Awad Ibrahim

Operating Under Erasure:
Hip-Hop and the Pedagogy of Affect

The black pathfinder is offset by the crazy gold trim. Moving down 52nd Street, cruise style. There is a super phat sound emanating from the other side of glory. Neither Milton's paradise regained or lost. It's just paradise in and of itself.

<div align="right">Spady (1993, p. 96)</div>

Anything you wanted to know about the [L.A.] riots was in the records before the riots… I've given so many warnings on what's gonna happen if we don't get these things straight in our life… Armageddon is near. How close is near.

<div align="right">Ice Cube</div>

Jouissance – and affective in general – seems to invariably be cheated in language. It is always in the excess, that which can only be accessed in and through the performed, that which can not be fully captured in language, something about it is always left over (Butler, 1999; Grossberg, 1992; Hall and du Gay, 1996; Kristeva, 1982; Lacan, 1977, among others). My interest in this paper is to navigate through this cultural space of left over, namely Black popular culture, Hip-Hop to be specific, and link it to a larger framework of pedagogy and learning. Affective, Grossberg (1992) explains, is "the unrepresentable excess – the sublime? – which defies images and words, which can only be indicated" and popular culture, especially when operating within an affective sensibility, "is a crucial ground where people give others … the authority to shape their identity and locate them within various circuits of power" (p. 83).

On their part, Giroux and Simon (1989a) argued that, "Popular culture represents a significant pedagogical site that raises important questions about the relevance of everyday life, student voice, and the investments of meaning and pleasure that structure and anchor the why and how of learning (p. 5). If this is so, it is surprising then how little attention the intersection of pedagogy, affective/investment, and popular culture within school sites has received. Here, my focus is on ethnography in general and critical ethnography in particular (see Simon and Dippo, 1986 for full discussion). I shall therefore begin with a theoretical framework – pedagogy of affective – then discuss my research and offer a conclusion on the need to rethink the connection between Black

popular culture, which is currently operating under erasure, the curriculum, identity investment, and the process of critical teaching and learning.

Mapping What Matters

The complexity of studying popular culture ethnographically stems from the fact that it works at the notoriously difficult plane of affect. Why we love a particular music, read a genre of novels, or watch "sleeze TV," Grossberg (1992) explains, might be explained, but never fully. All we feel emotionally is that quasi-orgasmic rush, juissance, running through our veins. However, I want to argue, this rush is neither neutral nor without its politics of identification (Ibrahim, 2003), which eventually influences (if not determines) what we learn and how we learn it. That is, the rush is not simply ideological (where we as consumers are manipulated by a ruling class) nor simply affective or emotional; afterall our emotions have their own (rational?) structure and language (Bourdieu, 1984; Williams, 1979). It is at this intersection of the consciously rational, willful, committed, and the unconsciously emotional, passionate, pleasurable and volitional that I want to locate popular culture.

Mapping what matters within popular culture is a "mattering map" (Grossberg, 1992), where no investment is haphazard and where people's identities and everyday lives are formed and performed. Popular culture is increasingly pervasive and powerful force not only economically (think about how many millionaires rap has created), but, more importantly, pedagogically and educationally. It is where people and youth in particular socialize their identities and thus envision the possibilities of their existence. Popular culture can be defined as a durable, transposable disposition, structured champ (Bourdieu, 1984) or a discursive formation (Foucault, 1977) whose meaning is only possible within a theory of articulation (Hall, 1986). The latter argues that diverse elements or formations, which have no intrinsic, historical or apparent connection, can be connec-ted, accumulated and articulated together to produce a new event, be it identity, musical or other-wise. For example, the articulation of dance hall music, DJing, MCing, break dancing, R&B, sound system, graffiti and fashion produced what we know now as Hip-Hop.

Such articulations, Grossberg (1992) argues, create a series of "alliances" which in turn make "a number of different positions available to different groups" (p. 71). That is, different cultu-ral articulations invade, populate and incorporate different bodies differently, and in the process effectively guarantee their singular sensibility, investment and engagement. However, no alliances are absolute and each has its own circuits of power that either empower or disempower. They do so because people affectively authorize them. As Grossberg (1992, pp. 83-4) aptly put it,

> People actively constitute places and forms of authority (both for themselves and for others) through the deployment and organization of affective investments. By making certain things matter, people "authorize" them to speak for them, not only as a spokesperson but also as a surrogate voice... People give authority to that which they invest in; they let the objects of such investments speak for and in their stead. They let them organize their emotional and narrative life and identity.

To affectively authorize a discursive formation to "speak" on our behalf is to enter the plane of belonging and identification (where identities are formed through interpellation (Althusser, 1971), and insofar as these moments of identification are fragmented and dispersed, identities are similarly dispersed). To affectively authorize a discursive formation is to find ourselves "at home," at least temporarily, with what we care about, "partly because there seems to be no other space available, no other terrain on which [we] can construct and anchor [our] mattering maps" (Grossberg, 1992, pp. 84-5). Hence they become sites of empowerment. On the other hand, however, affective relations can also be disempowering because "They render ideological and material realities invisible behind a screen of passion." They blind and position "people in ways which make them particularly vulnerable to certain kinds of appeals, and, most frightening, they can easily be articulated into repressive and even totalitarian forms of social demands and relations" (Ibid., p. 87). For example, misogyny and homophobia in Hip-Hop, which originally emerged as a subaltern creative cultural space of resistance, are cases in point. So there is no affective investment, and for that matter no popular cultural form, that is not complexly contradictory.

