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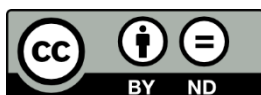
Urban classrooms, popular culture and polycentricity: Minority boys' use of football cards and hiphop in relation to education

by

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URBAN CLASSROOMS, POPULAR CULTURE AND POLYCENTRICITY: MINORITY BOYS' USE OF FOOTBALL CARDS AND HIPHOP IN RELATION TO EDUCATION

Martha Sif Karrebæk & Lian Malai Madsen

1 Introduction

Educational institutions have been described as key sites for the reproduction of existing sociolinguistic economies and communicative inequalities (e.g., Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). At the same time they encompass negotiations and challenges of (sociolinguistic) order and hegemony (Blackledge and Creese, 2010; Gutierrez, Rymes and Larson, 1995; Jaspers, 2005; Rampton, 2006), and globalisation and other contemporary developments in particular have brought new challenges to educators:

“The great task confronting educators as we move into the 21st century is to address the radical reconfiguration and cultural rearticulation now taking place in educational and social life. These developments are foregrounded and driven by the logics of globalization, the intensification of migration, the heightened effects of electronic media, the proliferation of images, and the everyday work of imagination. All these developments have shifted the commonly taken for granted stabilities of social constructs such as ‘culture’, ‘identity’, ‘nation’, ‘state,’ and so forth.” (McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood and Paret, 2003)

The quote from McCarthy *et al.* speaks about globalisation, migrations etc., but also about what may be termed ‘popular culture’, that is, e.g., new technologies and everyday

imaginings (maybe even everyday identifications). These imaginings are of great importance in the life of humans, including in the life of the core groups cared for by educational institutions: children and youth. The essential message is that the new developments ought to force contemporary education to reorient and reconsider their foundational assumptions (see also Eisenhart, 2001: 16). In other words, these recent developments need to have effects on a very local level, within single classrooms. A frequently named effect of globalisation in educational settings concerns the growing heterogeneity of the student body, and despite calls such as the one voiced by McCarthy et al. a frequent institutional and societal response to the new student population is to increase the emphasis on the National and to see minority students' often poor school results as caused, or at least motivated, by background characteristics such as (deficient) linguistic or cultural background, lack of educational aspirations, and reluctance to accept the majority society's value-ascriptions (Andersen 2010: 33). Such understandings certainly fail to acknowledge the variety of engagements with and understandings of education by children today.

In this paper we focus on popular culture in relation to education. Popular culture is a pervasive element in the everyday lives of young people, including their everyday school-life, and popular culture phenomena and practices offer unique possibilities for insight into the lived experiences and culture of children and youth. We argue that it is a precondition for the pedagogical use of popular culture that we understand this everyday life and the meanings that popular culture phenomena may have in the single case. Ethnography and didactics must go hand in hand. We will discuss two, in some ways contrasting, empirical cases of minority boys' engagement with the popular culture phenomena of hip hop and football cards. We focus particularly on the ways specific participants appropriate different practices, what local meanings practices achieve, and their relations to centres of authority.

We compare the two cases because they, in different ways, illustrate how popular cultural resources can become linked to unexpected values in the local communities. Far from an unequivocal celebration of the incorporation of popular culture within educational settings we wish to point to the intricacies faced by contemporary educators (see also Harklau and Zuengler, 2004). Besides, in this local context football cards, among the young children, and hip hop, among the adolescents, both relate to a ‘gangsta’ image, i.e. a cool, streetwise, tough persona. This social type is widely recognisable and relevant in the school we have studied, as well as far beyond, and the cool and streetwise identity practices characteristic of the ‘gangsta’ are usually combined with displays of opposition and negative attitude towards school (e.g. Bucholtz, 2011; Eckert, 2000). Yet, we demonstrate how a widespread social stereotype can be enacted and oriented to in highly different ways, *even within the same school*. Linguistic ethnography (Blommaert, 2005; Rampton, 2007) constitutes our methodological framework, and in order to discuss relations between normativity and negotiability in contemporary urban educational contexts we introduce the notions of popular culture, indexicality and polycentricity.

2 Linguistic Ethnography

In order to make, and make sense of, somehow surprising discoveries one needs a research approach which is sensitive to both situated activities, their relations to other activities which have taken place in the same setting, and the broader context in which they occur. *Linguistic Ethnography* (Blommaert, 2005; Blommaert and Rampton, 2011; Creese, 2008; Rampton, 2007) is a particular fruitful methodological framework for this. Linguistic ethnography regards ethnography as an essential foundation for analysis. This is due to the realization that we cannot take it as a given that the researcher understands the meaning of the world as it is

reflected in data, the same way as the individuals that the researcher studies. Yet, we seek to present *emic* understandings and to speak on behalf of the people whose life we study. The unpredictability appears, particularly in contemporary societies characterized by great linguistic and ethnic diversity (maybe even *superdiversitet*; Vertovec, 2007), but in principle the same insight is generally valid. Meanings are always situated and (re-)created within specific social relations, interactional histories, institutional frames and regimes. Besides, linguistic ethnography emphasizes that the meaning dimension encompasses much more than the linguistic expression of state of affairs. Meaning emerges out of relations between words, human beings, social communities, time and place, and the analytic work is focused on the understanding of such relations between individuals, language and community, between linguistic form, language in use, and ideologies or *the total linguistic fact* (Silverstein, 1985). Thus, in linguistic ethnography it is assumed that "the contexts for communication should be investigated rather than assumed" (Rampton, 2007:585). The linguistic sensitivity plays a central role, too. Focus remains within linguistic phenomena and the linguistic analyses of social actions offers a transparency to the analytic work which classic ethnography lacks (Rampton, 2007: 595f).

