

Literacy skills are fundamental to success in life and learning. Literacy is not only a key to college access, it is essential for basic survival.



MSU Curriculum & Research Team

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Community Partners

Detroit Public Schools

Detroit Job Corps

Wolverine Family Services

Coalition on Temporary Shelter

Detroit Recreation Department

Youth Development Initiative, Don Bosco Hall

MSU College of Education, MSU Detroit Center

Black Family Development

WHAT IS LITERACY?

As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the 21st century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies are multiple, dynamic, and malleable. As in the past, they are inextricably linked with particular histories, life possibilities, and social trajectories of individuals and groups.

—NTCE, National Council of Teachers of English

Verses literacy practices engaged in:

- Speaking with power and purpose
- Composing with similes, metaphors and rhyme
- Alliteration in lyrics/poetry
- Experimentation with poetry styles ranging from haiku to rap



Verses musical practices engaged in:

- Lessons on chords and harmony
- Exploring song structures AAA, AABA, ABAB and standard Blues, Hip Hop and R&B forms, etc.
- Song analysis including popular and world music
- One-on-one instrumental instruction on voice, guitar or piano



Community Music School-Detroit
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

MSU CMS-Detroit

The MSU Community Music School-Detroit (CMS-D) delivers high-impact, high-quality music education and music therapy to low income children and families in Detroit. Through music study, CMS-D builds 21st century life skills in urban youth and fills a unique niche in the local music education landscape as school music programs continue to disappear. CMS-D is an anchor provider of affordable music education for Detroit children.

CMS-D serves children and youth from Early Childhood Music through high school-age. Small group instrumental and vocal lessons, ensemble programs and summer camps offer sequential music learning.

VERSES: EXPLORING LITERACY THROUGH LYRICS AND SONG

VERSES IS AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO ENGAGING URBAN YOUTH in 21st century critical literacy skills through the art of songwriting and music production. The language arts, storytelling, poetry, song form, dynamics, lyrics, melodies, rhythm, chord construction, technology and more are fused in this original curriculum created by a cross-disciplinary group of Michigan State University (MSU) scholars from the Colleges of Music and Education.

In collaboration with the MSU Community Music School-Detroit (CMS-D), the Verses Project encompasses curriculum development, training and support for the Detroit-based artist/educators, testing and fine-tuning in a real-world classroom of Detroit youth, and publication of research findings.

More than 100 Detroit students are participating a music learning experience rooted in youth music culture. Through Verses, Detroit youth gain experience and confidence in artistic expression, while advancing their skills in language, reading, writing, literary structure, music composition, performance presentation, and use of sophisticated technology tools.

Verses enables MSU and CMS-D to deepen service to the city, community and children. The program seeks to identify and explore solutions for changing traditional thinking about the value and impact of music learning on literacy skills in K-12 schools.

Verses is made possible by support from the Marshall Mathers Foundation and Carhartt.



“SONGWRITING ALLOWS STUDENTS TO SPEAK TO THEIR OWN REALITIES and provides a profound opportunity for youth to talk about their position in the world. It’s a medium they’re comfortable with. This class is a way to teach them important skills by meeting them where they are.”

—MSU Assistant Professor of Music Education, JULIET HESS



VERSES YOUTH

TOTAL ENROLLMENT:

117 YTD

Students participating in more than one session/camp: **26**

Schools attended: **46**

AGES: 9 TO 18
average age 13.5 yrs

Number of hometowns: **22**

61% DETROIT RESIDENTS

Allen Park.....	1%
Canton.....	1%
Dearborn.....	1%
Detroit.....	61%
Farmington.....	3%
Ferndale.....	1%
Franklin.....	3%
Grosse Pointe.....	1%
Hamtramck.....	1%
Harper Woods.....	1%
Hazel Park.....	1%
Highland Park.....	5%
Inkster.....	1%
Lincoln Park.....	1%
Livonia.....	1%
Pontiac.....	1%
Romulus.....	2%
Saint Clair Shores.....	1%
Southfield.....	5%
Troy.....	1%
Westland.....	3%
Ypsilanti.....	1%