For Grossberg (1992), "mattering maps" are like "investment portfolios" where changing investments matter as much as where, how and the intensities and degrees of investment. They "define different forms, quantities and places of energy, They "tell" people how to use and how to generate energy, how to navigate their way into and through various moods and passions, and how to live within emotional and ideological histories" (p. 82). Mattering maps, he continues, "also involve the lines that connect the different sites of investment; they define the possibilities for moving from one investment to another, of linking the various fragments of identity together. They define not only what sites … matter but how they matter" (p. 84). Put otherwise, it is these mattering maps that regulate not only our passion, investment, and texture of our affective, but eventually our identities, identification, and the possibilities of we could become. In the following section I want to propose a larger "articulation" between race, curriculum and investments as they relate to the above framework of affective and mattering maps.

Race, Curriculum and Mattering Maps

"I still remember," I wrote in my field-notes diary, "on my first day at the high school where I am conducting my research, while standing in the middle of the foyer, the 14-year old girl Najat came running to embrace me in a manner of a lost old friend. She then wondered in French if I was coming to school to teach. "Non," I responded in French, but I was equally curious why she wanted me at the school. "Just because there is nothing Black in this school. All you see is white, white, white," she responded in English." First, I knew Najat since I was working in another research project in the same French-language high school for almost two years and second, I want to argue, in these non-identificatory spaces where self-consciousness undergoes the experience of desire to be reflected, seen and recognized, other spaces of identification, mattering maps will emerge: Black popular culture. In this case, Black popular culture – and diasporic Black hybrid identities in general – will emerge not only as sites of identification, but also as curriculum sites where learning can and does take place. I intend to show that, in the present research, when Black/African youth were unable to participate in dominant ("white, white, white") spaces, Black popular culture emerged as a mattering map of investment, learning and desire. Hence creating a "null curriculum"; by which I am referring to the sites of affective and pedagogical investment that are directly implicated in youth identity formation, but are not formally acknowledged in their schooling/learning processes (cf. Eisner, 1979). This raises a number of research and pedagogical questions, two of which will be addressed here. First, where (and how) do our youth form their identities if not within and in relation to the realm of popular culture, which is negated most often within formal education settings (Dimitriadis and McCarthy, 2001; Giroux and Simon, 1989a&b) and, second, what are the implications of this negation in reframing and reconceptualizing critical curriculum studies? Put otherwise, I want to ask, do social identities, especially race and gender, and their formation processes have any significant role in the process of learning; how do we engage these identities; and how can critical educators bring student-based and student-produced knowledge into the classroom, not to be consumed but rather to be critically engaged, deconstructed? This, furthermore, raises questions of voice and experience. How do we acknowledge previous experience as legitimate content and challenge it at the same time? How do we affirm student voices while simultaneously encouraging conscientization (Freire, 1993): the interrogation of such voices? And how do we avoid the conservatism inherent in simply celebrating personal experience and confirming what people already know? (cf. Eisner & Powell, 2002; Giroux and Simon, 1989a; Quinn & Kahne, 2001).

These questions can not be understood separately from a diagnosis of the modern condition of what Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) call "the age of difference." It is a temporal, poststructuralist and globalized historical moment where desire, agency, identification and identity

count and, indeed, where the politics of identity is the center of teaching and learning. A moment where identity itself is mediated by technological media, on the one hand, and by its relation to the Other, on the other. A moment where movements of goods, ideas, arts and bodies are ever made easier; a moment where postcolonial subjects are increasingly forming part of the metropolitan centers. In this moment, Dewey's (1916, p. 6) classic notion of "formal education" which was defined as "the deliberate educating of the young" would miss a wide range of aspects of learning that go on in sites other than classrooms. Such may include homes, hospitals, factories, night clubs, sport sites, concerts, museums, and so on (see Beer and Marsh, 1988; Cremin, 1976; Giroux, 2000; Nieto, 2000), as well as school sites such as hallways and gyms. The tension between what goes on in the hallways and gyms where learning can and indeed does take place and where students identities are formed (Giroux and Simon, 1989b; Ibrahim, 1998, 1999, 2000a&b), on the one hand, and classroom pedagogies and practice strategies, on the other, is scarcely dialogued about within the field of curriculum studies; at least not until recently (see also Dimitriadis and McCarthy, 2001; Goldberg, 1997; Kelley, 1998). There is therefore a need to rearticulate that tension and, as I shall do, show the potency of popular culture, more specifically Black popular culture, in the process of students' identity formation, cultural and linguistic practice. Here, the question of what I term the politics of embodiment: sexualized, gendered, abled, classed, and racial/ized identities that students bring with them to the classroom and how these identities are formed is vitally important to the praxis of imaginative critical educators.

Unfortunately, the age of difference is also the age of boundary maintenance, quick fixes, moral panic, competence measurement, unthreatening forms of multiculturalism, "accountability," "clientele," and the language of panacea and technique (what Dimitriadis and McCarthy, 2001 call "technicist discourse"). It is an age of what Nietzsche called "ressentiment" (resentment), a "practice by which one defines one's identity through the negation of the other" (Dimitriadis and McCarthy, 2001, p. 4). This ressentiment, Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) explain, is pronounced more clearly in how difference, multiplicity, and heterogeneity are dealt with in educational settings; how knowledge formation, mattering maps, genres of representation, and bodily encounters are all regulated by ressentiment. The Other is here capitalized, absolutized and rancourly put either in the inner-city or "overthere" in the Third World. The identity of social victim, interesting enough, especially in the United States, is claimed by the professional middle-class dwellers of the suburb. "In so doing, the suburban professional class denies avenues of social complaint to its other, the inner-city poor." This in turn projects the "suburban worldview as the barometer of public policy, displacing issues of inequality and poverty with demands for balanced budgets, tax cuts, and greater surveillance and incarceration of minority youth" (Ibid., pp. 4-5).