Our study uses longitudinal ethnographic work which enables us to notice activities and actions and to recognize these as practices; ethnographic insight has also been essential for knowing relations between the individuals that take part in the field that we studied. By means of formal and informal interviews and chats we have elicited individuals' own views on practices and incidents, or at least their construction of a situated meta-pragmatic understanding of these. Sequential micro-analysis has been performed on audio-recorded material to uncover the situational performance and construction of identities, activities and understandings. And local, as well as more widespread, ideologies have been

uncovered through the ethnographic work and our insight into prevalent media discourse in Denmark and elsewhere. This has enabled us to combine analysis of situated language use with larger social and contextual analysis, and to answer the micro-analytically eternally pertinent question “why that now?” and, in addition, the linguistic-ethnographically equally relevant question “and so what?”

3 Indexicality, metapragmatics and polycentricity

Local, socio-cultural meaning ascriptions to particular cultural resources can be accounted for through the notion of indexicality (Ochs, 1992; Silverstein, 2003). Indexicality refers to associations between forms and typical usage, contexts of use and stereotypes of users which linguistic and other signs (re-)create in communicative encounters. Indexical associations are termed metapragmatic because they typify and otherwise characterize signs’ link to pragmatically usable systems of signs or ‘metapragmatic models’ (Agha, 2003, 2007).

All language-in-use is indexical and it thereby points outside of the immediate linguistic context (Silverstein, 2003: 194f) towards normative centres of authority. Such centres are relevant to the understanding of (norms of) genres, registers, and – of course – indexicalities, and they influence semiotic including linguistic conduct. They also motivate moral evaluations of semiotic conduct in terms of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (Silverstein, 1998: 406). Yet, centres of authority are relevant only within specific socio-cultural domains and spaces, and in fact a multiplicity of such centres may co-exist – so-called polycentricity (Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck, 2005; Silverstein, 1998: 405). This implies that what is considered valuable and prestigious in one domain (and by some individuals) may be stigmatised in another and by others. For instance, for some people, hip hop is a cool way to show oneself to be school oriented in a non-nerdy way, for others it indexes educational non-achievers etc. All

situated encounters are potentially polycentric, even those not obviously so; there are always ‘multiple – though never unlimited – batteries of norms to which one can orient and according to which one can behave...’ (Blommaert, 2010: 40). Participation in popular cultural activities involves orientation to multiple norms, both within and across domains, and for school-children a pertinent implication of the existence of multiple centres of authority is that they need to learn to recognize and juggle different sets of norms of expectations, maybe even simultaneously (Blommaert *et al.*, 2005: 207).

4 Popular culture, football cards and hip hop

Popular culture is a cover term for a range of cultural practices and phenomena (Fedorak, 2009), which primarily have in common that they are understood in opposition to ‘high culture’. As such, they are not easily defined or delimited. A particularly important way to study popular culture is as practices in ordinary people’s everyday lives (cf. Williams, 2009). These practices are shared by many, they spread easily and are often closely tied to commercial interests. Somehow paradoxically they also contain elements of social transformation (Storey, 2009: xvi) as individuals exploit popular culture to challenge cultural, linguistic and political hegemony (see, e.g., Alim, 2011; Hall, 1985). Key elements in studies of popular culture are individuals’ shared experiences, social solidarity (Fedorak, 2009: 3) and translocal alignments (Hall, 1985; Hebdige, 2006; Pennycook, 2005: 593). Formal education is often described, and maybe experienced, in contrast to popular culture; for instance, in general the National is accorded primacy, and the reproduction of traditional cultural values is a declared aim. Also, schools tend to be everything but dynamic and easy to change. Yet, popular cultural practices and phenomena do pervade educational settings, thereby creating normative tensions. It is certainly worth studying how language and other semiotic resources

circulate, are learnt and appropriated in school-related popular culture activities as they often involve complex forms of cultural, linguistic and semiotic diversity. We will exemplify this in the following, bearing in mind that spaces of learning and socialisation develop within learners' networking practices, and that formal education is just one among a range of institutional and non-institutional settings: clubs, afterschool centres, virtual gatherings, etc.

