School, Youth Culture and Territorial Stigmatization in Swedish Metropolitan Districts

Ove Sernhede
Gothenburg University, Sweden

Abstract
This article deals with processes of marginalization and patterns of segregation in contemporary Sweden that have transformed the former welfare state. During the 1990s we saw the growth of new forms of poverty in the multi-ethnic suburbs of the metropolitan districts of Sweden. The schools in these suburbs are still wrestling with many problems. If these schools wish to reclaim credibility, one way might be to understand and to learn from the topics and processes embedded in hip-hop, the culture of the young in these areas. Hip-hop has grown and engaged many young people in the multi-cultural neighbourhoods of metropolitan Sweden during the last two decades. The article focuses on how informal learning processes embedded in the cultural praxis of youth empower them to express themselves. In the article these learning processes are contrasted with the formal learning carried on in contemporary suburban schools. The hip-hop culture from these suburbs carries with it a social and political criticism and could in one sense be compared to the cultural aspirations of the labour movement in the early part of last century.

Keywords
Territorial stigmatization, marginalization, schooling, symbolic violence, hip-hop, youth culture, learning processes, citizenship, social exclusion, post-industrialism

Introduction
In the present article I enter into a discussion on schools and youth culture in suburban areas in Swedish metropolitan districts. My point of departure is that young people from schools in these poor, immigrant-dense suburban areas, can be considered as the losers in today’s school system: in the schools studied in the project referred to in this article,approximately 50 per cent of all young boys and girls leaving the ninth grade in 2008 did not have a passing grade in one or more core subjects, which means that they are not allowed to apply for higher education.
At the same time we see signs of a strong and impressive youth culture that tends to articulate many aspects of the situation of the people in many of these neighbourhoods. Young people’s locally based cultures can be viewed as communities of practice that constitute part of what the research project describes as a ‘horizontal dimension’ of life in these vulnerable suburban areas. This dimension comprises local traditions of the area, ties between neighbours, activities organized by associations, everyday ‘relations between homes’ as well as young people’s multi-ethnic communities. Given this depiction, the schools, kindergartens, after-school centres, youth recreation centres, children’s clinics and social services, etc., may be said to constitute a chiefly ‘vertical dimension’ whose role it is to mediate and maintain what could be conceptualized as the dominant cultural codes, or what could be understood as ‘Swedishness’. The schools comprise one of the institutions in which the horizontal dimension constantly meets the vertical dimension, and this encounter often causes various kinds of complications and frictions. Different schools develop different strategies for dealing with these problems. The research project referred to in the article has focused on how the intersection between the horizontal and the vertical dimensions manifests itself in different aspects of everyday practices.

Against the background of the study the researchers involved call into question the Swedish school discussion that stresses the importance of new forms of leadership and teaching methods, if schools want to improve their results. The project has led us to see the issue of schools’ under-achievement from another angle. If we want to understand why these suburban schools don’t function the way they are intended to do, attention must also be directed towards both the wider societal context and the specific local conditions. This led to our investigating learning processes in the local youth culture, and here we saw how young people had another type of engagement and a much more devoted willingness to learn and express themselves. Similar to conclusions arrived at by sociologists Ryszard Szulkin and Jan O. Jonsson, we saw from the results of our project that the segregation and stigmatization of vulnerable city neighbourhoods lead to ‘lower average achievement and a specific cost for immigrant children, resulting in both less school efficiency and greater education inequality’ (Szulkin and Jonsson, 2005: 21). With all due respect to charismatic headmasters, American leadership ideologies and magic pedagogical models, we do not think the school system can solve its imminent problems all by itself. The new pattern of inequality and gaps in the educational system is ultimately a matter of societal development and political decisions (Englund, 2004; Lindberg, 1999, 2005).

The present text is structured like the movement of a pendulum. It begins with a contextualization of vulnerable suburban areas in Sweden. This explanation of the milieu is followed by an introduction to a hip-hop collective and its activities, a collective that is connected to one of the areas that we have been doing research in. Then we enter the two schools that are the cases in focus in our research project. We observe that these schools, despite their very different pedagogical models and leadership ideals, are struggling with the problem of living up to the demands of mediating knowledge. We then return to the youth culture for an examination of the
learning processes taking place in that context. Finally, we go back to the schools to open up a discussion concerning if and how the schools could possibly cooperate with and perhaps even learn from the various aspects of the youth culture. It is our belief that the schools must develop an understanding of the social and pedagogical consequences brought about by territorial stigmatization. This is not only a matter of ‘multi-cultural knowledge’ about traditions and ways of life of one ethnic minority or another; rather it is about developing a sensitivity to the hybrid and complex patterns of cultural amalgamation that characterize the world of young people in these areas.

In the project the word ‘suburb’ is taken to mean a residential area on the outskirts of a city or large town, as in English, but the connotation of the term in Swedish is not equivalent to that of the English term. In English a suburb is any residential area near to, basically within commuting distance of, a large city, and it constitutes in one sense a separate residential community with some political autonomy, inner city neighbourhoods and usually a lower population density. In the US, in particular suburbs tend to be generally wealthier areas. This is not so in Sweden and it is certainly not a characteristic of the regions where we have done our research. In Sweden a suburb is a place that is normally associated mainly with areas on the edge of large towns and cities, with high poverty levels that segregate and separate immigrant-dense housing areas from the rest of the city. These areas are reminiscent of what the French sociologist Loic Wacquant (1999, 2008) describes as territorially stigmatized. They induce prominent patterns of marginalization and discrimination that affect both the activities of schools and the communities established by young people outside the schools.