In education, the politics of ressentiment, especially as expressed by mainstream (conservative?) educational theorists, tends to "draw a bright line of distinction between the established

school curriculum and the teeming world of multiplicity that flourishes in the everyday lives of youth beyond the school" (Dimitriadis and McCarthy, 2001, p. 2). No where in the U.S. is this narcissistic line (and its moral panic) more drawn than against Black popular culture in general and Hip-Hop in particular. The conservative TV host Bill O'Reilly of The O'Reilly Factor on the Fox News Network single handedly forced Muppets and Pepsi Company to drop the rappers Snoop Dogg and Ludacris, respectively, from their advertisements and as their commercial representatives. Ironically, Ludacris was replaced by the Osbornes. Race as much as political agenda determine who gets to be represented and how and, in education, they regulate and govern who gets to be included in the curriculum – the "main text," as Maxine Greene (1992, p. 2) refers to.

For Eisner (1979) the "main text" can be divided into three typologies: implicit, explicit, and null curriculum. In the explicit curriculum, students enter a discourse and culture whose common signifier is "schooling," with publicly sanctioned goals. These goals are usually presented as ideologically neutral and pedagogically necessary if one is to become a "functional citizen." In the implicit curriculum, also known as the "hidden curriculum" (Apple, 1990, 1982), students are expected to conform and follow certain patterns of cultural practices of schooling that are not stated explicitly. "Take, for example, the expectation that students must not speak unless called on," Eisner (1979, p. 76) explains, "or the expectation that virtually all of the activities within a course [or a class] shall be determined by the teacher, or the fact that schools are organized hierarchically." For Eisner, what the school is doing through these implicit but firmly expected cultural practices is preparing "most people for positions and contexts that in many respects are quite similar to what they experienced in school," that is "hierarchical organization, one-way communication, routine; in short, compliance to purposes set by another" (1979, p. 77).

The "null curriculum" is defined as "what schools do not teach" (Eisner, 1979: 83; original emphasis). It is a configuration of knowledge, a mattering map that is linked to students' identities and ways of knowing and learning but not directly addressed in their schooling processes. Eisner argues that most subject matters that are now taught in school systems are taught out of habit. That is, schools teach geography, math, chemistry, and so on, for no reason other than that these were always taught (Eisner, 1979, p. 88). It is of course unwarranted to suggest that Eisner is negating their importance as subjects of study. To the contrary, he is reminding us of this question, which is rarely asked in educational settings: Why are we teaching what we are teaching? Hence, Eisner concludes, "we ought to examine school programs to locate those areas of thought and those perspectives that are now absent in order to reassure ourselves that these omissions were not a result of ignorance but a product of choice" (1979, p. 83).

It is here, I argue, that we should locate Hip-Hop, the cultural space or mattering map which accommodates both internal tensions and dynamic cultural ciphers, mediating the corrosive discourse of the dominating society while at the same time functioning as a subterranean

subversion. Hip-Hop is a null curriculum that is so subtle and subterranean that Ice-T likened it to a home invasion. "Homes are being invaded by hip-hop theories and Hip-Hop flavors. White kids are being injected with black rage and anger. People like KRS-One, Public Enemy, Cube are stimulating kids to question authority. And moms says, 'My home has been invaded by these new ideas. How did it get here?' It comes through the walkman. These homes are being invaded by us. And they know it. They know we are in their homes" (cited in Spady, 1993, p. 95).

But this home as well as school invasion and bombardment of popular culture images, Greene (1997) warned us, frequently has the (negative) effect of freezing the imaginative thinking of youth, thus potentially whirling them into "human resources" as opposed to "centers of choice and evaluation" (57). For critical educators, the latter will happen only when, on the one hand, we as critical pedagogues recognize the temporal and non-static nature of youth identities and when the youth themselves, on the other, are able to gaze back at these images and consciously "read" (through) them, a "conscious participation in [the art]work, a going out of energy, an ability to notice what there is to be noticed" (Greene, 1997, p. 58). Following Greene, my interest in the null curriculum is a recall to emphasizing the intersectionality between identity, politics, experience, and pedagogical dis/engagement and the process of learning. Building on this, I want to show below that students do appropriate and develop aspects of "null curriculum" as part of their identity formation; and in the case of Black popular culture, such a curriculum can be utilized in and as a form of critical pedagogy and praxis. This way, I conclude, we may contribute to bringing in Black students' previously unwarranted and non-validated forms of knowledge, address the feeling of alienation that Black students have in relation to Eurocentric curricula, and contribute to a more relevant, engaging and integrative anti-racist curriculum (Dei, 1996).

Against Temporality: Race-ing the Everyday

"The everyday" (Nietzsche, 1977) was quite a feast for my research participants, a group of continental francophone African youths. It was both a space of contradiction and confrontation. It was where they encountered the overdeterminded racial (racist?) gaze and it was, interestingly, their rendezvous with the jouissance of identification, investment, and desire. The former is linked to their Blackness. Here, all individuals who possess the Black body and who either live or immigrate to the West enter, so to speak, this "overdetermined gaze," what Gilroy (1997) calls "ethnic absolutism." This was well expressed by Frantz Fanon (1967, p. 116) when he talked about himself as a Black Antillais coming to the metropolis of Paris, "I am the slave not of the "idea" that others have of me but of my own appearance [my emphasis] ... I progress by crawling. And already [my emphasis] I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes." There is no

métissage here, no creolization, no hybridity: just one lump sum category, and one that is already determined, defined: Black. As a result, ironically, Blackness and its cultural and linguistic expression emerge for African youth as sites of bond, investment, and learning. The research data clearly shows that African youth choose Black popular cultural forms as sites of identification (Ibrahim, 1998, 2000a&b, see also below). They do so as part of their identity formation processes and their search for what it means to be Black in North America. As well, depending on their age and gender, they variably perform, enact the North American Black-stylized English and Hip-Hop identity. Hence, they create a null curriculum; color the everyday "little things" (Nietzsche, 1977); and heretofore begin the odyssey of becoming Black.