Hip hop has become a rather well-described vehicle for educational projects (e.g. Alim, 2006, 2011; Hill, 2009; Pennycook, 2007). Football cards, on the other hand, are usually categorised as toys and banned in educational settings. Neither, however, is traditionally included in educational practices. Football cards are trading cards, a childhood cultural phenomenon dating back to the late 19th century. In themselves they are complex semiotic objects which display visual information of both traditional linguistic kind, e.g. names of a player and his team, and of other kinds, for example, where the player usually shoots at the goal, his attack, defense and midfield value, his general position on the team. Clearly the decoding and understanding of such information demands complex skills, as does the use of the cards in exchanges and negotiations of social relations (Faigenbaum, 2003).

Hip hop is a musical and lyrical means of expression. The production and performance involve literacy, musical, rhythmical, and kinaesthetic skills, and the expression of values and positioning in the social world are also central elements (Hill, 2009). Experiments with ways of drawing out-of-school experiences of language closer to the curriculum and classroom pedagogy have received increasing attention, in particular the critical hip hop (language) pedagogies. These frameworks attempt to transfer semiotic competencies from particular popular culture niches into more formal, official contexts of school and training (cf. Alim, 2006; Bruce and Davis, 2000; Dimitriadis, 2001; Hill, 2009; Ibrahim, 1999; Ibrahim, Alim and Pennycook 2009).

In our examples hip hop and football cards represent local appropriations of transcultural flows (Ibrahim et al., 2009; Pennycook, 2007) that breaks with common assumptions. As we will show, the otherwise mainstream childhood phenomenon of football cards is locally related to a social model of school resistant streetwise children, and the hip hop practices conventionally associated with ‘gangsta’ identity are appropriated by adolescents in positioning as educationally ambitious.

5 The study

Our two case studies originate in an extensive collaborative project, carried out in a culturally and linguistically diverse urban school in a former traditional working class area in Copenhagen, Denmark. We have done fieldwork from 2009 until today (2013; and continuing) among students in their final years of school (grade 7-9), middle-school students (grade 4-6) and school-starters (grade 0-2). Our analytical starting-point is the students’ local realities and everyday encounters, and although the project is school-based, our approach exceeds the school context and involves institutional and non-institutional adults as well as peers. Over the years we have collected a range of data types: field diaries, self-, group- and home-recordings, video-data, ethnographic interviews, written texts, CMC, etc. (Madsen et al. 2013). For the purpose of this contribution we attend to field diaries, photographs and interview notes (case study 1); self-recordings, classroom recordings, text from a webpage and video-clips from Youtube (case study 2).

5.1 Football cards, literacy and peer-group orientation

In the first case study we argue that the local and situated meaning of semiotic resources cannot be assumed on the basis of general knowledge of a phenomenon; we need extensive insight into the local context. Also, we show how popular culture, in the shape of material objects or larger discourses, can be used to mediate social relations and thereby to express particular social identities. Of course, both points are arguments for the importance of doing serious ethnography. We concentrate on Elias¹, a young boy of Pakistani background, in first grade. First, we show two pieces of Elias' written productions.



Ill. 1: Danish book with Elias' writing

Illustration 1 is a photograph of Elias' Danish book; the theme is the letter R. The book contains representations of objects which are spelled with an r, e.g., *gris* 'pig', *rødhætte* 'red riding hood', *røg* 'smoke', *radiser* 'radishes', *regnbue* 'rainbow' etc., and probably inspired by this Elias has written: "gRis" 'pig', "RAIBUe" 'rainbow', "RØJ" 'smoke', "RoBedA" 'beet root'. In addition, we find, as the last word on the list, REAL MADRID, a world famous football club, underlined and exclusively in capital letters. The question now is what this

reveals about social relations and authority centres in Elias' life, and in order to explore it we initially return to the records of the situation. We audio-recorded some other children on that day, Elias only appears as background 'noise', so the following is based on MSK's (translated) field diary:

“The children are writing the letter R in the air as I arrive. I sit down at an empty chair next to Elias. I notice a deck of football cards in his bag and I tell him that football cards are cool. He smiles. ... Elias is clearly not very engaged in the teaching activities.

He rarely follows the teacher's instructions, gets involved in quarrels, gossips with me in a low voice, draws small men on my notes, and looks out of the open door. The teacher calls at him several times to reassume his attention. Elias is told that he has to do the R-assignment, so he writes gRis ('pig') and RAiBU ('rainbow').

...

I decide to concentrate on some of the other children because the teacher seems to notice that Elias is more focused on chatting with me than on his work. Yet Elias catches my attention when he draws out his deck of football cards and meticulously copies REAL MADRID from the *Iker Casillas* cardⁱⁱ. Elias asks me what letter the l is, I answer and he immediately replies that there is one like that in Casillas. I can see that he has also written RÅB, RØj, ROBEdA, RØj.”

These fieldnotes documents my impression that Elias demonstrated a lack of interest in the class. He showed that (according to the notes) by ignoring the teacher and by having his

attention on extra-curricular activities. It is not until he realizes that there is an R in Real Madrid that he demonstrates a clear engagement in the assignment. At first MSK was impressed by the number of words that Elias had written. However, it became clear that he had copied them from Bilal who sat next to him: he looked attentively into Bilal's work book, and the boys had the same words in the same order and with the same unconventional spellings. There was an additional sign that Elias did not put much effort into the assignment. When the teacher asked him to read aloud the words he had written, he only managed to do so with Real Madrid.

