussions (i.e., 3) take place for nearly every discussion of new textbook chapters.

*Reggaetón-Informational* states in its Preface, “Reggaetón grew through revitalized technologies, and diffusion of ever-evolving, innovative genres,” and Objective, “Students-Will-Be-Able-To hear & see Reggaetón as syncretism of distinctive styles through circum-Caribbean connections, facilitated by globalization.” Remaining sections focus on Reggaetón precursors in Jamaica, Panama, Puerto Rico, and ‘syncretism’ with input from Dominican and Cuban performers in the northeastern and southeastern United States. This later blending became globally recognized as Reggaetón. Each section includes music credits, identified by genre, and scholarly sources. Terms from anthropology within the informational video identify cultural change as Reggaetón developed: (a) ‘revitalization’ (Jamaican Reggae led to Dancehall, popularizing its acceptance by a wider audience in Jamaica), (b) ‘hybridization’ (Reggae in English by Jamaican ancestry musicians in Panama was translated into Spanish to reach a Latinx audience), (c) ‘adaptation’ (honoring the origins of Reggaetón by ‘borrowing’ the Jamaican Den-Bow beat of pre-Reggae), and (d) ‘syncretism’ (Puerto Rico and Caribbean-similar places, blending ‘hybridized’ Reggae with Spanish Hip-Hop). Cultural transfers diffuse “from one society to another” [29, p. 221-223], merge with existing culture [p. 234] and lead to ‘innovation’ [p. 9]. Once syncretized, Reggaetón ‘diffused’ (circulated) to a global audience. ‘Revitalization’

is “conscious, deliberate, and organized efforts by some member(s) of a society to create a more satisfying culture... [which] appear at moments of cultural stress” [p. 300]. These innovative forms may go “mainstream,” as occurred with Reggaetón, or remain “constricted” [p. 300]. ‘Hybridization’ is mixing forms, such as “style of music” blended with cultural expressions of identity or politics [30, p. 266, 271-272]. ‘Adaptation’ is initial borrowing, and ‘syncretism’ is “mixing or blending of elements from two or more cultural sources to produce a better culture or system” [29, p. 300].

When Daddy Yankee (Ramón Ayala) characterizes this multi-faceted process, illustrated in *Reggaetón-Informational*, “The mix of all those genres made Reggaetón,” he is referring to Reggae, Dancehall, and their Caribbean precursors (*soca, salsa, plena, merengue, bomba*) that blended with Meren-Rap and Hip-Hop through techno-mixing. In other words, Reggaetón is syncretism with origins specific to place (circum-Caribbean) and time (millennial technology), related to post-colonial ‘diasporas,’ i.e., population migrations. Using Audacity, I edited the soundtrack of an MTV (pay channel) interview with Daddy Yankee by Sway Calloway [9] and inserted audio-excerpts: (a) progression from pre-Reggae *ska*, Reggae and Dancehall in Jamaica [31-32] to (b) Spanish Reggae in Panama [33-34], which (c) merged with Spanish Hip-Hop [22] resulting from English Hip-Hop adjustments blended with Caribbean *salsa* and *plena* rhythms [22, 35-37], which (d) further syncretized as Reggaetón in Puerto Rico [36] and circulated to circum-Caribbean places (Figure 1). This syncretized musical genre as Reggaetón Latinx diffused globally to new audiences.

To present its premise, *Reggaetón-Argumentation* states in the Preface, “Reggaetón shares ideas about social practices,” before its Objective, “Students-Will-Be-Able-To hear and see how Reggaetón embraces newness and holds to home culture.” For an opening, six slides contrast other genres by noting a key feature in each that is missing in Reggaetón: authority linkages in *Corridos*, nostalgia in Hip-Hop, job conflicts in Country, parent-child tension in Rock-&-Roll, historic sadness in Blues, and spirituality allusions in Reggae. The next slide asks, “Reggaetón – What makes it distinct?” which sets the stage for analyzing what makes Reggaetón unique. The main premise is summarized with super-imposed text over multiple slides: “newness is new people, new

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experiences,” “home culture is already in place.” This sequence begins and ends, “Reggaetón embraces ‘newness’ while holding to ‘home culture’.” Lettering in colors signals the central idea by shifting from aqua (opening) to white (middle) before returning to aqua (closing). An agrarian song on desire for corn, *Más Maíz* (More Corn) [38], with a Reggaetón

beat, begins this analysis.

Its vigorous rhythm enhances an obvious reference to agrarian production. A follow-up slide notes that “corn and peanuts” were widely distributed circum-Caribbean foods, pre-historically past the Age of Discovery that brought colonial incursions to the Caribbean.



**Figure 1.** Circum-Caribbean Paths of Reggaetón Innovation and Diffusion

Several slides list 26 ‘home culture’ names identified in Reggaetón [39]. Located mostly in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, named places are neighborhoods (e.g., Loiza, Villa Duarte), cities (e.g., San Juan, Miami), or sectors (e.g., Alto Manhattan, i.e., Upper Manhattan). A parallel connection to “roads and streets” as ‘home culture’ leads to ten slides that describe how contemporary descendants of Jamaicans, who built the trans-isthmian canal, live in central Panama neighborhoods but continue contacts with Jamaica (home culture) and retain some cultural practices (home culture), while establishing new lifestyles (newness) and livelihood (newness). Final slides illustrate references to ‘home culture’ articulated through Reggaetón: Khris and Angel in *Ven Bailalo* (Come Dance) sing about their hometown, Santo Domingo [40], and Vico C in *Mi Barrio* (My Neighborhood) sings about Spanish Harlem, and a sub-place, *La Marketa* (The Market) [41]. Lyrics by these and other performers rarely mention neighborhood transformations, wherein “communal character... collective solidarity... have withered away” [42, p. 60].