Being is being distinguished here from becoming Black (see also Ibrahim, 1999). The former is defined as an accumulative memory, an experience, an understanding and an apprehension upon which one interacts with the world around her/him, whereas the latter is the process of building this apprehension, this memory. For example, as a continental African, I was not "Black" in Africa, though I had other adjectives that used to bricolage my identity, such as tall, Sudanese, basketball player, etc. That is, my Blackness was not "marked," as Stuart Hall (1997) would argue, since it constituted part of the norm which was taken for granted, it was outside the shadow of the dominant North American Other. However, as a refugee in North America, my perception of self was altered in direct response to the social processes of racisms and the historical representation of Blackness whereby the antecedent signifiers became secondary to my Blackness, and I retranslated my self: I became Black (Ibrahim, 2000a).

Similarly, the research findings point to the fact that continental African youth are constructed and positioned, much like Fanon, and thus treated as "Blacks" by North American hegemonic discourses, representations and dominant groups, respectively. This positionality offered to continental African students in exceedingly complex ways through interlocking representational discourses does not and is unwilling to acknowledge students' – ethnic, language, national and cultural – identity difference. Blackness, as I already noted, becomes the encompassing category and the umbrella under which African youth find themselves. This racialized perception and treatment is enforcing and simultaneously enforced by a social imaginary, a discursive space where Blackness is projected further into negative historical memory and representation (Smedley, 1999; West, 1993). Elsewhere I show that this cartography of Blackness, influences students' sense of identity, which, in turn, influences what they linguistically and culturally learn and how (Ibrahim, 1998, 1999, 2000a&b). What they learn, I will outline below, is Black-stylized English, which they access in Black popular cultural forms, such as films, newspapers, magazines and, more importantly, rap, reggae, pop, R&B and other types of music.

The Study: Site and Participants

This paper is part of a larger critical ethnographic research (Ibrahim, 1998) that was guided by the following questions. How and in what way does race social identity difference enter the process of learning? What is the role of race and racism in students' identity formation? How are continental African youth positioned and constructed in and out of school? What are the implications of this construction in their social identity formation, and how are these identities formed and performed?

The site of the research is a small, urban Franco-Ontarian high school, which I will refer to as Marie-Victorin (MV) and which is located in southwestern Ontario, Canada. Being a Franco-Ontarian school, the official language is French, however, the language spoken often in corridors and hallways is English. Besides English and French, Arabic, Somali, and Farsi can also be heard at other times. MV has a population of approximately 400 students from different ethnic, language, religious, and national backgrounds. One-third to one-half of the 400 are students of colour. Despite this disproportionate percentage, all teachers, administrators and staff are White.

When continental African students arrived en mass at MV from their homelands starting in 1991, they constituted from one-third to one-half of the school population. They come from cultural and linguistic backgrounds as diverse as their countries of origin: Somalia, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaïre), Togo, South Africa, Gabon, and Senegal. The Somali speakers make up the majority within this group. The continental African youth vary in age, gender and class. Most come from a middle-class or affluent background; their ages range from twelve to twenty; and they spread from grade seven to thirteen. Some came to Canada as landed immigrants, the majority however came as refugees.

I knew the school and its population very well since I worked in another research project in the same school for almost two years. With permission from the school administration, I restarted to visit the school and to "hang out" with African students at least once a week, and in most cases, two or three times from January to June of 1996. I took the role of a participant-observer, keeping regular notes and diaries. Having determined what they could offer to my research, I chose for extensive observation sixteen students – ten boys and six girls – between the ages of fourteen and twenty. The girls were Somali-speakers form Somalia and Djibouti. Of the ten boys, six were Somali-speakers – from Somalia and Djibouti, two Senegalese, one Ethiopian and one Togolese. I observed them in and out of the classrooms as well as in and out of school. With the consent of students and their parents, I interviewed them. I videotaped and audio-taped interactions and exchanges among students. I attended soirées, plays, basketball games, and graduations; and was delighted to be invited to their residences. I transcribed the interviews and some of the videotapes, and analyzed the data by grouping them by theme, category and subject.

Whassup With Hip-Hop? Enacting Black Hybrid Identities

The identification of continental African students with Hip-Hop culture needed no second observation after six months of being at MV. This identification with Hip-Hop, which is a Black male cultural practice, seemed to cut across all ages for the boys. Depending on their age, the situation with the girls was somewhat different. Girls in grade twelve and thirteen tended to be more postmodernly eclectic in their dress: oscillating between Parisian, eloquent North American middle-class, Hip-Hop and traditional national dress. Some of them, for example, dressed in traditional Somali dress for the multicultural celebration day. Conversely, like the boys, the younger girls of grades seven, eight and nine dressed in Hip-Hop and spoke Black-stylized English. On one afternoon, these younger girls, while behind the scenes preparing for an African dance performance scheduled as part of the Black History Month celebration and also while wearing the Islamic hijab (veil), were rapping to a recording of the African American rapper Cool J.

Hip-Hop cultural expressions, as performed (Butler, 1999) and enacted by continental male and female African students at MV, have three distinctive but interlocking features. Hip-Hop can be described as a way of dress, walk, and talk. Hip-hop dress is eloquently described by Rose (1991: 277) in talking about a New York City summer party. Picture this: "Thousands of young Black folks milled around waiting to get into the large arena. The big rap summer tour was in town, and it was a prime night for one to show one's stuff." Rose then describes what I see as Hip-Hop dress at MV: "Folks were dressed in the latest "fly gear": bicycle shorts, high-top sneakers, chunk jewelry, baggy pants, and polka-dotted tops. The hair styles were a fashion show in themselves: high fade designs, dread, corkscrews, and braids." Hip-Hop walk, on the other hand, usually involves moving the hands simultaneously with the head and the rest of the body as one is walking or talking. The talk is what generally referred to as "Black English" or "Black talk" (Smitherman, 2000), which I refer to as Black-stylized English (Ibrahim, 1999).