There were probably several reasons why Elias copied from Bilal. Naturally this is a way to minimize the work effort but it is also worth considering that this was not an accepted practice within the classroom. By copying Elias positioned against institutional norms, he challenged them, and insisted on a particular identity as the non-conforming child. This is much in line with his general actions within the classroom, as documented by the fieldnotes.

Now, the example could be an (relatively trivial) illustration of how popular culture, here football cards, permeates classrooms and may provide good learning opportunities and resources despite not being welcome. However, we think that there is a second dimension, too, which complicates the picture, and this dimension has to do with the indexicalities of football cards in this particular classroom for this particular child. In order to argue our case we now turn to the more general picture of Elias as we got to know him over the years.

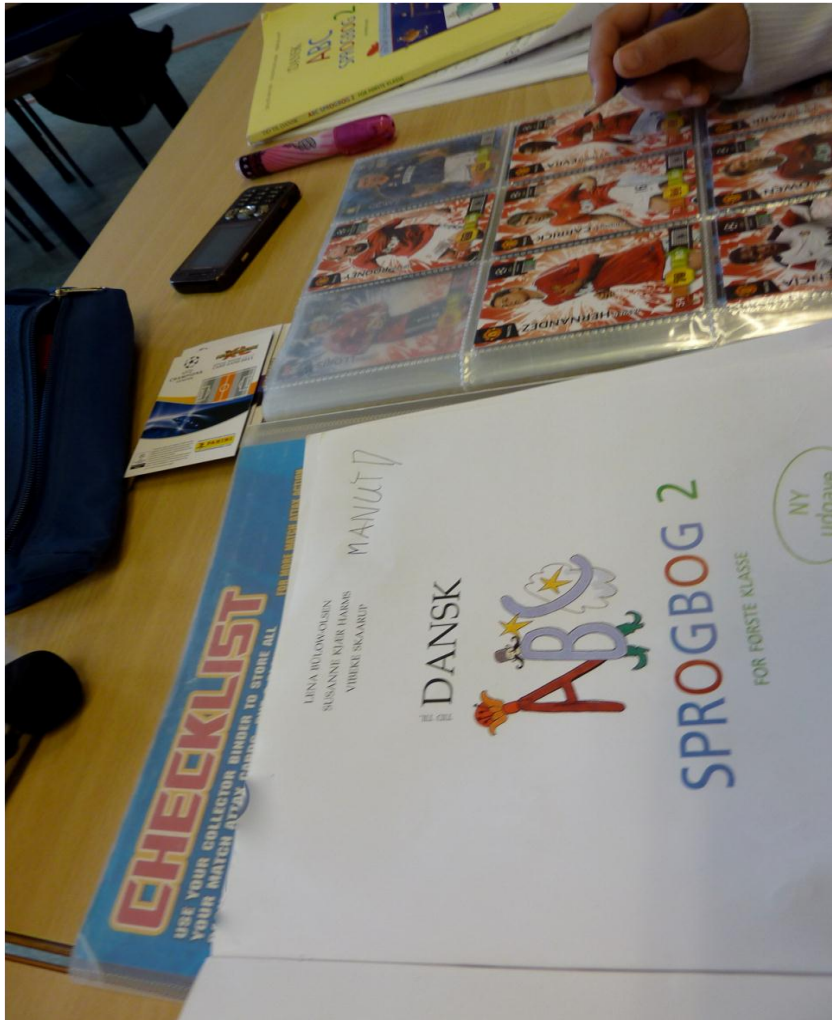
Teachers generally characterized Elias as having a negative school attitude; he arrived late for lessons and put little effort into the assignments. He had no friends in his class, he spent no time with the children outside of the classroom, and he did not speak much

to them in class either. Except for conflict situations and practical concerns he seemed to ignore his classmates. Elias was also the only child in this class collecting football cards, this despite football cards being a popular mainstream phenomenon in Denmark (Brunstrøm, 2012). In breaks Elias hung out with an ethnically mixed group of primary school boys, many of whom self-identified as ‘gangstas’ explicitly (using that term) and also through claiming affiliation with the local neighbourhood gang and being fans of different gangsta rappers such as Tupac. Teachers also pointed out a large number of these children as problematic. All Elias’ friends were devout football fans, and many collected and traded football cards. In addition, Elias came from a football-interested family who watched the big matches together, and he traded football cards with his siblings. The REAL MADRID incident sparked our interest in Elias’ use and understanding of football cards, and Author1 asked him to participate in an interview.

This interview was intended to elicit an account of Elias social world from his perspective (see Maybin, 2012), and of the meaning of football, football cards and sources of identifications etc. It was realised a few months after the initial classroom observation. Author1 asked Elias if there were any Pakistani players on the cards. He responded that there was Özil, a card that his sister owned, and that Özil was cool. However, during the talk Elias gradually changed his categorisation of Özil from being a Pakistani to that he *faktisk* ‘actually’ was a Muslim like Elias himself. (Özil Mesut is a third generation Turkish German). When he was asked to clarify if Özil was or was not Pakistani, Elias repeated that Özil was a Muslim, and that all Muslims were brothers. This concluded the subject.

