

Where Ludacris meets loquacious

Kaplan's new CD tries to help students study for SATs with the music they love

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Quick: Which of the following words would you expect to hear in a rap track?

- a. bling
- b. hustle
- c. crunk
- d. symbiotic

Actually, the answer is all of the above, thanks to the appearance of a new music CD that uses rap to help high school students boost their vocabulary.

Words and music

That's right: The music that includes stars who spell their names Fabolous and Ludacris is now being used as a study aid. And it's just in time for the new SATs, scheduled to begin in March.

Kaplan Test Prep and Admissions, the company that offers nationwide courses aimed at boosting students' SAT scores, recently released a music disc called "Vocabulary Accelerator," which features a dozen tracks of rap, R&B and alternative rock. The goal is to help students retain more than 300 SAT-level vocabulary words.

What the disc will do for students' street cred is another matter. The songs sound like current hits, but the lyrics contain words typically found in Scrabble games and crosswords puzzles. For example, the smooth R&B number "The Letter" sounds like an Usher tune,



Kaplan Test Prep is releasing a CD, produced by musician Keith London, left, that plants SAT vocabulary words in the lyrics of songs in the style of hip-hop musicians such as Ludacris, right.



PHOTO BY VICTORIA GRANTHAM



though you'd never hear him croon the lines, "My heart's debilitated, don't know if it can handle this / How ironic that you're going away to become a cardiologist." Or consider the clubby dance number "Super-Girl," with its combination of bottom-heavy beats and heady lyrics: "With candor we say pithy things / We must confess about our minimal resolve."

And the rap track "Move It" may mark the first time a rapper has used the word "fete" in place of "party." And who knows, the song may spawn a new dance with these instructions: "Clap your hands like this / We're gonna gambol like that."

The disc is the dual effort of Kaplan and

the New York-based educational publishing company Defined Mind. It's "an effort to communicate with students," says Defined Mind executive producer Keith London. "They have their own unique form of language, and we wanted to create an educational tool that speaks to that."

He says nay

But Ken Hartman, a Philadelphia-based college admissions expert and author, says the disc is the equivalent of memorizing words from a list, which isn't a great way to build vocabulary skills. The problem, he notes: Whenever companies such as Kaplan put out lists of common SAT words, the first ones to notice are the test-makers. "Don't you think if there's a word that's appearing on a regular basis on the SAT, they could quickly change that?"

The disc's creators acknowledge that the songs are essentially a mnemonic device, such as flash cards — or, more aptly, like the music-based "Schoolhouse Rock" cartoons that ran on ABC in the 1970s. And, yes, they admit, today's kids may find these educational songs a little tame compared to what they hear on the radio.

"The proposition here is, 'Hey, you're studying for the SAT anyhow, so here's another way to do it,'" says Jon Zeitlin, general manager of SAT and ACT programs at Kaplan. "We're not asking kids to put their Snoop Dogg CDs aside."