Since continental African students have limited or no contact with African Americans, their source for "Black" (read African American) linguistic and cultural practices is Black popular culture, specifically rap music; referred to in some circles as "urban music" (Walcott, 2000; Powell, 1991). Hence continental African students tend to "pick up" expressions and ways of talking and rapping that encompass stylistic and lexical features and not grammatical ones. For example, African students use expressions such as "yo yo" [appellation to pay attention], "whassup," "whadap," "wadap" [what is up/what is happening], "homeboy," and "homie" [my cool friend]. In so doing, they are stylistically and lexically allying themselves with and translating what they conceive as "Black linguistic practice."

This translation/imitation/citation/enactment is expressed in and through students' speech, is a performance of Black-stylized English (BSE). BSE is Black English (BE) with style; it is a sub-

category. BE is what some have referred to as Black talk (Smitherman, 2000), which has its own structure, syntax and grammar. BSE, on the other hand, refers to ways of speaking that do not depend on a full mastery of the language (Ibrahim, 1999). It banks more on ritual expressions such whassup, whadap, etc., which are more an expression of politics, moments of identification with Hip-Hop cultural identity and a desire for it than they are of language per se. They become the youth way of saying: "I too am Black," and "I too desire Blackness."

For continental African youth, significantly, these lexical expressions are new linguistic and cultural practices they learn, take up or "enter." Adopting Hip-Hop, making it a mattering map influences not only their identity formation but also how they position themselves and how they are positioned by others (Foucault, 1977). This is because when continental African students chose African American cultural and linguistic practices, they in fact chose an identification with a language and historical memory as well as a political and social stance.

I asked students in all of my interviews with African students, "Où est-ce que vous avez appris votre anglais?" (Where did you learn English?). "Télévision," they unanimously responded. However, within this télévision, there is a particular representation that seems to interpellate African youth identity and identification: Black popular culture. I asked Najat (14, F, Djibouti), for example, about the last movie she had seen:

> **Najat**: I don't know, I saw Waiting to Exhale and I saw what else I saw, I saw Swimmer, and I saw Jumanji; so wicked, all the movies. I went to Waiting to Exhale wid my boyfriend and I was like "men are rude" [laughs].
> **Awad**: Oh believe me I know I know.
> **Najat**: And den he [her boyfriend] was like "no, women are rude." I was like we're like fighting you know and joking around. I was like, and de whole time like [laughs], and den when de woman burns the car, I was like, "go girls!" You know and all the women are like "go girl" you know? And den de men like khhh. I am like, "I'm gonna go get me a popcorn" [laughs]. (individual interview, English)

Two issues are of particular interest in Najat's example. The first is the influence of Black English in using de, den, dat, and wicked instead of the, then, that, and really really good, respectively. The second is embedded in this notion: Youths do not read, relate to and identify with texts dis-embodiedly. That is, their agency and subjectivities bear witness and influence their reading of the text. For example, two subjectivities influenced Najat's reading of Waiting to Exhale were her race and gender identities. It is the Black/woman in burning her husband's car that interpellates Najat.

This interpellation or hailing, using Althusseur's (1971) terms, or moments of identification, using my own, point to the process of identification. This is a subconscious process which takes place over a period of time and it functions by internalizing that which is meaningful to us, hence determining our mattering maps, that which deserves our desires and investment. Omer

(18, M, Ethiopia) expresses the different ways in which African youth enter, so to speak, this process of identification when he contends:

> Black Canadian youths are influenced by the Afro-Americans. You watch for hours, you listen to Black music, you watch Black comedy, Master T., the Rap City, there you will see singers who dress in particular ways. You see, so. (individual interview, French)

For Omer and all the students I spoke to, their identification with Black popular culture is in large measures connected to their inability to relate to dominant groups and their cultural capital. As a result, Black popular culture emerges as a site of identification. Exploring this contention, Mukhi (19, M, Djibouti) contends:

> We identify ourselves more with the Blacks of America. But, this is normal… We can't, since we live in Canada, we can't identify ourselves with Whites or country music you know [laughs]. We are going to identify ourselves on the contrary with people of our colour, who have our lifestyle you know. (group interview, French).

The impact of these moments of identification was felt not only in the identity formation processes, but also in the course of second language learning. Here, rap was a significant site. And the fact that rap language was more spread in the boys' narratives raises the question of the role of gender in the process of identification and learning. The following are two of the many occasions on which students articulated their identification with and desire for Black America through the re/citation of rap linguistic styles.

> *Sam*: One two, one two, mic check. A'ait [alright], a'ait, a'ait.
> *Juma*: This is the rapper, you know what 'm meaning? You know wha 'm saying?
> *Sam*: Mic mic mic; mic check. A'ait you wonna test it? Ah, I've the microphone you know; a'ait.
> *Sam*: [laughs] I don't rap man, c'mon give me a break. [laughs] Yo! A'ait a'ait you know, we just about to finish de tape and all dat. Respect to my main man [pointing to me]. So, you know, you know wha 'm mean, 'm just represen'in Q7. One love to Q7 you know wha 'm mean and all my friends back to Q7… Stop the tapin' boy!
> *Jamal*: Kim Juma, live! Put the lights on. Wordap. [Students talking in Somali] Peace out, wardap, where de book. Jamal 'am outta here.
> *Shapir*: Yo, this is Shapir. I am trying to say peace to all my Niggaz, all my bitches from a background that everybody in the house. So, yo, chill out and this is how we gonna kick it. Bye and with that pie. All right, peace yo.
> *Sam*: A'ait this is Sam represen'in AQA […] where it's born, represen'in you know wha 'm mean? I wonna say whassup to all my Niggaz, you know, peace and one love. You know wha 'm mean, Q7 represen'in foreva. Peace! [Rap music]
> *Jamal*: [as a DJ] Crank it man, coming up. [rap music] (group interview, English)