This interview combined with insight from the long-term ethnographic fieldwork suggested how football cards were indexically associated with and connected Elias to the young streetwise gangsta peer group, to his family and even to wider (imagined) social

communities such as the Muslim community. This constituted the indexical meaning of the football cards. The communicative situation on the day where Elias learned about R had a polycentric potential (Blommaert, 2010: 40). One normative centre – the school embodied in the teacher – competed with other authorities in Elias' life, authorities which were situated outside of the classroom. This polycentric potential was released when Elias copied Real Madrid into the school book from a prohibited source and in this way demonstrated his social alignments. By copying exactly Real Madrid Elias positioned as a football gangsta boy, but he did it relatively discretely. In this way his challenge to the institutional centre of authority was a *secondary adjustment* (Goffman, 1961) and it never became a threat for the classroom stability. The teacher authority remained a local authority lærerautoriteten despite the hint at the existence of other authorities and norm centres than the school. At the same time he, of course, discovered that even to him R could be resource: R as in Real Madrid. R thereby went from meaningless to meaningful, R became a sociolinguistic resource.



Ill. 2: MANUTD in Elias' book

An additional point regarding Elias' case concerns how he, during the interview, repeated the contestation of official school norms. Thereby he validated the picture of him as a football gangsta boy at the same time as he used institutionally recognised resources (letters and writing) to do so. During the interview Elias demonstrated how he sometimes used football cards to copy names of clubs and players. He found cards with players from Manchester United and carefully wrote MANUTD (read out loud as 'Manchester United') next to his own name (erased from picture) on the first page of the book (ill. 2). Children's unsolicited contributions were not allowed to be scattered around in the school-books, and the first page is a particularly striking place to write. Elias smiled cunningly while jotting down

the name; this could be interpreted as a sign of him being aware of the social significance of his action. Maybe he was even aware that he exploited the naïve researcher's attention whose curious questions had partly legitimised his transgressive act. By writing MANUTD Elias showed three things: 1) to some degree he understood the researcher's agenda, 2) that he accepted to contribute to it, but 3) that he wanted to be in charge of how he should contribute and to what degree he wanted to align with school norms. He used his writing skills to negotiate the norms of writing, particularly the norms of who was to decide where to write what. Elias had once more exploited available linguistic resources and polycentric potentials in the situation to position against official school policies.

5.2 Hip hop in- and outside school

The next study of adolescents' engagement with hip hop cultural practices in- and outside school illustrates firstly that adolescents locally appropriate different cultural norms, but that there may be certain limitations to their negotiations; secondly that dominating educational norms are not only implemented by official educational institutions, but can also play a vital role in street and community initiatives and peer-cultural activities.

Among the adolescents in our study, three boys, Mahmoud, Isaam and Bashaar, were heavily engaged in a rap-band. They signalled affiliation with hip hop culture and engaged in various local and national hip hop and rap events (cf. Madsen, 2011; Stæhr, 2010). Excerpt 1, a self-recording made by Mahmoud and Bashaar, illustrates a hip hop oriented activity in a youth club where the boys usually spent a few hours after school. They are writing a climate rap. It is homework for school, but the activity takes place in a context in which they often worked on their hip hop music. This makes the activity somewhat hybrid. The two boys jointly create the lyrics, Mahmoud writes them down. The third participant Madiha, a girl, is also a regular to the youth club (see transcription key in appendix).

Excerpt 1:

1	Mahmoud:	[den stiger] ((rapper))	[it rises] ((rapping))
2	Madiha:	[Koran xxx kom nu] lav jeres	[Koran xxx come on] do your
3		lektier få jer en uddannelse (.)	homework get yourself an education
4		↓rap Koran tror I I får	(.) ↓rap Koran do you think you'll get
5		penge [for det]	money [for it]
6	Bashaar;	[HVOR MEGET] HVAD	[HOW MUCH] WHAT DO
7		HVAD TROR DU JEG FIK I	YOU THINK I GOT IN
8		FRANSK I DAG (.) <u>TI</u>	FRENCH TODAY (.) <u>TEN</u>
9		HISTORIE FIK JEG TOLV	HISTORY I GOT TWELVE
10		MATEMATIK FIK JEG <u>TI</u>	MATH I GOT <u>TEN</u>
11		LAD VÆRE MED AT SNAKKE	DON'T TALK
12		WALLAH	WALLAH
13		(2.0)	(2.0)
14	Madiha:	(ej hvor skulle jeg vide det fra)	(well how would I know)
15	Mahmoud:	[temperat <u>u</u> ren (.) den stiger]	[The temperat <u>u</u> re (.) it's rising]
16		((rapper))	((rapping))
17	Madiha:	[øh JA I FORHOLD TIL ANDRE]	[eh YES COMPARED TO OTHERS]
18		HVAD FIK DU MOUD	WHAT DID YOU GET MOUD
19	Bashaar:	Mahmoud fik sgu også ti	Mahmoud also got bloody ten
20	Mahmoud:	<u>TI</u> I FYSIK OG	TEN IN PHYSICS AND
21		KE↑MI (0.3) <u>TOLV</u> I	CEMIS↑TRY (0.3) TWELVE IN
22		BIOLO↑GI	BIOLO↑GY