PROBLEM SOLVING	Exploring today's complex social issues through song lyrics; learning the mechanics of song production and assembling the pieces into original artistic expressions
CREATIVITY	Daily creative writing prompts such as journaling and experimenting with poetic forms; using language expressively
ANALYTIC THINKING	Discussing different opinions held by students within work groups; breaking down the meaning and symbolism of songs across diverse genres; comparing and contrasting big ideas contained in songs and examples from students' own lives
COLLABORATION AND PARTICIPATION	Working as a group to create songs; listening, incorporating and respecting different ideas and perspectives
COMMUNICATION	Learning and practicing new words and language tools; presentational experience and new confidence gained
ETHICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY	Discussion of controversial song lyrics and the power of words to harm or heal
MANAGING SELF	Strengthened independent thought; exploring self through words and creative output; responsibility for work product timelines
RELATING TO OTHERS	Exploring ideas about race, class, economics and social justice through classic examples of the song literature and students' original songs
DEVELOPING PROFICIENCY WITH TECHNOLOGY	Learning to use Garageband, Audiomwave, iDock recording software, CD cover design apps, literacy apps; practicing internet research to locate literary and musical examples as part of coursework

FEEDBACK

"Before Verses camp, my daughter Victoria would not sing in front of people. She had a history of being bullied and was very self-conscious about what people would think of her. After the first few weeks I noticed her singing in the grocery store, she became more and more theatrical and would just about sing out anywhere. Victoria has started collecting information and networking with various artists and instructors in pursuit of becoming a singer songwriter. I am very impressed with the program, our entire family is impressed with it... I can only thank you all for this." —BERNITA BRADLEY

"This course and the instructors are invaluable because these young men and women are seeing the possibilities of things they may have never comprehended before. It has shown them options, in music, that will help them live out their dreams and passions. It has truly made the impossible, possible!" —LORI WILLIAMS

"I think the benefit was that Xavier and John started the school year highly motivated particularly for English Language Arts more specifically parts of speech. I'm also seeing an increase in the boys' individual confidence and willing to express themselves in front of groups. Finally, they look forward to opportunities to show their work, they are willing to take risk and try new things." —XAVIER GILLON

JOURNAL ARTICLES

"Showing their Identities & Telling their Stories," *New Educator*, Spring/Summer 2016

"I don't want to say bad things about Detroit": Examining adolescent literacy as literary presence, *Michigan Reading Journal*, Watson (in press).

"Teacher caring in planning and enacting open-mic time in a literacy-and-songwriting curriculum," submitting 2/1/17, *Journal of Teacher Education*, Deroo, Watson and Hess.

"Show some love": Enacting literacy presence and musical presence as civic engagement in the Verses Project, submitting 11/1/16, *Teachers College Record*, Hess, Watson and Deroo.

"Considering action verbs of secondary English classrooms in beyond-school literacy practices of a literacy-and songwriting curriculum," submitting 11/1/16, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, Watson and Deroo.

PRESENTATIONS

Replication vs. originality: Putting forward the open mic space in music education (note: working title). Submitted 10/11/16, *Research in Music Education*, Hess.

"Culturally relevant pedagogy" Paper presentation at the Imagining America National Conference, Milwaukee, WI, 10/7/16, Watson, Knaggs and Lanni.

REPORTS

The Verses Project: Exploring literacy through lyrics and song, Report, 10/12/16, Hess, Watson, Deroo and Woodward.

PRESS

Shade 45, Sway's Universe, SiriusXM Radio, "Will Langford Builds Musical Geniuses with Verses Project: Teaching Songwriting, Performing Mixing," 7/28/16

The Pulse with Karen Dumas, 910AM Superstation, Interview with Verses faculty De'Sean Jones and Jill Woodward a bout songwriting camps for urban youth, 7/7/16

"Free Detroit music camp explores the interplay of music and literacy," *Detroit Metro Times*, 7/1/16

"Song Writing Project Promotes Literacy," *Eye on Detroit*, CBS-TV, 5/26/16

Eminem Carhartt Air Jordan Raise \$227k for MSU Detroit Music School, *CBS Detroit*, 11/25/15

VERSES PROJECT

15-week pilot
Feb. 1-May 9, 2016

Verses Summer Camp 1
July 11-15, 2016

Verses Summer Camp 2
Aug. 8-12, 2016

Listening Parties & Open Mics for families and friends
May 9, July 15 & Aug. 12, 2016

15-week Fall semester
Sept. 12-Dec. 19, 2016

Listening Party & Open Mic
Dec. 19, 2016

15-week Spring semester
Jan. 9-May 1, 2017

Listening Party & Open Mic
May 1, 2017

"We are exploring topics that students want to say, things that they're interested in. We're seeing how youth are asserting themselves as contributors of and participants in their communities and in their schools."

—MSU ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH EDUCATION, VAUGHN W. M. WATSON

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