Of interest in these excerpts is the use of Black-stylized English (BSE), especially the language of rap: "Respect for my main man," "represen'in Q7," "kick the free style," "peace out, wardap," "'am outta here," "I am trying to say peace to all my Niggaz, all my bitches," "so, yo chill out and this is how we gonna kick it," "I wonna say whassup to all my Niggaz," "peace and one love." As important, when Shapir deploys terms like "Niggaz" and "bithces," he is first reappropriating the word Nigger, an appellation common in rap and Hip-Hop culture which is invoked without its traditional racist connotation; and, secondly however, he is using the sexist language that exists in rap (Ibrahim, 1999). This language has been challenged by female rappers and was critiqued by male and female students (Ibrahim, 2000a, p. 126).

Clearly, the boys were investing in Black popular culture, especially rap, as both a site of desire and of language learning. Depending on their age, on the other hand, the girls were either fully investing in rap and Hip-Hop like the boys or being postmodernly eclectic. In spite of this, I detected the following three features of Black English (BE) in both the older and the younger girls' speech: 1) the absence of the auxiliary be (19 occasions, e.g., "they so cool," "I just laughing" as opposed to they are so cool and I am just laughing); 2) BE negative concord (4 occasions, e.g., "all he [the teacher] cares about is his daughter you know. If somebody just dies or if I decide to shoot somebody you know, he is not doing nothing [italics added]"; the expression would be considered incorrect in standard English because of the double negative); and 3) the distributive be (4 occasions, e.g. "I be saying dis dat you know?" or "He be like 'Oh, elle va être bien' [she's going to be fine]"). These BE markers are, first, expressions of the influence of Black Talk on the girls' speech and, second, performances of the girls' identity location and desire. The girls had no illusion on where they saw themselves mirrored and where to invest. Amani (16, F, Somalia) contends:

> We have to wonder why we try to really follow the model of the Americans who are Blacks? Because when you search for yourself, search for identification, you search for someone who reflects you, with whom you have something in common. (group interview, French)

In a group interview, I asked Mukhi, in English, "But do you think that that [listening to rap] influences how you [African youths] speak?" He responded, "How we dress, how we speak, how we behave." Supporting both Mukhi and Amani, Hassan (17, M, Djibouti) argued:

> Yes yes, African students are influenced by rap and hip-hop because they want to, yes, they are influenced probably a bit more because it is the desire to belong maybe.
> *Awad*: Belong to what?
> *Hassan*: To a group, belong to a society, to have a model/fashion [he used the term un modèle]; you know, the desire to mark oneself, the desire to make, how do I say it? To be part of a rap society, you see. It is like getting into rock and roll or heavy metal. (individual interview, French)

In the same interview, Hassan found it unrealistic to expect to see Blackness allied with rock and roll or heavy metal, as they are socially constructed as White music. Similarly, he argued that African youths would have every reason to invest in basketball – constructed as a Black sport – but not hockey, for example. Clearly, one invests where one sees oneself mirrored, and African students had no doubt where their investment lied: an investment that is considerably influenced by who they are or what they have become.

In a racially conscious society, Hall (1991) argues, being Black means one is expected to be Black, act Black, and so be the Other. Becoming Black, on the other hand, I have shown, was a significant cartography not only in how African students were positioned in and outside the school, but also in how they saw, formed and performed their identities, subjectivities, investments and desires (see also Yon, 2000). This politics of positionality – how one is imagined, constructed and represented and the impacts of these on how one sees oneself, I contended, was directly implicated in students' political, linguistic and cultural choices. The effects of this politics are eloquently delineated in Fanon's Black skin/White mask. Fanon (1967, p. 116) shows how the gaze of the Other fixes him in an identity: "When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my colour. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my colour. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle." Again, when the child pulls her finger and points at him exclaiming "Look momma, a Black man," Fanon writes, "I was fixed in that gaze" – the gaze of Otherness (Hall, 1991). This example is probably too descriptive causing one to cast a doubt on the subtle and the almost completely unconscious experience within which identities are formed and performed, which in turn make certain maps matter.

Taking up, identifying with, enacting, imitating or citing Hip-Hop and rap means learning the cultural as well as linguistic practices that are introduced to continental African students through Black popular culture. They enter representational discourses of Blackness and Hip-Hop by learning a new style of dress and new ways of walking and of talking. Hence, students enter a "null curriculum," with which they do identify; a curriculum that at least partially reflects their own subjectivities; a curriculum that influences who they are and the future they desire.

This is not a Conclusion: Affect and the Pedagogy of Hip-Hop

Hiphopness – the dynamic and constant sense of being alive in a hip hop, rap conscious, reality based world – is actually where many young black people are today. As we enter [the 21st Century], it becomes even more important to realize that significant changes are taking place in the rapidly growing hip hop world. To stand back, wack crack style is to succumb to the inertia of the

past. And yet, to become a participant in this highly fluid, ritualized space is to exercise an act of freedom that may very well change your constitutive being (Spady, 1993, p. 96).