Madiha interrupts Mahmoud's rap with the suggestion that the boys do homework instead of rap music in order to get an education (lines 1-6). Thereby she articulates an assumption that rap does not lead to income (as education does), and suggests that there is a contradiction between youth cultural practices such as rap music and general measures of societal success. To do so, she employs non-standard linguistic features such as a prosodic pattern characteristic of the speech register that the participants refer to as street language (Madsen, 2013) and the slang expression *koran* used as intensifier (line 2, 4). Bashaar does not argue that they are engaged in doing homework. Instead he defensively mentions the high marks he has recently received in school (lines 6-12), as if to demonstrate his academic capabilities. Similar to Madiha he deploys linguistic features associated with street language, both prosodic and lexical (e.g., the expression *wallah*, line 12). Finally, Mahmoud, too, lists up high marks in several subjects. Excerpt 1 thereby illustrates how the boys defend their school competence as a reaction to the articulation of the assumption of an opposition or at least lack of connection between rap-culture and school success, and that rap does not lead to income, as education does. It is a typical example of how these boys creatively and in many ways successfully blend dominating educational norms and positive school orientation with peer and popular cultural norms and semiotic activities.

The next excerpt is from a Danish lesson situation a year later. The entire class participated in a rap workshop which was an element in a larger initiative by, mainly, the organisation *Ghetto Gourmet*, the city council of Copenhagen and a music venue. The aim was to enhance young Copenhageners awareness of citizenship, diversity and identity and to give them the chance to express themselves on these topics in performances. 15 schools in Copenhagen, typically from less privileged areas, participated. Excerpt 2 is from a preparation phase where the teacher linked hip hop to poetry and linguistic elements of poetry in general.

Excerpt 2:

1	Inger:	det er noget med hvad for nogle	it's something about what rhymes
2		rim	one can use in rap lyrics you'll get
3		man kan bruge i en raptekst det	that sheet and then I have some
4		papir	sheets (.) or it's
5		får I og så har jeg nogle	just one two sheets and they're about
6		papirer (.) eller det er	linguistic mechanisms in <u>poetry</u> in
7		kun et to papirer og de er om	general perhaps you may also be able
8		sproglige virkemidler i <u>lyrik</u> i det	yo
9		hele taget I kan måske også bruge	use that in rap or I don't know does
10		det i rap eller det ved jeg ikke	one
11	Isaam:	bruger man sproglige vir	use linguistic me me[chanisms]
12		virke[mid]ler	((addressing Mahmoud and Isaam))
13	Inger:	((henvendt til Isaam og Mahmoud)	[mm]
14		[mm]	((confirming)
15	Mahmoud:	((bekræftende))	in rap what what could that be give
16	Isaam:	i rap hvad hvad kunne det være giv	me an example
17		mig et eksempel	[e:h (°an example°)]
18	Tahir:	[ø:h (°et eksempel°)]	[e:h xxx example]
19	Mahmoud:	[ø:h xxx eksempel]	(2.2)
20	Inger:	(2.2)	xxx xxx
21		xxx xxx	what [are you saying hhh]
22	Mahmoud:	hvad [siger du hhh]	[not you Tahir not] you Tah <u>ir</u>
23	Inger:	[ikke dig Tahir] ikke dig	I asked Isaam right

24	Mahmoud:	Tahir jeg spurgte Isaam ikke	(I can't find a proper)
25	Isaam:	(jeg kan ikke finde et ordentligt)	You can't think of something
26		I kan ikke lige finde på noget	[no]
27	Inger:	[nej]	[no] no but one uses a lot (.)
28		[nej] nej men man bruger meget (.)	that thing
29	Mahmoud:	det der	so now what is it linguistic
30	Inger:	hvad er det nu sproglige	[mechanisms is]
31		[virkemidler er]	[different]
32	Isaam:	[forskelligt]	can we just have some (.) linguistic
		kan vi lige få nogle (.) sproglige	figures we call them as well
		billeder kalder vi dem også	yes dea death knocks on the door
		ja dø døden banker på døren	

The teacher explains what they are supposed to do during class. She links what she refers to as ‘linguistic mechanisms’ in poetry to rap and she positions Mahmoud and Isaam as experts, in several rounds (lines 8-9, 11-12, 18). Both Isaam and Mahmoud react as respondents to her question to Isaam in line 18 but the hesitation markers and the relatively long silences suggest that they have some problems providing an example. Isaam’s response (lines 22-23) ‘no but one uses a lot (.) that thing’ suggests that he is not comfortable with the term ‘linguistic mechanisms’. When the teacher rephrases ‘linguistic mechanisms’ as ‘linguistic figures’ Isaam seems to realise what she is talking about and suggests ‘death knocks on the door’ as an example. This textbook example of a linguistic figure is very little related to the kind of rap that these boys practice and listen to, and the attempt from the teacher to position the boys as experts and connect the poetry and hip hop genres somehow fail. Excerpt 2 provides a

contrast to excerpt 1 as it points to limitations to the creative mixing of cultural forms. We find only standard near linguistic forms including features indexing academic models (such as the vocabulary items ‘poetry’, ‘linguistic mechanisms’ etc.) throughout the example. So carrying out rap-related tasks for school clearly seems enacted differently in the leisure setting from in the school setting when guided by the teacher.