The research project was multi-disciplinary and consisted of seven researchers from different disciplines. We worked part-time for three years, from 2007 to the end of 2009. One of the several purposes was to study how the formal learning in schools was related to learning processes taking place in the youth culture in these segregated multi-ethnic Swedish suburbs. One aspect of this—which is a focus for this text—is to investigate the collective identity work among young people active in the youth culture. Our starting point concerning this aspect was the need to understand how our informants were trying to handle their situation as marginalized youth in a segregated neighbourhood. The study was primarily carried out through participatory observation and interviews. Four of us carried out fieldwork in schools and three had various kinds of contacts with the neighbourhoods, from real-estate owners to the local youth cultures. I primarily focused on the hip-hop collective and visited it two days a week almost every week during a period of 12 months. I also did interviews with other involved parties such as parents, social workers and teachers. At a general level, participatory observation is a method in which the researcher participates in relevant areas of everyday life and reality of the ‘research subjects’. In this case, participatory observation meant observing events, listening, asking questions and being part of the interpersonal interaction in different contexts that were important to the study.
The Schools, Young People and Social Exclusion in Sweden and the New Europe

For more than two decades, a development has been underway in Sweden that segregates and separates immigrant-dense housing areas from the rest of society. For more than two decades in Sweden, immigrant-dense housing areas have been segregated and separated from the rest of society. The patterns of marginalization and discrimination that are prominent in this context also have a direct effect both on the activities of the schools and on the communities established by young people outside the schools. Many young people in these areas say that they live with a feeling of alienation and ‘non-belonging’ (Sernhede, 2002/2007) in relation to the world outside their own city neighbourhood. The Metropolitan Committee (Storstadskommittén) established by the Swedish Parliament in the 1990s to study big city neighbourhoods delivered several reports on the living conditions in these areas. The researchers who participated in the committee characterize the areas as ‘socially vulnerable’ (see, for example, SOU, 1997:61; SOU, 1997:118).

During the 1980s and 1990s, the economies of large parts of Western Europe underwent a structural transformation. At the same time, changes were made in central aspects of the ‘social contract’ that had been the foundation of the post-war social structure (Bauman, 2005; Bourdieu, 1999; Harvey, 2007; Walzer, 1983). Even the Swedish welfare state has sloughed off its skin, and a number of Swedish researchers and debaters are prepared to consider these changes as an ‘epoch shift’ (Bengtsson and Wirtén, 1996). Some of the negative aspects of this shift are clearly discernible in the multi-ethnic suburbs of big cities. Societal institutions have difficulties in counteracting stigmatization, and the schools no longer appear to be the obvious passageway into Swedish society. Schools in such areas have difficulties being an arena where young people from the surrounding area can develop self-respect, knowledge and an understanding of the time in which they live. Some research suggests that the schools instead reinforce young people’s experience of alienation, of not being part of Swedish society (Bunar, 2001, 2004; Runfors, 2003).

As a partial response to this, young people in some of these suburban areas create their own cultures and communities and develop strategies to search for the respect, understanding and knowledge that society and the schools have not been able to provide (Sernhede, 2002/2007). Yet these cultures are not only about searching for belonging, security, intimacy, meaning and identity. They also represent young people’s need for a different understanding of the surrounding world and for cognitive maps other than those provided by the schools.

In Western Europe, the development towards a post-industrial society has entailed increasing social polarization (Harvey, 2007; Merrifield and Swyngedouw, 1996; Mingione, 2000). Owing to the emergence of new forms of ‘social exclusion’, some groups have been marginalized and have ended up outside society. The forms and intensity of these processes towards clearer and clearer patterns of marginalization and exclusion vary, but the tendency is unequivocal. The Europe of today
is a continent where millions of people are obliged to live in poverty and social exclusion. When Sweden joined the European Union in 1995, there were, according to official statistics published in 1998, 52 million people living in what was described as poverty. Current statistics indicate that the number of poor is now bordering on 75 million (Lindberg, 2008). These figures outline a picture of a new Europe as a continent of fermenting social tensions under its officious surface of welfare, an integrated labour market, free movement of capital and political stability. The French educational sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that poverty has returned in the shape of ‘modernized misery’ (Bourdieu, 1999). One aspect of this modern poverty is connected with the past few decades’ undermining of the institutions of the welfare state. According to British sociologist Scott Lash (1994), an ‘institutional deficit’ has been created that is particularly evident in the same urban settings in which ‘modern misery’ is most manifest. As pointed out by Loic Wacquant (1999, 2006a, 2006b), the ‘advanced marginality’ and territorial stigmatization in Europe tend to strengthen racism and social conflicts. Already in his 1994 article, Scott Lash wrote that it is no longer a question of if, but instead of when and in which city a European version of the 1992 Los Angeles ‘Rodney King riots’ will take place.

We know today that it took place in Paris, in the immigrant-dense suburban neighbourhood of Clichy-sous-Bois to be exact. The outburst that shook France during a few autumn weeks in 2005 began when two young boys with an ‘immigrant background’ were chased by the police. Out of fear, they took refuge in an electrical transformer station where they were both burned to death by high-voltage electricity. Inhabitants of Clichy-sous-Bois arranged a protest meeting against the actions of the police. Later in the evening, young people began setting fire to cars and shops in the area. The police task force (the CRS) responded to this youth violence with even more violence. The following evening the riots spread across Paris. One week later, essentially all major French cities had been affected by the most extensive street riots to take place in France since the riots of May 1968—Nantes, Toulouse, Lyon, Lille, etc. (Dikec, 2007; Hedström, 2005; Holmes, 2006).

The social democratic welfare states of Scandinavia have long been spared from European developments that have been dividing the big city urban landscapes for decades. Today, however, several areas around Stockholm, parts of Angered in Gothenburg, Rosengård in Malmö as well as Olleryd—our fictitious name for the suburban area in which our study was conducted—can be added to Clichy-sous-Bois and other ghetto-like neighbourhoods throughout Europe. Wacquant holds that these stigmatized areas are caught up in societal and medial discourses which demonize living conditions in a way that gives rise to fear and uncertainty, both inside and outside these areas. Territorial stigmatization penetrates every corner of life in these areas—the schools, the social welfare office, associations and the relations between people as well as individuals’ self-image.

This stigmatization contributes to forming stereotypical notions of crime as well as cultural and religious antagonisms, which in turn give rise to fear and moral panic. These demonizing processes are particularly apparent to young men from these areas.
Hip-hop as a Response to Social Degradation and the Global-tribal Community

Filthy Dozen Inc. (F.D.INC.) is a hip-hop collective that has emerged partly as a means of responding to these stereotypical notions of immigrant-dense suburban areas. The core of F.D.INC. consists of some 20 young men aged 18–28 years. Most of them are just over 20 years, and their family backgrounds represent all continents of the globe. While together they form a collective, each member participates in some form of creative, artistic project, either as solo artists or in small groups of two or three. None of them can support himself through his artistry, although it may periodically provide an extra income. Surrounding these core members is a ‘buddy structure’ comprising a theatre group as well as activities such as Olleryd’s Center for Digital Story Telling.

