# BEATBOXING as a Tool for Literacy

*"I would teach children music, physics, and philosophy; but most importantly music,*
*for the patterns in music and all the arts are the keys to learning"*
- Plato

Rooted in the earliest days of Hip Hop's birth in the late 70's, beatboxing emerged from the same creative ethos that defines Hip Hop's spirit and philosophy - making something from nothing.

Beatboxing is the art of making music with nothing more than your mouth and body. By creating and repeating drum sounds, instrument sounds, and sound effects, any and *all* sounds can be used to beatbox. Beatboxing requires no musical knowledge or theory and can be done immediately by anyone independently or in a group setting.

The ability to, not just listen, but to *actually create music* is instant with zero barriers for entry. It's fun, interactive, culturally responsive, and most important for young learners, the art and ability to beatbox is objectively cool. The way one feels when beatboxing is also profound and empowering in that when beatboxing, rather than learning how to play an instrument - you *are* the instrument.

I believe we can use beatboxing as a tool for literacy, specifically, as a key to help unlock phonics for young and vulnerable readers.

I have a unique firsthand perspective on the incredible qualities of beatboxing because in 2010, the nonprofit I founded launched a beatboxing program for students with disabilities called Beat Rockers at the Lavelle School for the Blind in the Bronx, NY.



BEAT Rockers: Beatboxing with the Blind

[Beat Rockers: Beatboxing with the Blind](#)

We witnessed the instant transformation our students experienced when they began to perceive their own bodies and mouths as powerful and very capable instruments. They were able to create music freely, independently (and with others), without instruments, permission, or outside support.

In addition to the joy of musical and creative self-expression, we recognized how rhythm, precise articulation, social connection and *communication* are inherent to both beatboxing and speech. As every student at Lavelle is required to take speech therapy, we began to research using beatboxing as a tool for speech therapy, particularly, as a way to help students practice speech sounds between their weekly interventions.



[Beatboxing as Speech Therapy](#)

We even developed a free ten-lesson online program called, [BOOTS n CATS](#) to inspire students to practice speech sounds by beatboxing.

## How Can We Apply the Magic of Beatboxing to Help Kids Read?

"*The principle goal of education in the schools should be creating men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done; men and women who are creative, inventive and discoverers, who can be critical and verify, and not accept, everything they are offered.*"
- Jean Piaget

**Beatboxing & Phonics: Beatbonics**

Beatboxing is language. It is a method of human communication consisting of sounds used in a structured way and conveyed verbally. But unlike any other language, beatboxing is inclusive of *all* sounds (phonemes) to express its language. Any sound*, any phoneme* (in any language) can be used as a musical sound when beatboxing.

As we all know, phonics teaches students to read by correlating sounds with letters or groups of letters. It teaches students to read words by unlocking the sound(s) each letter makes.

If phonics are the key to unlocking the code that is the English alphabet, **beatboxing can be a key to unlocking phonics.**

Beatboxing uses every letter sound, every *phoneme*, as a *musical* sound. Essentially, the letter sound or the music sound, is the same sound.  However, the music sound is simply far more enjoyable to make especially when used to beatbox.

**Beatbonics** marries three well established teaching tenets:

1. **Phonics**\* are a foundational strategy for teaching young children how to read.

2. **Music-based learning**\* and

3. **Play-based learning**\* are especially effective in teaching young children.

\*Links to supporting clinical research papers for each method of teaching/learning.

## What Are Specific Areas Within Phonics That Beatboxing Can Support?

- Phonological Awareness Deficits: the ability to recognize that spoken woods are made up individual sound parts

- Phoneme Isolation and Awareness: beatboxing to help students identify and isolate individual sounds in words

- Phoneme Blending:  beatboxing can assist in teaching students how to blend sounds

- Phoneme Segmentation: use beatboxing to break words into their component sounds

- Phoneme Manipulation: beatboxing can make phoneme manipulation more interactive:
    - Create beatbox patterns representing words, then change, add, or remove sounds to demonstrate phoneme manipulation
    - Use beatbox rhythms to emphasize the manipulation of sounds in words

## How Can I Get Involved?

Our mission is to use creative art and self-expression as a pedagogy to connect teachers with learners in order to improve academic, mental, and physical health outcomes.

Those with passion, experience, and a desire to develop innovative teaching strategies so our youngest and most vulnerable students find joy in the power of reading, join me.

Help uncover the connection that phonics plays in literacy through music and beatboxing so we can create new tools for teachers and young learners.

Goal 1: Summer 2025
- Learn how to best implement beatboxing as a key to unlocking phonics

Goal 2: Fall 2025
- ● Test our ideas through rigorous scientific research and eventually publish the research in a peer-reviewed journal and present at conferences

Goal 3: 2026
- ● Create and implement professional development training for teachers
- ● Create and implement a curriculum for students


If you are a school teacher, administrator, curriculum writer, professor, literacy specialist, academic researcher, speech therapist, music therapist, journalists, or a parent who would like to contribute to this research and project, **please email me at: [james.kim@yskim.org](mailto:james.kim@yskim.org)**

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THANK YOU.


Sincerely,
James Kim