Educational aspects of hip hop were not only relevant in school related activities. The local hip hop environment emphasised educational dimensions, and the boys’ hip hop mentors were strongly involved in several initiatives. One of these was the aforementioned organisation Ghetto Gourmet which had a so-called rap academy (workshops led by the rap mentors for youth interested in practicing rap music) as one of its activities. On the web page of the Ghetto Gourmet the rap academy is described as follows:

‘The rap academy.

An academy is a kind of educational institution. In contemporary modern society academy is typically connected to higher education, like universities.

But back in antique Greece the *Academy* was a place for the goddess Athea who among other things represented wisdom, inspiration, strength, courage, crafts and skills. It is these completely basic ideas we take back from the ivory tower and out to the street.’ (translation from Danish by LMM)

The quote illustrates how the local hip hop organisation argues for an ‘education of the streets’ in opposition to the ‘ivory tower’ of traditional educational institutions and thereby points to two contrasting cultural models. At the same time, the linguistic register employed strongly signals a traditional formal educational model, for instance, with the linguistic standard form and the reference to ancient Greece. The orientation towards a relatively traditional academic register is also likely to be reflected by the boys’ way of performing hip

hop and creating hip hop lyrics. We will illustrate this in the final two excerpts which are song lyrics by the boys' rap band. The first one precedes their involvement in the Ghetto Gourmet initiative.

Excerpt 3

Eow *yeah wannabes*

de kan ikke blive som the Mini Gs

(Exkaran) han er alt for klam

Eow I ' nogle tabere I efteraber

I kalder jer selv for en *G do you wannabe?*

I har intet værdi *do* jeg er ikke

Dansk Folkeparti

Så prøv at hør' det ' os der før'

for det ' her på Amar' vi taler vores sprog

acra para vur abow?

Eow *yeah wannabes*

You can't be like the Mini Gs

(Exkaran) he is way too gross

Eow you're loser you copy

You call yourself a *G do you wannabe?*

You have no value *do* I'm not

'Danish Folk Party'

So try to listen – we are in front

'cause it's here in Amar' we speak our

language

acra para vur abow?

The song is about dissing wannabes, claiming authority, and local street credibility, and linguistically it clearly highlights the linguistic diversity associated with street language practices. The lyrics contain slang expressions (e.g. *klam*), non-standard expressions historically associated with English (e.g. *Do you wannabe*) and with Kurdish and Arabic (*acra* 'police', *para* 'money', *vur* 'fist fight', *abow* 'an exclamation'), which the boys list as belonging to their local register on Amager (or 'Ama'r'). In this way the lyrics contain explicit metapragmatic commentary as they address local speech practices and demonstrate what the boys refer to as 'our language'. In contrast, excerpt 4 demonstrates a different

attitude. This rap is produced during the involvement with the rap academy of Ghetto

Gourmet:

Vi er her vi er mini ghetto gourmeter

Lad mig lige prøve at **argumentere**

Jeg er bare en rapper du må **acceptere**

De ting jeg **leverer** plus mine rim de
eksploderer

Jeg er bare en rapper der rapper om mit liv

Gider ikke spille smart og være **aggressiv**

Jeg er bare mig selv og ikke andet

Mine rim de er ikke for **fin** den er ikke for
vandet

Den er **ren** den er **flot** den er **venlig**

Mine raptekster er helt **uimodståelige**

Chorus:

I ved jo godt hvem vi er

Står på scenen og vi tør

Poesi og **harmoni**

Gangsterrap **lad mig være fri**

We are here we are mini ghetto gourmets

Just **let me** try to **argue**

I'm just a rapper you have to **accept**

The things I **deliver** plus my rhymes they
explode

I'm just a rapper who raps about my life

Don't want to play smart and be **aggressive**

I'm just me and nothing else

My rhymes they're not to **posh** it's not too
vague

It's **clean** it's **nice** it's **friendly**

My rap lyrics are **irresistible**

Chorus:

Well you know who we are

On the stage and we dare

Poetry and **harmony**

Gangster rap **spare me**

The lyrics are about being a competent rapper, being yourself and not an aggressive gangster.