Since its emergence on the North American east coast in the mid-1970s, hip-hop has been defined in terms of its well-known four ‘elements’—rap, break-dance, DJing and graffiti. According to hip-hop veteran Africa Bambaataa, who worked in the Bronx as early as the 1970s, there is today also a fifth element that has emerged from the need to keep the hip-hop movement’s development together (Chang, 2005). This fifth element consists of knowledge and teaching. Bambaata also took part in establishing what is now a worldwide hip-hop movement, ‘The Universal Zulu Nation’. Filthy Dozen regard themselves as part of this movement. When lecturing about their activities, they make a point of drawing a clear line of demarcation between the predominating MTV hip-hop, which they regard as superficial and commercialized, and the subversive underground hip-hop culture, of which they consider themselves to be exponents.

F.D.INC. is part of a movement that has developed from a phenomenon of the urban margin to a social force that resounds around Sweden (Söderman, 2007). This movement is, in turn, part of a global mobilization. We can see the same pattern in Brazilian favelas, American ghettos, African shanty towns, Middle Eastern kasbahs and French banlieues. Hip-hop brings young people together and creates a cultural identity that also has scope for knowledge and teaching. This variety of hip-hop provides starting points for ‘analyses’ of ‘messages’ that in many ways problematize the social reality in which young people with immigrant backgrounds, residing in stigmatized housing areas, are forced to live (Chang, 2005; Holmes, 2006).

Hip-hop can be regarded as a response to processes of social degradation (Chang, 2005; Rose, 1994; Toop, 2000). It emerged from various street cultures in the late 1960s and before long, in the second half of the 1970s, it had developed into a consistent subculture in New York’s de-industrialized and marginalized suburban areas. Hip-hop not only constitute symbolic or ritualized resistance against the prevailing order, as implied by a classical definition of a subculture (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979), but in its original form, it also contains a programmatic, political dimension that actively relates to the development of its own neighbourhood. Hip-hop’s focus on local belonging and its commitment to the importance of place are directly connected to its attempts to deal with the social, economic and cultural devaluation of its own city neighbourhood (Chang, 2006; Toop, 2000).
The hip-hop culture also contains a strategy for winning self-respect and solving conflicts. The Zulu Nation emphasizes that the knowledge required by young ghetto inhabitants must also be sought outside the institutional context of the schools. The schools teach ‘His-story’, that is, the white man’s history. They take no interest in the discrimination that has relegated blacks and third-world minorities to the dark side of society. Based on its ‘conscious-raising practices’, the hip-hop movement replaces brutal and violent gang rivalry with competitions or ‘battles’ to determine which neighbourhood has the best rappers or break-dancers.

The F.D.INC. has a vision of recreating these aspects of the roots of the hip-hop culture, which is why, in addition to their more artistic activities, they devote themselves to lecturing in schools, youth recreation centres, libraries and community centres. The starting points for these lectures and seminars are F.D.INC.’s ambitions to elevate the suburban areas and combat the poisonous media stress on their bad reputation. Many young people in suburban areas feel the need to upgrade both the physical environment and the local spirit of community. This is one reason why primarily young men have developed a romantic attitude towards the concrete architecture of the Million Dwelling Program. To an outsider, this idealization seems odd and contradictory, but it is part of a feeling of community and also based on the need to have a ‘liberated sphere’—a place where you don’t constantly have to face the Sweden that regards you as a second-class citizen.

The young men and women whom I have interviewed describe the relation between Olleryd and the rest of the city as neo-colonial. Segregation is a continuation of colonialism. These immigrant-dense suburban areas are modern reservations in which the third world makes itself felt in the middle of the first world (cf. SOU, 2005: 69). Ali G, 19 years old and one of the rappers, said to me:

> Olleryd is really a reservation. Rinkeby is too, in Stockholm. When I’m in Olleryd everything feels okay. Everybody badmouths Olleryd, but nobody’s been there. That’s why people don’t want to be anywhere else, ’cause then things aren’t okay. Now I’m in Olleryd, it’s another world. I know everybody and everybody’s just like me. When I leave Olleryd I come to Sweden, and when I’m in Sweden I feel discriminated. It doesn’t feel like Sweden is my country and I don’t know if it never will. Then maybe you wonder ’why the hell are you here then’. There are a lot of problems. I was born here, ya know, and I don’t know what I’m going to do with my life really. There just shouldn’t be any barriers.

Even though Ali G sounds a bit frustrated, F.D.INC. constitutes a new generation of hip-hoppers who have given up their predecessors’ strict city neighbourhood nationalism. Now it’s a matter of breaking the isolation of the suburban areas, and of coming out and meeting all parts of the city, hence their ambition to ‘spread the message’ at youth recreation centres, to participate in debates and to arrange lectures and workshops in libraries, etc. The confrontational image has been replaced by a wish for dialogue, a desire to be treated as equals and viewed as partners in discussions rather than as ‘aliens’. F.D.INC. aims to make their way into society through their outgoing artistry and message-making. Here is how Emanuel, 26 years old and member of the collective, stated his view:
The schools and the ordinary ways of becoming members of society, or whatever that’s called, seemed to be closed to us. But when we make music and perform, we get in through the side or by the back door, so you see, we find our own ways into society. If you look at most of us who live out here in the landscape of concrete, the concrete jungle so to speak, we manage to get into society mainly through skills that we develop in other areas than the school system—it’s through music, dance, football, boxing, basketball—yeah, what can I say, we have another view of education and life…

The Schools and Suburban Areas—from Learning to Labour to Learning for a Life in the Margins

The schools in these areas have to deal with a very complex situation. One serious critique towards the schools has to do with their lack of capacity to help young people in these areas to find a way into the mainstream of society. In his classical study of the schools in industrial society, Learning to Labor, English cultural theorist Paul Willis found that working class youth’s counterculture at school was in reality part of the reproduction processes that preserved the established order. This culture of resistance actually served to lock these young people into a subordinate social position. The Lads’ (as they were called) sabotage of lessons as well as their ‘partial penetration’ of the school culture—which they despised and regarded themselves as superior to—in reality prepared them for shouldering the hardships of physical labour. They left school as soon as possible and went straight into production work, usually getting jobs through their fathers’ or other relatives’ contacts.