Such transformations suggest that “neo-liberalism generates marginality” [29 p. 266-269] and “precarity” [p. 289-292]. Singers, nonetheless, remain loyal to ‘home culture’ identity as “barrio-centric” [43; see also 31], i.e., “glocally-tough, raw.”

Thus, the anthropological term, ‘glocal,’ fits early development of Reggaetón, when youth of incubator countries embraced millennial technology and created underground mixed tapes, circulated among club MCs in Jamaica, bus drivers in Panama, and friends in Puerto Rico. Another slide connects these ideas, proposing that music acquires local-regional popularity, before becoming global [43-45]. In sum, local practices influence globalization, as much as globalization affects local communities.

Other slides transition to social spaces that represent ‘newness’ in Reggaetón, such as “clubs and dancing,” as Ivy Queen sings, “*Yo quiero bailar*” (I want to dance) [46], with an observation that “dancing” and “clubs” are the most common words in Reggaetón [39]. This leads to generalizing on dancing popularity in Caribbean countries and code-switching in

Reggaetón, which demonstrates insidership [47] through ‘home culture’ as well as ‘newness.’ Thus, another form of ‘newness’ is coded language in Reggaetón: *yale* refers to ‘woman’ in Spanish (adapted from Jamaican speech); *sudor* refers to sweating in pleasurable dancing rather than physical labor; *rakata* refers to neighborhood sidekicks with whom one goes club-hopping; *calle* or ‘street’ as masculine domain contrasts to ‘home’ as female domain. As Ivy Queen sings, “*Vida es así*” (Life is like that) [48], a free translation illustrates her portrayal of feminism in Reggaetón [49]: “Life is like that... Happiness is... Someone to console me... Treat me differently... ((soothing)) Easy now, be calm...” The closing term *psychitriarse* (“to bust a flow”) refers to feeling better by sharing feelings with others and listening to others share feelings. Sung by a Jamaican ancestry singer in Panama, this final term within a brief vocabulary-glossary precedes slides that close *Reggaetón-Argumentation* by identifying new-generation performers.

From charter school to community college, no music was replaced or deleted. Instead, I revised text and imagery, and moved slides that contrast Reggaetón with other genres to the opening. Musical selections were not contested by charter school or community college students. When I reached (what I thought were) final versions at the charter school, I had spent considerable time researching literature on Reggaetón (and one person whom I interviewed), enabling me to collate a reasonable portrayal and explore ‘home culture’ and ‘newness’ in content and performance [50-51]. When I read about controversial lyrics (this century) by a pioneer, which demeaned vulnerable groups that protested, I deleted two images and deleted the singer’s name from the Daddy Yankee interview. The revision is what I show to community college students. This synopsis of content and intent of two videos, then, represents types of text illustrated through Reggaetón. Over eight minutes, 15 seconds, *Reggaetón-Informational* includes 185 slides, 25 cited songs, 59 unduplicated images (sources credited), and 12 scholarly sources. Over eight minutes, 22 seconds, *Reggaetón-Argumentation* includes 153 slides, 12 cited songs, 21 unduplicated images (sources credited), and eleven scholarly sources.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Two-phase creation of separate videos illustrates types of text (informational; argumentation) with Reggaetón as a musical learning modality.

The initial rationale was recognizing that charter school students enjoyed Reggaetón clips within brief videos on classroom rules and expectations, and/or appreciated the teacher’s efforts to bring something of interest to them [13]. In the first phase, digital-storytelling was a strategy through which students gained practical experience with Photo Story and Audacity, which enhanced literacy through digital projects that they created. My collateral excursion into development of three videos, shared with students, was meant to enhance learning process. Second phase at the community college emphasized video revision to illustrate-represent Reggaetón as ‘informational’ text and ‘argumentation’ (separate videos) to prepare students for final essays in an intensive-writing anthropology course. To report ideas in an essay based on library research is closer to informational writing than developing a thesis, resolving a research problem, or answering a theoretical question, which require argumentation. The two videos are designed to portray informational text as distinct from argumentation, which is the goal of writing anthropologically.

Preliminary development (charter school) and subsequent revision (community college) incorporated feedback from students, who were invited to review the videos for suitability (secondary school sensibilities) and instructional relevance (college-level instruction). Feedback was written and verbal at the charter school, whereas students provided full-class verbal feedback at the community college. This approach to collaboration between teacher and students blends ongoing interactive lessons with student feedback that leads to developing enhanced multi-media materials that are pedagogically sound, where Reggaetón is a learning modality.

### CONCLUSION

Students are sufficiently knowledgeable to contribute to enhancement of lesson content and delivery. This process produces results (content) and illustrates learning that is experienced as an interactive educational process (delivery).

Re-structuring two Reggaetón videos as multi-modal representations from one academic level (charter school) to another (community college) enhances pedagogical goals that facilitate college-level instruction of students in anthropological writing, which culminates in their strengthened skills for final essays. Teaching ethnographically reveals appropriate contexts for implementing instructional innovations.



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