The linguistic features are predominantly standard and we find vocabulary, such as 'argue'

and 'irresistible' associated with an academic speech style as the adolescents described it in

interviews and essays (Madsen, 2013; Møller and Jørgensen, 2011). These co-occur with

expressions not usually associated with street wise tough rap, such as ‘clean’, ‘nice’, ‘friendly’ and ‘harmony’, and in particular the chorus’ ‘Gangster rap spare me’ reflects associations with a traditional and relatively posh style in a Danish context. The examples from the lyrics and the linguistic practices involved in the presentation of Ghetto Gourmet suggest that it is not as much the academy that has been taken back to the streets as it is the street-associated cultural genre that has perhaps approached ‘the ivory tower’ – linguistically, stylistically and content-wise. The way hip hop is practiced in this local context thereby differs strikingly from the counter-hegemonic, creative and limitless linguistic practices that are documented in hip hop research and emphasised as the pedagogical and political potential of hip hop culture in critical hip hop pedagogies (see for example Alim, 2011).

6 Popular culture, education and polycentricity

Eisenhart (2001: 19) remarked that the educational anthropologist’s formulation of recommendations was feasible when the ethnographic focus remained on recurrent patterns in the lives and actions of a group. “But as soon as multiple and often competing voices must be represented within a group, the situation becomes more complicated. How should divergent voices be handled when decisions have to be made? Whose needs or desires should have most weight when resources are limited? What should one do when needs or desires are contradictory?” (Ibid.). In this paper on popular culture in relation to education we have tried to take into account the considerations of different agendas and motives within specific locales. We will, however, not commit ourselves to general recommendations which can be taken into other locales and classrooms. We have continuously underlined that in order to understand locales and situational encounters we must recognize that they cannot be regarded in isolation from the rest of the world, and specific symbolic tokens and media create links

between the local and the wider world. A classroom is not a bounded entity but an intersection of networks, understandings and communities. The use of media and the orientation to signs demonstrate the presence of diverse centres of authority, even within the classroom, and even when the teacher authority is not overturned entirely. Pedagogical and didactic measures should always take into account the local indexicalities and intricacies, and that these are only local in the sense that they may be used in particular ways in the particular setting. In other senses, they are highly trans-local and shared by many. Maybe that is the main generalization to take from our studies.

We have analysed a primary school boy's use of football cards. Football cards are clearly potential learning resources, but in the local (classroom) context they also indexed an orientation to a norm centre which contrasted with the official one governing the curricular activities. Elias participated reluctantly in school-based activities, he did not buy into the institutional norms, and he used football cards as a resource to transgress official boundaries and to show that he oriented to different centres of authority. Football cards were material manifestations of Elias' wider positioning in relation to popular sports culture and religion, and of his affiliations with family and friends. In our second case we discussed the relationship between peer-cultural and academic orientation in leisure settings and formal educational settings. The young hip hop-practitioners creatively enacted hip hop streetwise and school-positive personae, and we showed how hip hop-cultural practices in the context of the hip hop-pedagogical framework of the mentors and organisers of workshops to some extent bridged education and popular culture, but also that the hip hop practices could not really be seen as counter-hegemonic. The regular teacher brought the boys' interest and skills for rap music into the classroom, yet her efforts to manage a bridging of traditional curricular activities and hip hop had certain limitations. The hip hop-pedagogy of the grassroots

organisation had empowering aims, but still seemed to rest on traditional educational models and linguistic standard norms in contrast to such projects documented elsewhere (Alim 2011).

According to Pennycook (2007: 15) popular culture has to do with desire, mobility and multiple identifications. Both hip hop and football-cards clearly connected the young people with cultural communities beyond the classroom, beyond school and even beyond national borders. We have shown that cultural objects and movements can also be used to mediate very local social relationships, and that the local and situated meaning of semiotic resources cannot be assumed on the basis of a general knowledge. In addition, while all of the situated negotiations have some element of creativity, there may be certain limitations to the local appropriation of popular cultural resources. The centres of authority and the directions of normativity are neither obvious nor easily predictable. Initiatives aimed at including popular culture phenomena in the classrooms often argue that by combining activities and practices that students engage in outside the classroom with activities of importance inside the classroom, teachers can demonstrate recognition of students as individuals with a legitimate place in a school context, as well as offer them ways to contribute with something valuable to the school based activities (e.g., Cowan, 2005; Dyson, 1997; Fast, 2007; Gutiérrez *et al.*, 1995; Rymes, 2004). However, to the issue of popular culture our studies have added dimensions of peer culture and social dynamics. Popular culture is as much about differentiation as it is about integration and our studies redirects the attention to questions of how far and in what ways these powerful but complex cultural processes can be accommodated within national systems and philosophies of education (see also Harklau and Zuengler, 2004; Hill, 2009; Lefstein and Snell, 2004).

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8 Appendix

Transcription:

[overlap]	overlapping speech
LOUD	louder volume than surrounding utterances
xxx	unintelligible speech
(questionable)	parts uncertain about
((comment))	transcriber's comments
:	prolongation of preceding sound
↑↓	local pitch raise and fall
(.)	short pause
(0.6)	timed pause
<u>Stress</u>	stress
hhh	laughter breathe

ⁱ All research participants are anonymized.

ⁱⁱ Casillas is the goal keeper in Real Madrid.