In today’s post-industrial society, the working class no longer appears as a collective with a common agenda. Also, the role of the schools is no longer a matter of ‘learning to labor’, that is, of providing the manufacturing industry with manpower. As a consequence of the neo-liberal shift in school policies, the schools have become adjusted to the market and teaching has become increasingly individualized. The new economy makes different demands; now it is a matter of competitive thinking, entrepreneurship and individual careers. The unified Swedish nine-year compulsory school emphasized cooperation and responsibility for a collective social structure. But social stratification was reproduced by the educational system even in the Swedish welfare state. Clearly, also during this period, the schools were charged with meeting industry’s need for both manual labour and engineering—the work of the body and of the mind—despite all the ideology concerning democratic education that was produced in school curricula and elsewhere (Englund, 1986). In the same way, the esteemed words of the contemporary school system—individualization and freedom of choice—are associated with a post-industrial economic reality in which the large-scale manufacturing industry has had its day and manual industrial work is on the retreat. The new economy is not labour-intensive, but knowledge-intensive; it stresses techniques of knowledge generation, information processing and symbolic communication. Creativity and aggressive entrepreneurship are also highly valued in this context.
As discussed earlier, the structural changes of the post-industrial economy and contemporary social stratification processes have transformed the urban environment. Today, it is chiefly people from segregated and stigmatized neighbourhoods who do the work that the middle class doesn’t want to do—for example, various service jobs in pizzerias and convenience stores that are open in the evening, waiting tables in cafés, washing dishes in restaurants, driving cabs, cleaning hamburger chains at night and doing domestic work in the private homes and gardens of the well-to-do. This kind of work is not characterized by the collective spirit and trade-union organization typical of the Lads’ parents’ relation to wage labour. Today, young people living in marginalized suburban areas reproduce their subordination, much like the Lads did. However, they do not develop any counterculture in their schools that is comparable to that studied by Willis in Great Britain at the beginning of the 1970s.

Our study shows that resistance exists among young people, in and outside the schools, but this resistance isn’t connected to a collective identity such as that adopted in a more organized form by their parents. Young people from modern suburban areas don’t develop a form of resistance that has roots in a homogeneous parental culture, and they hardly feel superior in relation to the schools and Swedish society. The dominating feeling is rather one of being a second-class citizen. However, the resulting frustration seldom finds expression in organizations or political manifestations. It does, however, create counter-reactions, such as scuffles with the police or acts of arson against schools and other establishments. The fascination with gangster culture that is widespread in some areas as well as various forms of organized criminal activities must also be understood in relation to these circumstances. Marginalized suburban areas have become a problem for the police. But the fundamental fault in the suburbs—segregation, new patterns of poverty, stigmatization, etc.—is not the object of effective and lasting interventions. On the contrary, social and economic gaps are increasing, as is segregation. In the Million Dwelling Program areas of the big cities, police resources for surveillance, control and intervention have been strengthened during the past decade, while social measures aimed at prevention have been cut down (Blomqvist and Rothstein, 2005; SOU, 2000:39; SOU, 2006:73).

The most stringent and paramount perspective on this development can be found in Loic Wacquant’s study *Punishing the Poor* (Wacquant, 2009). In this book Wacquant gives an extraordinary exposé over how the structural changes of the economy intervene in the symbolic level and how the transformation from Fordist ‘workfare’ to neo-liberal ‘prison-fare’ is also a result of the struggle within the state. The caring ‘left hand’ has been outmanoeuvred by the ‘right hand’ (Bourdieu, 1994) and the more authoritarian aspects of the ‘bureaucratic field’, governed by a philosophy of moral behaviourism. Wacquant talks about a penalization of poverty that aims to control the dysfunctions and social insecurity in the divided urban landscape. He describes a new urban reality created by economic deregulation. The precarious and nomadic employment conditions for the post-industrial proletariat gives few opportunities for collective social movements or any form of organized resistance.
Curtailed Citizenship

Our material shows that most pupils in the secondary schools we studied do go to school and feel happy there in many respects. Most have a positive attitude towards their teachers, who, they think, are responsive to their needs. The school has an obvious social function; it’s a place where you see your friends and where you get a hot meal in the school lunchroom. You also get the latest updates on what happened last weekend, or who will be having a party next Saturday, etc. Even if the pupils’ social life seems to function at school, other aspects of school life clearly do not. Grades as well as statistics on the results of national standardized tests suggest that pupils in the schools we studied are well below the national average. Their scholastic motivation is not always very high. Moreover, grades aren’t so interesting to a pupil who lacks ambition or doesn’t see the opportunities associated with continued studies.

The pupils we interviewed are keenly aware of the situation on the labour market for ‘an immigrant kid from a bad neighborhood’. A multi-cultural pedagogic counselor at one of our schools stated that it’s difficult to get pupils motivated about achievements in school:

The thing is that they live in an environment with a very bad reputation, and they may have parents who are highly educated in their native country. But here their parents are unemployed or work in a pizza parlor or as cleaners. The rumor that’s spread among them is that even if you’re highly educated, if you’re an immigrant, you will never get the job you’re trained for /…/. No matter what we do here at school, we get nowhere. (Lunneblad, unpublished working material for project no. 2005–3440)

Many of the pupils in our study seem to have achieved a ‘partial penetration’ (Willis, 1983) of how the educational system and the labour market disfavour ‘non-ethnic’ Swedes and people who live in marginalized neighbourhoods. As one of our young interviewees put it: ‘If two people apply for a job and if one of them is an immigrant, the job goes to the one with the Swedish name’ (ibid.). But even this insight doesn’t lead to resistance or obstruction in relation to the schools. This is partly because the schools and the educational system are of no consequence to many pupils’ plans for the future. They see their future livelihood in relation to opportunities provided by family members, relatives or other contacts. ‘Maybe working in my uncle’s pizzeria, driving a cab, helping out in my brother’s bicycle repair shop or just drifting around’—these are some of the answers we received when we asked how the young people view their future working life.