The issues at stake in this paper are as follow. **First**, there seems to be two contradictory "texts" – tendencies, if you like – in education today. They are best described by Greene (1997, p. 64), "one has to do with shaping malleable young people to serve the needs of technology in a post-industurial society; the other has to do with educating young people to grow and to become different, to find their individual voices, and to participate in a community in the making." The pedagogy of Hip-Hop I am proposing, which is a pedagogy of affective, oscillates towards the latter, emphasizing a "politics of choice." Here the cartography of African students' null curriculum would be the starting point, if not the base, for a critical inclusive curriculum. A curriculum that, 1) deconstructs "culture" as static category, with hierarchical arrangements, undermining the multi-plicity of cultural identity, difference and community (Yon, 2000); 2) sees students' lives as providing the basis for reconceptualizing history as dynamic cultural and social productions; 3) notes that what might constitute reality for students may not be the teacher's reality; 4) draws on students' creative use of Black stylized English; 5) investigates Black popular cultural forms as part of hybrid diasporic cultural expressions that draw on a plurality of Black histories and politics; and 6) sees gender differences of identity enactments or a global understanding of them as part of a critical inclusive curriculum (hence, they need serious engagement and deconstruction).

Second, we know that students do not come to classrooms as generic disembodied individuals. On the contrary, racial and gender identities formed outside the classroom are crucial in the learning processes. Specifically, I showed and pointed to the fact that, Black popular culture, defined as a "null curriculum," is and can be on-and-off-school site where learning can and indeed does take place. If this is so, the notion of learning and worthwhile knowledge then needs to be reproblematized and broadened to include a variety of forms. Accordingly, learning may mean learning and appropriating hybrid cultural and linguistic practices that are not valued by the hege-monic dominant culture or outside the "main text." Significantly however, this raises the question: Why do African youth, for example, choose linguistic and cultural forms that are marginalized by the dominant group's narratives and cultures? The answer lies in part in what might be called the "politics of ethnic absolutism of Blackness," that is, how students are positioned by hegemonic discourses as "Blacks."

Third, this positionality needs to be deconstructed and new formulations that link on-and-off-school identities to classroom praxis need to be articulated and seriously engaged (see also Diamond and Mullen, 1999; Morgan-Fleming, 1999). Here, there is an urgent need for a praxis that

links "formal" education/learning with the popular, "informal." If those "who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word" are ever to speak it, Paulo Freire (1993, p. 69) argued, their world has to be linked to their word. Here, I am suggesting rap to be incorporated in classrooms, particularly English classrooms and especially English as a Second Language (ESL). There, rap can be studied as a genre, style and content, or it can be used simply to expose students to different linguistic variations and accents.

Fourth, rap and Black popular culture in general can create spaces where not only women and gender issues are brought to the forefront, but also racial, class, ability, and other forms of oppressions. Elsewhere (Ibrahim, 2002), I cited the multiple times in which students expressed their dissatisfaction with the "main text." One female student, it was her fifth year in the school, complained about doing the same language arts exercise for four consecutive years with the same teacher. When I asked her, as part of a group interview, whether she would like to study Hip-Hop/rap, the whole group applauded and answered, "Bien sûr! Ce serait bien agréable, très bon" [Of course! It would be really great, really good]. For these young people, rap as an aesthetic and oral narrative could be a curriculum that brings their concerns about sexuality, racism, sexism, and homophobia to the center. Also as a space for knowledge production, rap can be envisioned as a borderland which creates a language of critique that goes hand in hand with a language of possibility and hope (Anzaldua, 1987; hooks, 1994; Giroux, 1994; Simon, 1992).

Fifth and finally, proposing Black popular culture as a curriculum site is not an end in itself. I see it as either a starting point from which one moves into the "main text" or as a "text" used within the borders of the "main text." This proposition is also a call to centralize and engage marginalized subjectivities, their voices, and their ways of being and learning. It is a proposition which entails, first, a legitimization of a form of knowledge otherwise perceived as illegitimate and, second, a disruption to the one-dimensional representation of Blackness, a hybrid category which is de facto multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic (Ibrahim, 2000a). It is also a proposition where rap and Hip-Hop can constitute sites of possibilities and hope. A hope that those who do not see themselves represented in the curriculum, those who can not relate to the curriculum, those who are wittingly or unwittingly kept silent, may find a subject matter they can relate to and identify with; a subject matter that brings their experience to the forefront so it can be valued and not uncritically engaged. A hope that educators will not stuck in the notion that they do not know much about Hip-Hop, and hence it is better kept dormant. A hope that they will engage the different mattering maps where students invest their identities, learning, and desires. In the case of African youth, one must ask, whose identity are we assuming if we do not engage Hip-Hop and rap in our classroom activities? "By ignoring the cultural and social forms that are authorized by youth and

simultaneously empower or disempower them," Giroux and Simon (1989a, p. 3) argue, "educators risk complicitly silencing and negating their students."

This is unwittingly accomplished by refusing to recognize the importance of those sites and social practices outside of school that actively shape student experiences and through which students often define and construct their sense of identity, politics, and culture. (Giroux and Simon, 1989a, p. 3)

The issue at stake, then, is not only to motivate and empower students but, more importantly, to enable them to locate themselves in time and history and at the same time critically interrogate the adequacy of that location.

References

Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and Philosophy*. London: New Left Books.

Anzaldua, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinter/Anut Luter

Apple, M. (1990). *Ideology and Curriculum*. New York: Routledge.

Apple, M. (1982). *Education and Power*. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Beer, V. and Marsh, D. (1988). A Non-School Curriculum Model Illustrated in a Museum Setting, *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 221-239.

Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The Field of Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Dei, G.J.S. (1996). *Anti-racism: Theory and Practice*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and Education*. New York: The Free Press

Diamond, C. T. P. and Mullen, C. A. (1999). *The Postmodern Education: Arts-Based Inquiries and Teacher Development*. New York: Peter Lang.

Dimitriadis, G. and McCarthy, C. (2001). *Reading the Postcolonial: From Baldwin to Basquiat and Beyond*. New York and London: Teachers College Press.

Eisner, E. and Powell, P. (2002). Art in Science? *Curriculum Inquiry*, Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 131-159.