The schools are no longer charged with teaching young people how to earn a living, either in the inner city or in suburban areas. However, whereas middle-class children in inner city schools get an education that prepares them to meet our post-industrial society’s demands for entrepreneurship, creativity and individual choices, it seems as if schools in the immigrant-dense suburbs teach children to accept marginalization and subordination. If we consider grades at graduation and what young people from these areas do after leaving school, a pattern emerges. The leadership ideologies and pedagogical models that prevail at the schools we have
studied are intended to break this pattern. However, despite all these intentions, goals, teaching methods and visions, the schools are contaminated by the predominating discourse on marginalized suburban areas.

In her report on grade trends in ‘socially privileged’ and ‘underprivileged’ areas in the three metropolitan districts between 1998 and 2004, Anne-Marie Lindgren (2005) writes that ‘many of the schools in underprivileged areas are recognized as good’, but nevertheless, the proportion of children who do not achieve established goals is increasing. Lindgren also reviews the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s recurrent international comparative study, PISA. This study unequivocally shows an increasing gap between over-achieving and under-achieving pupils in the Swedish schools and that this gap has a ‘very clear socio-economic background’. Knowledge and education have always been matters of class. But developments during the past two decades have reversed the tendency towards leveling out the playing field that was in evidence during the decades after implementation of the unified educational system (the ‘enhetsskola’ or compulsory schooling and ‘grundskola’, the recent name given to such schools).

Paul Willis (2004) has commented on the school system in post-industrial society. He is of the opinion that

[It] is harder than ever to see schooling, in an earlier modernist liberal way, as a unified force for the emancipation for the whole working class. Are schools to train working class students to compete with each other ever more vociferously for the ever diminishing supply for ‘proper jobs’? Are they to prepare them, or some of them (which ones?) for coping with a hostile state in a life without work? Are they to prepare them for an ever-extending contractual submission to an ever-extending succession of training schemes? Prepare the rest for jail? (Willis, 2004: 191)

Willis’ text is drastic and provocative, but also relevant to the situation in Sweden. In accord with researchers such as Magnus Dahlstedt and Carl Ulrik Schierup (2007), we note that marginalized groups who don’t enter the labour or housing market also don’t have genuine citizenship. To use migration researcher Malcolm Cross’s terminology, they are reduced to ‘curtailed citizenship’ (Cross, 1998). In this situation, the educational system should work to give these groups an opportunity to win genuine citizenship (Marshall, 1950; Marshall and Bottomore, 1992). But the school system that was once characterized by the ‘public good’ has changed and now stresses the ‘private good’ (Englund, 2004). The school system has been influenced by changes in the neo-liberal social climate that emerged with increasing clarity during the 1990s. During the past 10 years, the social stratification of schools in Sweden’s largest cities has become more apparent (Skolverket, 2009; SOU, 2000:39). The general pattern is that the municipal schools in the Million Dwelling Program areas with multi-dimensional poverty are not only losing status, they are also losing the very pupils they need to keep. Despite all the consultants and frenetic pedagogues, statistics show that suburban areas with multi-dimensional poverty are struggling with difficulties: in 2007, for example, 45 per cent of all ninth graders in the schools we studied did not get a complete set of passing grades at graduation.
These young people live in areas in which 35 per cent of those between 20 and 25 years lack both education and work (The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs [Ungdomsstyrelsen], 2008); and they are aware of this fact. Why, then, don’t they use the school system to change their situation?

**The Schools and Symbolic Violence**

Schools in the territorially stigmatized urban margin, too, want to convince their pupils that they can be successful. ‘Even if you’re an immigrant from a poor neighborhood you can make a career for yourself if you just behave and do your homework’—this is what teachers at the schools we have been observing claim. And indeed, there are examples of individual pupils who have managed to leave their neighbourhood, to study and make a career for themselves. However, if we look at these suburban schools using a structural analysis, it becomes clear that, in practice, they don’t provide the same opportunities as other schools do. This is not because the teachers aren’t doing their jobs. On the contrary, it’s striking how many teachers devote a tremendous amount of time and commitment to their work. In the schools we observed, inadequate school achievement does not reflect the teachers’ shortcomings, but is instead a consequence of social processes outside the schools. Most young people realize that their immigrant background means a life as second-class citizens; nevertheless, they allow themselves to adapt to the prevailing order and even declare that they like their schools! To be sure, their commitment to studies and efforts to make higher grades aren’t always great. One explanation is that the school system is not primarily seen as an institution for accumulating basic knowledge capital that can later be advanced through continued education.

There are examples of schools in which the conflict between the vertical and horizontal dimensions tears everyday life at school apart. This is not true in the cases we have studied. ‘Through my observations, I have discerned an invisible contract between teachers and pupils. The pupils don’t question the teacher’s position openly in the classroom’ (Schwartz, unpublished working material for project no. 2005–3440). In return, pupils are treated fairly by their teachers. One interpretation of this is that the young people are acting in a well-directed performance in which everyone knows his/her role. In this way, most pupils satisfy not only their teachers’ need for appreciation, but also their own short-term interest in respect, security and contentment. This state of things is an aspect of what Pierre Bourdieu considers to be the school system’s ‘symbolic violence’. Bourdieu and his colleague Jean-Claude Passeron discuss the social conditions that must exist for a predetermined life story to appear to be freely chosen or to be the result of individual merits. From their point of view it is necessary and sufficient that the schools are able to convince individuals that they have chosen or conquered the career paths that social necessity has already allotted to them in advance (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2008).

These two scholars discusses symbolic violence as an aspect of how ‘power’ is maintained by ‘hiding the power relations that constitute the basis of its force’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2008: 50). In the suburban schools studied here, the logic of symbolic violence is partly different in form. Young people in these marginalized
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neighbourhoods don’t believe they have the same opportunities in Swedish society as ethnic Swedes from other schools do. They know that they are discriminated on the labour market as well as on the housing market, and that they are treated differently by the police, etc. At an early stage, these young people develop—even through the schools—a perception of themselves as subordinate and as not belonging to the Swedish culture. The ambition to put ‘immigrant children’ on an equal footing through equalization in relation to the ‘Swedish’, as ethnologist Ann Runfors expressed it (Runfors, 2003: 239), causes them to ‘appear to be defective’—they instead see themselves as a problematic category belonging to The Alien-Nation (Sernhede, 2002/2007).

What we are dealing with here is almost a form of symbolic violence similar to what post-colonial theorists describe as ‘othering’ or ‘otherization’. A group that is not included in the prevailing social and cultural order is labeled and pictured as different, strange, foreign, unworthy; it is seen as ‘the other’, some one that is not like us. This otherization keeps these people in a marginalized, excluded and inferior position. Another aspect of this is what use to be called self-otherization. This relates to the processes where ‘the other’ internalizes and identifies with, and thereby legitimatize, the picture of ‘the other’ that the dominant culture acclaim (Fanon, 1997; Hall, 1992; SOU, 2005:41). The spatial separation entailed in ethnic housing segregation has also meant mental separation; this separation is reinforced by discourses and practices that create and recreate notions of ‘the others’ as different, marginalized, powerless and thus lacking in status—at the bottom of the prevailing social hierarchies (Alinia, 2006; Kamali, 2006). The fact that schools in immigrant-dense areas mediate the dominant culture’s justification of social hierarchies and cultural preferences by claiming that everyone has equal opportunities is one aspect of their appearance as theatre, a guise. Most of the pupils know that this isn’t the case; everyone does not have equal opportunities. But what can be done about it? Not much. The young people choose instead to ‘make the best of the situation’. School attendance is compulsory; school is a necessity. The presence of most of the pupils at school can be regarded as an expression of ‘ritualized adjustment’ (Schwartz, unpublished working material for project 2005:3440). On the basis of our material, it can be argued that pupils ‘see through’ the prevailing order, that they don’t always share ‘the goals of the schools, but neither have they replaced those goals with a conscious alternative’ (ibid.). This means that pupils conform to the consensus around the school day maintained through the ‘invisible contract’, which can easily ‘be decoded by everybody involved’ (ibid.). In the closing remarks of her dissertation, Ann Runfors writes that the schools are an example of ‘how social degradation “works” in a well-meaning society and in a well-meaning field of activity such as education’ (Runfors, 2003: 240).

Revealing symbolic violence is a matter of exposing the practice that makes the structures of the predominant society appear to be natural and a given to the bulk of pupils. What would happen if the schools in these neighbourhoods went out and told the truth? Everybody doesn’t have the same opportunities; everybody doesn’t have the same chances on the labour market; everybody isn’t equal before the law, etc. What would happen if the schools worked with trying to understand what underlies
segregation, income gaps, discrimination, etc.? It is our opinion that the school system would gain the credibility and significance that it lacks today. These are precisely the questions raised by young people in the hip-hop collective—questions that were not answered at school and that concern their life and their circumstances. In the anthology *Learning to Labor in New Times*, Willis emphasizes one aspect that is closely connected to this symbolic violence and to the question of how it can be problematized and challenged:

School is not just a pedagogic instrument but a field of cultural production, I argue strongly that along with the maximum attempts to keep students on individualized tracks should run curricular and extracurricular provision for exploring collective logics, programs that deal with social justice, not least exposing schooling’s role in the reproduction of deepening class divisions in capitalist societies. (Willis, 2004: 193)

According to Willis, it is necessary at present to take the school curriculum itself as the starting point—to stress values of solidarity and collectivity—so that these values can become challenging alternatives to an increasingly individualistic and discriminating school system, a system that doesn’t see its own role in the patterns of social reproduction. Criticism of the prevailing conditions as well as the need for alternative strategies must be emphasized and developed by teachers in collaboration with pupils and their parents. It is through such joint efforts for and in the schools that the mechanisms of symbolic violence can be unmasked. To make this possible, the schools must open themselves to the surrounding world and, in that way, be prepared to enter into a dialogue with and learn from their encounter with that world. It is therefore interesting to return to the hip-hop collective once again and more closely examine the strategies and learning that occur in that context.

**What do you Learn in a Hip-hop Collective?**

We can view the F.D.INC. group as a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), actively reflecting on the surrounding world as well as on the group’s representation of itself. The commitment and intensity that are missing in the schools are to be found here. The patterns of behaviour at work in the group’s relation to the surrounding world, as well as those directed towards work within the group, play a major role in constituting its identity. These strategically oriented ambitions become visible in how the group represents itself (on the stage, on posters, through their style of dressing, tattoos, etc.), and in the communication patterns and self-understanding that develop within the group. But there are also less reflective aspects of the group’s activities which, accordingly, may be considered less conscious sides of this community of practice. If we look at the group from this perspective, we can see how F.D.INC., as a community of practice, is engaged in a constant process of conscious and strategic as well as non-reflective learning. Humans are social and cultural beings, who are engaged in a lifelong learning process in relation to all aspects of their everyday life. Learning processes are quite simply a fundamental aspect of
human life; only through these processes can we be creatures of culture. We are all interwoven in and compelled to relate to the differentiation of the world as it is manifested in our way of speaking about the existence of an outer, objective world, an inter-subjective social and cultural world, and an inner, mental world.\footnote{2}

F.D.INC. consists of a number of individuals who have formed a collective because group solidarity provides better opportunities for dealing with today’s living conditions. No individual in our culture can escape the ‘individualization’ that is so pervasive in our time and so controversial in modernity theory (Giddens, 2002; Ziehe, 2006). The identity-supporting role of traditional collective structures is currently tending to erode. For example, earlier identity markers based on class and culture gave security and support to the individual; at the same time, the identification processes connected to this security restricted the individual’s subjectivity and possibility to shape him/herself. In the working-class districts of Swedish big cities and industrial communities in the 1940s, young people’s career choices were strictly limited, as shown by Torsten Husén in his major, pioneering study of Swedish youth in the period before the Second World War (Husén, 1944). Class affiliation determined entirely whether the young person would go out to work or continue to higher education. ‘The ties between an individual’s choice of occupation and social level are highly evident the lower the social position, the more modest from the outset the choice of occupation for the children’ (Husén, 1944: 326–27). Just as for Willis’ Lads, identity and profession were strongly associated with the parents’ position in the chain of production.