Eisner, E. (1979). *The Educational Imagination On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

Fanon, F. (1967). *Black Skin White Mask*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*. Translated by D. Bouchard and S. Simon. New York: Cornell University Press.

Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Gilroy, P. (1997). Diaspora, Utopia and the Critique of Capitalism. In Gelder, K. and Thornton, S. (Eds.). *The Subcultures Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp.340-349.

Giroux, H. (2000). *Stealing Innocence: Youth, Corporate Power, and the Politics of Culture*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Giroux, H. (1994). Living Dangerously: Identity Politics and the New Cultural Racism. In Giroux, H. and McLaren, P. (Eds.) *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, pp. 29-55.

Giroux, H. and Simon, R. (1989a). Schooling, Popular Culture, and a Pedagogy of Possibility. In Giroux, H. and Simon, R. (Eds.) *Popular Culture, Schooling, and Everyday Life*. Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc. pp. 219-235

Giroux, H. and Simon, R. (1989b). Popular Culture as a Pedagogy of pleasure and meaning. In Giroux, H. and Simon, R. (Eds.) *Popular Culture, Schooling, and Everyday Life*. Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc. pp. 1-29.

Goldberg, M. (1997). *Arts and Learning: An Integrated Approach to Teaching and Learning in Multicultural and Multilingual Settings*. New York: Longman.

Greene, M. (1997). Art and Imagination: Reclaiming a Sense of the Possible. In Clinchy, E. (Ed.) *Transforming Public Education: A New Course for America's Future*. New York: Teachers College Press, pp. 56-65.

Greene, M. (1992). Texts and Margins. In Goldberg, M. and Phillips, A. (Eds.) *Arts as Education.* MA: Harvard Educational Review Reprint Series, pp. 1-17.

Grossberg, L. (1992). *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*. New York and London: Routledge.

Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage.

Hall, S. (1991). Ethnicity: Identity and Difference, *Radical America*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 9-20.

Hall, S. (1986). On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*. Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 56-59.

Hall, S. and du Gay, P (Eds.) (1996). *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage.

Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, Cyborgs, and women: The reinvention of nature*. New York: Routledge.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.

Ibrahim, A. (2003). Black-in-English: Black English as a Symbolic Site of Identification. In G. Smitherman, S. Makoni, and A. Ball (Eds) *Black Linguistics: Language, Society and Politics in Africa and the Americas*. London: Routledge, pp. 110-123.

Ibrahim, A. (2002). *"Hey, ain't I Black too?": Rap and Hip-Hop as Sites of Learning and Investment.* Paper presented at annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, March 28-April 1st.

Ibrahim, A. (2000a). "Hey, ain't I Black too?" The Politics of Becoming Black. In R. Walcott (Ed.) *Rude: Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism.* Toronto: Insomniac Press, pp. 109-136.

Ibrahim, A. (2000b). Trans-re-framing identity: Race, language, culture, and the politics of translation. *Transforms: Insurgent Voices in Education* Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 120- 135.

Ibrahim, A. (1999). Becoming Black: Rap and Hip-hop, Race, Gender, Identity and the Politics of ESL Learning, *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 349-369.

Ibrahim, A. (1998). *"Hey, Whassup Homeboy?"; Becoming Black: Race, Language, Culture, and the Politics of Identity; African Students in a Franco-Ontarian High School.* Unpublished Doctoral thesis, Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

Kelley, J. (1998). *Under the Gaze: Learning to be Black in White Society.* Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of Horror.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Lacan, J. (1977). *Écrits.* London: Tavistock.

Morgan-Fleming, B. (1999). Teaching as Performance: Connections between Folklore and Education, *Curriculum Inquiry*, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 273-291.

Nieto, S. (2000). *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education.* USA: Longman Publishers.

Nietzsche, F. (1977). *A Nietzsche Reader.* New York: Penguin Classics.

Powell, C. (1991). Rap Music: An Education with a beat from the street, *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 60, No. 3, pp. 245-259.

Quinn, T. and Kahne, J. (2001). Wide Awake to the World: The Arts and Urban Schools – Conflicts and Contributions of an After-School Program. *Curriculum Inquiry*, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 11-32.

Rose, T. (1991). Fear of a Black Planet: Rap Music and Black Cultural Politics in the 1990. *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 60, No. 3, pp. 276-290.

Simon, R. I. (1992). *Teaching Against the Grain: Texts for a Pedagogy of Possibility.* New York: Bergin & Garvey.

Simon, R. and Dippo, D. (1986). On Critical Ethnography Work, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 195-202.

Smedley, A. (1999). *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*. Oxford: Westview Press.

Smitherman, G. (2000). *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Spady, J. (1993). 'I ma put my thing down': Afro-American Expressive Culture and the Hip-Hop Community. *TYANABA Revue de la Société d'Anthropologie*. Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 93-98.

Walcott, R. (2000). By way of a Brief Introduction – Insubordination: A Demand for a Different Canada. In Walcott, R. (Ed.) *Rude: Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism*. Toronto: Insomniac Press, pp. 7-10.

West, C. (1993). *Race Matters*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Williams, R. (1979). *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review*. London: New Left Books.

Yon, D. (2000). *Elusive Culture: Schooling, Race, and Identity in Global Times*. New York: State University of New York Press.

About the Author

Awad Ibrahim is Assistant Professor at the Department of Educational Foundations and Inquiry, Faculty of Education, Bowling Green State Univesity, Ohio. He teaches and publishes in the areas of antiracism and critical multiculturalism, applied socio-linguistics, cultural studies, critical pedagogy and educational foundation. He is interested both in exploring the connections between race, language and culture and the politics of identity, and in film and popular music studies, especially Hip-Hop and rap.

E-mail: ibraham@bgnet.bgsu.edu.

Notes:

Posted by Dr. Awad Ibrahim, aka Dr. Dre at 10:39 AM