Today’s affiliations and collective identities are intertwined in another way in our current highly elaborated ‘reflexivity’ (Giddens, 2002; Ziehe, 2006). This doesn’t mean that social background or class have had their day. But people no longer ‘organically grow’ into their identities, at least not like they did fifty or hundred years ago. Like the old working-class quarters, today’s vulnerable suburban areas are marked by social subordination. But as a consequence of individualization and ethnic, cultural and religious heterogeneity, contemporary suburban areas lack the class-based feeling of solidarity that typically characterized the former working-class quarters. However, other community-creating structures have emerged based on various kinds of experiences. One dimension of great importance in today’s marginalized neighbourhoods is people’s experience of being a ‘non-ethnic Swede’. Against this background, seeds of new communities are being shaped that are fed by othering processes and the alienation caused by territorial stigmatization. The experience of being regarded as a second-class citizen because you live in a certain ‘vulnerable’ neighbourhood, have the ‘wrong’ skin colour, speak Swedish with the ‘wrong’ accent, or have the ‘wrong’ last name, etc., leads to the emergence of various counter-strategies. For the young hip-hoppers I have interviewed, the collective structure they are part of serves a compensatory, security-creating and identity-bearing purpose: the collective provides a response to these kinds of othering experiences.

In an interview with Toto, one of the youngest rappers, about the relations between what he thinks he learns in the hip-hop collective compared to school:
I’m not that good in school … but as Enrico used to say our group is also a kind of school. The older rappers like Enrico teach us new comers about the history of hip-hop, the slave ships, all the wars against the Indians in Latin America and so forth. But we don’t have like a school house, a bell that rings when we should go in … hehehe … or books and things like that. But when we gather to do rhymes we can look at a movie about South Africa or Nelson Mandela or James Brown or Bob Marley, yeah I don’t know—could be a TV program about police brutality or whatever … you know sometimes when we have to be inspired to write lyrics we do that, not every time but Emanuel he has this I-pod with a lot of films and stuff and then he plugs in to a TV so then we all look and discuss, it’s good I learn more here than in school, it’s much more fun and it’s things I need to know, you know, things that matters for us in Filthy Crowd, the way we live in our community you know.

Instead of just picking up knowledge that has already been produced by others (for example, by teachers or in textbooks and curricula), a group such as F.D.INC. carries out a more open search for knowledge in their specific, contemporary, post-colonial living conditions in the New Sweden. Through mutual support, the group can create understanding and acquire knowledge. Moreover, tools are created in the collective for navigating and developing strategies that will enable it to survive on its own terms. The group doesn’t only provide security, community and opportunities to express feelings; it is also an arena for different ways of responding to and commenting on its social conditions, such as exclusion from genuine citizenship, ‘othering’ and poverty. Based on its creative capabilities, F.D.INC. can also connect to currents that can bring them closer to the centre of the city. In such a way, they, as a collective, can identify career paths by exploiting the new post-industrial economy’s interest in cultural manifestations of the exoticized other’s cultural expressions and in street-wise, innovative, ghetto-infused creativity.

A hip-hop collective and a school are obviously two different arenas for learning. Systematizing the learning that takes place in a group such as F.D.INC., we can observe, along one dimension, that it is oriented towards the objective, outer world the young people are part of.8 A number of capacities can be seen to emerge in response to the need to handle the external social reality surrounding the group. Immediately apparent is the emergence of several practical skills, administrative capabilities and cognitive knowledge.

Along another dimension, learning is oriented towards a world that is basically ‘inter-subjective’. This concerns everything that exists between people, that is, language, norms, conventions, rituals—quite simply the social and meaning-bearing fabric that we normally call culture. In the subcultural context of F.D.INC., it is of great importance to learn how to use and develop this world of symbols, styles and other forms of linguistic, meaning-bearing and communicative practices that constitutes an important aspect of life of a hip-hop group and its relation to the outside world. Another aspect of this inter-subjective dimension of learning in a hip-hop collective concerns normative capabilities. To become real and functional, norms and values must be accepted by all individuals in a group, and that could be a hard learning process.
A third significant dimension concerns processes oriented towards every individual's essentially unique and subjective inner world of learning. By interacting with others in the group, the members will also get to know and understand themselves. Through various forms of reflective processes, which are built into their continuous responses to one another's ways of being, individuals develop a reflexive self-knowledge and understanding of their own identities, resources and limitations. Another kind of learning, important to aesthetic practice, concerns expressivity. Music and theatre provide both listeners and musicians with tools for reaching and expressing deep inner needs and feelings. This is of great importance, especially in adolescence. Toto said:

When you feel bad it can be hard to talk about it, it's not always so easy to know why you're down, then it can feel real good to write some lyrics, start to sing or just do some free styling to a fat beat, it feels like it's coming out, you feel relief somehow.

Obviously these types of learning are always intertwined with each other in social practice; however, the present construct helps us discern some important mechanisms underlying the young people's own cultural activities. The schools don't always leave much room for experiments with linguistic communication in a broad sense, particularly in areas of importance to the young.

**Hip-hop as General Education—a Challenge for the Schools**

A discussion has recently arisen about the relationship between hip-hop culture and the tradition of adult education. In his doctoral dissertation, music pedagogue Johan Söderman emphasizes a number of important observations from the hip-hop scene in Malmö and New York. To him hip-hop can by no means be placed in a given popular music genre or marked with an unequivocal label. Just as F.D.I.N.C. refers to hip-hop as being both underground and mainstream, Söderman also believes that the hip-hop sphere is characterized by this tension. He holds that there are important and interesting aspects of today's hip-hop with few opportunities to emerge. If we enter the environments in which hip-hop is practiced, we can discern the contours of a suburban culture that isn’t only striving after recognition; the culture also embraces the desire to analyze and develop strategies for social change. Hip-hop’s aesthetic, almost programmatic starting point in the encounter between cultures plays an important role in this context. On the basis of his own discipline, Söderman claims that, on the one hand, hip-hop can be seen as a strategy for teaching musical craftsmanship; on the other, it also provides an instrument for staging liberating pedagogical processes and, moreover, it can serve as a tool for political activism (Söderman, 2007: 115).

Söderman’s empirical material has been collected in Malmö as well as in the US. The setting in which I have done my fieldwork also has the potential to promote liberating pedagogical processes. Söderman describes the hip-hop milieu he has
studied as marked by the intention to ‘set people free from marginalization and alienation’; he believes that hip-hop ‘may become a means of communication for reaching people who are difficult to reach by traditional means; for example, people who do not read the daily newspapers. By seizing power over the cultural means of production, some of the rappers, too, display strategies similar to those employed by the Labor Movement when they started their cooperative associations at the beginning of the 20th century’ (Söderman, 2007: 116).

Thinking of hip-hop and F.D.INC. as part of a project for adult education is not foreign to some of the members of the collective. They have attended courses and training days arranged by educational associations and have thus gained insights into the historical context in which the classic adult education movement emerged. Enrico, one old member, answered my question about their relation to adult education:

What we’re doing is a kind of adult education for our time. We try to get people we meet to develop personally, so they can grow as people and begin to think and develop intellectually, too. Of course, we can’t give them any credits or grades or anything, but we can give hope and visions, we can give people a goal, something to work toward. What we do is give belonging, people need belonging, you know, you can’t just be an immigrant kid from this place, then you’re a nobody, that’s what the criminal gangs build on, too, you gotta be something and we give opportunities for another kind of belonging.

Where, then, does the youth culture practiced by these hip-hoppers lead us? It is obvious that it involves compensatory learning, that is, a kind of learning and development of life strategies that deal with areas the schools aren’t familiar with and therefore haven’t been able to provide for. Within the framework of the collective, capacities are developed that compensate for a marginalized and stigmatized existence.

Cultural commodity forms and their uses in context are sites of intense interest for most young people and offer, both the texts and their appropriation, fields for imaginative pedagogic practices to connect up their relevance with lived penetrations and with wider critical perspectives and analyses. Further, informal education sites can offer access to cultural commodities on terms controllable by young people, maintaining a critical difference from private sites of consumption in their recognition of informal cultural production and in their attempts to connect it with more formal expression: speaking, writing, singing, recording, and filming. (Willis, 2004: 194)

Only seeing these provocative suburban youth cultures as threatening is destructive. In reality, these groups have insights that are valuable to society as a whole, because through their cultural expressions they comment on and portray social problems and conflicts. If municipal schools in marginalized suburban areas want to develop opportunities for dealing with their situation, they must open up to the world of their pupils. In youth culture, the inquiry and learning taking place are governed by the needs and realities of young people. In the collective’s artistic productions—in rap texts, plays, films etc.—questions are raised that have not been answered in
the schools. Why are our neighbourhoods stigmatized? How should the increasing class divisions be understood? Does society have to consist of winners and losers? Why did we, of all people, end up in these poor areas? Young people’s search for answers to these questions is intertwined in their aesthetic practices, which is what makes it so important to respect their cultural expressions.

Notes

1. The empirical basis of this article comes from a project financed by the Swedish Research Council: Schools and Their Surroundings: An Interdisciplinary Project on Young People’s Learning and on the Encounter between Local Culture and the Schools in Multicultural Suburban Areas (VR Reg. no. 2005–3440). The project, as well as this article, proceeds from an ethnographic investigation of schools and their communities. The schools in question come from two multi-ethnic suburbs on the outskirts of one of Sweden’s larger municipalities.

2. There is at present a great variety of literature on the emergence and development of the hip-hop culture. For a more complete presentation of the four elements, see Chang (2006) and Toop (2000).

3. The term Million Dwelling Program is used to describe the suburban mass housing built in Sweden during the period 1965–74. These housing projects are now the home of large groups of immigrants and sites of contemporary poverty in the metropolitan areas of Sweden.

4. During recent years, however, national initiatives such as Föortstäget (‘The Suburban Train’) and Förorternas Riksdag (‘The Suburban Parliament’) have given some indication of the dormant political power of the urban periphery. In the late summer and autumn of 2009 there were riots in many suburban areas in the whole of Sweden: Stockholm, Malmö, Uppsala, Gothenburg, Södertälje, etc. We have seen Molotov cocktails and stones thrown at the police, the burning of cars and schools, attacks on buses and tramps, etc. In the media these riots have been interpreted as outbursts of frustration, primarily by male, suburban youth. Although these events could not be seen as organized, they are not a part of any traditional form of social movement, but they could maybe be understood, in the same way that Mustafa Dikec (2007) argues in his study of the French revolts in the autumn of 2005—as an unarticulated justice movement. Interviews on TV and in newspapers indicate this. A group of young men in Backa, Gothenburg, collectively wrote down a kind of message from the youth in this area, demanding a stop of police harassments, for jobs to the suburb, etc. Some young men I discussed these events with saw them as ‘our kind of intifada’.

5. In the schools we’ve studied, the normal order of things was peaceful, but the conflict between the horizontal and vertical dimensions was nevertheless present. At the start of the project, one of our schools became the target of a ‘rocket attack from Hizbollah’, as the headmaster described it. The headmaster demanded surveillance cameras and ‘a concrete wall with barbed wire around the school’. In another school, the teachers’ union tried to have the school closed for security reasons, because some of the teaching staff felt threatened by certain pupils. Struggles concerning who was to rule the hallways, the pupils or the teachers, were commonplace (Gustafsson, 2008: unpublished materials for project 2005-3440).

6. The so-called Storstadssatsningen (The Metropolitan Initiative) was decided on by the Swedish Parliament in 1998. It included an action package of 2.3 billion SEK intended
for 24 of the country’s most vulnerable areas in the three biggest metropolitan districts between 2000 and 2004. This initiative did not manage to break the segregation (see SOU, 2005: 29).

7. This differentiation is based on Habermas’ (1981/1984) theories of rationalization of modern man’s lifeworld and of the prerequisites of communicative action.

8. The structuring of learning processes in the group presented here comes from an earlier study of three rock bands by Sernhede in collaboration with Johan Fornäs and Ulf Lindberg: In Garageland. Modernity, Rock and Youth.

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Ove Sernhede is professor at Gothenburg University, mainly working at the Centre for Cultural Studies. Sernhede has been involved in research on different aspects of youth subcultures, music, urban studies, psychoanalysis and social pedagogy. His most recent research is related to youth culture and patterns of segregation and social exclusion in the divided metropolitan cities of contemporary Sweden, which is also the theme for the book 


Lifestyle, Desire and Politics (Göteborg: Daidalos 2002) together with Thomas Johansson. Youth and the Plural City: Social Life and Modes of Belonging (Göteborg: Daidalos 2005) was the result of collaboration with Mette Andersson and Yngve Lithman at the University of Bergen. [email: ove.sernhede@kultur.gu.se]